

The Return of Morality: An examination of
Michel Foucault's concept of an individual's
morality as a lawless universality

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Declaration Page

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The Return of Morality

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Michel Foucault describes how, using technologies of the self, those practices of self on self, necessarily learned in processes of spiritual direction, an individual is enabled to self-constitute an ethical subjectivity, and then, by conducting her own conduct, enjoy a singular style of living that reflects an unmitigated relation between her freedom and truth. The history of these ancient technologies also describes the constitution of ‘ways of being’ or attitudes independent of external power and of unique styles of living in ancient Greece, without reference to essential subjectivity. Foucault’s exposition of this freedom to self-constitute a unique style of existence is to answer the questions: where a concern for truth constantly calls truth into question, what is the form of existence which makes this questioning possible and what life is necessary given that an imposed truth is not necessary? By opposing concepts of self and trans-subjectivation in a new conception of ethics as a relationship of self to self, Foucault demonstrates how a subject might transform herself and refuse to renounce herself as obliged by the deployment of knowledge (*connaissance*). He asks whether this ethical subject might sustain a modern morality that will, no longer, need to be supported by either traditional ideology, code, or law? The Return of Morality is an exploration of these ancient Hellenistic technologies of self-subjectivation and their possible use today as the condition of possibility, according to Foucault, for modern strategies that refuse the limits imposed by the internal ruse of freedom and the inverted image of modern forms of pastoral power that govern self-identification and individualisation. This technology might allow the re-establishment of self-government and enable a style of living that might be called a unified morality for today, one referring to all life experience, one that exists outside of imposed code and law.

Prologue: The confusing use of a Humanist vocabulary

Throughout this thesis, the words ‘subject’, ‘individual’, ‘self’, ‘ways of being’, and ‘subjectivity’ are used in the text and in the works of many of the authors cited. Michel Foucault, himself, uses the words frequently and it might appear to the reader that he considers them as synonyms. When he uses the word subject, he regularly seems to refer to an autonomous agent, capable of thought and action. The English terms are indeed translations of French originals and when used in the political context, it is recognised that Subject (*sujet*) and individual (*individu*) are synonyms. Foucault’s use of the words is quite deliberate, but their meaning is unfortunately only implicit in his work. The prologue hopes to explain why this confusion exists and will attempt to define for the reader the intended meaning that might be applied to each word used in the text and in Foucault’s own words.

Consider these very important quotes from an interview given by Michel Foucault. ‘I would say that if now I am interested in the way in which the *subject* constitutes *himself* in an active fashion, by the practices of the *self*, these practices are nevertheless not something that the *individual* invents himself.’¹ When asked in the same interview whether games of truth were no longer concerned with coercive practices but with the practices of self-formation of the *subject*, he answers... ‘that is correct. It is what one might call an aesthetical practice...an exercise of the *self* on the self by which *one* tries to work out, to transform *oneself* and to attain a certain *mode of being*’²

Note the emphasis I have added, referring to the interchange between the use of the words subject, self, mode of being and one as the individual in a single sentence. The interpretations of statements, such as ‘the subject will constitute himself as subject’, are crucial in the controversy over the location of agency and volition in French post-war philosophy. Foucault immediately tempers the meaning, saying it is the individual who finds the practices of the self in culture. It is ‘one’, and not the subject, who transforms and attains. Note also the assignation of gender to a subject and the individual. It is this murkiness, the juxtaposition of terminology more suited to existentialism, humanism, structuralism, post-structuralism, in one

¹ Michel Foucault, ‘The ethic of care for the self as a practice of freedom, an interview with Michel Foucault on Jan 20, 1984’, *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 12 (1987), 112-131 (p. 122).

² Michel Foucault, ‘The ethic of care for the self as a practice of freedom, an interview with Michel Foucault on Jan 20, 1984’, *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 12 (1987), 112-131 (p. 122).

sentence that causes some confusion in Foucault's work. This is but one example of hundreds that might be selected from his interviews, lectures, and publications; the point being that in interviews and even in the most considered of written works, the same apparent inconsistency exists. Foucault would have us believe that he accepts and at other times rejects elements of the traditional notion of the subject and individual, including forms of freedom and responsibility, and the possibility of self-reflection. To avoid confusion, it seems sensible at this very early stage to review Foucault's use of terminology to try and avoid the murkiness. What is his understanding of the terms subject and subjectivity despite his consistent anti-humanism and opposition to ontological dualism, and rationalist and intentional notions of individual action and agency? ³

It is suggested ⁴ that the most obvious reason for murkiness is that the contemporary French philosophy, in its incomplete state, was most influenced by Heidegger, one of the founding figures of phenomenology. Academic philosophical critique at the time was also centred on Sartre as an absolutist regarding freedom and Husserl as a Cartesian foundationalist.⁵ Susan James comments that Foucault's regular use of the term subject was a matter of historical inheritance. She opines that Foucault grew up during the post-war period in France when the philosophy of the subject as in phenomenology and existentialism was all the rage. This may account for the regular use of the terms. In this philosophical milieu however, the subject is an ahistorical entity that exists and has always existed through time.⁶ She opines that this is certainly not what Foucault had in mind when he uses the terms.

In Foucault's early thought, the use of the term subject was incoherent as such a notion was 'disintegrating before our very eyes due in large measure to the development of structuralism.'⁷ Controversy reached a high degree of intensity by the calling into question of the sovereignty of the Cartesian subject, or of consciousness. Foucault observes that the methodological potential of the reflexive cogito is ultimately not as great as one might have believed and that, in any case, we can nowadays make descriptions which seem objective and positive, by dispensing with the cogito entirely.⁸ He declares that 'I have been able to describe

³ Raymond Caldwell, 'Agency and Change: Re-evaluating Foucault's legacy', *Organization*, 14 (2007), 1-22 (p. 1).

⁴ Louis Sass, 'Lacan, Foucault, and the 'crisis of the subject'', *PPP*, 21, (2014), 325-341 (p. 325).

⁵ Louis Sass, 'Lacan, Foucault, and the 'crisis of the subject'', *PPP*, 21, (2014), 325-341 (p. 327).

⁶ Susan James *Michel Foucault and Knowledge in Women of Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2021) p. 210.

⁷ Michel Foucault, 'Who are you, Professor Foucault?', in *Religion and Culture: Michel Foucault*, ed. by Jeremy R. Carrette (New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 87-104 (p. 94).

⁸ Michel Foucault, 'Who are you, Professor Foucault?', in *Religion and Culture: Michel Foucault*, ed. by Jeremy R. Carrette (New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 87-104 (p. 95).

structures of knowledge as a whole without ever referring to the cogito, even though people were, for several centuries convinced of the impossibility of analysing knowledge without starting from the Cogito.’⁹ From this the thesis assumes that when Foucault uses the term subject when referring to phenomenology or humanism, he is referring to the Cogito. This is important as the term is used many times in the sections of the thesis dealing with spirituality and the requirement to transform the subject that has no direct access to truth.

A brief schema of the contemporary philosophical milieu, and the centrality of a battleground over the concept of subject, will be useful. Alain Badiou suggests that a post-war French philosophy, immersed in existentialism and phenomenology, encompassed a search for new relation between concept and existence, between a philosophy of concept and a philosophy of life, and at stake was the enunciation of a new form of subject; the creation of this figure within philosophy and the restructuring of the battlefield around it.¹⁰ French philosophy witnessed the development of a new form of humanism linked to Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, to replace an explanatory and an epistemological humanism that had existed from the seventeenth century. For Sartre, in opposition to this older form of humanism, there are two starting points for a knowledge of the self, one that initiates reflection on a pre-existing world on the basis of the cogito and another anthropological one, which defines the concrete individual on the basis of her materiality. This Post-war humanism found its most coherent champions in existentialism and the related school of phenomenology as schools of thought converged around a specific theory of meaning. Put simply, they contended that to understand the world means to grasp how it appears to human consciousness.¹¹

Badiou also tells us that opposing this new humanism are the positions of Althusser and Lacan proposing definitions of history of existence without the subject or the subject as an ideological category. The battlefield was the contention that while there could not be a clear separation between concept and an experience of life in its actuality, neither could there be a subordination of existence to the idea or the norm. The two paths of concept and existence cross on the question of the humanist subject, defined in this French philosophical moment as the being that brings forth the concept as creative construct and abstraction. On one side then is an existential vitalism into which Badiou will interestingly and surprisingly places Michel

⁹ Michel Foucault, 'Who are you, Professor Foucault?', in *Religion and Culture: Michel Foucault*, ed. by Jeremy R. Carrette (New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 87-104 (p. 95).

¹⁰ Alain Badiou, 'The Adventure of French Philosophy', *New Left Review*, 35 (2005), 67-77 (p. 68).

¹¹ Alain Badiou, 'The Adventure of French Philosophy', *New Left Review*, 35 (2005), 67-77 (p. 68).

Foucault, along with Gilles Deleuze, and on the other conceptual formalism represented by Althusser and Lacan. It seems that most commentators might be inclined to place only the early Foucault thought into this category of vitalism. At this initial stage, Foucault's distinctive philosophical voice had yet to develop fully, his youthful thought was far more symptomatic of the times than it would subsequently become. In particular, his earliest publications on existential psychology and phenomenology were steeped in the humanist discourse that he would soon rebuff.¹²

Humanism, for Foucault, refers to an understanding of 'man' as a particular view of the human cognitive processes or subjectivity which takes them to be open to a kind of empirical investigation which can provide both the ground for knowledge (*connaissance*) and explain behaviour.¹³ Roger Paden refers to this humanism as an epistemological humanism, a form of humanism that had been transformed from a universal form of explanation to a philosophy of the social sciences.¹⁴ He says that 'essential to this philosophy is the view that knowledge can be criticised and justified by an appeal to a form of foundationalism which seeks to ground knowledge in empirically ascertainable human nature, in 'Man'. This view can be summarised in three theses: knowledge has indubitable foundations, these foundations are a function of the essential characteristics of human cognitive processes, and these characteristics can be discovered through a philosophical-empirical investigation of these processes. This investigation has been carried out by a set of sciences which Foucault refers to as the human sciences such as linguistics, psychoanalysis, ethnology.¹⁵ In *The Order of Things*, Foucault tells us that this humanism is of a recent origin, the effect of change in the fundamental arrangements of knowledge he calls the modern episteme, a humanistic episteme which is coming to an end.¹⁶

Starting in the mid-twentieth century, developments in the human sciences of linguistics, anthropology, and psychoanalysis began to offer a different perspective to humanism, one that criticised the role which humanism played in the social sciences¹⁷ and the focus on freedom and self-awareness that were seen as the core of phenomenology and existentialism. This contemporary anti-humanist thought, contributed to greatly by Foucault, initiated a crisis of the sovereign subject, turning focus away from individual human

¹² Michael C. Behrent, 'Foucault and Technology', *History and Technology*, 29 (2013), 54–104 (p. 68).

¹³ Roger Paden, 'Foucault's anti-humanism', *Human Studies*, 10 (1987), 123-141 (p. 123).

¹⁴ Roger Paden, 'Foucault's anti-humanism', *Human Studies*, 10 (1987), 123-141 (p. 128).

¹⁵ Roger Paden, 'Foucault's anti-humanism', *Human Studies*, 10 (1987), 123-141 (p. 128).

¹⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (London: Routledge Classics, 1980), p. 422.

¹⁷ Roger Paden, 'Foucault's anti-humanism', *Human Studies*, 10 (1987), 123-141 (p. 123).

consciousness and its dilemmas, away from the belief in the potential self-transparency and sovereignty of the subject, and towards the more objective and supposedly determining structures of language, ideology, and social institutions.¹⁸

The intention was to dismiss the allegedly self-evident truths of introspection. Foucault informs us¹⁹ that in the years that preceded the Second World War, and even more so after the war, philosophy in continental Europe and in France was dominated by the philosophy of subject. That philosophy took as its task par excellence the foundation of all knowledge and the principle of all significations as stemming from the meaningful subject. The importance given to this question was due to the impact of Husserl, but the centrality of the subject was also tied to an institutional context, for the French university, since philosophy began with Descartes, could only advance in a Cartesian manner. With the leisure and distance that came after the war, this emphasis on the philosophy of subject no longer seemed so self-evident. The post-war philosophical movement, then, can be read as the epic discussion about humanism and especially the ideas and significance of Descartes, as the philosophical inventor of the Modern subject, and his concern with the physics of phenomena and the metaphysics of the subject.

Foucault and his allies rejected human sciences for being grounded on a theoretically flawed philosophy of knowledge (*connaissance*) as they saw it, one that centred all access to or constitution of knowledge on the limited rational subject and its immediate interpretation of this knowledge as a truth of humanity in all its presentations. They attempted to restore knowledge (*connaissance*) as a practice, as a practice of creative thought, comparable to artistic activity, rather than as the organisation of revealed phenomena. Modernisation also became the quest for a new way in which philosophy could displace the prioritisation of universal ahistorical concepts, and approach the formation of new forms of life, of language, art, and of social organisation. They sought to understand the concept as a living thing, a creation, a process, an event, and as such not divorced from existence. There were two possible theoretical pathways, Foucault suggests, that led beyond this humanist philosophy of subject, neither of which he was tempted to take. The first of these was the theory of objective knowledge as an analysis of systems of meaning, as semiology. This was the path of logical positivism. He suggests however that given the absurdity of wars, slaughters, and despotism, which were the

¹⁸ Louis Sass, 'Lacan, Foucault, and the 'crisis of the subject'', *PPP*, 21, (2014), 325-341 (p. 330).

¹⁹ Michel Foucault, 'Sexuality and solitude', in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp 175-184. (p. 175).

result of the relationship between rationalisation and excesses of political power,²⁰ that is, the excess of a political rationality, it seemed acceptable that it might be left up to the individual to give meaning to his existential choices and that government of the individual might best be understood as a government by an individual truth rather than rationalist truth regimes of any kind. The second was that of a certain school of linguistics, psychoanalysis, and anthropology, all grouped under the rubric of structuralism. While Foucault was decisively influenced by post-modern theory and especially structuralism and post-structuralism, he cannot be wholly assimilated into that rubric. He suggests that structuralism poses the problem of the formal conditions for the appearance of meaning, starting above all from the privileged example of language, and serving as a model to analyse the appearance of other meanings not of a linguistic order. His role, however, he suggests, is not with the exposition of conditions but with the critique of conditions, a critique by which meaning disappears and gives rise to something different. In saying that, Foucault also presented the possibility of a life controlled by technologies of power/knowledge where individuals were objectified by institutions of knowledge. He also introduces technologies of discipline and coercion, constituting passive forms of subject and docile bodies whose individual life and social constructions are determined by biopower.

The aim for Foucault was not just to abandon the subject. While many of his books seem to deny the subject, he insists that his problem ‘was to define, not the moment at which something like the subject would appear but rather the combination of processes by which the subject exists with its different problems and obstacles and through forms which are far from being completed.’²¹ Foucault implies that subjectivity exists, the subject exists. However, he questions the forms in which it will exist. Amy Allen suggests an alternate reading of Foucault; ‘this reading maintains that Foucault’s analyses of power/knowledge regimes are devoid of references to the concept of subjectivity because they have to be. And they have to be devoid of such references because precisely the point of these works is to shift subjectivity from the position of that which explains to the position of that which must be explained, from *explanans* to *explanandum*.’²² On this reading of Foucault, his argument is that the subject should not be

²⁰ Michel Foucault, 'The Subject and Power' in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, ed. by Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 208-226 (p. 210).

²¹ Michel Foucault, 'The Return of Morality', in *Politics Philosophy Culture: Interviews and other writings 1977-1984*, ed. by Laurence Kritzman trans. by Alan Sheridan and others (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 242-255 (p. 253).

²² Amy Allen 'The Anti-subjective Hypothesis: Michael Foucault and the death of the subject', *The philosophical Forum*, 2, (2000), 113-131 (p. 120-12).

conceived as the necessary, fixed point around which all other theoretical explanations rotate, as it has been conceived in Western philosophy since Descartes. Instead, Foucault maintains that the peculiarly modern, humanist conception of subject is contingent and that its emergence at this particular point in history requires explanation. However, far from eliminating the concept of subjectivity, such a move merely indicates a shift in the explanatory priority of that concept. Foucault's aim is to offer an account of how subjectivity is constituted. Foucault does not designate an instrumental role for the subject with regard to objects or the body, but rather the subject's singular, transcendent position, with regard to what surrounds it, to others, to the body, and to the subject itself. This transcendent position is a consciousness and a self-consciousness.²³ He asks three quite interesting questions:²⁴ There cannot be any truth without a subject for whom this truth is true, but how, if the subject is a subject, does this subject have access to the truth? How can there be a truth of the subject, even though there can be truth only for a subject? In every culture, there are a certain number of discourses concerning the subject that, independently of their truth value, function, circulate, have the weight of truth, and are accepted as such. Given these discourses in their content and form, given the bonds of obligation that bind us to these discourses, what is the experience of ourselves in light of the existence of these discourses? In what ways is our experience of ourselves formed or transformed? It is around this third question that Foucault approached the question of the relationship of subject to truth for some years.

The subject, if it ever existed at all, can no longer be the clearly delimited, rational, conscious entity in the form of a Cogito that comes down from Descartes. The contemporary human subject has to be something murkier, more mingled in life and the body, more extensive than the Cartesian model; more akin to a process of production, or creation, that concentrates much greater potential forces inside itself. Foucault's work aimed to ensure that the subject was not replaced by another form of humanist subject and preferably not replaced at all. As will be shown, technologies, instead, would enable the processes of subject formation he called subjectification and subjectivation. Whether or not this formation could be called a subject, or under what conditions it might be called subject, is what Foucault's philosophy will explain.

²³ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject, Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 56.

²⁴ Michel Foucault, *Subjectivity and truth, Lectures at the Collège de France 1980-1981*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 10-11.

Foucault concludes that it could not take the name of subject if that term retained its Cartesian signification.

In general, the term subject, as used in the thesis, is derived from philosophy, politics, and grammar. In the first case, the term refers to the a priori condition of possibility of thought and knowledge established by Descartes and the transcendental consciousness that posits itself as the origin of representation established by Kant. In the second case, the term refers to a relation of subjection with respect to a power imposed. In the third, the term refers to the subject of a sentence in verbalisation. In all cases the term denotes a dimension of agency that is lost in behaviourist, structuralist, or deterministic accounts of action. Foucault's use of the term seems to prioritise the importance of the political sense of subjection and subjugation and to refer in general terms to the grammatical sense in the enunciation of true discourse. He rejects any conception of the essential subject of Descartes and Kant. As he suggests, the assertion 'I lie, I speak' in ancient times was enough to shake the foundations of Greek truth: I lie, I speak, on the other hand, puts the whole of modern fiction to the test.²⁵ Gerald L Bruns suggests that 'the point would be to think of Foucault's early occluded style as a practice of de-subjectivation; the form of his language, whatever one's reaction to it, is an application of his argument against reductive (phenomenological) consciousness.'²⁶ In his essay on Maurice Blanchot, Foucault says that, grammatical appearances aside, "I speak" does not have the structure of the cogito because the one entails an experience of language that the other, in its angelic purity, escapes: "I think" led to the indubitable certainty of the "I" and its existence; "I speak," on the other hand, distances, disperses, effaces that existence and lets only its empty emplacement appear. Thought about thought... has taught us that thought leads us to the deepest interiority. Speech about speech leads us, by way of literature as well as perhaps by other paths, to the outside in which the speaking subject disappears.²⁷ To which Foucault adds, "No doubt, that is why Western thought took so long to think the being of language: as if it had a premonition of the danger that the naked experience of language poses for the self-evidence of the 'I think'."²⁸

²⁵ Michel Foucault, 'The thought of the Outside', in *Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology*, ed. by James D. Faubion trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1998), pp. 146-190 (p. 149).

²⁶ Gerald L. Bruns, 'Foucault's Modernism', in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, ed. by Gary Gutting (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 348-379 (p. 363).

²⁷ Michel Foucault, 'The thought of the Outside', in *Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology*, ed. by James D. Faubion trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1998), pp. 146-190 (p. 149).

²⁸ Michel Foucault, 'The thought of the Outside', in *Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology*, ed. by James D. Faubion trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1998), pp. 146-190 (p. 149).

To dissolve the philosophical sense, Foucault opines that he could well be considered as a negative theorist.²⁹ Most of his statements on the subject were declarations of what the subject was not. Thus starts the confusion over the existence of the subject. As a negative theorist, one assumes a theory of subject and assumes a prior objectification. Theory, then, cannot be asserted as a basis for analytic work.³⁰ He will understand the Cartesian subject then as merely an historical concept or idea without any apparent reality but one which has influenced the history of thought and therefore must be criticised, and the historical conditions which motivate the conceptualisation must be examined. Foucault refused to set up a theory of the subject as might exist in existentialism and phenomenology and beginning with that theory pose the question of knowing how such and such a form of knowledge (of the self) was possible.³¹

Alessandro Fontana states in *The Aesthetics of existence*, that it is no secret to anyone that, as was often said, there is no essential subject in Foucault's work. Subjects are always subjugated: they are the point of application of techniques, normative disciplines, but they are never sovereign subjects.³² Foucault says in the same interview that 'we have to make distinctions. In the first place, I don't think there is actually a sovereign, founding subject, a universal form of subject that one could find everywhere. I am very sceptical and very hostile toward this conception of the subject. I think on the contrary that the subject is constituted through practices of subjection, or, in a more autonomous way, through practices of liberation, of freedom, as in Antiquity, on the basis of course of a number of rules, styles and conventions that are found in the cultural environment.'³³ In 1983, Foucault suggests that there are two meanings to the word subject: subject to someone else by control and dependence or tied to identity by a consciousness or self-knowledge.³⁴ As such, then, a subject is any individual upon whom a relationship of power is exercised, that is, being subject in a relationship of power. As

²⁹ Michel Foucault, *On the Government of the Living: Lectures at the College de France 1979-1980*, ed. by Michel Senellart trans. by Graham Burchell (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 76.

³⁰ Michel Foucault, 'The Subject and Power', in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, ed. by Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 208-226 (p. 209).

³¹ Michel Foucault, 'The ethic of care for the self as a practice of freedom, an interview with Michel Foucault on Jan 20, 1984', *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 12 (1987), 112-131 (p. 122).

³² Michel Foucault, 'An Aesthetics of Existence', in *Politics Philosophy Culture: Interviews and other writings 1977-1984*, ed. by Laurence Kritzman trans. by Alan Sheridan and others (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 47-57 (p. 45).

³³ Michel Foucault, 'An Aesthetics of Existence', in *Politics Philosophy Culture: Interviews and other writings 1977-1984*, ed. by Laurence Kritzman trans. by Alan Sheridan and others (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 47-57 (p. 47).

³⁴ Michel Foucault, 'The Subject and Power', in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, ed. by Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 208-226 (p. 208).

for being tied to an identity by a consciousness or self-knowledge, Foucault had already defined this concept of identity in 1980 as a subject, ‘through which, for which, and regarding which the truth of the self is manifested’³⁵, that is, ‘subject in a manifestation of truth.’³⁶ The experience of ourselves is formed and transformed by the fact that somewhere in our society there are discourses considered to be truth and which circulate or are imposed as true, based on ourselves as subject.³⁷

From this fundamental position, he declares that his objective was to create a history of the different modes by which, in Western culture, human beings are made into subjects.³⁸ His work on subjectification and objectification is well known where individuals are subject to power and subjugated. In this early work, the terms individual and subject are indeed synonyms. Foucault defines an individual in *Psychiatric Power* when he says that one should see the real constitution of the individual on the basis of a certain technology of power. Discipline, he says, seems to be this technology, specific to the power that is born and develops from the classical age, and which, on the basis of this game of bodies, isolates and cuts out what I think is an historically new element that we call the individual.³⁹ There is also an understanding, in Foucault’s work on neo-liberalism, of the individual as the juridical individual as he appears in philosophical or juridical theories: the individual as abstract subject, defined by individual rights that no power can limit unless agreed by contract. And, beneath this, alongside it, there was the development of a whole disciplinary technology that produced the individual as an historical reality, as an element of the productive forces, and as an element also of political forces. The individual is a subjected body held in a system of supervision and subjected to procedures of normalization.⁴⁰

His later work, however, was to study how a human being which Foucault will call ‘the self’ turns herself into a subject using ‘technologies of the self.’ It seems necessary then to

³⁵ Michel Foucault, *On the Government of the Living: Lectures at the College de France 1979-1980*, ed. by Michel Senellart trans. by Graham Burchell (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 81.

³⁶ Michel Foucault, *On the Government of the Living: Lectures at the College de France 1979-1980*, ed. by Michel Senellart trans. by Graham Burchell (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 81.

³⁷ Michel Foucault, *Subjectivity and Truth: Lectures at the Collège de France 1980-1981*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 11.

³⁸ Michel Foucault, 'The Subject and Power', in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, ed. by Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 208-226 (p. 208).

³⁹ Michel Foucault, *Psychiatric Power: Lectures at the College de France 1973-1974*, ed. by Jacques Lagrange (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), p. 57.

⁴⁰ Michel Foucault, *Psychiatric Power: Lectures at the College de France 1973-1974*, ed. by Jacques Lagrange (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), p. 57.

declare at this earliest of stages that the interchangeable use of the terms subject and individual in Foucault's work can only be valid when the individual is in a position of being subject-to rather than a subject-of. For this reason, when the thesis discusses technologies, the terms subject and individual are, indeed, interchangeable, in that all individuals are subject-to relationships of power, whether they are externally applied or imposed by the self on the self.

Along with the concept of an 'individual' as developed in *Discipline and Punish*, it seems that, in the processes of individualisation and totalisation utilised by pastoral power, the individual is again a construct of these mechanisms of subjection.⁴¹ Despite these understandings of individual as conceptions and their historical conditions, there can be no reason to deny the material existence of the self, a self that is nothing if not consequential, in all of Foucault's references. This self 'is not the subjective pole of experience.'⁴² The acceptance of the term self is not a return to an ontological dualism or a rationalist or intentional notion of individual action and human agency. Agency, as a modern conception related to the innate subject, is still decentred away from the self. Foucault will suggest that the 'theory of political power as an institution usually refers to a juridical conception of the subject of right.'⁴³ He adds that the analysis of governmentality, that is to say power as a set of reversible relationships, must refer to an ethics of the subject defined by the relationship of the self to the self. The self, for Foucault, is a constituted subject of experience rather than an agential or an innate Cartesian form of knowing subject.

The term subjectivity, on the other hand, is only one form of an organisation of experiences. Subjectivity is conceived as that which is constituted and transformed in its relationship to its own truth and in the telling of that truth in veridiction. It is not related to an anthropology that has universal value.⁴⁴ Subjectivity, as an organisation of forms of self-consciousness, defines, for Foucault, the way in which an individual experiences herself in a game of truth⁴⁵ where she relates to herself. Subjectivity, however, is not for Foucault merely

⁴¹ Michel Foucault, 'The Subject and Power' in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, ed. by Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 208-226 (p. 213).

⁴² Louis Sass, 'Lacan, Foucault, and the 'crisis of the subject'', *PPP*, 21, (2014) 325-341 (note 2).

⁴³ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 252.

⁴⁴ Michel Foucault, *Subjectivity and Truth: Lectures at the Collège de France 1980-1981*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 12.

⁴⁵ Games of truth is the term coined by Foucault to describe the formation of procedures by which the individual is led to observe herself, analyse herself, interpret herself, recognise herself. They are the ensemble of rules and technologies that an individual has at her disposal for the production of truth. According to Foucault in *Subjectivity and Truth* on page 221, correspondence between the truth and reality may be established when, within a game of truth, one undertakes to know on

the passive product of impersonal historical processes, as one might have thought from his earlier accounts of the “subjection” of the self in relation to power. Rather, he insists that the subjectivity may be constituted by the self, using the techniques available to it historically, alongside, doubtless, the influence of a myriad of factors outside its control. A self is never isolated; she is subject to historical conditions and pre-conditions. Subjectivity is the basic understanding of this self as a ‘being’, as a state of consciousness of the self and external entities. How this unique consciousness is experienced, analysed and interpreted defines subjectivity. Each form of subjectivity is unique to the individual. Subjectivity is the consciousness of being a subject of experience and that definition applies to the form of subjectivity that is constituted by games of truth, regulated by technologies of the self, by technologies of knowledge, or by technologies of coercion. Subjectivity is an obligation to the truth of the experience, a tying to identity, as constituted in games of truth in all their presentations. As such then, the subject, as a thing, as an entity or an object, does not simply appear at a specific moment in time and therefore can be known epistemologically. Rather a knowledge of subjectivity exists through experience, as a result of a combination of processes which can be defined.⁴⁶

The subject, as it appears in conventional Cartesian philosophy, is a propensity to a nominalism, essentially a reification of the experience of this interrelationship between the material self and the world into which it is thrown. The subject, if it does exist as more than a concept, could never be objectively known and therefore we can have no idea of it. The subject cannot be known as an object that exists outside of experience of the world. As Foucault asks: ‘How can there be a truth of the subject, even though there is truth only for a subject.’⁴⁷ Such a concept is incoherent. One might have an illusory sense of the subject, as Descartes did, in the form of an innate subjectivity, or a material organisation of experiences, or a bundle of perceptions of experiences of things and of the self. The subject, however, can never enter into any part of one’s knowledge (*savoir*).

Foucault seems to agree with the contention that no attributes of the world can be absolutely known, apart from the external relationships within the human world of experience.

what conditions one may say that a proposition is true. The truth is said by individuals who are free, who arrive at a certain agreement, and who find themselves thrust into certain networks of practices of power and constraining institutions.

⁴⁶ Michel Foucault, ‘The Return of Morality’, in *Politics Philosophy Culture: Interviews and other writings 1977-1984*, ed. by Laurence Kritzman trans. by Alan Sheridan and others (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 242-255 (p. 253).

⁴⁷ Michel Foucault, *Subjectivity and Truth: Lectures at the Collège de France 1980-1981*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 10.

This human world has a very Heideggerian definition. Humanist thought suggested that reasoning and language, the tools of reflection, habitually analyse this world of relationships into components such as part and whole, object and subject, I and it, or agent and instrument. However, in rejecting this humanism, the primary unit of experience can neither be the individual nor her surrounding, but the articulation between the two. Subjectivity must be viewed as a unified concept, an articulation of the world, experience of the world and a way of being. The world should be viewed as a field of mutually enabling relationships, rather than a world of isolated independent parts.

Foucault clarifies his position in his very last interview when he suggests that experience is the rationalisation of a process of subjectivation which results in the constitution of a subject, *or to be more precise*, the constitution of a subjectivity, and he defines a subjectivity as ‘only one of the given possibilities of organisation of a self-consciousness.’⁴⁸ Subjectivity for Foucault is a form. It is a form and a form that is never the same as itself. It is a form constituted in truth that ‘appears’ in history. He suggests that his problem was to define, not the moment at which something like the subject would appear but rather the combination of processes by which the subjectivity ‘exists’ with its different problems and obstacles and through forms which are far from being completed.⁴⁹ The ‘mode of being’ of political subjectivity will differ in form from the ‘mode of being’ of the desiring subjectivity. In different circumstances, experiences, and using different technologies that deploy the game of truth, one establishes with one’s self different forms of relationships, and subsequently one constitutes different but true forms of subjectivity.

Foucault informs us that identity, which one attempts to support and to unify under a mask of essentialism and an innate subject that can be discovered, revealed, and liberated, is in itself ‘only a parody: it is plural; countless souls dispute its possession; numerous systems intersect and dominate one another. Foucault explains that, in genealogy, the second use of history is the systematic dissociation of our identity. The study of history makes one “happy, unlike the metaphysicians, to possess in oneself not an immortal soul but many mortal ones. And in each of these souls, history will discover not a forgotten identity, eager to be reborn,

⁴⁸ Michel Foucault, 'The Return of Morality', in *Politics Philosophy Culture: Interviews and other writings 1977-1984*, ed. by Laurence Kritzman trans. by Alan Sheridan and others (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 242-255 (p. 253). Author’s emphasis added

⁴⁹ Michel Foucault, 'The Return of Morality', in *Politics Philosophy Culture: Interviews and other writings 1977-1984*, ed. by Laurence Kritzman trans. by Alan Sheridan and others (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 242-255 (p. 253).

but a complex system of distinct and multiple elements, unable to be mastered by the powers of synthesis.’⁵⁰

Foucault’s work is an original and often powerful attempt to break with ontological dualism, epistemological realism, subjective and humanistic notions of intentionality and centred agency, and somehow theorise without a notion of the essential or knowing subject. His ambition in his oeuvre might be described as an attempt to describe the many and varied process by which unique human beings have been made into subjects by external power and by the power voluntarily imposed by the self on the self. Keeping this in mind might remove some confusion.

⁵⁰ Michel Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', in *Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology*, ed. by James D. Faubion trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1998), pp. 369-391 (p. 386).

Introduction

The title of this thesis, *The Return of Morality*, is borrowed from *Le retour de la morale*, Michel Foucault's very last interview. He died on June 25th, 1984, three days before this interview was published. The inclusion of 'return' in the title signifies a circular thread in Foucault's later work, one that can be followed in Foucault's genealogy of morality as a form of government for the individual. The thread links his unveiling of technologies of the self⁵¹, understood as transformative actions by the self on the self that inhered in a Hellenistic philosophy as a way of life, in *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality Volume 2*, and especially the technologies of self-examination and confession, in the practices of institutions of modern pastoral power; the practices employed in government of the individual and in spiritual direction in early Christian monastic institutions; the identification of the same practices in Hellenistic spiritual direction as a means to a unique Greek morality and self-government; and finally in the elaboration of their possible role today, in the form of an aesthetics of existence as a new concept, for Foucault, of ethics and morality. In all cases while the technologies might remain similar, their objectives and modalities are fundamentally transformed throughout their history.

The thesis takes as a starting point in the circle Foucault's suggestion that 'in Greek ethics, people were concerned with their moral conduct, their ethics, their relations to themselves and to others, much more than with religious problems. For instance, what happens to us after death? What are the gods? Do they intervene or not? These are very, very unimportant problems for them, and they are not directly related to ethics, to conduct. The second thing is that ethics was not related to any social or, at least, to any legal-institutional system. For instance, the laws against sexual misbehaviour were very few and not very compelling. The third thing is that what they were worried about, their theme was to constitute a kind of ethics which was an aesthetics of existence. Well, I wonder if our problem nowadays is not, in a way, similar to this one, since most of us no longer believe that ethics is founded in religion, nor do we want a legal system to intervene in our moral, personal, private life. Recent liberation movements suffer from the fact that they cannot find any principle on which to base the elaboration of a new ethics. They need an ethics, but they cannot find any other ethics than

⁵¹ As will be examined in great detail, technologies of the self are the practices, the exercises, that exist within all cultures by which an individual learns, through a form of direction by another, to act upon herself and to transform her subjectivity. They are forms of subjectivation and the practices considered most important in the history of Western subjectivity by Foucault include self-examination and confession.

an ethics founded on so-called scientific knowledge of what the self is, what desire is, what the unconscious is, and so on.⁵²

The thesis examines Foucault's unveiling of the strategies of Hellenistic technologies of the self in the constitution of a Greek morality, technologies which he called spiritual exercises, and, through the re-establishment of these technologies in what he will call an aesthetics of existence for a modern age, examines the possibility and coherence of a return of a Greek 'morality as the practice of freedom'⁵³ for today.

The thesis will also examine the reason for this implicit normative stance taken by Foucault in a 'turn to ethics' which was most unexpected. In his book *Foucault's Askesis: An introduction to the Philosophical Life*, Edward F. McGushin⁵⁴ contends that this new way of practicing 'philosophy as a way of life' evokes Foucault's ethical resistance to modern relations of power and knowledge. McGushin investigates how these concrete practices serve to contest identifications of the subject that result from various configurations and relationships of knowledge/power, including forms of biopower. Biopower brought life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations and made knowledge/power an agent of transformation of human life. The consequence of biopower was the growing importance assumed by the action of the norm. A normalising society is the historical outcome of a technology of knowledge/power centred on life. The law operates more and more as a norm and its institutions are increasingly incorporated into a continuum of apparatuses.⁵⁵ McGushin says that with the formation of modern philosophy as a discursive practice, new relations of political power begin to take over the technologies of the self. In other words, just at the moment when philosophy ceases to conceive itself as a technology for becoming a subject who has access to the truth, the moment it ceases to conceive itself as a technology of the self, political government arises as an ensemble of relations, institutions, and technologies for producing subjects who are normal.⁵⁶ He opines that in order to understand Foucault's later ethical project, it is necessary to see it within the context of his earlier work on power/knowledge. He suggests that Foucault's

⁵² Michel Foucault, 'On the genealogy of ethics', in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp. 253-280 (p. 255-256).

⁵³ Michel Foucault, 'The ethic of care for the self as a practice of freedom, an interview with Michel Foucault on Jan 20, 1984', *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 12 (1987), 112-131 (p. 115).

⁵⁴ Edward F. McGushin *Foucault's Askesis; An introduction to the philosophical life* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007), p. 283.

⁵⁵ Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality:1* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 144.

⁵⁶ Edward F. McGushin *Foucault's Askesis; An introduction to the philosophical life* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007), p. 283.

earlier projects represented an attempt to bring to light the relations of power and knowledge that narrowed and limited freedom and this later work on the care of the self represents Foucault's and, by extension, the self's effort to take back that freedom by redefining it in terms of care of the self. McGushin opines that Foucault's excavation of ancient philosophical practices gave him the tools to counter this function of knowledge/power, that is, subjectification with a practice of self-formation and subjectivation.

This thesis will disagree with McGushin's contention. This thesis suggests that the freedom Foucault speaks of is not freedom from the power relationships of subjectification that such commentary associates with Foucault's genealogical work. These relationships refer to limitations imposed by objectifying knowledge (*connaissance*), relationships of power/knowledge (*savoir*), that is, subjectification and constituted passive subjectivity, and the domination and objectification of the individual by coercive forms of biopower.⁵⁷ McGushin suggests that as this modern power functions by producing individual subjects that might resist, Foucault's subject might be both active and passive. As the prologue clearly indicates, a passive subjectivity by its very nature cannot be an active subject. Endowed with a passive subjectivity, the individual will not resist as she has no knowledge of any imposed limitation. For example, when speaking of sexuality as a form of objectifying knowledge in modernity, Foucault insists that if power is seen to be constitutive of desire itself, then 'you are always-already trapped.'⁵⁸

Foucault admitted that 'perhaps I've insisted too much on the technology of domination and power. I am more and more interested in the interaction between oneself and others and in the technologies of individual domination, the history of how an individual acts upon himself in the technology of self.'⁵⁹ Foucault also suggests that 'When I was studying asylums, prisons and so on, I perhaps insisted too much on the techniques of domination. What we call discipline is something really important in this kind of institution. But it is only one aspect of the art of governing people in our societies. Having studied the field of power relations taking techniques of domination as a point of departure, I would like, in the years to come, to study power relations starting from the techniques of the self.'⁶⁰ Taking Foucault's lead, the thesis will

⁵⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality:1* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 83.

⁵⁸ Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality:1* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 83.

⁵⁹ Michel Foucault, 'Technologies of the self', in *Technologies of the self: a seminar with Michel Foucault*, ed by Luther Martin and Huck Gutman and Patrick H Hutton (London: Tavistock Publications, 1988), pp. 16-49 (p. 16).

⁶⁰ Michel Foucault, 'Sexuality and solitude', in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp 175-184. (p. 175).

contend that he speaks of freedom from the forms of voluntary subjection, or the voluntary submission of subjectivity, in processes of subjectivation, and particularly in processes of self-examination and confession that inhere in the imposition of an individualising direction of consciousness and a totalising power by modern institutions of power and discipline; that is, a form of pastoral power that is imposed on individuals and societies. Sharing the same technologies of the self, Foucault's Greek form of morality or self-government and the forms of an apparent self-government that pastoral power imposes are both, therefore, processes of subjectivation, the voluntary self-constitution of subjectivity through the deployment by the self of either of two forms of knowledge as one's own truth. As Foucault opines, 'the technologies of living are, at bottom, procedures of constitution of a subjectivity or of subjectivation, and this is how they should be understood.'⁶¹ These technologies enable the development of individual relationships of the self to the self as a process of self-subjectivation and pastoral power as a process of trans-subjectivation. As will be shown, self-subjectivation is the deployment of a spiritual knowledge, giving rise to a subjectivity constituted by the self. Trans-subjectivation is the deployment of a discourse of knowledge (*connaissance*) that is voluntarily accepted as truth by the self, constituting a subject while, at the same time, renouncing her own spiritual truth. As will be shown, with the cultural and pedagogical prioritisation of objective and scientific knowledge in modernity, complete with the conception of an indubitable direct access to a truth as knowledge (*connaissance*) by the Cogito, a subject who by observing has access to truth, trans-subjectivation of this knowledge has influenced the development of Western subjectivity to a far greater extent than self-subjectivation. Foucault, albeit it implicitly, suspects such subjectivity, as is self-constituted in trans-subjectivation, is limited and seeks to restore self-subjectivation as the predominant form of self-constitution of subjectivity. He reveals the Hellenistic strategy of spirituality as a mediated, yet more definite, access to truth of the self in the form of spiritual knowledge, can, through spiritual exercise, transform this modern form of subjectivity to a new form of ethical subjectivity. Ethics, in a new interpretation of the word, becomes for Foucault a process of transformation of the subject from the empirical Cartesian subject to a spiritual or ethical subject. Ethics is redefined by Foucault as 'a process in which the individual delimits that part of himself that will form the object of his moral practice, defines his position relative to the precept he will follow, and decides on a certain mode of being that will serve as his moral goal. And this requires him to

⁶¹ Michel Foucault, *Subjectivity and Truth: Lectures at the Collège de France 1980-1981*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 254.

act upon himself, to monitor, test, improve, and transform himself.⁶² The ethical subject is a constituted subject or the transformed modern subject, transformed by spiritual exercises or technologies of the self, depending on whether Foucault is examining antiquity or modernity.

Morality is also redefined as the new form of self-government that results from this ethical subjectivation. Morality is indissociable from these forms of self-activity. Every morality must comprise of a moral subjectivation. Foucault opines⁶³ that in certain moralities, such as Christian and modern moralities, the main emphasis is placed on the code, on its systematicity, its capacity to embrace every area of behaviour. In others, the strong dynamic element is to be sought in forms of subjectivation and the practices of the self. In this latter case, such as in Greek morality, the system of codes and rules of behaviours may be rather rudimentary. What is required in Greek morality is that the self transforms her way of being, her *ethos*, through spiritual exercises or her ethics. The self will impose a morality on herself, one constituted in a relationship with herself in the formation of the ethical subject, rather than a self-renouncing relationship with knowledge (*connaissance*), doctrine, ideology, or code.

Foucault's new ethics and morality expose the inverted image modern individuals have of forms of pastoral power. Pastoral power was introduced into the Western world by the Christian Church who formed pastoral power into precise mechanisms and definite institutions. As will be shown later in the thesis, pastoral power is an individualising and totalising form of power, one which governs the very consciousness of individuals, that is, their subjectivity. It controls the processes whereby individuals identify themselves and their truths. Through technologies of self-examination, confession, complete obedience, a pastorate, or its modern equivalent in psychiatric or penal institutions, will impose identities such as Christian, mad, ill, or criminal, depending on the institution of power that is spoken of.

Foucault does 'not think that the idea that one could govern men, or that one did govern men, was a Greek idea.'⁶⁴ He notes that 'never in Greek or Roman antiquity did one have the idea that certain individuals could play the role of shepherd in relation to others, guiding them along their entire lives, from birth to death. Politicians had never been defined in Greek and

⁶² Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality:2* (London: Penguin books, 1992), p. 28.

⁶³ Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality:2* (London: Penguin books, 1992), p. 30.

⁶⁴ Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College de France 1977-1978*, ed. by Michael Senellart trans. by Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 168.

Roman literature as pastors or as shepherds.⁶⁵ He suggests: 'I think we can say that the origin of the idea of a government of men should be sought in the East, in a pre-Christian East first of all, and then in the Christian East, and in two forms: first, in the idea and organization of a pastoral type of power, and second, in the practice of spiritual direction, the direction of souls.'⁶⁶ Foucault's interest, then, in early Christianity was not an interest in faith as such. He conceived the church as a political force, 'a superb instrument of power for itself, entirely woven through with elements that are imaginary, erotic, effective, corporal, sensual and so on.'⁶⁷ As he says: 'the church was the big apparatus of knowledge in the West for centuries, and particularly from the eighteenth century.'⁶⁸ He suggests that 'it has often been said that Christianity brought into being a code of ethics fundamentally different from that of the ancient world. Less emphasis is usually placed on the fact that it proposed and spread a new power relations throughout the entire world.'⁶⁹

Although Christian and modern cultures are not co-extensive and must be distinguished, Foucault argued that the provenance of contemporary modern confessional technologies of the self, in psychiatry and penology, and the experience of truth of the self they entail, must be found in the Christian experience of truth and of the self as soul or subject.⁷⁰ The modern subject and the Christian subject will identify the truth of themselves only within the context of a subject-object configuration and their experience of truth of the self is associated with a methodological and even juridical experience of self-objectification. The essence of self, in all its forms, is assumed to be a possible object of knowledge (*connaissance*). Christianity organised a pastoral power that was both specific and autonomous, it implanted its apparatuses within the Roman Empire. Foucault opines that 'Western man has learned to see himself as a sheep in a flock, something that assuredly no Greek would have been prepared to accept. Over millennia he has learned to ask for his salvation from a shepherd (*pasteur*) who

⁶⁵ Michel Foucault, 'Sexuality and Power (1978)', in *Religion and Culture: Michel Foucault*, ed. by Jeremy R Carrette (New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 115-130 (p. 121).

⁶⁶ Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College de France 1977-1978*, ed. by Michael Senellart trans. by Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 169.

⁶⁷ Michel Foucault, 'On Religion', in *Religion and Culture: Michel Foucault*, ed. by Jeremy R Carrette trans. by Richard Townsend (New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 106-109 (p. 107).

⁶⁸ Michel Foucault, 'On Religion', in *Religion and Culture: Michel Foucault*, ed. by Jeremy R Carrette trans. by Richard Townsend (New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 106-109 (p. 107).

⁶⁹ Michel Foucault, 'The Subject and Power', in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, ed. by Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 208-226 (p. 213).

⁷⁰ Alexandre Macmillan, 'Michel Foucault's Techniques of the Self and the Christian Politics of Obedience', *Theory Culture & Society* 28 (1977) 3-25 (p. 5).

sacrifices himself for him'⁷¹ Pastoral power portrays itself as a salvatory power for each individual. Yet it is a totalising form of power that constitutes individuals by directing conscience. The new ethics exposes the assumption that individuals make that their examination of self and confession is in fact their own choice, their volition. It exposes the internal ruse that these individuals fall for that they are freed by the technologies of self that inhere in pastoral institutions, instead of realising that they are constrained by them. In classical antiquity examination of conscience was an instrument of mastery, here it will be an instrument of subordination. The internal ruse will suggest that for unsuspecting individuals 'technologies of power suggest that they speak the truth of themselves following liberation by this power.'⁷² Institutions will contend that, where power normally reduces one to silence, confession frees the individual self. Pastoral power initially manifests itself in its zeal, devotion, and endless application. Pastoral power is fundamentally presented and perceived as a beneficent power, but beneficence is only one of a whole bundle of features by which this pastoral power is defined. It is also a power that cannot be exercised without knowing the inside of people's minds, without exploring their souls, without making them reveal their innermost secrets. It implies a knowledge of conscience and an ability to direct it. It implies a demand, by those who exercise pastoral power, of a total, absolute, and unconditional obedience and obliges a renunciation of all truth of self in favour of a new truth.

Foucault argues that this ruse and image inversion is persistent for individuals using the technologies of confession and truth-telling employed by modern psychiatry, penology, and medicine, because 'the obligation to confess is now relayed through so many different points, is so deeply ingrained in us, that we no longer perceive it as the effect of a power that constrains us; on the contrary, it seems to us that truth, lodged in our most secret nature, demands only to surface: that if it fails to do so, this is because a constraint holds it in place, the violence of a power weighs it down, and it can finally be articulated only at the price of a kind of liberation.'⁷³

To the unenlightened, these technologies of the self as used in pastoral power, whose objectives were transformed in their history, appear to support individualisation, self-government, and self-identification. Individuals believe that they freely tell the truth of themselves but the truth they tell is not their truth or their true discourse of the self. It is imposed

⁷¹ Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College de France 1977-1978*, ed. by Michael Senellart trans. by Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 174.

⁷² Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality: I* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 60.

⁷³ Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality: I* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 60.

by a coercive pastoral power and by institutions and agents of that power, as a discourse claiming truth and under the guise of individual freedom.

For Foucault, a return of a Greek morality is not a struggle against a political power even though elements of pastoral power were integrated into the power of the modern state; it is a struggle against the absolute control over and government of individualisation, a struggle that is enacted by restoring the original objectives of ancient technologies of the self that had been transformed by these regimes of pastoral power and truth.

Technologies of the self or spiritual exercises

For Foucault, the history of thought is the analysis of the way an unproblematic field of experience, or a set of practices, which were accepted without question, which were familiar and silent, out of discussion, becomes a problem, raises discussion and debate, incites new reactions, and induces a crisis in the previously silent behaviour, habits, practices, and institutions. The history of thought, understood in this way, is the history of the way people begin to take care of something, of the way they become anxious about this or that, about themselves, or about truth. On a general enquiry, one might ask why any human experience might become an object of moral solicitude. For example, Foucault asks; how, why, and in what forms was sexuality constituted as a moral domain.⁷⁴ To begin with, Foucault's work on sexuality in modernity reveals that all individual human experience might refer to the development of diverse fields of knowledge (*connaissance*); the establishment of a set of rules and norms which found support in religious, judicial, pedagogical, and medical institutions. As part of this initial exploration, Foucault had planned a history of the experience of sexuality, where experience is understood as the correlation between fields of knowledge, types of normativity. As he suggested, 'through the domination of institutions of knowledge/power, it is now possible for the relation of truth to be validated and manifested in no other form than that of scientific knowledge.'⁷⁵ Foucault opines that 'sexuality was conceived of as a constant. The hypothesis was that where it was manifested in historically singular forms, this was through various mechanisms of repression to which it was bound to be subjected in every society.'⁷⁶ As shall be shown, these mechanisms of repression were technologies of power and domination.

⁷⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure, The History of Sexuality:2* (London: Penguin books, 1992), p. 10.

⁷⁵ Michel Foucault, *The Courage of truth, Lectures at the Collège de France 1983-1984*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 237.

⁷⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality:2* (London: Penguin books, 1992), p. 4.

While studying domains of a universal experience of sexuality and its interdictions, however, Foucault puzzled at the figure of the self-constituting subjectivity which appeared in self-examination and confessional practices where the individual herself produced a discourse of truth for herself. Unlike other interdictions, Foucault opines that sexual interdiction is constantly connected with the obligation to tell the truth about oneself.⁷⁷ Foucault soon became aware of modern practices of confession and examination of self whereby the individual constituted a truth of her desires and pleasures for herself. This truth of the self was not linked to discourses of knowledge of sexuality. Power was no longer understood to be constitutive of desire. He had seen this phenomenon quite a number of years previously in his work on madness and mental illness. Foucault noted a series of practices in his study of madness and penology by which ‘individuals were led to focus attention of themselves, to decipher, recognise, and acknowledge themselves as subjects, bringing into play between themselves and themselves a certain relationship that allows them to discover the truth of their being.’⁷⁸ These practices of examination and confession were games of truth, controlled by technologies of self, constituting truth and subjects who spoke and lived their own truths. Foucault asks;⁷⁹ what are the games of truth by which man proposes to think his own nature when he perceives himself to be mad; when he considers himself to be ill; when he conceives himself as a living, speaking, labouring being; when he judges and punishes himself as a criminal? What were the games of truth by which human beings came to see themselves as desiring individuals? Whereas before the answer was a form of objectification by knowledge (*connaissance*) in the formation of human sciences or a subjectification on the other side of a normative division, becoming an object of knowledge (*savoir*)/power, Foucault’s new answer is the use of ‘procedures by which the subject is led to observe himself, analyse himself, interpret himself, recognise himself as a domain of a possible knowledge.’⁸⁰

The theme of knowledge/power and the subjectification of individuals as the primary influence on the history of modern human concepts of both religious and scientific truths, was now

⁷⁷ Michel Foucault, 'Technologies of the self', in *Technologies of the self, a seminar with Michel Foucault*, ed by Luther Martin and Huck Gutman and Patrick H Hutton (London: Tavistock Publications, 1988), pp. 16-49 (p. 16).

⁷⁸ Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality:2* (London: Penguin books, 1992), p. 5.

⁷⁹ Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality:2* (London: Penguin books, 1992), p. 7.

⁸⁰ Michel Foucault, 'Foucault' in *Dictionnaire des Philosophes*, ed by Denis Huisman, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1984) 942-946 (p. 944).

described by Foucault in *On the Government of the Living*⁸¹ as worn and hackneyed. In the same lecture series, he re-emphasised that the notion of dominant ideology, against which he had previously posited this notion of knowledge/power, for many reasons could never theoretically provide an adequate foundation for its claims of universal and perpetual truth. He insists that the analysis of men's thoughts, behaviour, and knowledge in terms of ideology must be rejected as theoretically unsound. The function of the notion of knowledge (savoir) in technologies of knowledge/power, and the discursive practices that constituted the domain of objects and concepts for passive individuals, was precisely to clear the field of the opposition between scientific and unscientific, illusion and reality, true and false, that dominated any theory of ideology. However, with the revelations of the possible influences of technologies of the self, Foucault revised his emphasis on power on the self by external forces, to prioritise the notion of a power of the self on the self, that is, varied capacities of the self to govern the self, and others, by means of the self's own truth. The notion of government is understood, not in a narrow sense of executive and administrative decisions in state systems but in the broad senses of mechanisms and procedures, if not almost an art, intended to conduct or direct the conduct of individuals or the self.

Where he had until then used 'technology' to refer to systems of domination and coercion, he now transposed the term onto his new interests, employing it to the way individuals perform hermeneutic actions on themselves and enact and announce their subjectivity. These are the technologies of the self. Frédéric Gros will maintain that Foucault does not present these practices of the self as a conceptual novelty but as the organising principle of his entire work and the common theme of his earlier work.⁸²

In his later work, he noted changes in the way individuals were led to assign meaning and value to their conduct, their duties, their pleasures, their dreams. Foucault noted that the original problematisation of sexuality and experience was linked, in Greek and Greco-Roman culture, technologies, to the aesthetics of existence; 'those intentional and voluntary actions by which men not only set themselves rules of conduct, but seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and make their lives into an oeuvre that carries

⁸¹ Michel Foucault, *On the Government of the Living: Lectures at the College de France 1979-1980*, ed. by Michel Senellart trans. by Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 11.

⁸² Frédéric Gros, 'Course Context', in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject, Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982* (New York: Picador, 2005), pp.507-550 (p. 515).

certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria.’⁸³ The contention is that Foucault, as a theorist of power, understood that, like all power relationships, the new technologies of self to self, these aesthetics of existence, were ever present and were always available to those whose attitude enables them to problematise the era they live in. For a long time, the study of technologies of domination in modern Western history had hidden the existence of these practices of the self from Foucault. It was this recognition of the possibilities for a new technology of the self that instigated the theoretical shift in Foucault’s work. So long as Foucault was studying the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the subject, as if by natural tendency, was reflected as the objective product of systems of knowledge and power, the alienated correlate of these technologies of power/knowledge from which an external identity was imposed, and beyond which the only salvation was madness, crime of literature.⁸⁴ Foucault says that ‘the very important role played at the end of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by the formation of domains of knowledge (*connaissance*) about sexuality from the points of view of biology, medicine, psychopathology, sociology and ethnology; the determining role also played by normative systems imposed on sexual behaviour through the intermediary of education, medicine, justice made it hard to distinguish the forms and effects of the relation to the self as particular elements in the constitution of this experience. In pursuing my analysis of the forms of relation to self, in and of themselves, I found myself spanning eras in a way that took me further and further from the chronological outline I had first decided on.’⁸⁵ According to Frédéric Gros, Foucault, ‘as a historian, was tempted to carry out a history of the technologies of the self themselves, as a lawless universality, in their historico-ethical dimension, and in domains of effectuation other than sexuality.’⁸⁶ Foucault’s critical interest however was not in the categorisation or the history of technologies of the self themselves. It was Hadot’s work on the history and strategies of Hellenistic spiritual exercises that transformed Foucault’s perception of technologies of the self to the greatest extent. He saw the possibility, by borrowing the strategies of Hellenistic technologies of the self, of showing that by constituting one’s own experiences of one’s own self, by constituting for oneself a form of subjectivity that he will call the ethical subject, one can alter one’s self-consciousness, think

⁸³ Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure, The History of Sexuality:2* (London: Penguin books, 1992), p. 10-11.

⁸⁴ Frederic Gros, *Course Context: The Hermeneutics of the Subject, Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982* (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 513.

⁸⁵ Michel Foucault, 'Preface to the History of Sexuality:2' in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. by Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), pp. 333-340 (p.333-339).

⁸⁶ Frédéric Gros, 'Course Context', in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject, Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982* (New York: Picador, 2005), pp.507-550 (p. 510).

differently and be who one never was. Arnold Davidson opines that ‘in order fully to understand Foucault’s motivations and his object of study, one must take into account the way that Hadot’s work on ancient spiritual exercises helped to form his entire project.’⁸⁷ He adds that ‘I do not think it is an exaggeration to claim that Foucault’s study of ancient sexual behaviour is guided or framed in terms of Hadot’s notion of spiritual exercises; that Foucault’s aim is to link the practices of the self exhibited in the domain of sexual behaviour to the spiritual training and exercise that govern the whole of one’s existence. In ancient thought, governing one’s sexual practices was one aspect of that governing of oneself that was the goal of spiritual askesis.’⁸⁸

This thesis, in the first few chapters, aims to examine technologies of the self and to categorise their forms in Hellenistic philosophy as a way of life and in early Christian monasticism, using Foucault’s own work and especially the work of Pierre Hadot. To be clear from the very beginning of the thesis, Foucault never intends the return of morality to be a return to a Greek life experience or a return to a particular Greek morality. There is no return to a Greek way of life with all its obvious faults and historical problems. Foucault insists that trying to rethink the Greeks today does not consist of setting off Greek morality as the domain of morality par excellence which one would need for self -reflection. He insists that ‘Greek ethics had nothing to offer the present day. The Greek ethics were linked to a purely virile society with an absolutely acceptable slavery; a society in which the women were underdogs whose pleasure had no importance, whose sexual life had only to be oriented toward, determined by, their status as wives, and so on. Greek ethics are quite dead, and Foucault judged it as undesirable to return to then as it would be impossible to resuscitate this ethics. The point is to see to it that European thinking can take up Greek thinking again as an experience which took place once and with regard to which one can be completely free.’⁸⁹ In any case, as a general maxim, he insists that ‘you can’t find the solution of a problem in the solution of another problem raised at another moment by other people.’⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Arnold Davidson, ‘Spiritual Exercises and Ancient philosophy: an Introduction to Pierre Hadot’, *Critical Inquiry*, 16 (1990), 475-482 (p. 480).

⁸⁸ Arnold Davidson, ‘Spiritual Exercises and Ancient philosophy: an Introduction to Pierre Hadot’, *Critical Inquiry*, 16 (1990), 475-482 (p. 4).

⁸⁹ Michel Foucault, ‘The Return of Morality’, in *Politics Philosophy Culture: Interviews and other writings 1977-1984*, ed. by Laurence Kritzman trans. by Alan Sheridan and others (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 242-255 (p. 253).

⁹⁰ Michel Foucault, ‘On the genealogy of ethics’, in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp. 253-280 (p. 262).

The thesis is not intended as a critical historical analysis of Hellenistic philosophy itself as this is a work for another thesis. It will not attempt to point out where Foucault might have been selective in his choice of exercises, purposely omitting those that might have a metaphysics as their objective. It is to assess their value as processes of self-subjection as Foucault suggests they are. As will be explained, Foucault never intended a return to practicing Hellenistic philosophies as a way of living. His aim was to re-establish technologies of the self and, in particular, self-subjection in a return to a morality of self-government for the individual today. This later work on technologies of the self, in which Foucault drew from Hellenistic philosophy strategies and techniques to form the ethical subject, poses the possibility of a return of a form of self-government in modern times that might be founded on an unmitigated convergence of freedom and truth, and of a coherent relationship between forms of subjectivity and truth. Foucault's contention is that as a result of the practices of the early Christian institutions, morality as self-government as Foucault uniquely defines the concept, and the convergence of freedom and truth, disappeared to a great extent in Western culture only to be replaced with a culture of rule, code and indictment as the basis for government of the individual and society. In Western culture, technologies of the self took the form of imposed individualising techniques and of totalisation procedures, and subsequently developing into technologies of domination by the Christian Church as an institution of knowledge/power.⁹¹ As he says, 'I think we can say that the origin of the idea of a government of men should be sought in the East, in a pre-Christian East first of all, and then in the Christian East, and in two forms: first, in the idea and organisation of a pastoral type of power, and second, in the practice of spiritual direction, the direction of souls.'⁹²

Anti-essentialism, anti-Cartesian philosophy, and Foucault's refusal of a direct and indubitable access to truth of the self.

Foucault suggests that as the Greeks lived in a pre-Christian and pre-Cartesian era, Greek thinkers did not search for a subject. Self and life, understood as a unity, is a canvas which can be transformed and reformed by an art of living or a *tekhne*. The Greek individual understood that she might constitute for herself, using technologies or exercises, not a subject but a way of being or attitude, a 'way of being' which Foucault calls *ethos*. He describes 'a certain way

⁹¹ Michel Foucault, *Confessions of the Flesh; The History of Sexuality Volume 4*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Robert Hurley (London: Penguin Classics, 2021), p. 35-36.

⁹² Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College de France 1977-1978*, ed. by Michael Senellart trans. by Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 169.

of thinking, speaking and acting, a certain relationship to what exists, to what one knows, to what one does, a relationship to society, to culture and also a relationship to others that we could call, let's say, attitude.⁹³ 'It is a voluntary choice made by certain people, a stance; in the end, a way of thinking and feeling; a way too of acting and behaving that at the one and the same time marks a relation of belonging and presents itself as a task.'⁹⁴ In addition, by truth telling or *parrhesia*, she constitutes for herself a new style of living that is an exact coherence with her *ethos*. This life called *bios* is constituted by a Greek morality, a form of government which is an unmitigated convergence of freedom and truth.⁹⁵ Foucault's work on technology is an attempt to theorise forms of self-government without any notion of an agential and essential subject and without any referral to an ethics that is related to knowledge (*connaissance*). Could work on technologies of the self, and especially the technologies he examined in Hellenistic spirituality whereby individuals can constitute *ethos* and *bios*, give guidance as to how individuals might choose to govern their conduct through the creation of new attitudes, self-identities, and way of living in a modern world? Foucault identified the origins of technologies of the self, in what might be called the arts of existence or aesthetics of existence that were part of a Hellenistic philosophy as a way of life. These are 'intentional and voluntary actions by which men not only set themselves rules of conduct, but also seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and make their lives into an oeuvre that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria.'⁹⁶

Foucault's opposition to Cartesian philosophy is an important aspect of his work on subjectivation and must be examined in this thesis. Foucault's intention in his notion of subjectivation is to ensure that the purported essential subject is exposed as having no unity, essence, or integral identity. Indeed, his work marks an important break with conventional ontological dualism, epistemological realism and rationalist and intentional notions of individual action and human agency.⁹⁷ By decentering the epistemological and moral subject of rationalism and humanist thought, Foucault appears to remove human agents from centre

⁹³ Michel Foucault, 'What is critique ' in *The Politics of truth*, ed. by Sylvère Lotringer trans. by Lysa Hochroth and Catherine Porter (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2007), pp 41-81 (p. 42).

⁹⁴ Michel Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment', in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp. 303-319 (p.310).

⁹⁵ Michel Foucault, 'The Return of Morality', in *Politics Philosophy Culture: Interviews and other writings 1977-1984*, ed. by Laurence Kritzman trans. by Alan Sheridan and others (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 242-255 (p. 242).

⁹⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality:2* (London: Penguin books, 1992), p. 10-11.

⁹⁷ Raymond Caldwell, 'Agency and Change: Re-evaluating Foucault's legacy', *Organization*, 14 (2007), 1-22 (p. 1).

stage.⁹⁸ As has been shown in the prologue, subjects are always subjugated: they are the point of application of varied techniques, or normative disciplines, but they are never sovereign subjects.⁹⁹ The subject is constituted through practices of subjection, or, in a more autonomous way, through practices of liberation, of freedom, as in Antiquity, on the basis of course of a number of rules, styles and conventions that are found in the cultural environment.¹⁰⁰ He suggests that the problem is to determine what the subject must be, to what conditions he is subject, what status he must have, what position he must occupy in reality or in the imaginary, in order to become a legitimate subject of this or that type of knowledge.¹⁰¹ This involves a philosophical interrogation, a genealogy, a historical ontology that analyses the history of subject as a historically determined being and the processes and technologies that constituted this way of being.

Foucault real interest was neither in the metaphysical form of subject in the classical sense (Cartesian, Kantian, Husserlian) nor for objective truth in the epistemological sense, but rather in the relationship between subjectivity and truth.¹⁰² Foucault objected to the notion of setting up of a theory of the subject, as could be done in phenomenology and existentialism, and then beginning with that theory of the subject, posing the question of knowing how such and such a knowledge of the subject was possible. He opposed the Cartesian approach, which, according to Foucault,¹⁰³ promotes the truth of reality and an indubitable access to this truth by the knowing subject/. The Cartesian approach places self-evidence at the origin of a theory of subjectivity and relationship to truth; self-evidence as it is actually given to an innate consciousness without any possible doubt. The Cartesian approach is, in effect, he proposes, an assumption that the nature of representation is unproblematic. One thing cannot be doubted; One experiences one's own experience, the "I" exists indubitably, and representations exist as accurate reflections of things in the world. To be capable of truth, one only has to open one's eyes and to reason soundly and honestly, always holding to the line of self-evidence and never

⁹⁸ Raymond Caldwell, 'Agency and Change: Re-evaluating Foucault's legacy', *Organization*, 14 (2007), 1-22 (p. 2).

⁹⁹ Michel Foucault, 'An Aesthetics of Existence', in *Politics Philosophy Culture: Interviews and other writings 1977-1984*, ed. by Laurence Kritzman trans. by Alan Sheridan and others (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 47-57 (p. 45).

¹⁰⁰ Michel Foucault, 'An Aesthetics of Existence', in *Politics Philosophy Culture: Interviews and other writings 1977-1984*, ed. by Laurence Kritzman trans. by Alan Sheridan and others (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 47-57 (p. 45).

¹⁰¹ Michel Foucault, 'Foucault' in *Dictionnaire des Philosophes*, ed by Denis Huisman (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1984) pp. 942-946 (p. 942).

¹⁰² Cristian Iftode, 'Foucault's ides of philosophy as Care of the Self: Critical assessment and conflicting metaphilosophical views, Procedia-Social and Behavioural sciences 71 (2013), 76-85 (p. 77).

¹⁰³ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 190.

letting it go. The subject only has to be what he is for him to have access in knowledge (*connaissance*) to the truth that is open to him through his own structure as subject.¹⁰⁴

Foucault will insist that Descartes initially founded his empiricism and rationalism on an ancient method of spiritual meditation on representation and truth as we will examine in the spiritual exercise of *melete*. Foucault suggests that when one reads Descartes, it is striking to find in the *Meditations*, there is exactly the same spiritual care (as in Hellenistic philosophy) to accede to a mode of being where doubt would not be allowed and, finally, we would know the truth of the self. But, in the final leap taken by Descartes, in ‘defining the mode of being to which philosophy gives access, we notice that this mode of being is entirely determined by knowledge (*connaissance*), and it is as access to a knowing subject or to what would qualify the subject as such, that (a modern) philosophy would define itself.’¹⁰⁵ Foucault tells us that ‘philosophy superimposes the functions of spirituality on an ideal based on scientificity.’¹⁰⁶ The Cogito as a form of subjectivity is constituted by the deployment of, and founded on, forms of knowledge (*connaissance*) in a process of trans-subjectivation. It is a flawed concept that must be corrected despite its pre-dominance in the history of Western subjectivity. Foucault contends that there is no doubt in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that Descartes’ knowledge of knowledge (*connaissance*) finally completely covered over the knowledge of spirituality, but not without having taken up a number of its elements.¹⁰⁷

In the analysis of a Cartesian philosophy of the subject, Foucault rejects any possibility of an essential subject as the source of all truth and, at the same time, rejects any possibility of unmediated or direct access by a self-consciousness to the real truth of objects including the self. He rejects the validity of any relationship between a self-evident self-consciousness to the truth of objects and particularly of self which is defined in Cartesian philosophy as indubitable. He insists that to know the self, one must transform Cartesian self-consciousness of self to another form of self-consciousness and reject all notion of self-evidence. To this end, Foucault talks of ancient forms of conversion and salvation and discusses the ancient philosophical

¹⁰⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 190.

¹⁰⁵ Michel Foucault, 'The ethic of care for the self as a practice of freedom, an interview with Michel Foucault on Jan 20, 1984', *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 12 (1987), 112-131 (p. 125).

¹⁰⁶ Michel Foucault, 'The ethic of care for the self as a practice of freedom, an interview with Michel Foucault on Jan 20, 1984', *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 12 (1987), 112-131 (p. 125).

¹⁰⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 309.

technologies that bring this conversion around. He relates forms of conversion to processes of subjectivation. These are discussed in the thesis. At this stage, it will suffice to say that the movement from one form of subjectivity to another is akin to a conversion, and the forms of subjectivation are mirrored in the different forms of conversion.

Spirituality as a form of access to truth of the self

Foucault rejects empiric possibilities as a badly flawed theorisation of representation, and he rejects the analysis of men's thoughts, behaviours, and knowledge in terms of ideology.¹⁰⁸ Foucault introduces a concept of spirituality which is 'the set of researches, practices, and experiences,¹⁰⁹ which are not for a content of knowledge (*connaissance*) of self but for a spiritual truth of the self. Spirituality postulates that the truth is never given to the empirical subject by right.¹¹⁰ What is given to the empirical subject is a content of knowledge (*connaissance*) as a domain of objects. In modernity, as a result of Cartesian philosophy, access to the domain of objects has been substituted for access to the truth and this is an error.¹¹¹ Spirituality postulates that the subject as such does not have right of access to the truth and is not capable of having access to the truth. It postulates that for the subject to have a right of access to the truth, 'he must be changed, transformed, shifted, and become, to some extent, and up to a certain point, other than himself. The truth is only given to the subject at a price that brings the subject's being into play. It follows from this spiritual point of view that there can be no truth without a conversion or a transformation of the subject.'¹¹²

Foucault opines that once access to the truth has really been opened up, it produces what he calls rebound effects of the truth on the subject.¹¹³ The truth enlightens the individual. He says: 'In short, I think we can say that in and of itself an act of knowledge could never give access to the truth unless it was prepared, accompanied, doubled, and completed by a certain

¹⁰⁸ Michel Foucault, *On the Government of the Living, lectures at the College de France 1979-1980*, ed. by Michel Senellart trans. by Graham Burchell (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 76.

¹⁰⁹ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject, Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 15-16.

¹¹⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject, Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 191.

¹¹¹ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject, Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 191.

¹¹² Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject, Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 15.

¹¹³ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject, Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 16.

transformation of the subject: not of the individual, but of the subject himself in his being as subject.¹¹⁴ This thesis examines Foucault's claim that transformation of the subject brings enlightenment with regard to the usefulness of knowledge (*connaissance*), and enlightenment with regard to the hidden technologies that form us and the possibility of transgressing the 'contemporary limits of the necessary'¹¹⁵ and the constitution of ourselves as 'autonomous subjects.'¹¹⁶ It examines the claim made by Foucault that this enlightenment might, by rejecting ideology and revealing the effects of pastoral and dominating power, 'separate out, from the contingency that made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think.'¹¹⁷ This thesis follows Foucault's pathway of spirituality from an ancient Hellenistic culture of 'care of the self' or *epimeleia heautou*, to a modern 'aesthetics of existence' as Foucault will call his version of *epimeleia heautou* and it will assess his ambition for a return of this form of spirituality as a form of self-subjectivation, one that will found the return of morality as a form of self-government and the possibility for every individual to develop an attitude for the present, a critical attitude which serves to question how the self is governed and to voluntarily choose styles of self-government.

For Foucault, self-subjectivation is the thread that links morality in antiquity to a new concept of modernity. Technologies are the tool or the art skill that enable this thread. Foucault's ambition is to restore only self-subjectivation as a form of moral subjectivation and the practices of the self that are meant to insure it¹¹⁸; the form that was unwittingly transformed into trans-subjectivation in Christian monastic institutions. He insists that this trans-subjectivation has been far more influential in the development of Western subjectivity. Foucault understood that these technologies of self-subjectivation could provide autonomous and constitutive modes of action rather than any compliance and obligation to ideology or dogma in favour of which, in a Cartesian leap of faith, an individual will have to renounce herself and her unique truth. For Foucault, the modern Western concept of subject, the result of a trans-subjectivation is no longer a coherent one, It is a concept that is historically

¹¹⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject, Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 16.

¹¹⁵ Michel Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment', in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp. 303-319 (p. 313).

¹¹⁶ Michel Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment', in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp. 303-319 (p. 303).

¹¹⁷ Michel Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment', in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp. 303-319 (p. 316).

¹¹⁸ Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality:2* (London: Penguin books, 1992), p. 28.

determined by knowledge (*connaissance*), and limited to a certain extent, by the Enlightenment and by the prioritisation of a modern belief that humanity through the accumulation of knowledge (*connaissance*) of objects can understand everything about the universe, life and living, over a spiritual knowledge of the self, of existence, and ways of living. To return to self-subjectivation, to spirituality, and to the deployment of spiritual knowledge, Foucault required optional technologies as opposed to a universal code or normalising ethic and he identified the possibilities of their existence in Hadot's work on spiritual exercises.

Foucault and Technology

Technology is a word that appears frequently in Foucault's writing and is, moreover, integral to his thought. Foucault primarily typically employs the term, as well as the related and in French often synonymous one of 'technique', to refer to methods and procedures for governing human beings.¹¹⁹ This concept of a technology as a tool in the formation and the government of the subject is fundamental to Foucault's proposed return of morality. Following the horrors of the second World War, theorists of power criticized technology in the name of humanism, typically employing the term to refer to tools or machines, or the application of science to industrial production. Foucault, however, using an ancient interpretation of the Greek term *tekhnē* as an art of living, suggests that human action could be motivated by a learned technology or autonomous exercise, and that power through technologies might be applied and resisted without any recourse to humanism's metaphysical and agential claims. Foucault uses the term technology to highlight the ways in which power relationships operate throughout all history and throughout all societies. His work on the notion of a technology is an attempt to explain that technologies of power and of the self, irrespective of its source or objective, will achieve the government of the self and others by the subjection of the individual, consciously or unconsciously, constituting an individual's mode of being that will correspond to the requirements of the technology.¹²⁰ Technologies of the self are technologies of individual domination.¹²¹ All relationships, including relationships of self to self, are relationship of power.

Foucault suggested that humanism, far from being the antidote to technology, as he understood the term, was in fact the problem. Foucault insists that 'in trying to make a diagnosis of the present in which we live, we can isolate as already belonging to the past certain tendencies which are still considered to be contemporary.'¹²² Humanist notions, including the Cogito, essential subjectivity, and Kantian 'man' are coming apart for Foucault and disintegrating in a contemporary philosophy that began in a large measure with the structuralist development. As soon as it was realised that all human knowledge, all human existence, might

¹¹⁹ Michael C. Behrent, 'Foucault and Technology', *History and Technology*, 29 (2013), 54–104 (p. 55).

¹²⁰ Michael C. Behrent, 'Foucault and Technology', *History and Technology*, 29 (2013), 54–104 (p. 54).

¹²¹ Michel Foucault, 'Technologies of the self', in *Technologies of the self, a seminar with Michel Foucault*, ed by Luther Martin and Huck Gutman and Patrick H Hutton (London: Tavistock Publications, 1988), pp. 16–49 (p. 19).

¹²² Michel Foucault, 'Who are you, Professor Foucault?', in *Religion and Culture: Michel Foucault*, ed. by Jeremy R Carrette (New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 87–104 (p. 92).

be contained within structures, that is to say within formal sets of elements which obey relations anybody could describe, man ceased to be simultaneously subject and object. The notion of sovereign consciousness could no longer be coherent. Despite the fact that Foucault could not define himself a structuralist for a myriad of reasons, for him, the idea of agential subject would no longer be a fruitful theme for research. What Foucault required was to find a way to make statements that might be objective and positive and yet dispense with the Cogito and the sovereign subject entirely. While rejecting philosophical humanism and metaphysical discourses, he found himself drawn to the ideas of power and technology in the constitution of subjectivity, the government of the individual and as a kind of conceptual antidote to humanism's metaphysical platitudes. Technology enabled, in a number of ways, a philosophy without the subject, the various forms of which Foucault experimented with at different stages of his career: it could refer to the impersonal, systemic, and integrated character of epistemological structures, thus emancipating the problem of knowledge (*connaissance*) from the analysis of interpretative consciousness; to the practical procedures by which power aspires to mould individual behaviour constituting passive subjects, thus freeing power from questions of foundation and legitimacy; and, finally, to the practices, exercises, and routines by which one constitutes one's own selfhood, freeing, in this way, the concept of the individual from states of totalitarian and individualising power and metaphysical notions of subjectivity and interiority.

Foucault's objective for more than twenty-five years was to sketch a history of the different ways in Western culture that knowledge (*connaissance*) developed about the human subject. Even from a very early stage, Foucault's interest was in the problematic of foundation, that is, the conditions of possibility for any knowledge of the self and any anthropology.¹²³ Foucault makes it clear on so many occasions that, for him, neither the recourse to a theory of an original experience nor the study of the philosophical or metaphysical theories of the soul, the passions, nor the material body in human sciences can serve as the main axis in such an historical investigation. He insists that he has always rejected the analysis of men's thought, behaviour, and knowledge in terms of ideology.¹²⁴ Foucault, influenced by Nietzsche, sought a general argument against an objective or ideological foundationalism. However, as Foucault

¹²³ Michel Foucault and Ludwig Binswanger, *Dream and Existence*, ed. by Keith Hoeller (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1993), p. 31.

¹²⁴ Michel Foucault, *On the Government of the Living, lectures at the College de France 1979-1980*, ed. by Michel Senellart trans. by Graham Burchell (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 76.

was well aware, any attack on foundationalism faces another problem. It is common to present relativism, even scepticism, as the alternative to foundationalism. Thus, for many, a successful attack on foundationalism would necessarily imply the truth of a pernicious relativism that would spell the end to all forms of serious intellectual endeavours. If Foucault was to be successful in his project of a history of thought, it was necessary to produce an argument against objective foundationalism which will not immediately raise the spectre of relativism.¹²⁵ Technologies, existing as autonomous and universal relationships of power, provided Foucault with the methodology to constitute individual human thought as the analysis of focal point of human experiences of the self, thereby subtly avoiding any accusation of relativism that might inhere in cultural ideology and traditional mentalities. Technologies of the self especially provide the means by which one constitutes many 'ethical' subjects, and an infinite number of ways of conducting the self, even within rigid moralities and rules of conduct, and far too many to constitute a foundation for any accusation of constituting a cultural relativism.

Foucault, rather than assume a theory of the subject or of 'man', began a genealogical inquiry concerning models of self-knowledge and their history: How was the subject constituted, at different moments and in different institutional contexts, as a possible, desirable, or even indispensable object of knowledge? How were the experience that one may have of oneself and the knowledge that one forms of oneself organised according to certain schemes? How were these schemes defined, valorised, recommended, imposed? Foucault attempted to answer these questions using the example of sexual behaviour and morality as one domain of human experience. In his history of sexuality, he identifies two separate technologies. He suggests that, to begin with, his expectation was that sexuality, as a diverse field of knowledge (*connaissance*), embracing the biological mechanisms of reproduction as well as the individual and social variants of behaviour, would establish, through autonomous technologies of knowledge/power and coercive practices, a set of rules and norms for individuals.¹²⁶ Experience and therefore self-knowledge as subjects of a sexuality was constituted by these dominating and dividing practices. When he came to study these modes according to which the individuals are led to recognise themselves as subjects of a sexuality, he noticed that a theme of a hermeneutics, by the self, of the sexual subject of desire existed in a long Christian tradition of examination and confession, in which the self was required to recognise herself as a subject

¹²⁵ Roger Paden, 'Foucault's anti-humanism', *Human Studies*, 10 (1987), 123-141 (p. 123).

¹²⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality:2* (London: Penguin books, 1992), p. 5.

of desire. He noticed practices or technologies of the self by which individuals were led to focus their attention on themselves, to decipher, recognise, as acknowledge themselves as subjects of desire, bring into play between themselves and themselves a certain relationship that allows them to discover, in desire, the truth of their being. Individual were led to practice on themselves a hermeneutic of desire. In his genealogy of this desiring subject, he determined how, for centuries, Western man had been brought to recognise himself as a subject of desire.¹²⁷ Foucault suggests that the guiding thread that seemed the most useful for this inquiry was constituted by what one might call the "techniques of the self," which is to say, the procedures, which exist in every civilisation, suggested or prescribed to individuals in order to determine their identity, maintain it, or transform it in terms of a certain number of ends, through relations of self-mastery or self-knowledge.¹²⁸

Power relationships

Power relationships, enabled by technologies, have a very specific and constitutive nature. This 'positive,' methodological use of the terms power relationships and technology evoke the autonomous, concrete, and anti-metaphysical outlook. Indeed, Foucault suggests that the conception of essential subject belonged to the same rational and epistemological ideology which transcended forms of constitution in technologies; whereas he will contend that technology, in various forms, is the only means by which modes of being for individuals are constituted. Foucault's use of immanent technology then can be described as an opposing philosophy of subject constitution to the philosophy of innate forms of subject inherent in existentialism and humanism, and the related concept of phenomenology, that predominated Western Modern thinking. Consciousness is not directed at the world but is constituted through technologies in the world. The modern subject, as an entity, does not properly exist. Individuals possess a 'mode of being' and an organisation of consciousness entirely due to a historical and a technical constitution. All forms of human subjectivity then are a product of a logical technology of constitution rather than an innate existence.

As a theorist of power, Foucault's uses the term technology when referring to the various methods and procedures of power that necessarily exist for governing, in the widest

¹²⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality:2* (London: Penguin books, 1992), p. 5-6.

¹²⁸ Michel Foucault, 'Subjectivity and Truth', in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp. 87-94. (p. 87).

positive understanding of the term, the conduct of the self and others by truth, that is technologies of power and of the self. Foucault needs to answer the following questions; How is this power exercised in technology, by what means is it exercised and what happens when individuals exert power over others and over themselves? Rather than study power itself, Foucault suggests that one ought to study the historical conditions which formed the concept of power relations in the first place, power relations which were which are not just a modern theoretical question but a part of modern experience.¹²⁹ Foucault certainly does not want to constitute a concept of power as a juridico-discursive representation, one that gives rise to repression of an essential subject and a theory of law that governs it. Power is not something from which a repressed subject might be liberated. Neither is one always-already trapped by an all-pervading law.¹³⁰ The form of power relations of interest to Foucault applies itself to the immediate everyday life of the individual. It is not the power of absolute domination and exploitation defining every action of the individual as being subject to the other by control and dependence.¹³¹ Power relationships are practices of liberty and cannot exist in a state of domination. This essential freedom of the subject exists only because of the existence of the power relationship. The contingent action of the subject can only exist then within power relationships.

Foucault suggests that what characterises power relationships is that they bring into play relations between individuals or between groups; relationships between partners where certain actions modify the actions of others. A relationship of power is a mode of action which does not act directly and immediately on other individuals. Instead, it acts upon their actions, an action upon an action. For Foucault, it is not a relationship of violence on the body or upon things. Power can be exercised only over free individuals and only insofar as they are free. Freedom of the individual is a condition of possibility for the exercise of power over the individual. The one over whom the relationship of power is exercised is recognised and maintained as the person who acts, and the action is contingent. The exercise of power is always a way of acting upon an acting subject or acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of acting. It governs the possibility and mode of action of other free individuals. The

¹²⁹ Michel Foucault, 'The Subject and Power' in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, ed. by Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 208-226 (p. 208).

¹³⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality: I* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 83.

¹³¹ Michel Foucault, 'The Subject and Power' in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, ed. by Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 208-226 (p. 211).

exercise of power consists in guiding the possibility of individual conduct as a question of government by government of the subject, of souls, of communities.

Technology as a concept

Foucault's most important pronouncements on 'technology' in general are associated with his political and 'genealogical' writings of the 1970s. The term was used initially to refer to the ways in which modern social and political dominant systems and institutions control, supervise, and manipulate populations as well as individuals. Foucault also uses a conception of technology to propose a positive understanding of power relationships that shape human conduct. The technical phenomenon is impersonal, and Foucault contends that technologies cannot be reduced to or explained in terms of individual intention. Foucault will attempt to explain that all technology, irrespective of its source or objective, will achieve the government of the self and others by the constitution of a mode of being of human subjectivity that will correspond to the requirements of that technology. Foucault uses technology to propose an understanding of the effect of positive power relationships in forms of government of individuals that is shorn of latent moral or doctrinal values and the historical concepts that perpetuate them.

Foucault credits Jurgen Habermas,¹³² as the source of the notion that one can distinguish three major types of technology: techniques of production, techniques of signification or communication, and techniques of domination. Foucault, however, adds that, in his later post-genealogical work, he became more and more aware that in all societies there is another type of technology, a technology of the self that is a very specific technology of power. Foucault will suggest, then,¹³³ that there are four main technologies, each a matrix of practical reason: (1) technologies of production, which permit us to produce, transform, or manipulate things; (2) technologies of sign systems, which permit us to use signs, meanings, symbols, or signification; (3) technologies of power, which determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination; and (4) technologies of the self, which permit individuals to bring about 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

¹³² Michel Foucault, 'Sexuality and solitude', in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp 175-184. (p. 175).

¹³³ Michel Foucault, 'Technologies of the self', in *Technologies of the self, a seminar with Michel Foucault*, ed by Luther Martin and Huck Gutman and Patrick H Hutton (London: Tavistock Publications, 1988), pp. 16-49 (p. 18).

themselves in order to attain a certain state ¹³⁴ of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality. Each implies certain modes of training and modification of individuals, not only in the obvious sense of acquiring certain skills but also in the sense of acquiring certain attitudes.¹³⁵

Technologies of production are something exerted over things and give the ability to modify, use, consume, or destroy them. These are technologies that stems from aptitudes of the body or relayed by external instruments. This is a form of power that Foucault will call an objective capacity within a technology of production.¹³⁶ Technologies of sign systems, which permit us to use signs, meanings, symbols, or signification, are relationships of communication which transmit information by means of a language, a system of signs, or any other symbolic medium. Communicating is always a certain way of acting upon another person or persons but the results of communication, in general, are not an aspect of the realm of power relationships over the individual. Technologies of power refer to autonomous ways in which processes immanent in the human world, that is, processes of power, control, supervise, and manipulate populations as well as individuals, tying people to identities.

Despite the reality of a number of different forms of technologies, one ought not assume a question of separate domains of influence. Types of relationships always overlap one another, support one another reciprocally, and use each other mutually as a means to an end.¹³⁷ The coordination between them is neither uniform nor constant but is established within specific models in society in what Foucault calls disciplines. Technologies of production, communication, and technologies of power, ‘welded’ together, make up the practices of disciplines.¹³⁸ Disciplines display different models of articulation, sometimes giving pre-eminence to technologies of power relationships and sometimes to the other technologies.

¹³⁴ Michel Foucault, 'On the genealogy of ethics', in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp. 253-280 (p. 255).

¹³⁵ Michel Foucault, 'Technologies of the self', in *Technologies of the self, a seminar with Michel Foucault*, ed by Luther Martin and Huck Gutman and Patrick H Hutton (London: Tavistock Publications, 1988), pp. 16-49 (p. 16).

¹³⁶ Michel Foucault, 'The Subject and Power' in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, ed. by Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 208-226 (p. 217).

¹³⁷ Michel Foucault, 'The Subject and Power' in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, ed. by H Dreyfus and P. Rabinow, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 208-226 (p. 217).

¹³⁸ Michel Foucault, 'The Subject and Power' in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, ed. by Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 208-226 (p. 218).

The frequency with which Foucault spoke about ‘technology’ beginning in the early 1970s was a direct consequence of this new way of thinking about power relationships, specifically as Foucault tried to understand these paradigmatic modern disciplinary power relationships. Disciplinary power, which regiments the human body, is the phenomenon that would introduce the words ‘technique’ and ‘technology’ into Foucault’s lexicon on a frequent and regular basis.¹³⁹ At the same time that Foucault was concerned with analysing technologies of discipline and domination, he was developing a distinctly affirmative understanding. In his genealogical works of the 1970s, Foucault rejected philosophies and ideologies based on modern rationality, all regimes of truth, and their forms of subjectivity and regarded them, rather, as sources or constructs of objectification. He rejects unifying or totalizing modes of theory as rationalist myths of the Enlightenment that are reductionist, and suppressing plurality, diversity, and individuality in favour of conformity and homogeneity. Where modern humanist, rationalist and scientific theories tend to see knowledge (*connaissance*) and truth to be neutral, objective, universal, or vehicles of progress and emancipation, Foucault analyses them in his genealogy as integral components of power and domination.

By examining the employment of ideology and discourse within certain social conditions, Foucault gradually developed his approach which he called, following Nietzsche, genealogy. Genealogy followed his archaeology in undermining the ideological, metaphysical and anthropological assumptions in the history of truth and thought. It sought to examine the deployment of discourse or an apparatus of knowledge.¹⁴⁰ In this genealogical phase, Foucault’s concerns shift from an examination of the techniques used, and in the problems with these techniques, in the production of knowledge (*connaissance*) to the effects and the mechanisms of knowledge/power on the constitution of the human subject. Foucault abandons any certainty that an objectifying rational knowledge, especially in the form of human sciences, can provide any concrete notion of reality of what it might mean to be a human being. The theme of government of humanity for Foucault involved the shift from dominant ideologies as the absolute subjugation of the individual by knowledge (*connaissance*) to the notion of a formation of the individual by discursive practices and a simultaneous subjectification; from the formation of the individual as an object of knowledge (*connaissance*) to the formation of

¹³⁹ Michael C. Behrent, 'Foucault and Technology', *History and Technology*, 29 (2013), 54–104 (p. 81).

¹⁴⁰ Jeremy Carrette, *Foucault and Religion; Spiritual corporality and Political Spirituality* (Oxford: Routledge, 2000) p. 14.

the individual as a disciplined subject of knowledge (*savoir*), enabled by technologies of disciplinary power.

As has been shown, in his early archaeological work, Foucault appears to treat ideology as existing independently of subjects and their social context. His archaeological studies defined the hidden structures through which subjects appear as objects, determining who the subject might be as well as defining, limiting, and controlling the relation between how subjects perceive themselves in their relationship with the world. The discourses they constitute determine who can say what, when and how. Now in his genealogical work on knowledge/power, discourses are no longer simply independent rules regulating systems and objectifying the individual. Discourses are embedded in discursive and non-discursive practices, or technologies of power, employed by institutions of knowledge and truth, that form the very objects of which they speak, including the human subject. This is the process of subjectification, the understanding of what it is to be a subject, the way the natural world is understood, social relations and human institutions are organised. According to Foucault, power and knowledge will directly imply one another and they are bound in a complex network of relations. The truth of the body and the self are experienced through technologies of knowledge/power. What mattered in the relationship of power as a form of government was that which the individual knew (*savoir*) as truth. It did not matter the knowledge was in actuality true. By allowing discursive practices to become anonymous and even subject-less, passive subjects, who are the conduits of discourses of knowledge/power, are unable to exercise choice, free-will, or the autonomy so desired by Modern Enlightenment.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault examined the technology of discipline as a new technology of power in the disciplining of the modern soul in the prison regime. Disciplinary power is a discreet, distributed power; it is a power which functions through networks, the visibility of which is only manifest in the obedience of those on who it is silently exercised. Disciplinary power has the anonymity of a machine or a technical process: A disciplinary system is autonomous which is never the case in the exercise of power by a Sovereign. Whereas in sovereign power, there is a definite individual who wields power over the individual, disciplinary power has the anonymity of a machine or a technical process: 'A disciplinary system is made so that it works by itself, and the person who is in charge of it, or its director, is not so much an individual as a function that is exercised by this and that person and that

could be equally exercised by someone else.¹⁴¹ The main context in which Foucault begins to describe disciplinary power as a technology concerns the way in which it constitutes the individual, by pinning down the human body and regulating it by investing it with subjectivity. The major effect, he explains,¹⁴² of disciplinary power is the reorganization in depth of the relations between somatic singularity, the subject, and the individual. In this regime of power, through a mode of subjection, the individual was objectified, and the notion of a criminal was constituted as an object of knowledge (*connaissance*) in a power/knowledge relationship. Once again, the implicit project of *Discipline and Punish* is to undermine faith in the sense of autonomy and self-awareness implicit in humanism.¹⁴³ Discipline makes individuals; it is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise.¹⁴⁴ The project examines the introduction of disciplinary technology as a means of producing compliant subjects; it is about how processes of relentless control, assessment, and observation of inmates in the modern prison-system ‘normalise’ individuals and therefore produce new subjects through the exercise of invasive management techniques which intrude upon and govern every aspect of life.

In penal practice, the body was made docile through the specific manipulation, shaping and use of the body in disciplinary regimes, producing reality and constituting individuals through new forms of objectifying knowledge (*connaissance*). The prison produces an environment for a new understanding of the individual in the science of criminology, which in turn, gives birth to the delinquent. The carceral society made a human science possible by making the delinquent knowable through the power/knowledge matrix. For example, the Panopticon is a privileged place for experiments on men, and for analysing with complete certainty the transformations that may be obtained from them.¹⁴⁵

Technologies of the self; A theoretical shift

To grasp what Foucault meant by ‘technologies of the self,’ one must understand how this idea emerged out of his analysis of different power relationships and those anonymous

¹⁴¹ Michel Foucault, *Psychiatric Power: Lectures at the College de France 1973-1974*, ed. by Jacques Lagrange (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), p. 55.

¹⁴² Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the birth of the prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), p. 29.

¹⁴³ Louis Sass, 'Lacan, Foucault, and the 'crisis of the subject'', *PPP*, 21 (2014), 325-341 (p. 330).

¹⁴⁴ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the birth of the prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), p. 170.

¹⁴⁵ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the birth of the prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), p. 170.

mechanisms of disciplinary power in particular, which constituted passive subjects in processes of subjectification. In both technologies of anonymous disciplinary power and Foucault's new conception of technologies of the self, the individual is the site of applied practices or technologies. Yet with technologies of disciplinary power, these practices are ultimately exercised on individuals from an exterior anonymous institution of power; with technologies of the self, it is the individual who will make herself the object of her own technical practices.¹⁴⁶ Foucault had expected in his critical work a confirmation that, in the modern West, all human experience was constituted by the normalising technologies of knowledge/power, pinning pre-determined identities onto the subject in a process of subjectification. A surprised Foucault however offers a counterpoint to this expected subjection in the concept of a technology of the self. Technologies of the self refer to the ways in which the self modifies, structures, and constitutes itself as a subject, and in this way, they can be thought of as internalised technologies of power. One cannot lose sight of the fact however that in the quotidian, both technologies of power and the self are not necessarily mutually exclusive and often overlap and support one another. Michael Clifford summarises this inter-relationship of technologies very well. He says: 'Disciplinary power can be said to proceed through techniques of domination and coercion since it manipulates bodies and controls them. Yet the efficacy and efficiency of these techniques are dependent on technologies of the self whereby individuals take on the norms and rules of discipline and make them part of the constitution of themselves. Thus, we have to take into account the interaction between the processes by which individuals act upon themselves and the techniques of domination and control peculiar to discipline.'¹⁴⁷

Foucault describes in *The History of Sexuality Vol 1* how an all-pervasive regime of enquiry was rigorously asserted in order to investigate this new sphere of knowledge of sex. Foucault begins with the proposition that it was through medical, religious, pedagogical, and psychoanalytical confessions that sexuality also became a subject of scientific analysis in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In his lecture *Sexuality and Solitude* Foucault speaks of an intriguing piece he had read previously in the 1950's.¹⁴⁸ He says that in a work consecrated to the moral treatment of madness and published in 1840, a French psychiatrist, Leuret, tells of the manner in which he treated one of his patients. Because of the importance

¹⁴⁶ Michael C. Behrent, 'Foucault and Technology', *History and Technology*, 29 (2013), 54–104 (p. 54).

¹⁴⁷ Michael Clifford, *Political genealogy after Foucault: Savage Identities* (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), p. 101.

¹⁴⁸ Michel Foucault, 'Sexuality and solitude', in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp 175-184. (p. 175).

Foucault attributes to the progression of the technology of confession in this simple example, the whole story as related by Foucault will be included the thesis.

Foucault tells us that one morning Leuret 'placed Mr. A., his patient, in a shower room. He makes him recount in detail his delirium. "But all that," said the doctor, "is nothing but madness. Promise me not to believe in it anymore." The patient hesitates, then promises. "That is not enough," replies the doctor. "You have already made me similar promises and you haven't kept them." And he turns on the cold shower above the patient's head. "Yes, yes! I am mad!" the patient cries. The shower is turned off; the interrogation is resumed. "Yes. I recognize that I am mad," the patient repeats. "But," he adds, "I recognize it because you are forcing me to do so." Another shower. "Well, well," says Mr. A., "I admit it. I am mad, and all that was nothing but madness." To make somebody suffering from mental illness recognize that he is mad is a very ancient procedure in traditional therapy. In the works of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, one finds many examples of what one might call "truth therapies." But the technique used by Leuret is altogether different. Leuret is not trying to persuade his patient that his ideas are false or unreasonable. What happens in the head of Mr. A. is a matter of perfect indifference to Leuret. The doctor wishes to obtain a precise act, the explicit affirmation: "I am mad."¹⁴⁹

Foucault comments that 'Since I first read this passage of Leuret, about twenty years ago, I kept in mind the project of analysing the form and the history of such a bizarre practice. Leuret is satisfied when and only when his patient says, "I am mad," or: "That was madness." Leuret's assumption is that madness as a reality disappears when the patient asserts the truth and says he is mad. We have, then, the reverse of the performative speech act. The affirmation destroys in the speaking subject the reality that made the same affirmation true.¹⁵⁰

Foucault suggests that 'When I was studying asylums, prisons and so on, I perhaps insisted too much on the techniques of domination. What we call discipline is something really important in this kind of institution. But it is only one aspect of the art of governing people in our societies. Having studied the field of power relations taking techniques of domination as a point of departure, I would like, in the years to come, to study power relations starting from the

¹⁴⁹ Michel Foucault, 'Sexuality and solitude', in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp 175-184. (p. 175).

¹⁵⁰ Michel Foucault, 'Sexuality and solitude', in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp 175-184. (p. 176).

techniques of the self.’¹⁵¹ It was this recognition of the possibility of a new technology that instigated the theoretical shift which occurred in the writing of Foucault’s *History of Sexuality*. In the first volume, *The Will to Know*, Foucault considers sexuality as discourse and its discursive practices as a technology of power. In the work to prepare the final two volumes, he noted in his genealogy of the desiring subject that individuals were led to practice, on themselves and on others, a hermeneutics of the self, a hermeneutics of which their sexual behaviour was doubtless the occasion, but certainly not the exclusive domain.

In Foucault’s later work on technologies of the self, inspired by this work on sexuality and the individual’s obligatory production of a truth about herself, two particular technologies of the self, both relationships of subject to truth, are revealed. Foucault reveals in the technology of examination of conscience, the procedures by which the individual is led to observe herself, to analyse herself, to interpret herself, to recognise herself as a domain of possible knowledge (*connaissance*). He also reveals the technology of confession. Avowal is a technique of power and, potentially, of domination, but, on the one hand, in the strictest sense, an avowal is necessarily free as through the procedure of avowal, the individual is produced as a subject who bonds himself or herself to the truth he or she avows. However, he advises that one should be careful and avoid any idea that avowal is a technique imposed on individuals from the outside and whose effects are limited to the production of a certain discourse of truth about a fixed and pre-existing subject. This form of avowal is not a technology of the self. In this modern conception, confession frees the subject, and power relationships reduces it to silence; truth does not belong to the order of power but shares an original affinity with freedom.¹⁵² Foucault suggests; ‘the obligation to confess is now relayed through so many different points, it is so deeply ingrained in us, that we no longer perceive it as the effect of a power that constrains us; on the contrary, it seems to us that truth, lodged in our most secret nature, ‘demands’ only to surface; that if it fails to do so, this is because a constraint holds it in place, the violence of a power weights it down, and it can finally be articulated only at the price of a kind of liberation.’¹⁵³ Therefore, if one gets rid of the injunction to avow and the mechanisms of power linked to it, one does not finally free one’s own ‘true self’ or ‘nature’, since there is no such thing according to Foucault.

¹⁵¹ Michel Foucault, ‘Sexuality and solitude’, in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp 175-184. (p. 175).

¹⁵² Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality:1* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 60.

¹⁵³ Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality:1* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 60.

Foucault asks why and how does the exercise of power in our society, the exercise of power as government of human beings in the form of regimes of truth, demand not only acts of obedience and submission, but truth acts in which individuals who are subjects in the power relationship are also subjects as actors, spectator witnesses or objects in manifestation of truth procedures? Why in this great economy of power relations has a regime of truth developed indexed to subjectivity? It seems that the very efficiency of these dominating techniques is also dependent on a simultaneous technology of the self whereby individuals voluntarily choose to take on the norms and the rules of discipline and make them part of the constitution of themselves. As he said, 'the very important role played at the end of the eighteenth and in the nineteenth centuries by the formation of domains of knowledge about sexuality, from the points of view of biology, medicine, psychopathology, sociology, and ethnology; the determining role played by the normative systems imposed on sexual behaviour through the intermediarity of education, medicine and justice, made it hard to distinguish the forms and effects of the relationship to self as particular elements in the constitution of this experience.'¹⁵⁴ Thus, sexuality which to start was to reveal the authoritarian fixings of identities through domains of knowledge and tactics of power, in the eighties, reveals techniques of existence and technologies of the self. He had noticed that human sciences and penal institutions in particular had developed confessional technologies whereby the subject was constituted by a form of self-identification. These forms of self-identification were related to the same extensive hermeneutics required of monks in early Christian monasteries and in spiritual exercises as practiced by adepts in Hellenistic spirituality. What is at stake is the new and voluntary deployment of knowledge (*connaissance*) by the self in a new theorisation of subject formation which Foucault will call subjectivation.

The technology of Subjectivation

Foucault became more and more aware that in all societies there are techniques that permit individuals to bring about, by their own means, a certain number of operations on their own bodies, their own souls, their own thoughts, their own conduct, and this in a manner so as to transform themselves, modify themselves, and to attain a certain state of perfection, happiness, purity, supernatural power. He calls these techniques technologies of the self.¹⁵⁵ The aim of

¹⁵⁴ Michel Foucault Preface to the History of Sexuality Vol 11 *The Foucault reader* ed. By Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984) pp. 338-339 (p. 339).

¹⁵⁵ Michel Foucault, 'Sexuality and solitude', in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp 175-184 (p. 175).

all technologies is to constitute ways of being for the individual that are appropriate to the strategies of power. While technologies of power in processes of subjectification, constitute passive subjects of knowledge (*connaissance*), technologies of the self required a new theorisation on the constitution of 'ways of being' for the subject. The strategy of these new technologies of the self is the development, by the individual, of a power relationship of the self to the self, constituting a subject of experience of individual right action, or the ethical subject, in two distinct processes of subjectivation of forms of knowledge. At the heart of the Foucauldian distinction between these subjectivations of discourse, is that in the case of the former one accepts a discourse of truth whose authority is purportedly beyond question, while in the case of the latter the enunciation of the truth arises from the subject's own practices of freedom, from a choice.¹⁵⁶ Technology for Foucault, then, ceases to imply an impersonal and systemic process for controlling individuals in terms of power/knowledge, biopower and biopolitics. Technologies of the self are those voluntary practices by which individual, motivated by their perspectives of truth, not only fix rules for themselves, in the conduct of their conduct, and the creation of a style of living or morality for themselves, but seek to transform themselves in their particular way of being. Thus, a regime of truth is no longer modelled on the notion of power/knowledge and the constitution of passive subjectivity in processes of subjectification by discourses claiming truth, but with the obligation for individuals with regard to the procedures for the manifestation of truth for herself and her self-constitution in processes of subjectivation of knowledge.

The techniques that make up a technology of the self are not codes of conduct or a series of rules of conduct or behaviour. They are not intended as a series of rules by which one might be dominated by another. These practices or actions are not discursive practices, defining or constituting the subject in relationships of power. They are the techniques by which the relationship of the self to the self is developed. They are procedures, actively and voluntarily carried out by the individual, procedures determined, by their mode and extent of action, to transform the life of the individual in its worldly actuality and equally in the individual's way of being, the very being of the subject. The technologies of the self permit individuals to bring about by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their

¹⁵⁶ Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg, The Aesthetic and ascetic dimensions of an ethics of self-fashioning: Nietzsche and Foucault, *Parrhesia*, 2 (2007), 44-65 (p.56).

own bodies, 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.¹⁵⁷

The identification of self and self-knowledge become the end of anonymous technologies of the self, technologies that the individual does not invent for herself but that exist in history and in cultures, enabling a constitution of modes of being of subjectivity that avoid being determined and relativized by dominant power relationships that tie the subject to their history. Foucault advises that ‘if now I am interested, in fact, in the way in which the subject constitutes himself in an active fashion, by the practices of the self, these practices are nevertheless not something that the individual invents by himself. They are patterns that he finds in his culture, and which are proposed, suggested, and imposed on him by his culture, his society and his social group.’¹⁵⁸

Foucault new theorisation of subject formation relates to the technologies of trans-subjectivation and self-subjectivation of truth. Foucault first elaborated his conception of subjectivation and its links to the deployment of truth in the *Hermeneutics of the Subject*.¹⁵⁹ While subjectification pertains to the way that an individual is objectified as a subject through the exercise of technologies of power/knowledge, subjectivation pertains to the relationship of the self to the self; to the multiple ways in which the self can be fashioned on the basis of what she will voluntarily take to be the truth. Subjects constitute themselves through all kinds of available technologies and practices and recognise themselves as individuals that can orient their own lives and actions towards what they consider to be the truth. Foucault explains that technologies of the self, whose aim is to help the individual voluntarily choose between different forms of knowledge as truth, carry out two different processes or games of truth whereby forms of knowledge will undergo the process subjectivation into truth for the individual. From these games of truth, two new ways of being will appear for individuals. This process of subjectivation takes the form of a permanent relationship to the self. Such subjectivations are not set apart from processes of subjection to knowledge/power and domination since the self-constitution is based on patterns and models strategically suggested by a cultural context. However, these subjectivations are not subjections in disguise: there is a

¹⁵⁷ Michel Foucault, 'Technologies of the self', in *Technologies of the self, a seminar with Michel Foucault*, ed by Luther Martin and Huck Gutman and Patrick H Hutton (London: Tavistock Publications, 1988), pp. 16-49 (p. 10).

¹⁵⁸ Michel Foucault, 'The ethic of care for the self as a practice of freedom, an interview with Michel Foucault on Jan 20, 1984', *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 12 (1987), 112-131 (p. 122).

¹⁵⁹ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject, Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 214.

relative independence and a possibility of individual tactics and singular acts that guarantees self-reflection, ontological freedom, and a critique of all knowledge/power regimes.¹⁶⁰

Foucault contrasted two different modes by which the subject constitutes herself. At the heart of the distinction between these two modes of subjectivation is that in trans-subjectivation one accepts a truth whose authority is purportedly beyond question, and which lies external to the self. In self-subjectivation the enunciation of truth arises from the subject's own practices of freedom, from a choice linked firmly to the practice of freedom.¹⁶¹ Trans-subjectivation consists of a deployment of truth in which the subject objectifies herself as a subject in a discourse claiming truth. This objectification of the self might include a submission of the self to the law, the moral code, the Bible or to a text. The discourse of truth for the individual as enounced will reflect that of the discourse claiming truth. Any examination of trans-subjectivation must question the individual's conditions for reaching true judgments about herself and, if possible, to disclose an evidential basis for the truth of this specific kind of knowledge through rational means. The main goal for the self is to build a framework in which more or less consistent links between various theoretical elements will be maintained with a satisfactory degree of consistency and systematicity.¹⁶² Theoretical enquiry precedes any practical consequence. Ultimately, Foucault reveals that this mode of objectification by the self leads to a rift in the sphere of the self's experience: On the one hand, we have the outcomes of the theoretical enquiry that usually take the form of abstract, formal principles, and on the other, we have a series of practices into which the principles reached in theory are to be applied. Hence, central to the basic mode of the self's relationship with the sphere of values is the knowledge (*savoir*) of objectifying norms, contained and consistent with discourses claiming truth, that will be enacted in life, an enactment that is only possible by a renunciation of the self. Foucault will assert that to believe one's own thought or representations of worldly things is not a knowledge beyond doubt. Knowledge cannot be grounded on an incorrigible and indubitable foundation.¹⁶³ Foucault also suggests that 'when Descartes says, I think, therefore I am, you have a therefore that is theoretically unanswerable. Behind is hidden another

¹⁶⁰ Herman Westerink, 'Thinking Spirituality Differently: Michael Foucault on spiritual self-practices, counter-conducts, and power-knowledge constellations', *Religions* 10 (2019) 1-11 (p. 3).

¹⁶¹ Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg, 'The Final Foucault: Government of others and Government of the self, in *A Foucault for the 21st century: Governmentality, Biopolitics and discipline in the new millennium*, ed. by Sam Binkley and Jorge Capetillo (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), pp 63-71 (p. 66).

¹⁶² Herman Westerink, 'Thinking Spirituality Differently: Michael Foucault on spiritual self-practices, counter-conducts, and power-knowledge constellations', *Religions* 10 (2019) 1-11 (p. 3).

¹⁶³ Mark Olsen Foucault and Critique: Kant, humanism and the human sciences <www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/00003388.html>

therefore, which is this, it is true, therefore, I submit. This submission, this renunciation of the self, is a recognition that self-consciousness, as it presents, cannot have a relationship to truth. To have a relationship to truth in a form of trans-subjectivation, technologies constitute a Cogito, or a form of subject that transcends the self. This is the caesura, the rupture, the complete break of the subject's being. As we shall see Foucault identifies trans-subjectivation originating in Christian metanoia or conversion of the self as a voluntary rupture, break or a change within the self in the form of a renunciation of the self and a sudden and dramatic change of the subject's being.¹⁶⁴ He says that it can be called a sort of trans-subjectivation.¹⁶⁵ As Deleuze¹⁶⁶ suggests, in so-called rationalist philosophies, the abstract is given the task of explaining, and it is the abstract that is realized in the concrete. One starts with abstractions such as the One, the Whole, the Subject, and one looks for the process by which they are embodied in a world which they make conform to their requirements. Foucault will maintain that this systematic discourse has reorganised and transformed into academic and theoretical disciplines of Modern philosophy, such as metaphysics, philosophical anthropology, philosophy of mind and the like. The notion of truth likewise has been transformed to a scholastic, cognitivist, scientific, logical and positivistic version, that will itself determine human thought.¹⁶⁷

Foucault identifies another deployment of truth, another meaning for subjectivation, and which directly links to an ethic of self-fashioning. This mode of subjectivation was very much under-developed due to Foucault's untimely death. It is the deployment of a knowledge that Foucault will call self-subjectivation, the subjectivation of a true discourse of the self, a true discourse founded on a different form of knowledge to knowledge (*connaissance*). There is no necessity for the renunciation of the self. It was the domination of this self-subjectivation, according to Foucault, by a trans-subjectivation of discourses of metaphysics that led to two thousand years of renunciation of self. It was as a direct result of the submission to these external discourses that the eventual predominance of the rational subject was enabled in Modernity. In this self-subjectivation, the individual does not refer to the authority of code, book, or text, but to her own individual truth. Self-subjectivation involves coming together

¹⁶⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 217.

¹⁶⁵ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 214.

¹⁶⁶ Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Michael Lester (New York: Columbia UP, 1990),

¹⁶⁷ Thomas Flynn, 'Philosophy as a way of life, Foucault and Hadot', *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 31 (2005), 609-622 (p. 610).

with oneself, an essential moment of which is not the objectification of the self as a subject in a true discourse, but in the subjectivation of a true discourse in a practice and exercise of oneself on oneself.¹⁶⁸ It is suggested that Foucault indicates a number of factors that appear to be integral to subjectivation of a true discourse and which do not appear to be present on the objectification by a discourse claiming truth.¹⁶⁹ First, there is resistance, resistance to prevailing power relations, which seems integral to the kinds of subjectivation that characterises self-fashioning and autonomy. Second, self-subjectivation is linked to *parrhesia*. Third, critique seems integral to this deployment of knowledge in subjectivation and finally such a mode of subjectivation entails a problematisation of the contemporary world, as opposed to an accommodation with it.

One is still left with the question of the normative, ethical, and political basis for the decision as to which form of subjectivation one might choose to deploy.¹⁷⁰ It seems that the individual's attitude, again constituted by technologies of the self, will provide the factors which appear to be integral to self-subjectivation and which do not appear in trans-subjectivation; including an attitude of freedom from power relationships, an attitude of *parrhesia* or truth telling of the self, an attitude of critique of the self and a problematisation of the present in which the self exists. Trans-subjectivation seems to suggest an accommodation to the truth of the world in a renunciation of the self. As we shall see, Foucault included all of these in the attitudes he suggests for a modern individual and is the veritable core of his ethics.

¹⁶⁸ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 333.

¹⁶⁹ Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg, 'The Final Foucault: Government of others and Government of the self, in *A Foucault for the 21st century: Governmentality, Biopolitics and discipline in the new millennium*, ed. by Sam Binkley and Jorge Capetillo (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), pp 63-71 (p. 70).

¹⁷⁰ Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg, 'The Final Foucault: Government of others and Government of the self, in *A Foucault for the 21st century: Governmentality, Biopolitics and discipline in the new millennium*, ed. by Sam Binkley and Jorge Capetillo (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), pp 63-71 (p. 70).

The concepts of philosophical *ethos*, *parrhesia*, and *bios*

The thesis has noted that Foucault's use of technology was very useful to explain how an individual might act without the aid of an agential subject and yet not be confined by rigid structures. It has also been noted that Foucault discovered in the work of Hadot how some ancient Greeks used *tekhne* or arts of living to change themselves and the way they lived their lives. Foucault also suggests that as they lived in a pre-Christian and pre-Cartesian era, Greek thinkers did not search for a subject. Self and life, understood as a unity, is a canvas which can be transformed and reformed by an art of living or a *tekhne*.

The Greek individual understood that she constituted for herself, using *tekhne* or spiritual exercises, not a new form of subject as Foucault will propose, but a new way of being or attitude, a 'way of being' which Foucault identifies as *ethos*. In addition, by truth telling or *parrhesia*, she constitutes for herself a new style of living that is an exact coherence with her *ethos*. This life is called *bios*, a style of life, a way life is conducted which is an unmitigated convergence of freedom and truth.¹⁷¹ These concepts and the technologies that support them are the foundations for Foucault's understanding of self-government by truth in modernity. He characteristically delved much more deeply into their complexities and ramifications than might be recorded in history, but he uses the concepts practically unchanged to support the use of the technologies in self-constitution and self-government in the present day. For Foucault, Greek *tekhne* or technologies of the self were no doubt processes of subjectivation, and he believed that the Greeks would have discovered subjectivity had the culture of *epimeleia heautou* persisted. The importance of this *tekhne* to Foucault in the establishment of a morality that was not based on the pre-existing essential subject makes an examination of Greek understanding of individuality, identity, ways of living essential to the thesis. Is the constitution of an *ethos* and a *bios* in effect a process of subjectivation as Foucault suggests? This chapter looks at these concepts as they are presented by Foucault and Hadot.

Hellenistic culture of the self was a pre-Cartesian philosophy, and controversially according to Foucault, did not concern itself too much with a metaphysics. Conceived in a pre-Cartesian era, Hellenistic spirituality is concerned with the self-constitution of a 'way of being' and a style of living for the individual in this world, in a movement away from a Platonic metaphysics of renunciation of this world in favour of an other, more real, ideal world. This

¹⁷¹ Michel Foucault, 'The Return of Morality', in *Politics Philosophy Culture: Interviews and other writings 1977-1984*, ed. by Laurence Kritzman trans. by Alan Sheridan and others (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 242-255 (p. 242).

post-Platonic thought is particular to an era where the notion of a renunciation of the self and the constitution of an alternative form of a metaphysics was no longer considered coherent. Hellenistic philosophy as a way of life had a little concern with objective knowledge (*connaissance*) of the soul. The culture of the self, *epimeleia heautou*, the *tekhne* inherent in Hellenistic philosophy, was concerned with the voluntary development of the self as a holistic individual, a unity of body and mind; with the development of a philosophical *ethos* or philosophical attitude of ethical subjects; and with the development of a style of living.

Clifford Geertz suggests that the moral and aesthetic aspects of a given culture, the evaluative elements, have commonly been summed up in the term *ethos*, while the cognitive, existential aspects have been designated by the term worldview. A people's *ethos* is the tone, character, and quality of their life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood; it is the underlying attitude toward themselves and their world that life reflects.¹⁷² *Epimeleia heautou* might be understood to constitute in the individual similar underlying attitudes and to embody a particular tone or character. The strategy is for the individual to inhabit or be inhabited by the relevant moral and aesthetic style, attitude, or mood. While societies, cultures and moralities in general are nothing without their normative elements, their moral codes, and moralities of behaviours, Foucault insists¹⁷³ that along with an adherence to code and modes of behaviour, the manner in which one forms oneself as an ethical individual must also be taken into account in decided how to behave. This is the manner in which the individual commits to a certain mode of being rather than a mode of compliance.¹⁷⁴ This way of being is what Foucault means by a philosophical *ethos*. Foucault opines that in antiquity 'the will to be an ethical individual . . . was principally an effort to affirm one's freedom and to give one's life a certain form in which one could recognise oneself, be recognised by others, and in which posterity would find an example of the good life.'¹⁷⁵

The idea of attitude appears many times in Foucault's oeuvre. He describes 'a certain way of thinking, speaking and acting, a certain relationship to what exists, to what one knows, to what one does, a relationship to society, to culture and also a relationship to others that we could call, let's say, attitude.'¹⁷⁶ 'It is a voluntary choice made by certain people, a stance; in the

¹⁷² Clifford Geertz, 'Ethos, world-view and the analysis of sacred symbols.', *Antioch Review*, 17, (1957), 421–437 (p. 421).

¹⁷³ Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality:2* (London: Penguin books, 1992), p. 28.

¹⁷⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality:2* (London: Penguin books, 1992), p. 28.

¹⁷⁵ Michel Foucault, 'The Return of Morality', in *Politics Philosophy Culture: Interviews and other writings 1977-1984*, ed. by Laurence Kritzman trans. by Alan Sheridan and others (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 242-255 (p. 253).

¹⁷⁶ Michel Foucault, 'What is critique' in *The Politics of truth*, ed. by Sylvère Lotringer trans. by Lysa Hochroth and Catherine Porter (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2007), pp 41-81 (p. 42).

end, a way of thinking and feeling; a way too of acting and behaving that at the one and the same time marks a relation of belonging and presents itself as a task.’¹⁷⁷ ‘Attitude is a form of attention.’¹⁷⁸ ‘It is developed in a relationship of self to self where you respect the self, you honour it.’¹⁷⁹ Foucault opines that the only object that one can freely, absolutely, and always want is the true self and that true self can only be described as a combined mode of being and a way of living.¹⁸⁰ To will the self is a matter of ontological freedom; the freedom to will one’s singular way of being. The only object to which the will can be orientated in absolute freedom so that it can be exerted without being determined by external forces, without having to take into consideration alterations according to the occasion or time, is the true self. When one does not will the self, does not want the self, when there is a disconnection between the will and the self, such a situation describes a non-relationship to the self.

Ethos’ ontological status remains somewhat ambiguous. In its Hellenistic interpretation, *ethos* consists of certain qualities that are neither abilities, good behaviours nor virtues in the moral sense. Instead, *ethos* or attitude is a unique ontological reality in the form of qualities of being, qualities of existence, or ways of being.¹⁸¹ Neither is it an innate disposition, but one constituted in a daily and incessant practice of the art of living. It is an individual attitude which reflects the individual’s value and belief. Rather than an object of knowledge (*connaissance*), it is a form elaborated through a relationship of self with the self and with power over the self. It is the self-awareness of this certain attitude; not of the self but of the attitude, which Foucault suggests, might allow the individual to be called an ethical subject, constituted by the self: ethical, however, in a Greek sense which means manifesting *ethos* and subject in the sense of subject to a relationship of self to self in terms of a self-imposed code. *Ethos* influences or controls the individual’s way of doing things, of being, and of conducting themselves.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁷ Michel Foucault, ‘What is Enlightenment’, in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp. 303-319 (p.310).

¹⁷⁸ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 11.

¹⁷⁹ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 214.

¹⁸⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 133.

¹⁸¹ Michel Foucault, *Subjectivity and truth, Lectures at the Collège de France 1980-1981*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017) p. 31.

¹⁸² Michel Foucault, *The Courage of truth: Lectures at the Collège de France 1983-1984*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) p. 33.

While this *ethos* was described in many different ways by different schools, the common understanding between them is that the individual's way of being is manifest in an attitude of freedom, a freedom to constitute a true discourse of the self and to constitute a unique and different life for oneself. *Ethos* reveals a way of being of freedom. To get a true knowledge of this self, for the self and for others, is to examine the reflection of this *ethos* in the individual's style of living, a style that is constituted by means of a form of truth telling or philosophical *parrhesia*. To have a true knowledge of one's own self is to experience one's own life. Through the coherence between the style of life one leads and one's *ethos*, the set of choices one makes, the things one renounces and those one accepts, how one dresses, and how one speaks, the philosophical life is from the start to finish the manifestation of this truth of the self.

Epimeleia heautou, caring for the self, attending to oneself, being concerned about oneself, of achieving salvation, according to Foucault,¹⁸³ is a fundamental principle for describing the philosophical attitude of freedom in all its expressions throughout Greek, Hellenistic, and Roman culture. Salvation through freedom is achieved by an awakening and an enlightenment from an inauthentic life through a transformation of the self and the establishment of *ethos*. The Greek individual constitutes or transforms her *ethos* in an active manner, through an experience of the relationship between herself and the world in spiritual knowledge; and by determining and imposing, in complete freedom, her own rules of conduct, and by practising *parrhesia*, that is, the telling of the truth of the self as one of the most important philosophical practices, constitutes a style of living which might be called a Greek morality or *bios*.

Hadot, in agreement with Foucault, will also suggest that *epimeleia heautou* is not concerned with the exposition of a doctrine, but with guiding to a certain settled mental attitude.¹⁸⁴ He opines; 'since the ultimate goal of the theoretical discourse of philosophy was to produce an effect in the soul of the listener or reader, this discourse had to bear in mind not only pedagogical constraints, but the needs of psychagogy, of the direction of souls.'¹⁸⁵ He suggests that it is the spiritual practice that expresses a particular existential attitude, and it is

¹⁸³ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 2.

¹⁸⁴ Arnold J Davidson *Spiritual exercises and Ancient philosophy: an Introduction to Pierre Hadot* in *Critical Inquiry*, 16 (1990), 475-482 (p. 477).

¹⁸⁵ Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a way of life: Spiritual exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. by Arnold Davidson trans. by Michael Chase (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), p. 21.

the plurality of different schools that enables the comparison between the consequences of different possible fundamental rational attitudes. It is these attitudes or perspectives that develop with a mastery of the self and the subjectivation of a knowledge of the futility of all those things that do not concern the self. Attitude was a mental orientation of individuals, a self in its habits,¹⁸⁶ who avoid frustration and disappointment because their desires and decisions depend on themselves alone and avoid all external influence.

In this very Greek understanding of *ethos* or attitude of freedom, freedom is understood as the capacity to constitute for oneself a mature, authentic, unique and particular way of being where, finally, reality, as the truth and value of things to the human world, and a knowledge of the self, as a free individual in the world, might be known by the individual, through the assimilation of *logos* in the mind and the carrying out of real exercises on the body. Freedom is not defined as liberty, as a free will, or an opposition to determinism. It is not defined as a liberty of an essential entity or existence from repression or oppression by law and rule. This freedom is a condition of spiritual knowledge rather than a conventionally granted civil or political status. It is the capacity for rational self-direction, that is, to know what is good for the self and to know the means to pursue what is good for the self. Freedom seems to be best described as an individual's condition of possibility to constitute for herself the life she leads as the 'true life'. This is achieved in a relationship of power with the self, enabled by a technology of the self she finds in her traditions and cultures through a spiritual direction by others.. Freedom is not the property of the subject. Freedom and its possibilities are no longer to be understood as dependent on exclusively active innate subjects of knowledge or passive subjects that have been constituted within the experiences of knowledge/power practices. Freedom is not just a democratic freedom of doing whatever one wants. It encapsulates a freedom from desires and passions that drive immoral and unethical activity. It is the capacity to live a style of life in accordance with an accurate apprehension of the highest good for oneself. It is the capacity to live a style of life that manifests ethical differentiation. Freedom is a possibility of exercising a constitutive power relationship over oneself by the self, rather than have a power relationship imposed by regimes of truth.

Using this concept of freedom, Foucault was able to exclude the traditional idea that freedom can be equated with liberty of an innate autonomy, an individual will, the causality of

¹⁸⁶ Michel Foucault, 'The Hermeneutic of the Subject', *Ethics, subjectivity and truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow, trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), p. 211.

human willing, or subjective agency. In a Heideggerian sense, human beings are thrown into the world and subjectivation of knowledge in all its forms enables their conditions of possibility. This condition of possibility is not a question of existence preceding essence as Sartre might suggest. Through technologies that exist in the world, one is made aware of one's freedom through subjectivation of spiritual knowledge as opposed to knowledge (*connaissance*) to reason, to form opinion, that is, to construct a true discourse of the self. In this notion of a government of the self by the self, of the conduct of conduct, the reversibility of power relationships becomes particularly significant. Freedom is the possibility of a reversibility of power relationships. Judith Butler suggests that power not only acts on subjects, but in a transitive sense, enact the subject into being. As a condition, power precedes the subject. Power loses its appearance of priority, however, when it is wielded by the subject, a situation which gives rise to the reverse perspective that power is the effect of the subject, and that power is what the subject effects.¹⁸⁷ Inherent in this notion of *ethos* is freedom as the condition of possibility of effecting a power relationship of the self to the self.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau's famous dictum that humankind "is born free and is everywhere in chains"¹⁸⁸ demonstrates these two particular forms of freedom and liberty. The term freedom is used here to describe freedom as a pure category that is both abstract and grounded; it represents the basic category of freedom designated in the assertion, "all humans are free." Conceptions of political or freedom from domination, which might be better defined as liberty, are designated in the same statement by the notion of 'chains' to mean that humans were never entirely free from the practical constraints of coercion and political authority. While contemporary philosophers consider freedom as the capacity for an innate willing subject to guide its own actions without any reference to the object or objects sought through action, Foucault will present this Greek freedom to be the capacity to direct oneself to ways of being and individual attitude, to conduct of one's conduct itself, as the object or aim of freedom. Self-direction, the conduct of one's own conduct, no matter how different it may appear to society is the crucial characteristic of the free person. Freedom is conceived by Foucault in terms that are more ethical and spiritual rather than metaphysical.

Ethos, as an attitude of freedom, in a more Roman nuance, may also be defined as an attitude of tranquillity or beatitude. Foucault will contend that the notion of individual freedom

¹⁸⁷ Judith Butler, *The Psychic life of Power, Theories in subjection* (California: Stanford University Press 1997), p. 13.

¹⁸⁸ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, trans. by Christopher Betts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.43.

was crucial to the Greeks and therefore they will focus very much on that attitude. Slavery and freedom from tyranny were very real concerns for the Greeks. Foucault suggests that the search for freedom constituted the development of an anxiety in Greek culture concerning all the disturbances of the body and the mind, disturbances which must be prevented by means of an austere regimen. For the Romans, who were more politically secure, tranquillity, as an expression of individual freedom, is an ontological state that opens, to the individual, modalities of experience of life. Spiritual knowledge, achieved in a technology of the self or spiritual exercise, enlightens and transforms the subject and the truth gives beatitude and tranquillity. Tranquillity is a way of reacting minimally or under great control when faced with adversity. It is the ability to maintain autonomy and independence in relation to the things that happen in life over which one has not control. Tranquillity is a certain quality of being, a certain modality of experience that means that the events that occur around one, in existence, produce the least possible effect on the individual and enable her to maintain her autonomy and independence in relation to them.¹⁸⁹ The Latin word “*tranquillitas*” denotes stability of soul or mind. It is a state where the mind is independent of any kind of external event and is also free from any internal excitation or agitation that could induce an involuntary movement of mind. Thus, it denotes stability, self-sovereignty, and independence.

Foucault suggests that through a spiritual exercise or technology of the self on the self, defined in *epimeleia heautou*, the adept arrives at tranquillity of the soul, an inner freedom, or in a word, beatitude. Beatitude is a quality that means that the entire being is happy whatever happens to her.¹⁹⁰ Reference might also be made to the two great themes achieved in *epimeleia heautou*, that of *ataraxy* as the absence of inner turmoil, the self-control that ensures that nothing disturbs one, and *autarchy* as a self-sufficiency which ensures that one needs only the self. Foucault explains that the Greeks considered recognition and an attitude of ontological freedom as the real ethical problem to be solved by *enkrateia*, the self-mastery or domination of oneself by oneself and the effort that this domination demands of the self and by indifference to indifferent things (*autarkeia*). The concrete expression of this freedom was actualised in a daily life as *sophrosyne* or a *bios* of moderation. The practices of *enkrateia* and *autarkeia* as spiritual exercises can be regarded as the pre-requisite of *sophrosyne*, as the form of effort and control that the individual must apply to herself in order to achieve a state of a moderate life

¹⁸⁹ Michel Foucault, *Subjectivity and truth, Lectures at the Collège de France 1980-1981*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 31.

¹⁹⁰ Michel Foucault, *Subjectivity and truth, Lectures at the Collège de France 1980-1981*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 31.

Parrhesia: Philosophical *ethos* transforms into *bios*.¹⁹¹

Foucault suggests that the problem of how truth telling by the individual came to be a manifestation of a truth of the self, precisely to the extent that the person speaking holds the truth, is a multiple and complex cultural process. Foucault's own study on philosophical *parrhesia* and *bios*, he confesses, is a study of only a fragment that deals with the telling of the truth of the self, a process he identifies in the development of the cultures of veridiction. Veridiction is a term Foucault uses, vaguely at times, to describe truth-telling of the self, the enunciation of a discourse of truth. A veridiction, that is specifically the product of a series of exercises he calls *askesis*

Foucault tries to show that there is a shift in the forms and places of the practice of *parrhesia* throughout Greek history of Antiquity. The notion of *parrhesia* was first of all and fundamentally a political notion. As it appears in Euripides' plays and also in the texts of the Fourth Century B.C., *parrhesia* is an essential characteristic of Athenian democracy. *Parrhesia* was a guideline for democracy as well as an ethical and personal attitude characteristic of the good citizen. Athenian democracy was defined very explicitly as a constitution (*politeia*) in which people enjoyed *demokratia*, *isegoria* (the equal right of speech), *isonomia* (the equal participation of all citizens in the exercise of power), and *parrhesia* which is a requisite for public speech, takes place between citizens as individuals, and also between citizens construed as an assembly. Moreover, the agora is the place where *parrhesia* appears.¹⁹² During the Hellenistic period this political meaning changes with the rise of the Hellenic monarchies. *Parrhesia*. now becomes centred in the relationship between the sovereign and his advisors. It is the advisor's duty to use *parrhesia* to help the king with his decisions, and to prevent him from abusing his power, even at the risk of the speaker's own life. Political *parrhesia* is the openness which makes one speak, which makes one say what has to be said, irrespective of the personal cost, what one wants to say, what one thinks ought to be said because it is necessary, useful and true. *Parrhesia* is necessary and useful both for the king and for the people under his rule.

Finally, *parrhesia*'s evolution can be traced through its relation to the field of philosophy, regarded as an art of life. This form of *parrhesia* of interest was developed around the time of Socrates and is identified as philosophical *parrhesia*. Foucault introduces it as an

¹⁹¹ Michel Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others: Lectures at the College de France 1982-1983*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 341-350.

¹⁹² Michel Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, ed. by Joseph Pearson (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2001), p. 22.

important transformation in the history of *parrhesia*, that is to say, the transition from a political practice of truth telling defined in relation to the City and its institutions, to a different Cynical form of truth telling which will be defined in relation to the individual's way of doing things, her being, and conducting herself, and to their formation as ethical subjects.¹⁹³ In this final transformation, Cynic *parrhesia* involved a manner of existence rather than an enunciation of truth by a speaker. It was no longer a matter of truth-telling but a matter of the manifestation of the true life.¹⁹⁴

Etymologically, *parrhesia* is the act of telling all, that is a frankness, open-heartedness, plain speaking, speaking openly, and speaking freely. It is the openness which makes one speak, which makes one say what has to be said, irrespective of the personal cost, what we want to say, what we think ought to be said because it is necessary, useful and true.¹⁹⁵ *Parrhesia* is a pure and simple transmission of the thought, with the minimum of embellishment or rhetoric. It is clear therefore that *parrhesia* does not come under the discursive strategy of demonstration, flattery, persuasion, teaching or rhetoric. It may be seen to perform the functions of all these strategies, but its own strategy does not correspond to these functions.

Foucault argues that this notion of a philosophical *parrhesia*, as a technology of the self, taken in a Greek or more specifically Cynic sense of the word, is no longer a valid model in the epistemological model of objective truth and knowledge (*connaissance*) that characterises our present. The truth it speaks of is no longer a truth of knowledge (*connaissance*) and *parrhesia* concerned with a different antithetical form of truth. It is the foundation of an ethical, spiritual experience of truth.¹⁹⁶ Foucault reveals how the notion of Socratic *parrhesia*, of free speaking of the truth of the self, contributed to the development of two distinct pathways in Western philosophy. On the one hand as a result of Socratic *parrhesia* in *Alcibiades*, starting from the principle of the need to give an account of oneself, *Alcibiades* proceeds to the discovery and establishment of oneself as a reality ontologically distinct from the body, explicitly designated as the soul and revealed in its divinity. A knowledge of the soul produces an ontology of the self.¹⁹⁷ The establishment of the soul, as reality ontologically

¹⁹³ Michel Foucault, *The Courage of Truth: Lectures at the Collège de France 1983-1984*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) p. 33.

¹⁹⁴ Alexandre Macmillan, 'Michel Foucault's Techniques of the Self and the Christian Politics of Obedience', *Theory Culture and Society* 28 (1977), 3-25 (p. 10).

¹⁹⁵ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 306.

¹⁹⁶ Alexandre Macmillan, 'Michel Foucault's Techniques of the Self and the Christian Politics of Obedience', *Theory Culture and Society* 28 (1977), 3-25 (p. 11).

¹⁹⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Courage of Truth: Lectures at the Collège de France 1983-1984*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 127.

distinct of the body, was correlative with a mode of knowledge of the self, *gnothi seauton*, which had the form of the soul's contemplation of itself and its recognition of its mode of being. This, Foucault claims, marks out the future site of metaphysical discourse, which will have to speak to man of his being and what in the way of ethics and rules of conduct follows from this ontological foundation of his being.¹⁹⁸ We will see that Foucault will posit that a spiritual exercise in the form of a critique of knowledge (*connaissance*), whose role is that of defining the conditions under which the use of such reasoning is legitimate, in order to determine what can be known, will identify this conclusion as illegitimate, beyond experience, and gives rise to eventually to a dogmatism and heteronomy, along with illusions.¹⁹⁹

On the other hand, Foucault reveals in his reading of *Laches*²⁰⁰ that Socratic *parrhesia*, starting from the principle of the need to give an account of oneself in the world and of the need to care for the self, proceed to the discovery and the establishment of oneself as a way of being and a way of doing, of which one has to give account throughout one's life. What has to be accounted for, and the very objective of this activity of accounting, is how one lives and how one has lived. That is to say, giving account of oneself leads to *bios*, which is the ethical material and object of an art of oneself.²⁰¹ It leads to life, to existence, and the way in which one conducts this existence. This establishment of the self as *bios*, no longer as soul, but as life and a mode of life, gives rise to an enunciation of truth which 'does not mark out the site of a possible metaphysical discourse, but a mode of truth telling whose role and end is to give some form to this *bios*, as an aesthetics of existence, as a mode of existence which is to be tested and examined throughout its life.'²⁰² Reason is prevented, by a refusal of metaphysics, from going beyond the limits of what is given in experience. In *Laches*, Foucault finds the moment when the requirement of truth telling and the principle of the beauty of existence came together in the care of the self. The establishment of oneself, not as a soul or a substantial subject ontologically distinct from the body, leads to *bios*, to life, to existence and the way one conducts this existence. Existence is 'correlative' to a mode of spiritual knowledge of the self, but instead of metaphysical discourse it gives rise to a mode of truth telling whose role and end is to give

¹⁹⁸ Michel Foucault, *The Courage of Truth: Lectures at the Collège de France 1983-1984*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 160.

¹⁹⁹ Michel Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment', in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp. 303-319 (p.308).

²⁰⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Courage of Truth: Lectures at the Collège de France 1983-1984*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 161.

²⁰¹ Michel Foucault, *The Courage of Truth: Lectures at the Collège de France 1983-1984*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 127.

²⁰² Michel Foucault, *The Courage of Truth: Lectures at the Collège de France 1983-1984*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 161.

some kind of form of subjectivity to existence.²⁰³ It seems that a Socratic legacy might be understood to suggest an equivalence between *epimeleia heautou* and *gnothi seauton* and while a Hellenistic philosophy prioritised *epimeleia heautou*, the history of Western thought demonstrates that it was *gnothi seauton* that dominated metaphysical discourse. With the advent of Christian thought, the Greek notion of *ethos* and *bios* completely disappeared, dominated by the discourse of the soul.

Philosophical *parrhesia* is an act of truth, a technology of the self, a technology of truth telling, but what defines it is not the enunciation of objective truth as such? It is a particular way of telling the truth by ensuring the coherence between conduct of living and an individual's *ethos*. It is a testimony.²⁰⁴ Through the type of life one leads, the set of choices one makes, the things one renounces and those one accepts, how one dresses, and how one speaks, the philosophical life should be from the start to finish the manifestation of this truth. When the concrete life of the individual speaking is in harmony with her discourse, and with what she is, then the individual is an ethical individual. The mode of life appears as the essential, fundamental correlative of the practice of truth telling, or philosophical *parrhesia*. *Parrhesia* constructs a complete style of living for a Greek. It is an ethic of existence, that is applied not just to a single form of morality as in sexual relationships but in all aspects of the quotidian. In Hellenistic philosophy, *parrhesia* may be considered games of truth whose objectives is not to discover a secret reality inside the individual. The objective of this truth-game is to turn the individual's life, *bios*, into a 'place' where truth can appear and act as a real force.

The *parrhesiastic* game presupposes that the *parrhesiastes*, the truth teller in a true life, is someone who has the ethical qualities of freedom and all the ethical qualities that freedom endows, which are required, first to know the truth, and secondly, to convey such truth to others.²⁰⁵ A *parrhesiastes* refers to someone who exhibits a kind of ontological harmony where the *logos* and *bios* of such a person is in harmonic accord. The decisive criterion which identifies the *parrhesiastes*, the subject who practises *parrhesia*, is not to be found in her birth, nor in her citizenship, nor in her intellectual competence, but in the harmony which exists between her *ethos* and her *bios*. The subject of spiritual knowledge and the subject of conduct have a 'perfect fit'. The ethical character of the one who tells the truth is irrelevant in a

²⁰³ Michel Foucault, *The Courage of Truth: Lectures at the Collège de France 1983-1984*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 160.

²⁰⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others, lectures at the Collège de France 1982-1983*, ed. by Frédéric Gros, trans. by Graham Burchell (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 343.

²⁰⁵ Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg, 'Michel Foucault; Crises and Problemization', *Review of politics*, 67 (2005), 335-351 (p. 337).

Cartesian world, where access to truth is a function of method. By contrast, in the Greek conception of *parrhesia*, truth-telling is guaranteed by the possession of certain ethical qualities: qualities that can only be obtained in a conversion of the self. When someone has certain ethical qualities, then that is the proof that she has access to truth of herself and vice versa. An ethical individual is one who manifests *ethos* in the conduct of their life.

***Bios* is Greek subjectivity.²⁰⁶**

Bios is Greek subjectivity in that the experience of the true life for the individual is a form of self-knowledge. It is an organisation of the experience of the true self. When the Greeks speak of *bios*, it is understood that they do not mean life in the biological sense of the term. Foucault suggests that the Greeks had two expressions for the notion, ‘to live’. *Zoe* is understood to mean to have the property of living, the material, animalistic, quality of being alive. *Bios* is the form of relationship that one decides to have with things, the way one places oneself in relations to them, the way in which one finalises them in relation to oneself. It refers to the way of living that life. *Bios* takes on a property of ‘to live’ that is a modality that can be qualified, life with its accidents, its necessities, but also the life one may make oneself, or decide oneself. *Bios* is not a life determined by fate. Foucault describes *bios* as ‘the form of relationship one decides to have to things, the way in which one places oneself in relation to them, the way in which one finalises them in relation to oneself. It is again the way in which one inserts one’s own freedom, one’s own ends, one’s own project in these things themselves, the way in which one as it were puts them in perspective and uses them.’²⁰⁷ It is the way in which one will put in perspective perceive those different choices that are common to everyone yet are characterised by themselves in a *bios* for themselves alone.

Giving an account of your life, your *bios*, is also not to give a narrative of the historical events that have taken place in your life, but rather to demonstrate whether you are able to show that there is a relation between the rational discourse, the *logos*, you are able to use, and the way that you live. Life is what happens to us, of course, but from the angle of how one acts, what one does with what fate might bring. It is the course of existence, but in the light of the

²⁰⁶ Michel Foucault, *Subjectivity and Truth: Lectures at the Collège de France 1980-1981*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 253.

²⁰⁷ Michel Foucault, *Subjectivity and Truth: Lectures at the Collège de France 1980-1981*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 253.

fact that that this course is inseparably linked to the ‘possibility of managing it, transforming it, directing it in this or that direction.’²⁰⁸

Mediated by philosophical *parrhesia*, philosophical *ethos* transforms coherently into *bios*. *Bios* is the focus of *parrhesia*. Giving an account of your life, your *bios*, is not to give a narrative of the historical events that have taken place in your life, but rather to demonstrate that there is a relation between the rational discourse, the *logos*, you are able to use, and the way that you live. *Parrhesia* means to disclose who you are — not your relation to future events, but your present relation to truth. It is a true manifestation of the subject, a manifestation of the subject in the style of life they compose for themselves, and the power of true discourse in their *bios*. This establishment of the self as *bios*, as true life and mode of life, is correlative to a mode of knowledge of the self, but this knowledge has a very different form when giving an account of oneself is indexed to the problem of *bios* rather than to the discovery of the soul. It does not take the form of the soul’s contemplation on itself in the mirror of its divinity. The mode of self-knowledge takes the form of a test, of examination, and also of exercise concerning the way one conducts oneself in accordance with one’s *ethos* of freedom.

Bios is that which must be an object of *tekhne tou biou*. The arts of living, of conducting oneself, must be brought to bear on *Bios*, the life that can be qualified. *Bios* is the correlative of the possibility of modifying one’s life, of modifying it in a rational fashion and in accordance with the principles of the arts of living. The Greek life is neither a profession, occupation nor a status. Life is defined, in Antiquity, by a spiritual knowledge, a knowledge of what one desires, by what one wants to do, and by what one seeks. It is defined by the type of relationship that one decides to have to things, the way in which one places oneself in relations to them, the way in which one finalises them in relation to oneself. It is the way in which one inserts one’s own freedom, one’s own ends, one’s own project in these things themselves, the way on which one puts them in perspective and uses them.²⁰⁹ What will define *bios* is the end one sets for oneself, the way in which one will put into perspective the different choices that are available to everyone. *Bios* is that which results from the conduct of one’s own conduct by the individual.

²⁰⁸ Michel Foucault, *Subjectivity and truth, Lectures at the Collège de France 1980-1981*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. By Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 34.

²⁰⁹ Michel Foucault, *The Courage of Truth, Lectures at the Collège de France 1983-1984*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 253.

Foucault informs us also that through the emergence of truth telling or *parrhesia*, there is a history of existence as *bios* that was constituted in Greek thought as an aesthetic object.²¹⁰ Existence as *bios* was constituted in Greek thought as an aesthetic object and founded a history of the stylistics of existence, a history of life as possible beauty in a very Greek sense. This self-fashioning without reference to any rules and predetermined patterns is what amounts to making our lives a work of art and giving style to one's existence. What made the Greek idea of aesthetics of existence or of giving style to one's existence so fascinating for Foucault was the fact that it was not concerned with law (be it divine or natural) nor with the knowledge of what (or who?) one is. Foucault opines that this history of *bios* as aesthetics has been hidden by the history of a metaphysics or the history of the way in which the ontology of the soul or subject has been founded and established. The history of *bios* has also been hidden by the privileged study of the aesthetic forms devised to give form to things, substances, colours, lights, sounds and words.²¹¹ Philosophical *ethos* and *bios* constitute the aesthetic of existence which Foucault will describe as the concrete manifestation in life of individual meaning²¹²

Bios as a style of living

Arnold Davidson distinguishes between the notions of a way of life and a style of life. In the ancient world, philosophy itself was a way of life, a way of life that was distinct from everyday life, and that was perceived as strange and even dangerous. He says: 'Given this basic characteristic of philosophy itself as a way of life, there were, of course, different philosophies, what I shall call different styles of life, different styles of living philosophically. Each philosophical school, Stoic, Epicurean, Platonist, and so on, represented a style of life that had a corresponding fundamental inner attitude.'²¹³ Foucault opines that the question of 'a style of existence was central to experience in antiquity, stylisation of the relation to oneself, style of conduct, stylisation of the relations to others. Antiquity never stopped posing the question of whether it was possible to define a style common to these different domains of conduct.'²¹⁴

²¹⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Courage of Truth: Lectures at the Collège de France 1983-1984*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 162.

²¹¹ Michel Foucault, *The Courage of Truth: Lectures at the Collège de France 1983-1984*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 162.

²¹² Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 237.

²¹³ Arnold Davidson, 'Ethics as Ascetics: Foucault, the history of ethics, and ancient thought' in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, ed. by Gary Gutting (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 115-140 (p. 132).

²¹⁴ Michel Foucault, 'The Return of Morality', in *Politics Philosophy Culture: Interviews and other writings 1977-1984*, ed. by Laurence Kritzman trans. by Alan Sheridan and others (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 242-255 (p. 243).

The idea of *bios* as a style of existence played a major role in Foucault's initial exploration of Greek antiquity. Style does not mean 'distinction' here;²¹⁵ the word is to be taken in the sense of the Greeks, for whom an artist was first of all an artisan and a work of art was first of all a work. The notion of stylisation does remove *bios* from the quest for universal standards of behaviour that legislate conformity and normalization, reducing men and women to a mode of existence in accordance with a least common denominator. It focuses upon the dimension of freedom distinctive of an individual's place or role in life. An ethics of stylisation invites one to engage in struggle according to one's unique rootedness in the world and history. In praise of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Foucault calls their work "a book of ethics, the first book of ethics to be written in France in quite a long time," and by ethics he means a stylization, "a life style, a way of thinking and living." The distinctiveness of Deleuze and Guattari's ethics of stylization at our peculiar juncture in history is to incite us to struggle against fascism – certainly fascism of the historical variety which so successfully moved so many, "but also the fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behaviour, the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us."²¹⁶

The question of style was central to Greek experience, style in relation to oneself and others. Style served not as a fashion but as an anthropology and developed notions of how an individual might appear in actuality as a reflection of their very freedom, their being, their *ethos*. Foucault opines: 'In fact, the discovery of such a style would probably have led to the definition of the subject.'²¹⁷ This theme of *bios* as object of care, as Foucault suggests, is the starting point for a whole philosophy of practice and activity, of which Cynicism is the first example.²¹⁸ It seems that the imminent discovery of the subject, as a unity of *ethos* and *bios* in a style of existence²¹⁹ that is enabled by Greek *tekhne*, seems to provide a coherent reason for Foucault to proceed with an examination of Greek concept in the elaboration of a new theory of subjectivation.

²¹⁵ Paul Veyne, 'The Final Foucault and his Ethics', trans. by Catherine Porter and Arnold I. Davidson, *Critical Inquiry*, 20 (1993), 1-9 (p. 7).

²¹⁶ Michel Foucault, 'Preface', *Anti-Oedipus, Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), p. 108.

²¹⁷ Michel Foucault, 'The Return of Morality', *Politics Philosophy Culture: Interviews and other writings 1977-1984*, ed. by Laurence Kritzman trans. by Alan Sheridan and others (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 242-255 (p. 242).

²¹⁸ Michel Foucault, *The Courage of truth, Lectures at the Collège de France 1983-1984*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 128.

²¹⁹ Michel Foucault, 'The Return of Morality', in *Politics Philosophy Culture: Interviews and other writings 1977-1984*, ed. by Laurence Kritzman trans. by Alan Sheridan and others (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 242-255 (p. 244).

The initial appearance and development of *tekhne tou biou*

Apparent even in his earliest work, Foucault's obsession was always with a problematic of foundation.²²⁰ Alongside his best known archaeological and genealogical examination of the relationship between subjectivity and truth, there is a work on a concept of spirituality. The aim of this work on spirituality was not to confirm the coherence of traditional philosophies and political theories. Neither was it to establish a modern political or individual ethic, but to provide the proper coherent foundations for both. He proposes that this foundation might be found in technologies of the self or arts of living. In his examination of modern, dualist, humanist morality and ideology, he revealed that they were founded on juridical conceptions of subject of right and a juridico-discursive representation of power. It is this conception of power, he argues, that governs both the thematic of repression and the theory of law as constitutive of human experience.²²¹ Spirituality enabled Foucault to discard this thinking negative conception of power and to look to found ethics and politics on a non-dualist and possibly a holistic conception of the individual. As he says, 'the history of the care and the technologies of the self would thus be a way of doing the history of subjectivity; no longer through.... the constitution of fields of scientific objectivity giving a place to the living, speaking, labouring subject; but, rather, through the putting in place, and the transformations in our culture, of relations with oneself, with their technical armature and their knowledge effects. And in this way, one could take up the question of governmentality from a different angle: the government of the self by oneself in its articulation with relations with others'²²²

Given the importance to Foucault's work of all the concepts of technology and all forms of the arts of living discussed previously, and the extensive historical research he carried out to elaborate the concepts of *techne tou biou* (the art of living) and *epimeleia heautou* (the care of the self), it seems appropriate to speculate a little on the origins of these technologies. Foucault will refer to a long history of *tekhne*, dating from the pre-Socratic era. The model of *tekhne*, however, is neither a code nor a prescriptive system, nor a theoretical system. It presents itself as technologies for living, *tekhne tou biou*, that are something quite different to rules of conduct. Greek *teckhne*, that is to say, ordered procedures, or arts, are considered ways of doing

²²⁰ Jeremy Carrette, *Foucault and Religion: Spiritual corporality and Political Spirituality* (Oxford: Routledge, 2000), p. 9.

²²¹ Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality: I* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 82.

²²² Michel Foucault, 'Subjectivity and Truth', in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp. 87-94. (p. 88).

things that are intended to carry out a certain number of transformations on a determinate object. As we have seen *tekhne* is not a code of the permitted and prohibited, it is a certain systematic set of actions and a certain mode of action..

In the examination of the history, the chapter will confirm the validity of an important assertion made by Foucault that technologies are freely circulating in cultures and societies for anyone who might choose to use them. Foucault explains they are patterns an individual finds in his culture and which are proposed, suggested, and imposed on her by her culture, her society and her social group.²²³ Indeed, Foucault will assert that by Greco-Roman times, in the form of spiritual exercises, they were so ubiquitous in oral form that no index of exercises was deemed necessary. What is also to be examined is the idea that while technologies themselves might stay constant, it was their aims, strategies and ends that were subject to regular transformation. A history of the transformation of aims and end is very useful to understand how Foucault can use ancient technologies and defend this use when confronted with criticism chiefly from historians.

Popular history will suggest that at the dawn of human civilisation, the dominating forces of nature held sway over humanity. At some time, rituals and routines, which Foucault will call technologies of production and communication were devised in accordance with explanations and remedies that were thought, reasoned, and implemented in a crude but effective attempt to improve life experience. The pain and frailty of the human condition constituted an existential crisis that individual human reason could not accept. The human world was no longer tolerable due to the capriciousness of natural forces and a fatalism they demanded. Technologies were the inventions that enabled a problematisation of difficult conditions and enabled strategies for change.

About two and a half thousand years ago, human thought underwent a profound transformation. With the progress of technologies of production and communication granting the gift of time to speculate, simultaneously, it seems, and in all cultures, new possibilities were perceived, and new ways of living were invented. Foucault's analysis of Western technologies or arts of living suggests that they are a response to a profound cultural crisis. All human action that previously was accepted as a self-evident route to harmony was questioned and problematised through a matrix of practical reasoning. Some theorists have suggested that the

²²³ Michel Foucault, 'The ethic of care for the self as a practice of freedom, an interview with Michel Foucault on Jan 20, 1984', *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 12 (1987), 112-131 (p. 122).

nature of the axial change was cognitive or intellectual. They argue that, during the Axial Age, people began to be more reflexive than reactive. Karl Jaspers²²⁴ originally opposed ‘mythos’ to ‘logos,’ and defined reflexivity as general consciousness, and as thinking about thinking. Hitherto unconsciously accepted truths, customs and conditions were subjected to examination, criticised, validated or rejected. Rational thinking, and the possibility of problematisation of human conduct that it allowed, revealed the gaping disparity between a rational worldview and the chaos and disorder that dominated the human condition. The conditions were suitable for reason to replace superstition and belief in mythical forces as the foundation for a new way of being. Human beings, using technologies of the self, through a new ambitious vision of their way of being and of what might be possible, claimed a new responsibility for their own destiny. Human beings, through technologies of self or arts of living, understood their world from a subjective perspective, with a support of ritual and technique which allowed them to identify external influences on their thought and experience and allowed them to negate their legitimacy.

These technologies or art of living were anonymous processes, a system of voluntary actions or cultural technologies, freely available to the individual, should she choose, to permit the acquisition of certain individual qualities that are neither abilities, good behaviours nor virtues in the modern humanistic moral sense. The dividing line between the making of one’s life as a beautiful and good life by fixing rules of conduct for oneself, and the living of a life that conforms with an imposed rule of living, is the matter of the individual’s free choice of action.

Tekhne tou biou points to the initial emergence of Axial Age practices as an elite interest, not to their subsequent diffusion among large populations as happen at the start of the Imperial Roman age. This ‘Axial Age’ (500–300 BCE) refers to the period during which most of the main religious and spiritual traditions emerged in Eurasian societies.²²⁵ The concept of the Axial Age developed out of the observation that most of the current world religions (Buddhism, Hinduism, Daoism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam) can trace their origins back to a specific period of Antiquity around 500 to 300 BCE, and that this period is the first in human history to have seen the appearance of thinkers who still are a source of inspiration for present-day religious and spiritual movements: Socrates, Pythagoras, Buddha, Mahavira, Confucius,

²²⁴ Karl Jaspers, *The Origin and Goal of History*, (New York: Routledge Classics, 2021), p. 65.

²²⁵ Karl Jaspers, *The Origin and Goal of History*, (New York: Routledge Classics, 2021), p. 14.

Lao Tse, the Hebrew prophets. It has been noted²²⁶ that recorded world events from about 500 BCE to 300 BCE show a remarkable surge in thought on the nature of humanity and human life. To take specific examples, Socrates, Confucius, and the Buddha were not particularly religious people. They all emphasized self-discipline as the way of life, but they did not see this way of life as specially linked to a God or the gods. The simultaneous appearance of for example Buddhist, Confucian, and Socratic thought is quite remarkable and one wonders how much the ideas and ethics developed in these times might have influenced each other. In any case, there is a marked rise in religious, philosophical and spiritual exploration and these have provided the foundations for Modern thought today.²²⁷

Thus, the Axial Age was defined as an enlightenment, with reference to modern religions, modern spirituality, and the modern world. It is supposed to have been the beginning of a new era (this is the origin of the term ‘axial’). Socrates, Confucius, and Buddha are understood to be closer to modern people than to inhabitants of early chiefdoms and archaic empires. They ask the same questions and provide the same responses as today's religious and spiritual leaders. The reason why such figures are still read today is that they proposed a new ‘art of living’ in which the constitution of a morality of self-discipline is still valid in a modern time. The technology of self-discipline, in all its forms, might therefore be understood as the foundation of a Western philosophy as a way of life. This morality of self-discipline finds its origins in technologies of production and the rise of agriculture. Apart from carrying out simple instinctual behaviours, no animal would work in the spring in order to have food for the winter. The civilised human is distinguished from the animal mainly by prudence or forethought, which is a self-administered check, and which arises when an action is performed towards which no impulse urges but because reason suggests that a profit will arise at a future date.²²⁸ Foucault will argue that the real change in individual conduct was made possible, in the pre-Socratic era, by the emergence of technologies of the self, in the form of self-discipline and selflessness within definite modes of conduct, which were new at the time, and which today form the core of world moralities, religions and modern notions of spirituality. Foucault will describe them as discourses that extol certain conducts but, and this must be emphasised, without putting themselves forward as rules or a code. Neither do they put themselves forward

²²⁶ Nicolas Baumard, Alexandre Hyafil & Pascal Boyer ‘What changed during the axial age: Cognitive styles or reward systems?’ in *Communicative and Integrative Biology*, <http://www.tandfonline.com> [accessed 24 June 2022]

²²⁷ Karl Jaspers, *The Origin and Goal of History*, (New York: Routledge Classics, 2021), p. 14.

²²⁸ Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy* (London: Rutledge Classics, 2004), p. 25.

as a purely theoretical discourse on the essence of certain good conducts. They are not ideas. They present themselves as *tekhne peri ton bios*, techniques whose object is life or *bios*. To carry out transformations on a determined object with a view to certain ends is the Greek definition of *tekhne*.²²⁹ In this case the determine object is the way of life of the individual, not the individual herself, but the style of her life.

Foucault's main work begins with Socrates whom he suggests consecrated *epimeleia heautou* and to whose *parrhesia* he attributes the true beginning of Western philosophical traditions. But even Socrates and his philosophies had a history. This historical radical questioning of mythic traditions led to the birth of philosophy as a way of life in Western culture. The general pre-Socratic Greek problem in the development of a Greek morality was not focussed on the individual herself. It was not focussed on transforming the individual self in a *tekhne* of the self or *epimeleia heautou*, it was the *tekhne* of life, the *tekhne tou biou*, determining how to live and what life to live. The problem was: Which *tekhne* do I have to use in order to live well as I ought to live? How to live life well, however, as always was a matter of perspective. Two distinct strategies for technologies of existence developed. In Greece, social cohesion was secured by loyalty to the City state and philosophers, including Plato and Aristotle, could see no merit in any other form of polity. In the first *tekhne*, Greek thought is dominated by religious and patriotic devotion to the city. Individuals curtailed themselves by a duty to the city; their individual ethics constituted lives of citizens and have a large political element.²³⁰

The second strategy appeared in elite Greek society. *Tekhne tou biou* was the also name given by Foucault to an elite 'arts of living', to the question of knowing how to govern one's own life in order to give it the most beautiful possible form (in the eyes of others, of oneself, and of the future generations for which one might serve as an example). In this elite society, a Greek individual's way of being and conducting herself, the aspect her existence revealed to others and to herself, the trace that this existence may leave and will leave on the memories of others after her death, will be the object of her aesthetic concern. *Tekhne tou biou* gave rise to a concern for beauty, splendour, perfection, a continual and constantly renewed work of giving form to her existence. This technology constituted life as a beautiful life. Life took on the brilliance of a beauty that was revealed to those able to behold it. It was a form of ancient

²²⁹ Michel Foucault, *Subjectivity and truth, Lectures at the Collège de France 1980-1981*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 251.

²³⁰ Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy* (London: Rutledge Classics, 2004), p. 3.

aesthetics of existence in the formation and development of a practice of self whose aim was to constitute oneself as the worker of the beauty of one's own life.²³¹ The arts of living were a principle of stylisation of conduct for those who wished to give their existence the most graceful and accomplished form possible.²³² Greek acts were not codified in an aesthetics of existence according to the norms of good or bad but were judged by the aesthetic criteria of beauty and style.

Foucault will insist that the appearance of thinkers, such as Socrates in Greece, corresponds to the transition from mythic to theoretic culture that laid down new arts and *tekhne* or modified and transformed the existing ones. In particular, Foucault refers to a transformation of the objective for Socrates in particular of *tekhne tou biou*, the art of living, that existed in pre-Socratic societies, to the Socratic version of *epimeleia heautou* as the care of the self in Alcibiades, without a change in the technologies employed by the individuals. This was still a political technology which involved looking after, not life as *bios*, but the self, in order to be able to take care of others and the city-state. A Greek citizen of the fifth or fourth century would have felt that his *tekhne tou biou* was to take care of the city, of his companions. Where before, the status of young aristocrats alone destined them for power; where before, Athenian pedagogy tried but was hopelessly inadequate to train princes; Socrates appears as the person whose essential, fundamental, and original function is to encourage others to attend to themselves, to take care of themselves in order to be able to lead well. The *epimeleia heautou* (care of the self), in its Socratic presentation, is still a pedagogical structure of training and practice which will lead the individual to the knowledge of the *tekhne tou biou* one might need to be able to govern others, the art to be able to govern well.²³³ With Plato's Alcibiades, Socrates will suggest to Alcibiades that one must take care of oneself because one will have to rule the city. This object, aim for the cultivation of the self, organised and executed by the imperative to 'care for oneself', was consecrated by Plato as the salvation of the city state.²³⁴

Following the fall of City States to Macedonia, the aims of technologies changed once again as social cohesion was secured not by useful and voluntary technologies of living in the

²³¹ Michel Foucault, 'The Concern for Truth', in *Politics Philosophy Culture: Interviews and other writings 1977-1984*, ed. by Laurence Kritzman trans. by Alan Sheridan and others (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 255-267 (p. 259).

²³² Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality:2* (London: Penguin books, 1992), p. 250-251.

²³³ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject, Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982* (New York: Picador, 2005), p.38.

²³⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject, Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982* (New York: Picador, 2005), p 192.

City State but by technologies of domination of the individual citizen under Macedonian control. In this Hellenistic period, when political power passed into the hands of the Macedonians, Greek philosophers, in particular, for the first time turned away from politics and devoted themselves to problematising individual virtue or individual salvation. Individual citizens were left alone to face external forces over which they had no control. They no longer asked, as Plato and Aristotle suggested they should do, how men might create a good state but instead asked existential questions. They enquired as to what technologies might be required to ensure that men might be virtuous in a wicked world, or happy in a world of suffering. The Greek and Roman stoics did concern themselves with politics, but the care of the self for the self remained the dominant practice of philosophy as opposed to politics. Stoic ethical doctrine changed very little from Greek to Roman philosophy and was what most philosophers regarded to be of most importance.

According to Foucault, within Hellenistic philosophical schools, a transformation of the objectives of Socratic/Platonic technology occurred which changed this pedagogical structure of a previously political training and practice to an inter-play between philosophy and spirituality. *Epimeleia heautou* for one's own sake took on a role in the formation of the individual self. The art of living, the technologies in antiquity, those found in the Hellenistic and Roman period, and also in early Christianity, focus less on the question of training of the body in gymnastics and athleticism or medical and political technologies, and very much more on the question of being, a focus on the 'being' one is, on the way of being, giving oneself an absolutely specific type of experience as a style of living.²³⁵ The focus of these arts is not to teach an individual how something may be done or how it ought to be done. It is to teach someone how one transforms what one is through the things one can and must do, through the actions one has to accomplish. This new concern with self involved a new experience of self. The new form of the experience of the self is to be seen in Hellenistic philosophy as a way of life and in the first and second century Roman understanding of Stoicism, when introspection becomes more and more detailed. A relation developed between writing and vigilance. Attention was paid to nuances of life, mood, and reading, and the experience of oneself was

²³⁵ Michel Foucault, *Subjectivity and truth, Lectures at the Collège de France 1980-1981*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 30.

intensified and widened by virtue of this act of writing. A whole field of experience opened which earlier was absent.²³⁶

Foucault suggests that one of the main evolutions in Hellenistic philosophy and spirituality was when, in these schools, it became a way of living with the self as its end and objective. Controversially he contends that metaphysics sink into the background, and ethics, which are now individual, become of the first importance.²³⁷ Foucault argues that in the Hellenistic era, and in particular in Cynicism, the nature of technology was, to use Foucault's phrase, the practice of existence. It introduced a conception of a secular spirituality into philosophical thought which suggests that to escape from an unenlightened state regarding the truth of oneself and one's existence, one must first change oneself. This change, while cognitive in the form of a relationship to knowledge (*connaissance*), was also ethical, in that individuals became aware of a possibility of conducting themselves of developing their own style of living. Foucault believed that the question of style was central to experience in antiquity; stylization of the relation to oneself, style of conduct, stylization of the relation to others. Antiquity never stopped posing the question of whether it was possible to define a style common to these different domains of conduct.²³⁸

Foucault suggests that *tekhne tou biou* transformed and became more and more a *tekhne* of the self, an *epimeleia tou biou*. Technology now focusses on the self, her way of being, as opposed to her style of living. The fall of the Greek City State as the core political unit and the political uncertainty that followed changed paradigms of human thinking, introduced into culture the possibilities of individuation, of selfhood, while still not achieving any notion of individual subject. In the first century BC and AD, there was an explosion of new ideas about the self.²³⁹ Seneca, Plutarch, and Epictetus all gave ideas of the self. Foucault himself talks of the first two centuries AD as the genuine golden age in the history of the care of the self, just before the spread of Christianity and the appearance of the first great Christian thinkers: Tertullian and Clement of Alexandria.²⁴⁰ For Seneca, for instance, the problem is to take care

²³⁶ Michel Foucault, 'Technologies of the self', in *Technologies of the self: a seminar with Michel Foucault*, ed by Luther Martin and Huck Gutman and Patrick H Hutton (London: Tavistock Publications, 1988), pp. 16-49 (p. 28).

²³⁷ Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy* (London: Routledge Classics, 2004), p.219.

²³⁸ Michel Foucault, 'The Return of Morality', in *Politics Philosophy Culture: Interviews and other writings 1977-1984*, ed. by Laurence Kritzman trans. by Alan Sheridan and others (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 242-255 (p. 253).

²³⁹ Richard Sorabj, *Self, Ancient and modern insights about individuality, life, and death*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), p. 156.

²⁴⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 81.

of himself and the formation of an individual *ethos* to begin with and only then his style of living, his *bios* which reflects coherently his *ethos*. A new technology of the self requires not just a *tekhne tou biou* but a care of the self, an *epimeleia heautou*. To be precise, Foucault refers to *tekhne tou biou* as an art of living in pre-Socratic societies and *epimeleia heautou*, as a *tekhne* of the self, an art of living in post-Socratic Hellenistic societies as examples of technologies of the self and emphasises their eventual co-extensiveness in Hellenistic spirituality or philosophy as a way of life. The art of living, *tekhne tou biou* as *epimeleia heautou* saw the possibility of the constitution of a life as an individual form of morality and not as a rule of life or a universal morality to be complied with by all. The essence of a care of the self is the recognition of the freedom of the self to form the self, and as a practice of freedom from the unenlightened self. The notion of *tekhne tou biou* was transformed as a phenomenon in Hellenistic tradition where relations of the self to the self were intensified and valorised. All this in order to behave ‘properly’, in order to practice freedom properly.²⁴¹

Epimeleia heautou: the strategies that Foucault will identify as the foundation for his notion of self-subjectivation

In a set of shifts, reactivations, organisations and reorganisations of these techniques, Foucault suggests that *epimeleia heautou* becomes the great ‘culture of the self’ in the later Hellenistic and Roman period.²⁴² This transformed technology manifested a change in orientation, from a short-term materialistic orientation to the city to a long-term spiritual one for the individual. The practice of the self is identified and united with the art of living itself; the art of living and the art of oneself are identical; at least they become or tend to become identical.²⁴³ Foucault, then, in discussing a rich and frequently employed Greek notion of *epimeleia heautou* that had a long life throughout Greek history, was therefore not presenting an unknown event in history. The notion and its practices were already well known and described. Foucault suggests that *epimeleia heautou* was a very complex, rich and frequently employed Greek notion but one to which the historiography of philosophy has not attached much importance.²⁴⁴ Yet, he insists,

²⁴¹ Michel Foucault, ‘The ethics of a concern of the self as a practice of freedom, an interview with Michel Foucault Jan 20, 1984’, in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp. 281-303 (p. 281).

²⁴² Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 50.

²⁴³ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 206.

²⁴⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 2.

that it was this technology of the self which gradually acquired the dimension and form of a veritable cultivation of the self which reached the summit of its popularity in the first two centuries of the imperial epoch.²⁴⁵

Epimeleia heautou as a technology of the self became co-extensive with the *tekhne tou biou* in the writings of Seneca and Marcus Aurelius in particular. The Hellenistic notion of *epimeleia heautou*, as a *tekhne* of the self, a technology of the self, the practices of the self, or the art of oneself, is presented as an example of technologies of life and of the self that were transforming and emphasises their eventual co-extensiveness in Hellenistic spirituality or philosophy as an *ethos* and a style of living.

Epimeleia heautou constitutes for the individual an experience of a particular knowledge of the self which will be called spiritual knowledge, a useful and relational form of knowledge rather than an objective form which was common due to the influence of Platonic metaphysics of the soul. It permits the acquisition of a unique ontological reality that is not the Platonic soul and which Foucault will call the ethical subject. It is a reality in the form of qualities of being, qualities of existence, ways of being, or what Foucault will call the rebound effects of the truth on the transformed subject.²⁴⁶ The effects are the result of a relationship between the ethical subject and truth. For example, in Stoic philosophies, it results in the mode of being of freedom, expressed as tranquillity, detachment, self-reliance, beatitude. Tranquillity is not just a style of behaviour, a way of reacting minimally or under great control faced with adversity. It is the ability to maintain autonomy and independence in relation to the things that happen in life. Freedom is an ontological state that open the individual to modalities of experience where the events that occur around one, in existence, produce the least possible effect on the individual and enable him to maintain her autonomy and independence in relation to them.

Foucault will describe the appearance in written history of the phenomenon of *epimeleia heautou*, as a ‘cultural phenomenon of a determinate scale, constituting a decisive moment that is still significant for the modern mode of being subjects.’²⁴⁷ It is in the theme of the ‘*epimeleia heautou*, a true culture of Hellenistic and Roman philosophy, as a practice of

²⁴⁵ Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self: The History of Sexuality:3* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 45.

²⁴⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 16.

²⁴⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 9.

living, that Foucault finds, through the work of Pierre Hadot, a notion of spirituality, defining a way of being, a standpoint, forms of reflection, and practices which make it an extremely important phenomenon, not just in the history of representations, notions and theories, but in the history of subjectivity itself or, if you like, in the history of practices of subjectivity.²⁴⁸ *Epimeleia heautou* is now a critical form of individualism based on the practice of life as an *techne tou biou*, an art of living, of spiritual exercise in Stoic, Epicurean, and Cynic traditions, and constitutes the appearance of the golden age of the spiritual exercise in societies of the first two centuries A.D. Foucault suggests that Socrates is, and always will be, the person associated with *epimeleia heautou*, and through his thought, the phenomenon remained a fundamental principle for describing the philosophical attitude, and not just the political attitude, throughout Greek, Hellenistic, Roman and early Christian culture. Hadot agrees, suggesting that Socrates was the ‘living call to awaken our moral consciousness, and brought care of oneself to Western awareness.’²⁴⁹ Foucault opines that from the Hellenistic and Roman period, we can see a real development of a true culture, a culture of care of the self.

He identifies *epimeleia heautou* as the cultural or spiritual tradition that designates a number of actions, or spiritual exercises, exercised on the self by the self, actions by which one takes responsibility for oneself and by which one changes, purifies, transforms, and transfigures oneself.²⁵⁰ These exercises include techniques of meditation, memorisation of the past, examination of conscience and checking representations as they appear in the mind. *Epimeleia heautou* is a certain way of considering things, of behaving in the world, undertaking actions, and having relations with other people. It implies a certain way of attending to what one thinks, and what takes place in one’s thoughts. It is an ‘attitude’ towards the self, others and the world. It is a certain way of attending to what one thinks and what takes place in thought. It designates a number of actions exercised on the self by the self, actions by which one takes responsibility for oneself, and by which one changes, purifies, transforms, and transfigures oneself. It involves a series of practices defining a way of being and practices which make it an extremely important phenomenon in the histories of subjectivity itself.²⁵¹ *Epimeleia heautou*, a spiritual

²⁴⁸ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 11.

²⁴⁹ Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a way of life: Spiritual exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. by Arnold Davidson trans. by Michael Chase, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), p. 89.

²⁵⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 11.

²⁵¹ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 11.

practice embedded in a philosophical culture of the self, became a general, fundamental, and unconditional principle for these philosophies; applicable to all irrespective of status or age within that culture, yet only practiced by the few. Foucault will contend that ‘to become again what we should have been, but we never were’ is one of the most fundamental themes of this practice of the self.²⁵²

Foucault sought to interpret the new ‘ends’ that gradually appeared in the ‘culture of the self’ of Hellenistic and Roman Philosophical schools. This change occurred, not through the adoption or imposition of new codes, but through an intensification of the relation to oneself by which one constituted for oneself an *ethos* or way of being of ontological freedom, and a style of living that reflects one’s *ethos*, as the product of one’s practice and art, in a culture of the self. In the art of living, *tekhne tou biou* as *epimeleia heautou*, Foucault saw the possibility of the constitution of a life as an individual form of morality, where one imposed one’s own rule of conduct, and not as an imposed rule of life or a cultural morality to be complied with. *Epimeleia heautou* now constitutes the technologies of self-discipline used to foster an understanding of the self in the world and to allow the self to conduct her conduct in accordance with that understanding. It is not simply a self-awareness of one’s moral actions but self-formation as an ‘ethical’ subject through ethical action.²⁵³

Knowledge of the self (*gnothi seauton*)

With the later development of *epimeleia heautou* as an art of the self as opposed to a more simple art of life in Socratic thought, Foucault opines that the notion of *gnothi seauton* is incorporated into *epimeleia heautou* as the source of a new form of knowledge of the self, a spiritual knowledge which on undergoing processes of subjectivation, constitute the truth of the self, not of the subject in the domain of knowledge (*connaissance*) as a knowledge of objects but of the self as *ethos* and *bios*. Foucault asks what is the ‘price’ that one must pay for access to this knowledge of oneself. The long and persistent effort required to practice the difficult art of caring for the self is the price attached to the acquisition of truth.

For Foucault, the fundamental reason for the disappearance of *epimeleia heautou* as a cultural phenomenon was that the notion of *gnothi seauton*, isolated and divided by Platonic

²⁵² Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 95.

²⁵³ Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality:2* (London: Penguin books, 1992), p. 28.

thought from the *epimeleia heautou*, gained privilege as a relationship to knowledge (*connaissance*) of the self. Subsequently it became the dominant imperative of Western analytical philosophy with very wide implications for the future of western thought. He says that as soon as the self that one cares for is renounced and is replaced by a Platonic metaphysics in the form of a knowing and remembering soul, the entire exercise of *epimeleia heautou* becomes an exercise of knowledge (*connaissance*) of the soul, in that one must get to know the soul as an object of knowledge to which it has immediate access. There is no longer a need for a technology of living; one needs a technology of the self which is a hermeneutic of the soul or subject. Thus began the history of a Western metaphysical tradition. The establishment of the soul, as a reality ontologically distinct of the body, was correlative with a mode of knowledge of the self which had the form of the soul's contemplation of itself and its recognition of its mode of being. This, Foucault claims, marks out the future site of metaphysical discourse, which will have to speak to man of his being and what in the way of ethics and rules of conduct follows from this ontological foundation of his being.²⁵⁴

In the development of this philosophy, through Platonism in particular, the context for a direct apprehension of truth of the soul through reason in objectively precise terms is defined in metaphysical discourse. A metaphysics based on reason, or a knowing soul might extend ontology, the knowledge of what is, beyond sense perception. Platonic understanding of *episteme* and *doxa* was considered to be the beginning of this distinction in Western philosophy. The limitations inherent in sensory experience could only be counteracted by reason and the knowledge produced was both certain and necessary. It required that the worldly self be renounced as having access to illusion only, and a new form of metaphysical entity with a direct access to truth of self be countenanced. Spirituality remained for a short time as the context for an apprehension of truth that required that the worldly self to transform itself in order to know the truth of self. Its influence disappeared except for a short resurgence in Hellenistic philosophy as a way of life. There is little doubt, in the West at least, that in the development of a mystical Platonic theology in the Patristic period, theology and spirituality, or dogmatic and mystical theology, separated and became mutually exclusive categories.

Pierre Hadot traces the reduction of philosophy to an absolute philosophical discourse. He argues that, apart from the monastic use of the word *philosophia* where spirituality had

²⁵⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Courage of Truth: Lectures at the Collège de France 1983-1984*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 160.

buried itself up to the fourth century, philosophy becomes a purely theoretical and abstract activity of knowledge (*connaissance*) and was no longer understood as a way of life. Moreover, he maintains that philosophy itself was demoted to a support to a developing Christian theology. He posits the teaching of philosophy in the modern university system further obscures the distinction between philosophical discourse and philosophy as a way of life, to the extent that philosophy is evidently no longer a kind of life.²⁵⁵ Dogmatic theology characterises the whole of the first millennium of Christian thought and the framework of the Christian world picture in terms of revealed truth. Hellenistic influence, in the form of a spirituality, is resisted and rejected, and the rejection becomes sharper, and ultimately final, with the full emergence of the fundamental Christian doctrine of creation out of nothing.²⁵⁶ It is only by virtue of having a soul that any individual might have access to truth and even then, truth must be revealed.

²⁵⁵ Arnold Davidson, 'Spiritual Exercises and Ancient philosophy: an Introduction to Pierre Hadot', *Critical Inquiry*, 16 (1990), 475-482 (p. 479).

²⁵⁶ Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999) p. xiii-xiv

Spiritual Direction and Awakening.

Foucault opines that the knowledge of and art of applying technologies of the self, such as self-examination, revealing oneself, controlling passions, are not innate and instinctive behaviours. Although, as Foucault explains, technologies are patterns an individual finds in his culture and which are proposed, suggested, and imposed on her by her culture, her society and her social group,²⁵⁷ they can only be learned by the individual with the aid of another through processes of spiritual direction. As has been shown, these learned technologies are essential in processes of ethical subjectivation and the development of moralities. Therefore, a history of direction and spiritual directors is important to reveal how these technologies were applied throughout antiquity and to access the requirement for any form of direction that might be required in a return of morality.

Spiritual direction, the direction of souls, the direction of individuals, is defined by Foucault as the process whereby an individual submits to and leaves to another a whole series of decisions of a private kind, in the sense that they normally, usually and statutorily fall outside the domain of political constraint and legal obligation.²⁵⁸ In the domain where political constraint and legal obligation do not apply, direction requires one to rely on the will of the other. Whereas political power wills in the place of the subject and imposes its will on the subject, in spiritual direction, one wills this other will. There is no ceding of will, there is no sanction or coercion. The one directed always wants to be directed, and the direction will last only insofar as the one directed still wants to be directed. The game of freedom, in the acceptance of the bond of direction, is, according to Foucault, fundamental.²⁵⁹ The person directed does not seek an external end in direction, but an internal end understood as a modality of a relationship of self to self. Foucault suggests that if we call subjectivation the formation of a definite relationship of the self to the self, then we can say that spiritual direction is a technique that consists in binding two wills in such a way that they are always free in relation

²⁵⁷ Michel Foucault, 'The ethic of care for the self as a practice of freedom, an interview with Michel Foucault on Jan 20, 1984', *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 12 (1987), 112-131 (p. 122).

²⁵⁸ Michel Foucault, *On the Government of the Living: Lectures at the College de France 1979-1980*, ed. by Michel Senellart trans. by Graham Burchell (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 229.

²⁵⁹ Michel Foucault, *On the Government of the Living: Lectures at the College de France 1979-1980*, ed. by Michel Senellart trans. by Graham Burchell (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 230.

to each other, the other and the will of the other will be freely accepted by the one who is directed so that she might establish a certain relationship of self to self.²⁶⁰

The concept of a spiritual direction, the process within which the subject learns, through technologies of the self, to conduct her conduct, to carefully control her acts and thoughts, is a very ancient tradition. Among the Greeks and Romans populace, the practice of life guidance included a fairly wide range of different procedures to control the passions, guidelines for health, and for ensuring fairness in relations with others.²⁶¹ Spiritual direction in Greece can be identified in two major forms, both of which are not religious. They are fundamentally of a philosophical character and are either institutional or non-institutional. The first is non-institutional and was an activity of physicians who, for a fee, would advise on the conduct required to face up to difficult moments in life or would attempt to provide a solution for moral ills. Another non-institutional form takes the form of a free and benevolent act of friendship when one is asked to help. Karen Armstrong suggests that ‘people did not go to Socrates to learn anything; he always insisted that he had nothing to teach them, but to have a change of mind. Participants in a Socratic dialogue discover how little of what they know is significant and that the meaning of even the simplest proposition eluded them. The shock of ignorance and confusion represented a conversion to the philosophical life, which could not begin until one realised that one knew nothing at all.’²⁶² Foucault suggest that one must care for the self because one is ignorant. It is ignorance and the discovery of being unaware of this ignorance that gives rise to the requirement of caring for the self.²⁶³ The Socratic dialogue was never aggressive or didactic; it was conducted with courtesy, gentleness, and consideration. There was no question of forcing the interlocutor to accept a point of view. The interlocutor voluntarily altered her own perception, enabled her own transformation or conversion, or, in Foucauldian terms, constituted a new form of subjectivity for herself in a self-subjectivation. Adepts were able to achieve a conversion by introducing a different form of knowing, a spiritual knowing apart from rationality, which was not founded on a knowledge (*connaissance*).

²⁶⁰ Michel Foucault, *On the Government of the Living: Lectures at the College de France 1979-1980*, ed. by Michel Senellart trans. by Graham Burchell (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 230.

²⁶¹ Michel Foucault, *Confessions of the Flesh; The History of Sexuality Volume 4*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Robert Hurley (London: Penguin Classics, 2021), p. 79-80.

²⁶² Karen Armstrong, *The Case for God: what religion really means* (London: Vintage Books, 2009), p. 378.

²⁶³ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 254.

In the Hellenistic philosophical schools, however, there existed a much more continuous and institutional forms of direction ensuring the use of *epimeleia heautou* as a philosophy as a way of life. Individuals were committed for long periods of time to such a general regime of existence. In general, in Hellenistic spirituality in all its forms, technologies of the self are procedures offered to individuals by spiritual directors to enable them to determine their identity, maintain, or transform it, in terms of a certain number of ends, through relations of self-mastery and self-knowledge.²⁶⁴ Foucault will maintain that *epimeleia heautou* is shot through with the presence of the other: the other as a permanent guide of one's life, the other as correspondent to whom one writes and before whom one takes stock of oneself, the other as helpful friend, benevolent relative.²⁶⁵

In 1980, Foucault delivered a course on the government of the living devoted to Christian practices. This study was based in the texts of the first Christian Fathers in which the problems of baptism, declarations of faith, catechesis, penance, and spiritual direction were linked together. He examines the emergence in monastic institutions of new techniques, new technologies of the self, demanding several things from the individual for the remission of his sins. He noticed that the obligation to examine the self and to tell the truth about oneself was established and structured around the theme of spiritual direction and, also, the subject's production of a discourse in which his own truth could be told as one of the major forms of obedience to one's spiritual director. These institutional practices of direction in Christianity in monasticism mirrored to a great extent Hellenistic practices to the extent that the monasteries could also be defined as schools of philosophy as a way of life but where one can trace the development of new forms and the transformation of effects.

One can measure a great transformation separating Christian direction from Hellenistic direction. The aim of the latter is to establish the conditions for a sovereign exercise of the will upon oneself. Christian direction on the other hand is aimed at the renunciation of the will. Christian direction, in the form of a complete submission to the director, never leads one to the point where one can establish sovereignty over oneself, but to the point where the adept can, no longer, will anything. It is this change in the object of spiritual direction from Hellenistic tradition to the Christian tradition, and the transfer from teaching of the conduct of one's own

²⁶⁴ Michel Foucault, 'Subjectivity and Truth', in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp. 87-94. (p. 87).

²⁶⁵ Frédéric Gros, 'Course Context', in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981-1982* (New York: Picador, 2005), pp.507-550 (p. 537).

conduct to the imposed conduct and renunciation, and the emphasis Foucault places on both, that require the thesis to examine variations in spiritual direction and the movement of the objectives of the technologies that it teaches and introduces into modern thought. For Foucault, Christian examination of conscience and confession was established within monastic spiritual direction to establish technologies that usurp an earlier version of Hellenistic technologies of the self. These monastic practices, he opines, were a way of subjecting the individual, by demanding from him a complete obedience to a spiritual director and an indefinite introspection and an exhaustive statement of truth about himself.²⁶⁶ Foucault will contend that that the detailed verbalisation of sin and the exploration of oneself is an important phenomenon, the appearance of which in Christianity and generally in the Western world, marks the beginning of an ultimately very lengthy process in which subjectivity of Western man is developed.²⁶⁷ As a direct consequence, in the modern West, the subject of truth is only a subject of truth by subjection to the other.²⁶⁸ The establishment in Christian monasticism of two new technologies, penitential discipline and monastic asceticism, led to a complex evolution in the Christian church. The new technologies developed a certain mode of relation of oneself to oneself and brought a new issue into play, that of new forms of subjectivity. These new forms of subjectivity were much more innovative and much more determinant than the degree of severity added or subtracted in the monastic milieu from the codes of behaviours that were handed down from their Hellenistic roots. Processes of self-subjection, common in Hellenistic philosophy as a way of life, evolved onto processes of trans-subjection in early Christianity by the prioritisation of regimes of divine revelation and salvation, and subsequently the problem of the flesh as a mode of experience was placed at the centre of the power apparatus of the monastic institutions. ‘During the course of its later development and through the formation of certain technologies of the individual-penitential discipline, monastic asceticism—a form of experience was constituted that activated a new modality of the code and caused it to be embodied, in a totally different way, in the behaviour of individuals.’²⁶⁹ The objectification of the self, by the self, and the production of a true discourse of the self in line

²⁶⁶ Michel Foucault, *On the Government of the Living: Lectures at the College de France 1979-1980*, ed. by Michel Senellart trans. by Graham Burchell (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 323.

²⁶⁷ Michel Foucault, *On the Government of the Living: Lectures at the College de France 1979-1980*, ed. by Michel Senellart trans. by Graham Burchell (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 225.

²⁶⁸ Frédéric Gros, 'Course Context', in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982* (New York: Picador, 2005), pp.507-550 (p. 510-511).

²⁶⁹ Michel Foucault, *Confessions of the Flesh; The History of Sexuality Volume 4*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Robert Hurley (London: Penguin Classics, 2021), p. 36.

with a discourse claiming truth takes meaning historically from this general and permanent injunction to obey a spiritual director in all its forms. Foucault will insist that from this point of view, the subjectivation of Western man is Christian, and not Greco-Roman.²⁷⁰ Spiritual direction in Antiquity, on the other hand, as a relationship between the director and the adept, has as its aim the absolute autonomy of the relationship of self to self rather than a regime of domination and obedience. A modern interpretation might suggest that a true subject, an enlightened subject was possible therefore, no longer in the sense of a subjection in the form of trans-subjectivation but only in an irreducible choice of self-subjectivation.

The Christian pastor and obedience in direction

Pastoral power is a form of power which cannot be exercised without knowing the inside of people's minds, without exploring their souls, without making them reveal their innermost secrets. It implies a knowledge of conscience and an ability to direct it.²⁷¹ The pastor will have at his disposal means of analysis, of reflection, of detection of what happens; but, also, the adept will be obliged to tell his pastor everything that occurs in the secrets of his soul. The adept must confess without cease everything that occurs within himself to someone charged to direct his conscience, and this exhaustive confession will, somehow, produce a truth, which was certainly not known by the pastor, but was not known either by the subject himself.²⁷² In order to ensure this individual knowledge, Christianity appropriated two essential instruments at work in the Hellenistic world: self-examination and the guidance of conscience. It took them over but not without altering them considerably from their Hellenistic origins.²⁷³ However pastoral power also insists on pure obedience.²⁷⁴ It is a relationship of the submission of one individual to another. Foucault insists that 'the relationship of submission of one individual to another individual, correlating an individual who directs and an individual who is directed, is not only a condition of Christian obedience: it is its very principle. And the person who is directed must accept submission and obey within this individual relationship and because it is

²⁷⁰ Michel Foucault, *On the Government of the Living: Lectures at the College de France 1979-1980*, ed. by Michel Senellart trans. by Graham Burchell (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 236.

²⁷¹ Michel Foucault, 'The Subject and Power', in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, ed. by Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 208-226 (p. 214).

²⁷² Michel Foucault, 'Sexuality and Power (1978)', in *Religion and Culture: Michel Foucault*, ed. by Jeremy R Carrette (New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 115-130 (p. 125).

²⁷³ Michel Foucault, 'Pastoral power and political reason', in *Religion and Culture: Michel Foucault*, ed. by Jeremy R Carrette (New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 134-152 (p. 143).

²⁷⁴ Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College de France 1977-1978*, ed. by Michael Senellart trans. by Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 230.

an individual relationship. The Christian puts himself in his pastor's hands for spiritual matters, but equally for material things and for everyday life.²⁷⁵ In Christian obedience, one obeys in order to be obedient, in order to arrive at a state of obedience. The aim of obedience is the mortification of one's will; it is to act so that one's will, as one's own will, is dead, that is to say so that there is no other will but not to have any will.²⁷⁶ Mortification is not death, but it is a renunciation of this world and of oneself, in order to provide life in an other world.

Hellenistic Anthropology; Mankind's woes, awakening and enlightenment

In the view of all Hellenistic and early Roman schools of philosophy, and indeed of most axial age philosophies, mankind's principal cause of suffering, disorder were human passions in the form of unregulated desires and exaggerated fears that ruled the way life was lived. The principal cause of human suffering is the passions, for example, disorderly desires and exaggerated fears; and, therefore, philosophy is, in the first place, a spiritual practice rather than an intellectual pursuit of knowledge. It is a 'therapeutics' for the passions that requires, not a radical transfiguration or a renunciation of the self, but a transformation of the immature self. Human unhappiness might come from the search for material goods and the attempt to keep these material goods, instead of the goods that are really good and beautiful for the self.

This Hellenistic anthropology suggests that mankind lives in a contingent world and deals with the contingency by seeking to acquire and keep possessions, not just material but also wealth, status, another's good opinion, that could be lost or kept at any instant. The paradox that exists is that in the very impermanence of things, mankind seeks to avoid the very inevitable contingencies of existence. Unhappiness might also spring from the actions taken to try and avoid evils, now and in the future, that may be unavoidable or that might never happen. Hadot maintains that the ancient philosophical schools responded to an elementary existential experience, the cries of the flesh not to be hungry, not to be thirsty, not to be cold, or their tragic situation of human beings, who are conditioned by fate, helpless and defenceless in the fact of the accidents of life, the setbacks of fortune, illness and death.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁵ Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977-1978*, ed. by Michael Senellart trans. by Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 234.

²⁷⁶ Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977-1978*, ed. by Michael Senellart trans. by Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 234.

²⁷⁷ Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a way of life: Spiritual exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. by Arnold Davidson trans. by Michael Chase, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), p. 87.

Philosophy must show that one ought to search only for that which is obtainable, and one should try and avoid only that which is avoidable. In a difficult and permanent attitude of freedom, one should want only that which depends on one and be indifferent to that which does not depend on one. Philosophy is the achievement of *sapientia*, whose objective is a relationship of self-control, self-possession, and a pleasure in the self.²⁷⁸

A Hellenistic anthropology, then, would suggest that lived experience for most of mankind is founded in an inauthenticity²⁷⁹ or to use a more Kantian word, an immaturity. Foucault informs us that an inauthentic state is defined by Seneca as a state of *stultitia*. The principal cause of inauthenticity is dominant passion in the form of human desire and unnecessary fear of and worry about the unnecessary. The desire for a self-transformation is not founded on a notion or idea that there is an inherent fault in the self. There is no requirement to renounce what one is. Self-transformation is the result of a problematisation of life's crises, the rational strategy to cease being unhappy, and to live life in a state characterised by more happiness, in accordance with whatever the divergent views of happiness each Hellenistic school might propose. Hellenistic philosophy would consider that desires are both natural and necessary, or natural but not necessary, or neither natural nor necessary. Only desires which are natural and necessary can be healthy. An individual life, in order to be a happy one, needs to be healed of such consuming and unhealthy passions in therapeutic exercises. In this context healing consists in bringing one's soul back from the worries and desires of life to the joy of existing. Whereas as worries and desires can consume the subject; letting them go reveals the only genuine pleasure, the pleasure of existence.

Foucault cites Seneca and his work in *De Tranquillitate* on *stultitia*,²⁸⁰ that state which individuals are in when they are ignorant, when they are un-awakened, and have made no progress in philosophy as a way of life. The awareness of the necessity of spiritual awakening is very difficult to acquire because many people have never known anyone who functions with the coherence of thought and action, a coherence that might describe the life of masters such as Socrates. Most take the mode of existence and style of living of their parents and family, or of the social group they have been born into as the norm for their own. In other words, *stultitia*

²⁷⁸ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 134.

²⁷⁹ Pierre Hadot, *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*, (Paris: Albin Michel, 2002), p. 240.

²⁸⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 130-135.

or a lack of awakening is the opposite pole to a learned Socratic care of the self, as the beginning of a relationship of the self to the self. *Stultitia* is defined by a non-relationship with the self, a state from which the individual stultus cannot escape alone. It requires the presence, insertion and intervention of a spiritual master or director.

Seneca suggests that just as any individual is not responsible for the seeds of virtue that are implanted in her by the very nature of her reason, neither is she responsible for the awakening that that may take place through a *logos* or a proposition of truth which gets through to the individual.²⁸¹ There is something like an automatism of the work of the *logos* on virtue, on the soul, an automatism which is due both to the existence of the seeds of virtue and to the nature, the very property of the true *logos*. The *logos* can produce effects on the soul spontaneously and automatically because it speaks the truth. Despite that, when attention is badly directed, as in the that perpetual restlessness of the soul, mind, and attention of the *stultus*, the presence of *logos* does not always produce positive effects. Hence a certain art is required, or at any rate a certain technique, a correct way of listening.²⁸² Every individual needs a *tekhne*, a technology or an art. This *tekhne* must be taught in a mode of spiritual direction.

One cannot awaken oneself; one must be awoken. Despite the fervour and the passion with which the awoken will seek the self, there is no deep source, no inherent motivation that drives the will. Neither Plato's mythology of remembrance nor a hermeneutics of the self that might reveal the essence of the self, can ensure a Hellenistic enlightenment. *Stultitia* is a description of the natural affliction of mental restlessness and irresolution which the art of living will allow the individual to rise above but only provided someone lend a hand and pull the sufferer out. Even then, the demands of regular and sacrificial forms of conduct restrict the numbers who are capable of participating in self constitution.²⁸³ While all are competent to practise, it is generally the case that few are actually capable. Lack of courage, strength, endurance, an inability to grasp the importance of the task is the destiny of the majority, in reality.²⁸⁴ It seems that in Greek Epicurean tradition, Epicurus was, in a singularity without

²⁸¹ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 337.

²⁸² Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 338.

²⁸³ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 337.

²⁸⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 118.

exception, was the only individual who was able to extricate himself from non-wisdom and attain wisdom on his own.²⁸⁵ Outside of this *Sophos*, all others need guides to achieve *sapientia*. Foucault opines that it was the philosophers who disseminated the rule of the practice of the self, who spread its notions and methods and proposed models. In most cases they are the sources of the texts that were published and circulated and served more or less as manuals for the practice of the self.²⁸⁶

The *stultus* is someone blown to the wind and open to the external world, that is, someone who lets all representations of the external world into her mind. She accepts these representations without examining them, without knowing how to analyse what they represent. She allows these representations to get mixed up in her own mind, with her passions, desires, ambition, mental habits, and illusions. The content of representations cannot be separated from these subjective elements. The *stultus* is also someone who lets her life pass by without any direct attention to the present and her reality. She constantly changes her viewpoint and her way of life. She constantly changes her mode of living and reaches old age with ever having thought about it. The *stultus* is also someone who remembers nothing, who lets her life pass by, who does not try to restore unity to her life by recalling what is worth memorising. nor direct attention, and constantly changes her viewpoint and her way of life.

The will of the *stultus* is a will that does not always will coherently. It is constantly interrupted and changing. The will of the *stultus* is not a free will. To have a free will means that one might will without what it is that one wills being determined by this or that event, this or that representation, this or that inclination. To will freely is to will without any determination. To will freely is to will absolutely, that is, without contradiction. A *stultus* will want something and at the same time to regret wanting it.²⁸⁷

Foucault opines that the only object that one can freely, absolutely, and always want is the true self and that true self can only be described as a combined mode of being and a way of living.²⁸⁸ To will the self is a matter of ontological freedom; the freedom to will one's

²⁸⁵ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 136.

²⁸⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 149.

²⁸⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 133.

²⁸⁸ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 133.

singular way of being, one's *ethos*. The only object to which the will can be orientated in absolute freedom so that it can be exerted without being determined by external forces, without having to take into consideration alterations according to the occasion or time, is one's *ethos*, the true self. When one does not will the self, does not want the self, when there is a disconnection between the will and the self, such a situation describes a non-relationship to the self. To escape from *stultitia* will be precisely to act so that one can will the true self, so that one can strive towards the self as the only object one can will freely, absolutely, and always, in a relationship of self to self. In the search for the self, the result of an absolute will, for the enlightened individual, all things will pale into insignificance, the world is nothing, until the enlightened one possesses that object of his will. It might be appropriate to point out here that the history of *stultitia* as outlined by Foucault was written with an implicit, yet quite clear, assumption that the *stultus* is as much a phenomenon of modernity as it was in Roman society. It seems that Foucault's history was as much a genealogy of the unenlightened of the present.

Right from the start of life, even in the lap of the mother, the *stultus* has a relationship to knowledge (*connaissance*) rather than to self, relationships that serve to define morally sound action and morally valid subjectivity. Consequently, the *stultus* ought not strive for knowledge to replace her ignorance.²⁸⁹ Foucault insists that 'the subject is not so much ignorant as badly formed, or rather deformed, vicious, in the grips of bad habits.'²⁹⁰ He adds the individual should strive for a status as subject that he has never known at any moment of his life. He has to replace the non-subject with the status of subject defined by the fullness of the self's relationship with the self. He has to constitute himself as subject...²⁹¹

The *stultus* is someone who has not cared for herself by means of *tekhne tou biou* or *epimeleia heautou*, the art of living, as taught by a spiritual director. Arts of living are the techniques or technology of the self, a matter of thought out, elaborated, systematised procedures taught to individuals in such a way that, through the management of their own life, through the control and the transformation of the self by the self, individuals might attain a

²⁸⁹ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 129.

²⁹⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 129.

²⁹¹ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 129.

certain mode of being.²⁹² This acquisition cannot be produced without a direct action of the self on the self as mind and body as an exercise; a relationship of self with others who will provide one with knowledge; and a relationship of self to truth as it is produced in a game of truth initiated by the self as opposed to initiated by conditions of knowledge. Foucault will insist that this subjectivity-truth problem is absolutely central in the arts of living. The arts of living are essentially methods and procedures by which individuals, by actions on themselves, may modify and transform their experience of themselves by referring to a true teaching, truthful speech, the discovery or search for a certain truth.²⁹³ Arts of living, according to Foucault, allows the individual to acquire for herself a certain ontological status, a status that opens her up to a modality of experience, an ethical subjectivity, describable in terms of tranquillity, happiness, beatitude and so on.²⁹⁴

In reality, the art of living as it existed in the Hellenistic era makes up a whole domain covering completely different experiences, extending from the art of confronting something specific in life like sexuality to the art of one's death, bereavement, financial ruin, marriage, etc; guiding on how to prepare for these moments, on what might be said, what might be done and how one should comport oneself at these special times. In addition, a whole part of this art might not address these specific moments of life but the general regime of day-to-day life as in the regime of the body, its health, maintenance, and fitness. There is also the regime of the soul as in the mastering of passions and desires, the control of emotions and angers. All of this comprises technical formulae. Within this context, *tekhnē* or art must be understood as a skill at doing a specified thing, typically one acquired through practice. This art of living has to deal with *stultitia* as its raw material and its objective is to allow the individual to escape from the inauthentic state.

Hadot suggests that the sole occupation for Hellenistic philosophy must be that of awakening and healing.²⁹⁵ This notion of a spiritual awakening is not however an exclusively Hellenistic conception. It appears in many guises in Greek philosophy. It appears as a model for Platonic *epistrophe* or conversion and recollection of the Ideal by the soul. One slowly

²⁹² Michel Foucault, *Subjectivity and Truth: Lectures at the Collège de France 1980-1981*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017) p. 35.

²⁹³ Michel Foucault, *Subjectivity and Truth: Lectures at the Collège de France 1980-1981*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017) p. 35.

²⁹⁴ Michel Foucault, *Subjectivity and Truth: Lectures at the Collège de France 1980-1981*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017) p. 31.

²⁹⁵ Pierre Hadot, *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*, (Paris: Albin Michel, 2002), p. 269.

opens one's eyes and emerges from the illusions of the cave. One discovers the light and reverts to the very source of the light, which is at the same time the source of being. It appears again in a Christian *metanoia* but in the form of a drastic change of mind or opinion, a radical renewal, a sort of rebirth through the renunciation of the subject herself, with death and resurrection at the heart of this as an experience of oneself, and the renunciation of the self as an essential element in transfiguration.²⁹⁶ In the development of a Hellenistic spiritual tradition, Foucault reveals the influence of Socrates who, in the activity of encouraging others to attend to themselves, declares that with regard to his fellow citizens, his role is that of someone who awakens them.²⁹⁷ The precise start of a regime of *epimeleia heautou* or the notion of care of the self by the individual will be looked upon as the moment of the first awakening for the individual. From the time of awakening, the regime must remain as a practice of freedom, a principle of restlessness and movement, of continuous concern, throughout the individual's life.

By spiritual awakening, Foucault proposes that the link between the free individual and knowledge (*connaissance*) in all its various guises, presentations and with all its conditions and limitations, might be broken. Knowledge (*connaissance*) as a discourse that claims to be true no longer determines the subjectivity of the free, awakened, individual. Spiritual awakening is self-consciousness becoming worldly, to use a Hegelian expression, in the form of an ontologically free individual, an ethical individual, an ethical subject, defined as an individual with an *ethos* or an attitude of freedom. A link is formed between ethics and a new form of knowledge and a new form of truth, a way of self-government, the awakened individual and the transformed ethical subject. Truth for this individual is not defined by a certain content of knowledge (*connaissance*) that is thought to be universally valid, it is not even defined by a certain formal and universal criterion. Truth is essentially conceived as a system of obligations for the individual to her unique experience of events that constitute for herself her own spiritual knowledge. In spite of this obligatory attachment, the system of obligations constitutes paradoxically the very freedom of the individual from the power exercised and the limitations imposed by knowledge (*connaissance*).

²⁹⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 216-217.

²⁹⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 7.

For Foucault, spiritual awakening, through the transformation of the mode of being of the individual, to an attitude of ontological freedom, and consciousness of goodness, value and reality induces a lasting effect upon the life of the individual. Awakening refers to an event in subjective consciousness, a new spiritual or ethical awakening and enlightenment, a way out of *stultitia* and could well be interpreted as a nod to Kant's understanding of the Enlightenment as an *Ausgang* or an exit, a way out.²⁹⁸ As will be shown, such a relationship to truth in the form of a spiritual awakening allows Foucault to provide some defence against the structures of growing cognitivism and rationalism of contemporary Western philosophies and ethics, which prioritise universal logic as a direct access to truth. Foucault will always deny that this access is possible.

Foucault identifies an indispensable role for 'another' within the practice of the art of living. While not terribly important, as an aside it is interesting to note that Kant claims that our immaturity is one that is self-imposed by the acceptance of direction. This immaturity is a certain state of will which makes one accept someone else's authority to lead us in areas where the use of reason is called for. Kant gives three examples²⁹⁹; when a book takes the place of our understanding; when a spiritual director takes the place of our conscience, and when a doctor decides for us what our diet is to be. While Kant's relationships to priests, doctors, and books are negative, exclusively one of dependency, Foucault enthusiastically turns to those Greek spiritual relationships in a positive manner, in order that these directors might lead individuals to constitute themselves through the use of anonymous technologies avoiding any form of agential subjectivity.

Returning to the *stultus*, both awakening and enlightenment requires the necessary intermediary of someone else, not an educator in the pedagogical sense, that is, someone who will teach spiritual truths, facts and principles as a different form of theoretical knowledge and know-how. The extrication of the *stultus* from her condition and mode of life is an art that focusses on the mode of being of the individual herself and the style of her life. It is not just the simple transmission of knowledge (*connaissance*) as a form of truth that is capable of replacing ignorance. It is a protreptic education, that is one that can turn the mind in the right direction in a transition from *stultitia* to *sapientia*. Foucault suggests that in order to achieve an awakening, the individual cannot rely on knowledge (*connaissance*) in forms of pedagogy

²⁹⁸ Michel Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment', in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp. 303-319 (p. 305).

²⁹⁹ Immanuel Kant, 'What is Enlightenment' <<http://www.columbia.edu/acis/eta/ccread/kant.html>>accessed 18.1.2016

to replace her ignorance. An access to truth, whose sole condition is knowledge (*connaissance*), will find reward and fulfilment in nothing else but the indefinite development of knowledge (*connaissance*).³⁰⁰ With knowledge (*connaissance*), the moment of awakening cannot exist. Knowledge will simply open out onto the indefinite dimensions of progress, the end of which is unknown. Foucault gives an interesting example of this phenomenon when he describes over-knowledge (*sur-savoir*) of sexuality as a somehow excessive knowledge, a geared-down knowledge, and at the same time an intensive and extensive knowledge of sexuality, not according to the individual's plan, but according to a cultural, social plan, in theoretical or simplified forms. There was a double phenomenon in Western society: on the one hand, located only at the level of the individual, the subject's misunderstanding of his own sexuality and in the other the over-knowledge of sexuality in society.³⁰¹

Instead, the individual should strive for the status of that individual as she has never known at any moment in her life up to an awakening. She has to replace the non-subject with the status of subject of spiritual truth, with all the ambiguities of the term, defined by the fullness of the self's relationship with self. She has to constitute herself as subject of her own truth.³⁰² The truth can transfigure and save the subject. As Foucault suggests, the requirement inherent in spiritual awakening is that one become again what we should have been but never were.³⁰³

Spiritual direction, which incorporated these demanding and sacrificial forms of conduct, is a corrective and a training process. Training does not involve a technical or professional training that is linked to a practical type of activity. It is the provision of a protective armature with regard to the rest of the world and any accidents or events that may occur. One is trained to withstand in the right way all the possible accidents, misfortunes, disgrace, and setbacks that might befall the individual. While the training role is always present, the art of living is fundamentally linked to the practice of criticism of one's own ignorance and of one's cultural world whose pervading influence has left the self ignorant of the most useful and relevant forms of knowledge. The process of learning virtue for an individual is unlearning

³⁰⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 18.

³⁰¹ Michel Foucault, 'Sexuality and Power' in *Religion and Culture: Michel Foucault*, ed. by Jeremy R Carrette (New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 115-130 (p. 117-118).

³⁰² Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 129.

³⁰³ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 95.

vices that have already been learned. Hellenistic philosophers will suggest that this individual is not so much ignorant as badly formed, or rather deformed, vicious, and in the grip of bad habits. This individual, right from the start of experience, at the moment of birth, and in the lap of her mother, has never had the relationship to nature of rational will that defines morally sound action and the morally sound subject. Correction requires a stripping away of previous education, established habits, and the environment. Quoting Cicero, Foucault suggests that as soon as we are born and admitted into our families, we find ourselves in an entirely distorted milieu in which the perversion of judgement is so complete that we can say we took in error with our nursemaid's milk.³⁰⁴ Correction of the influences of the family milieu or ideology, not only of its educational effects, but also of the set of values it transmits and lays down, and the entire pedagogical training process is required. Correction, according to Foucault, is the means by which we can recover, correct and become again what we never were.³⁰⁵ There is nothing that persistent hard work, sustained and intelligent zeal, will not overcome. The art of living is a critical and correctional activity with regard to oneself, one's cultural world, and the lives led by others.³⁰⁶ The practice of the art of living is established against a background of errors, bad habits, an established and deeply engrained deformation and dependence that must be shaken off.³⁰⁷

A question of elitism.

Foucault opines³⁰⁸ that for many varied and contingent reasons, the morality of antiquity addressed itself only to a very small number of individuals; it did not require everybody to obey the same pattern of behaviour. It concerned only a very small minority of the people, even of the free people. The morality of antiquity addressed itself only to a small number of individuals as it was a matter of individual choice. Epictetus informs that Socrates only succeeded in persuading one in a thousand to take care of themselves.³⁰⁹

³⁰⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 95.

³⁰⁵ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 95.

³⁰⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 93.

³⁰⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 94.

³⁰⁸ Michel Foucault, 'The Return of Morality', in *Politics Philosophy Culture: Interviews and other writings 1977-1984*, ed. by Laurence Kritzman trans. by Alan Sheridan and others (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 242-255 (p. 253).

³⁰⁹ Epictetus *Discourses* 111, i, 18-19.

To be moral was to act individually, to choose to act in a certain manner. Morality, as acts of personal choice, was constituted by a lawless universality of the aesthetics of existence or technologies of the self. With regard to obligation to ethical living as a qualified principle, or a principle applicable to all, Foucault writes that in antiquity the will to be an ethical subject was principally an effort to affirm one's freedom and to give one's life a certain form in which one could recognise oneself, be recognised by others. But there was never a question of making it an obligation for all. Morality was a matter of individual choice; anyone could come and share in it. There is no a priori exclusion of an individual on the grounds of birth or status.³¹⁰

In addition, in Hellenistic and Roman traditions, the care of the self appears as a universal value but which in actual fact is only accessible to a few. The demands of regular and sacrificial forms of conduct restrict the numbers who are capable of participating in self constitution.³¹¹ All are competent to practise although it is generally the case that few are actually capable. Lack of courage, strength, endurance, an inability to grasp the importance of the task is the destiny of the majority, in reality.³¹²

A capacity for *Epimeleia heautou* will also appear as an elite privilege as it appears as a correlation with a notion of *otium* or free time. One cannot take care of the self unless the life before one, the life available to one, is such that one can treat oneself to the luxury of *otium*. As a real condition for caring of the self.³¹³ Foucault opines that *epimeleia heautou* also took shape within quite distinct practices, institutions, and groups which were often closed to each other, and which usually involves exclusion from all the others. It is linked to practices of fraternity, school and sect; sets of individuals who gathered together like the Epicureans or the Stoics. At the time of Seneca or even more so at the time of Marcus Aurelius, it might have been valid for everybody, but there was never a question of making it an obligation for all. Morality was a matter of individual choice; anyone could come and share in it. We are thus

³¹⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 118.

³¹¹ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 180.

³¹² Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 118.

³¹³ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 113.

very far from the moral conformities, the structures of which are elaborated by sociologists and historians by appealing to a hypothetical average population.

Caring for the self is not only found, however, in aristocratic circles. It is not just the wealthiest, the economically and politically privileged who practice caring for the self. In a poorer population, it appeared as a popular cultic and theoretically unpolished form and in a more aristocratic population as an alternate more personal, and cultivated form amenable to a life of cultivated free time and theoretical research.³¹⁴ Epicurean groups were popular communities, were filled with artisans, small shopkeepers, and poor farmers, representing a democratic political choice. Most of the group refuse to endorse and perpetuate the status differences which existed in the city-state and in society. The distinction between rich and poor, between someone high born and someone from an obscure family, politically powerful or not, were in principle not endorsed, recognised or accepted.³¹⁵ Most of the groups did not accept even the distinction between a freeman and a slave.

Foucault suggests that the attempt by some traditions of Stoicism to identify and elaborate a style of existence that could have universal application found expression only within a framework of a religious style. This religious style emphasises a focus on the development of a cosmic relationship rather than on individualism. It was no longer a question of stylisation of the governing relationship of self to the self, an ethical stylisation developed in liberty and freedom of existence leading to a self-constitution of ethical subjects. It becomes instead a matter of the adoption or enforcement of the religious truth, leading to the objectification of the individual by herself or the subjectification through technologies of domination. The unity of a style began to be thought of only during the Roman Empire in the second and third centuries, and it was thought of immediately in terms of code and truth. Foucault argued that in a Roman morality, as in a post-Hellenistic morality, codes of behaviour gradually came to be emphasised at the expense of forms of ethical subjectivation and the notion of a Greek morality disappeared. A shared style of living that is reducible to a moral code or subject to its prescriptions is not a morality for an ancient Greek.

This ideological turn from spirituality as a way of life to philosophy as knowledge (*connaissance*) and objectification through this knowledge was intensified and institutionalised

³¹⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 114.

³¹⁵ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 118.

in the Roman period. Foucault insists that the Greeks ‘immediately stumbled upon what I consider to be the contradiction of the morality of antiquity between the relentless search for a certain style of existence on the one hand and the effort to make it available to all on the other. While the Greeks probably approached this style more or less obscurely with Seneca and Epictetus, it found expression only within the framework of a religious style. All of antiquity seems to me to have been a profound error.’³¹⁶

³¹⁶ Michel Foucault, 'The Return of Morality', in *Politics Philosophy Culture: Interviews and other writings 1977-1984*, ed. by Laurence Kritzman trans. by Alan Sheridan and others (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 242-255 (p. 253).

Spiritual knowledge and truth

Karen Armstrong opines that despite modern scientific and technological achievements, it seems that modern spiritual thinking is at times remarkably undeveloped, even primitive.³¹⁷ Over the centuries, humanity has prioritised that knowledge which lies within the reach of human sensibility and reason. It provides information on the domain of objects and concepts. However, Foucault will also demonstrate that previous to this prioritisation of objective knowledge (*connaissance*), there was a domain of knowledge which modern philosophy and scientific endeavour has put to one side. Foucault's particular understanding of antiquity and his own post-modern scepticism has rediscovered practices, and resultant attitudes and ideals, that were central to a production of a spiritual knowledge and philosophy as a way of life before the advent of the modern period. This form of knowledge, a spiritual knowledge revealed by Foucault to appear initially in Hellenistic philosophy as a way of life, helps one to live peacefully and with joy within uncertainty and despite the realities for which there are no easy explanations and problems for which humanity has no resolution. Mortality, pain, grief, despair have no scientific explanation. The ultimate truth cannot be adequately expressed in any ideological theoretical system because it lies beyond the use of language, concepts and human reasoning. It is always subject to an apophatic reticence that is antithetical to a modern understanding of a capacity for access to objective knowledge (*connaissance*).³¹⁸

As a direct result of this modern form of thinking, the meanings of the modern symbols used in language and ideas have become the understanding of an individual's truth. Humanly conceived ideologies, those that give humans the feeling that they know exactly what they are talking about, represent, however, an incomplete and incoherent understanding of what it is to be human and of human subjectivity, ways of living life, and ways of coping with the vicissitudes of life. However, these symbols or human constructions, in a postmodern age, are no longer seen to be immune to criticism or deconstruction and are rejected as uncertain. Unfortunately, they are rejected without being replaced with any adequate technology to help humans live their lives in peace and without existential fear. It seems that Foucault's intention is to provide these adequate technologies by revealing those that had already been known as spiritual knowledge and Hellenistic philosophy as a way of life but had been rejected over the centuries by Cartesian certitude. The acquisition of spiritual knowledge is a practice, a

³¹⁷ Karen Armstrong, *The Case for God: what religion really means* (London: Vintage Books, 2009), p. 9.

³¹⁸ Karen Armstrong, *The Case for God: what religion really means* (London: Vintage Books, 2009), p. 379-380.

dedicated style of living, and ultimately a conversion from this unenlightened way of thinking and living. Freed from logical and conscious deliberation, the subject is transformed, and the activities can bring tranquility, beatitude and indescribable joy. Foucault will call these effects rebound effects, the effects of the truth on the subject.³¹⁹ It is what the Greeks will call *ekstasis*, a stepping outside of the norm, of the workaday self, a means of transcending the ego and the cogito. This *ekstasis* was a *kenosis*, a self-forgetfulness, so much so that one is no longer afraid of death and in touch with a deeper hitherto unconscious level of the psyche³²⁰ and subjectivity was transformed by this spiritual knowledge. Without such a spiritual practice, Foucault will contend, it is impossible to access forms of truth that are useful or relational to the everyday existence of the individual. One may have access to the truth of objects, but this will not transform the individual or enlighten the individual. It will not constitute new forms of subjectivity. Through a spiritual practice, individuals come to the insight that they alone control the deployment of types of knowledge. They become strangers to their previous modern ways of thinking, speaking and acting. Moving beyond the fallible everyday perceptions, the individual is introduced into another way of seeing. Minds cleared of inadequate ideas and human constructs that block spiritual understanding, these individuals have access to the ineffable truth of themselves. Once they have left the idols of thought behind, they are no longer concerned with the simulacrum, the projection of their own ideas and desires.

Foucault suggests that ‘knowledge played a different role in the classical care of the self. There are very interesting things to analyse about relations between scientific knowledge and the *epimeleia heautou*. The one who cared for himself had to choose among all the things that you can know through scientific knowledge only those kinds of things which were relative to him and important to life.’³²¹ So, theoretical understanding, scientific understanding, was secondary to, and guided by, ethical and aesthetic concerns. Quite limited sorts of knowledge were useful for *epimeleia heautou*. The purpose here is to introduce Foucault’s concept of a spiritual knowledge which is much less known. Spiritual knowledge was not a concept that Foucault devised for his purposes. He identifies the form in the works of Seneca and Marcus Aurelius, in the development of spiritual exercises within *epimeleia heautou*, and in the critical work of Nietzsche. Knowledge of the world to which one might gain access through Seneca’s

³¹⁹ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 16.

³²⁰ Karen Armstrong, *The Case for God: what religion really means* (London: Vintage Books, 2009), p. 83.

³²¹ Michel Foucault, 'On the genealogy of ethics', in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp. 255-280 (p. 269).

spiritual journey is a knowledge of the world in which one lives. The purpose therefore is to examine the roles of different forms of knowledge and especially the diminution of the role of knowledge (*connaissance*) in the life of the individual in forms of Greek morality. As we shall see, the diminution of the role of knowledge (*connaissance*) and the games of truth that arise from these forms of knowledge, will affect in a very great way the individual's perception of her truth and transform the very nature of an individual's subjectivity. We have also seen in the introduction that subjectivation is dependent on the deployment of two different forms of knowledge, spiritual knowledge and knowledge (*connaissance*).

This chapter examines Foucault's understanding of spiritual knowledge whose deployment he will use in individual ethical subjectivation, the basis of a return of a Greek morality for today. It asks whether in discovering the truth of the self, in a spiritual knowledge, to be an individual truth constituted for the self by the self, Foucault finds a way to avoid the confining limitations of universal modern ideology and universal human concepts of subjectivity that history and his own archaeology of knowledge has determined to be subject to constant limitation.

In most pre-modern cultures, there were two recognised ways of thinking, speaking, and acquiring forms of knowledge.³²² Both were essential, and neither was considered superior to the other; they were not in conflict but complementary. A practical reason, a *logos*, was the pragmatic mode of thought that enabled people to function effectively in the world. It assumed and was practiced as an accurate correspondence with reality and was essential to the survival of humanity. *Logos* achieved spectacular results in the early modern period in the West and as a result society developed into an entirely different modality, governed by scientific rationality and objectivity. Within this culture dominated by knowledge (*connaissance*), the scientific method was considered to be the sole reliable means of attaining truth of the self and of the world one lives in. Theology, philosophy and sciences all followed the same conception of *logos*. *Logos* had, however, existential limitations. It could not assuage human grief or find ultimate meaning for individuals in the human condition.³²³ For that, individuals turned to what Foucault will call spiritual knowledge. Spiritual knowledge reveals how to live life more richly and intensely, how to cope with mortality, and how to endure suffering. Spiritual knowledge

³²² Karen Armstrong, *The Case for God: what religion really means* (London: Vintage Books, 2009), p. 11.

³²³ Karen Armstrong, *The Case for God: what religion really means* (London: Vintage Books, 2009), p. 11.

introduces deeper dimensions of existence, a new attitude according to Foucault, whose truth is attained by the self acting on the self when deploying this form of knowledge.

Scientific knowledge (*connaissance*), as human science of 'Man' seeks to master reality of what it means to be human, to explain it, and bring it under the control of a universal reason. Foucault's anti-realist interpretation, influenced by Socratic philosophy, of Cartesian certainty suggests that thought can only lead one to understand that thought can never give one the ultimate epistemological conception of the truth of what is real about the self. As he will suggest, humanity cannot have a direct access to truth of the self. The fundamental human cognitive process is a dialectic process that can only perceive things as opposites rather than as a unity of notions of truth. Following this progression of thought, one ought not to seek scientific or epistemological truth of the subject in thought but to accept that the only way in which the self can be grasped by humanity lies in the manifest act of true living in the world, living with a spiritual knowledge, rather than a life lived in correspondence with a knowledge (*connaissance*) of human concepts and of the world. Opposing this, Western philosophies and religions expect to find the ultimate truth in right thought leading to the formulation of dogma and ethical code and the endless arguments that such a development initiate.

Foucault's notion of style of living is a perception of individual ethics that holds that neither religious dogma, the scientific knowledge of the world nor the knowledge of an imposed ethics as how to live in the world, can replace that ancient understanding that to live well is to live in a true relationship with the self. This oneness with the self is achieved by an aesthetic of existence, a way of being in the world, utterly different from the humanist, Christian, or modernist notion of subjectivity and agency. All significant life, every small and every significant action in life, reflects the oneness of the individual with herself.

In ancient philosophies as ways of right living, their ultimate aim is not right thought but right action. The task of adepts is not to think right but to act right. Rather than an emphasis on the development of dogma and science, the emphasis is on the action of transforming the individual. The individual is transformed from her position of alienation from herself, from others and from nature by the deployment of a philosophy of spiritual knowledge. Philosophy becomes no longer a claim of universal truth, or an interpretation of the world in realms of truth, but a way of transforming, not the universe in its reality, but the human world and the individual who lives in it. All emphasis is in the act of living rather than the thought of living or the subject of truth.

Because none of the extant theories of a subject have been given priority or emphasis, all experience of living is an experience, not of the subject, but of the individual, to the extent that the individual wants to constitute itself as its own master.³²⁴ This constitution of the individual as its own master, manifest in the search for styles of existence as different from each other as possible, is the definition of an ancient Greek notion of morality. Foucault will suggest that beginning with Christianity, we have the opposite, an appropriation of morality by the theory of the subject.³²⁵ He suggests that a moral experience centred on the subject no longer seems satisfactory and the search for a form of morality acceptable to everybody in the sense that everyone should submit to it, strikes him as catastrophic.³²⁶

At the start of the series of lectures to the Collège de France published as *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, Foucault sets *epimeleia heautou* and the Cartesian model against each other as sources of the knowledge and the truth of the self. For Foucault this was both an historical question and a question of the relationship of the subject to truth.³²⁷ A brief schematic of the relationships between the subjectivity and truth will demonstrate that even in its pre-Socratic beginnings, Western philosophical truth, in its different rational and theological guises, has split the world into the world of appearance and the world of the real. According to Foucault, ancient philosophy developed with the foundation that truth existed as a form of knowledge to which an individual, in her natural or worldly state, had no access. Beyond the world of appearance, which is the world of humanity, lies the world of unconscious meanings, invisible processes, implicit rules, and divine motives that can only be brought to light in divine revelation. Truth was only possessed by the Gods. The access to the truth of things and self, developed from the mediation of a divine generosity to those worthy of knowledge. An entire spirituality, an index of spiritual exercises, a technology of the self, an entire technology of renunciation of the self, existed in all civilisations by which access to truth might be granted to the individual.³²⁸ Technologies of the self, including practices of purification, concentrating

³²⁴ Michel Foucault, 'The return of morality', *Politics Philosophy Culture: Interviews and other writings 1977-1984*, trans. by Alan Sheridan and others, ed. by Laurence Kritzman (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 242-255 (p. 25).

³²⁵ Michel Foucault, 'The return of morality', *Politics Philosophy Culture: Interviews and other writings 1977-1984*, trans. by Alan Sheridan and others, ed. by Laurence Kritzman (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 242-255 (p. 253).

³²⁶ Michel Foucault, 'The Return of Morality', in *Politics Philosophy Culture: Interviews and other writings 1977-1984*, ed. by Laurence Kritzman trans. by Alan Sheridan and others (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 242-255 (p. 255).

³²⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 189.

³²⁸ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 47.

the soul, techniques of withdrawal in *anachoresis*, constitute part of a whole set of practices that existed in ancient Greek civilisation.³²⁹

Foucault opines that starting with Socrates in *Alcibiades* there is the idea of conversion, in the senses of a turning towards the self, in a process of awakening, aided by a spiritual director and the technologies they provide, which alone can give access to a form of truth. To know the truth required an ancient form of spirituality, one that postulates that for the subject to have right of access to the truth, the subject must be changed, transformed, shifted, and become other than herself.³³⁰ The practice of philosophy and spirituality as a way of life, identified in Greece as a practice of *epimeleia heautou*, is the work required through which the subject carries out the necessary transformations of herself in order to have access to the truth. Foucault will call spirituality; the set of researches, practices, conversions of looking, modifications of existence, etc., which are, not for knowledge (*connaissance*) but for the subject, for the subject's very being, the price to be paid for access to the truth.³³¹

Taking Descartes as a reference point, Foucault will suggest that there came a point, the Cartesian moment, when the subject as such became capable of a form of truth. The Cartesian subject does not have to transform herself. The Cartesian subject only has to be what she is for her to have access to this truth. There is no awakening, no conversion, no enlightenment, and no transformation of self-consciousness. Spirituality postulates that, in opposition to a modern analytic form of philosophy which studies the conditions of knowledge (*connaissance*) for immediate access to truth, the truth is not given to the individual by a simple act of knowledge (*connaissance*), which would be founded and justified simply by the fact that she is subject and because she possesses this or that structure of subjectivity.

Spirituality rejects any form of empiricism that postulates that a knowledge (*connaissance*) of the domain of objects, to include a way of being, can be defined as access to the truth. Neither can a Cartesian type of knowledge (*connaissance*) be defined as an access to this truth of a way of being. Cartesian epistemology proposes and assumes that subjective representations of reality will conform to the world of objects. The relationship of truth between the subject and the object is founded on the view that the subjective perception and knowledge

³²⁹ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 48.

³³⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 15.

³³¹ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 15.

(*savoir*) of the object, of reality, to include the subject itself, conforms exactly to knowledge (*connaissance*) and to the external reality of the world. Access to truth is immediate and evident. Empiricist and rationalist subjectivity share a similar presupposition. This relationship to truth is shared by Hume's empiricism, where subjective knowledge will conform to external objectivity but all the while recognising the improbability of metaphysical notions of self, essence and subject. Cartesian subjectivity then is determined by its empirico-rational presumption of such conformity, the real being known either through reason or by the way of the senses.

Through the work of Kant, Cartesian metaphysics develops in a radical manner. Descartes suggests that philosophy alone as a direct access to truth is sufficient for knowledge (*savoir*), and Kant completed this by saying: if knowledge has limits, these limits exist entirely within the structures of the knowing subject, that is to say, in precisely what makes knowledge possible. Knowledge claims to be a rational reflection by a universal knowing subject founding notions of ideologies and moralities linked to a reasoned notions of truth, and with universal vocation. He proposed that the purely intelligible essence of a thing ought to be considered unknowable and the very idea of metaphysics and its dogmatic assertions about things in themselves must be considered problematic. He asserted that in human experience, things in themselves, including the self, as noumenon, are unknowable and beyond the grasp of even reasoned intellect. The phenomenon, the appearance, or that which is given to an empiric consciousness is all that might be known. Foucault's archaeology served to expose the possibility of a historical a priori which 'delimits in the totality of experience a field of knowledge, defines the mode of being of the objects that appear in that field, provides man's everyday perception with theoretical powers and defines the conditions in which he can sustain a discourse about things that is recognised to be true.'³³² His genealogy serves to expose the extent to which discourse constitutes those objects of which they speak. In both cases, knowledge (*connaissance*), as a source of truth of things and of the self are exposed as unreliable.

There are therefore two regimes of truth, divided in history by the Cartesian moment. This moment, which Foucault called, completely arbitrarily, Cartesian, without in any way wanting to say that it is a question of Descartes, or that he was the inventor or the first person

³³² Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (London: Routledge Classics, 1980), p. 172.

to do this,³³³ occurs when it is assumed that what gives access to truth is knowledge (*connaissance*) and knowledge (*connaissance*) alone. Foucault opines that the Cartesian moment was first manifest in Platonic metaphysics. The Cartesian moment in antiquity placed a form of self-evidence, through a process of memory, at the origin, the point of departure of the Western philosophical approach to reason. Following the Cartesian moment, knowledge (*connaissance*) of a domain of objects is a form of certainty about the truth of the representation of these objects, perceived as a self-evident truth, as it is given to consciousness without any possible doubt. Knowledge of the self is a form of consciousness of the self. The acceptance of this notion, of an indubitable knowledge of all objects, made *gnothi seauton* or the imperative to know yourself into a fundamental means of philosophical and epistemological access to the truth of the self as an object in the world. One only had to reason about the self to know the truth of the self. In the more modern interpretation, it made the same assumptions as human sciences in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Before the Cartesian moment, in the technology of *epimeleia heautou* or care of the self, *gnothi seauton* or know yourself is formulated within *epimeleia heautou* as a consequence of caring for the self. One could only have access to the truth of the self by means of a series of exercises and practices inherent in *epimeleia heautou*. Knowledge of the self could never be achieved by direct access to truth for the cogito. Following the Cartesian moment and its conception of a direct access to the truth of our being which philosophically requalified *gnothi seauton*, *epimeleia heautou* is discredited as a source of knowledge of truth.³³⁴

Foucault says that we can say that the Modern age of the relations between the subject and truth begins (as a Cartesian moment) when ‘it is postulated that, such as she is, the subject is capable of truth, but that, such as it is, the truth cannot save the subject.’³³⁵ Foucault observes, and this is crucial to his later work, that up to the modern age, ‘Western philosophy can be read in its entire history as the slow disengagement of the question ‘how, in what conditions can one think the truth of the self from the question ‘how and at what price, according to what procedure, must one change the modes of being of the subject in order to gain access to the truth of the self. When the subject’s being is not put into question by the necessity of having

³³³ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 17.

³³⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 14.

³³⁵ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 19.

access to the truth (true discourse of the self), we have entered a different age in the history of relations between subjectivity and truth.’³³⁶

Foucault seems quite adamant that a philosophy of science, of the subject and philosophy of the mind cannot reconcile the sciences of humans in the world and the thrownness, to borrow Heidegger’s phrase, of humans in the world. This knowledge (*connaissance*) does not concern the subject in his being, it only concerns the individual in his concrete existence, and not in the structure of the subject as such.³³⁷ Yet no one can deny human action, consciousness, and feeling. Foucault’s question in the later work on the individual’s conduct of her conduct asks whether the individual can act freely and what does it take to act freely. Given that one cannot rely on an epistemological realism and a sure knowledge of the self, how does one adjust from the old morality of rules and indictments, one where ethics and knowledge are fundamentally related, and one that guides life with its doctrines and dogmas. How can one still live a beautiful, good and a happy life? Can one constitute one’s own individual morality without a theory of self or a theory of subject or knowledge? To make sense out of life, the Western philosophical tradition suggests that there seems to be two main questions. What is and what matters?

So, what of knowledge (*connaissance*)? Is a concept of universal knowledge (*connaissance*) as truth a possible form of salvation for humanity? Does it serve any function? Foucault’s own position is quite clear. He says that knowledge (*connaissance*) of the domain of objects will simply open out onto the indefinite dimension of progress, the end of which is unknown and the advantage of which will only ever be realised in the course of history by the institutional accumulation of bodies of knowledge, or the psychological or social benefits to be had from having discovered the truth after having taken such pains to do so.³³⁸ He adds ‘that the modern age of the relations between the subject and truth begin when it is postulated that, such as he is, the subject is capable of truth, but that, such as it is, the truth cannot save the subject.’³³⁹

³³⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 18.

³³⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 18.

³³⁸ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 19.

³³⁹ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 19.

Spiritual knowledge

The one who cared for himself had to choose, among all the things that you can know through scientific knowledge, only those kinds of things which were relative to her, useful to her, and important to her life. Theoretical understanding, scientific understanding, was secondary to, and guided by, ethical and aesthetic concerns.

For the Epicureans, the general knowledge of what is the world, of what is the necessity of the world, the relation between world, necessity, and the gods; all that was very important for the care of the self because it was first a matter of meditation: if you were able exactly to understand the necessity of the world, then you could master passions in a much better way, and so on. So, for the Epicureans, there was a kind of adequation between all possible knowledge and the care of the self. The reason that one had to become familiar with physics or cosmology was that one had to take care of the self. For the Stoics, the true self is defined only by what one can be master of.³⁴⁰ Socrates when asked in the *Phaedrus* whether one should choose a knowledge (*connaissance*) of trees or a knowledge (*connaissance*) of men, chose the knowledge (*connaissance*) of men. Foucault also references Demetrius, a famous Cynic, who proposes that one should ignore all those types of knowledge one could learn which are completely pointless and of no possible use in the real struggles of life. One should retain only the knowledge that will be used and which we will be able to resort to, and resort to easily, in the different opportunities of the struggle.³⁴¹ Demetrius does not demand that individual gaze be transferred from external things to the inner world. Demetrius does not demand that the gaze be directed towards the conscience, or towards oneself or the depths of the soul. It is only ever a matter of the world. It is only ever a matter of others. It is only ever a matter of what surrounds one. What is involved is simply knowing them differently.³⁴² And in knowing them differently, this knowing is the primary characteristic of the knowledge (*connaissance*) validated by Demetrius.

Foucault cites Seneca saying ‘If man has fortified himself against the accidents of fortune; if he has risen above fear; if, in the greed of his hopes, he does not embrace the infinite but learns to seek his riches in himself; if he has cast out the dread of men and gods, convinced

³⁴⁰ Michel Foucault, 'On the genealogy of ethics', in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp. 255-280 (p. 270).

³⁴¹ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 232.

³⁴² Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 235.

he has little to fear from man and nothing from God; If, in despising all frivolities which are the torment as well as the ornament of life, he has come to understand that death produces no evils, and ends many;.....If he has opened his conscience to the gods and always lives as if in public-then, respecting himself more than others, free from storms, he is settled in an unalterable calm: then he has gathered within him all truly and necessary science; the rest is only a diversion of leisure.³⁴³ ³⁴⁴ Seneca advises that, metaphorically, in a thought exercise, one places oneself at a point that is both central and elevated so that one can see below one the overall order of the world of which one is part. What is involved is a completely different effort to a Platonic act of memory of a divine and other world; it is rather a spiritual movement, a conversion to the self, that transforms the individual. An individual gains a real knowledge of the world by placing herself so high that she can see the tiny space she occupies within the world, and the short time she remains in the world. Spiritual knowledge for Seneca is the self's view of the self and it ensures the self's freedom within the world itself.³⁴⁵

In the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius, Foucault suggests,³⁴⁶ there is a figure of spiritual knowledge that corresponds to the figure found in Seneca, but which is symmetrically opposite. For Marcus Aurelius, the spiritual exercise is not a matter of stepping back in order to grasp the world as a whole. Rather it is a matter of studying the world one lives in, to the smallest detail. Neither the value nor that quality of a thing must escape. One must always define and describe the object whose image appears in the mind in such a way that one sees it distinctly, as it is in essence. One must examine representations in such a way that one considers at the same time in what kind of universe each is useful, what this use is, and what value it possesses with regard to the whole and to the individual. One never loses sight of any of the components that characterise the world in which one exists and in particular characterise one's own situation in the very spot one occupies.³⁴⁷

³⁴³ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 233.

³⁴⁴ Foucault uses here an old nineteenth century edition of Seneca: (*Euvres completes de Sénèque le philosophe, Bienfaits*. VII.i.7

³⁴⁵ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 282.

³⁴⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 291.

³⁴⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 282.

Descartes also suggests in his *Discourse on the Method* that ‘it is possible to arrive at knowledge that is very useful in life and that in place of the speculative philosophy taught in the schools, one can find a practical one, by which we could make ourselves, as it were, masters and possessors of nature. This is desirable not only for the invention of an infinity of devices that would enable us to enjoy without pain the fruits of the earth and all the other goods in this life; for even the mind depends so greatly upon the body that, were it possible to find some means to make means generally more wise and competent than they have been up to now.’

Nietzsche’s spiritual knowledge, which Foucault calls the historical sense, shortens vision to those things nearest to it, the body, the nervous system, nutrition, digestion, and energies; it unearths decadence. It looks from above and descends to seize the various perspectives, to disclose dispersions and differences, to leave things undisturbed in their own dimension and intensity. It reverses the surreptitious practice of historians, their pretension to examine things farthest from themselves, the grovelling manner in which they approach this promising distance (like the metaphysicians who proclaim the existence of an afterlife, situated at a distance from this world, as a promise of their reward). The historical sense can evade metaphysics and become a privileged instrument of genealogy if it refuses the certainty of absolutes. Genealogy rejects the metahistorical deployment of ideal significations and indefinite teleologies.³⁴⁸

Almost all the questions of most interest in Foucault’s examination of the relationship between subjectivity and truth, and especially those questions concerning the truth of the self and subject, are such as science cannot yet answer today, and the confident answers of theology and metaphysics no longer seem as convincing as they did in the past. Neither can modern philosophies of the subject provide adequate answers in that they depend on foundations of assumption and speculation about the nature of the subject and subjectivity. This space between religion and science assumes that there is a different way of looking at and experiencing reality, a diminution of the acute sense of the importance and reality of subject and object dualism, and a diminution in the importance of knowledge (*connaissance*) and its claims of truth in favour of a true discourse of the self, constituted by the self. Rather than asking questions about what is accepted as true or false, and discovering the forms of truth that exist within discourses of ideas, ideologies, religious and scientific revelations and doctrines, for Foucault, the far more

³⁴⁸ Michel Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', in *Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology*, ed. by James Faubion trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1998), pp. 369-391 (p. 381).

interesting question is how historical perspectives of truth are produced within certain games of truth and what effect these truths, which must be spoken by the individual, have on how life is lived and on what it means to be a human being. It is through these games of truth that ‘being’ is historically constituted as experience, as something that can and must be thought.³⁴⁹ It is through these games of truth that humans perceive themselves and their way of being to be desiring, mad, ill, or criminal. It is through these games of truth that individuals experience self-identity and constitute their subjectivity. It is through these games of truth that individuals constitute relationships of self to self and govern their conduct.

Philosophical considerations on truth and knowledge.

Foucault opines that there are two regimes of truth, divided in history by the Cartesian moment. The forms of truth in each regime are absolutely not the same truth.³⁵⁰ The truth to which the Cartesian subject seeks access is a truth that takes the form of knowledge (*connaissance*) of a domain of objects, with its own rules and criteria. Foucault introduces *epimeleia heautou*, a technology of the self, an aesthetics of existence, as a technology which has a reductive function in its valuation of knowledge (*connaissance*). In a reprioritisation of conceptions of knowledge and truth from an objective knowledge (*connaissance*) of what is, to a true spiritual knowledge of what matters, he suggests that a life lived for and in a spiritual truth reduces all the pointless obligations which everyone usually acknowledges and accepts, and which have no basis in nature or in reason. This new way of being and new way of living is the condition of possibility for the reduction of all pointless conventions and all superfluous opinions, in order to reveal the truth of the self. It brings to light, in their irreducible nakedness, those things which alone are indispensable to human life, or which constitute its most elementary and rudimentary essence. It reveals what life is in its independence, its fundamental freedom, and consequently it reveals what life ought to be.³⁵¹

The knowledge to which *epimeleia heautou* aspires is the knowledge of ‘being’ itself. Cartesian access to truth is not an access to the knowledge of one’s own being, as in the knowledge of one’s own self-consciousness as an object to be known. There cannot be truth of the subject, when there is truth only for the subject. The truth sought in *epimeleia heautou* is

³⁴⁹ Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality:2* (London: Penguin books, 1992), p. 7.

³⁵⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 191.

³⁵¹ Michel Foucault, *The Courage of truth, Lectures at the Collège de France 1983-1984*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012,) p. 171.

the truth of the ‘being’ of the self. Paradoxically, one cannot have access to this form of truth unless one changes one’s way of being. Knowledge of ‘being’ is such that the being to which one has access will, at the same time, and as an after effect, be the agent of transformation of the one who has access to it.³⁵² Foucault calls this the Platonic or the Neo-Platonist circle: by knowing myself, by knowing that ‘being’ of which I consist, I accede to a being that is the truth, and the truth of which transforms my self-consciousness, my subjectivity. I become the ethical subject. This transformation of the way of being enables the self-formation of the ethical subject. Ethics, for Foucault, is this process of transformation, the movement from unenlightened to enlightened. *Epimeleia heautou* is an ethics of the self, and the self-consciousness it permits is the ethical subject. As we shall see, this understanding of the ethical subject remains consistent in his later work on morality and forms of self-government. This knowledge of ‘being’ is what Foucault understands by a concept of spiritual knowledge. This knowledge of ‘being’, to which *epimeleia heautou* will grant access, does not belong to the domain of objects to be known. Foucault introduces a Greek concept of *ethopoiesis*. A primary characteristic of this spiritual knowledge, therefore, is that it is *ethopoiein*, that it, it transforms the individual’s very way of being, her *ethos*. Knowledge (*connaissance*) as a knowledge of the domain of objects is not immediately translatable into precepts or an ethic for the individual. It has no effect on the subject’s mode of being, her *ethos*.³⁵³ In the Greek ethic of knowledge and truth, ‘what is ruled out, the distinguishing point, the frontier established, does not effect, once again, the distinction between things of the world and things of human nature; it is a distinction in the mode of knowing and the way in which what one knows about Gods, men, and the world can have an effect on the nature, I mean on the subject’s way of doing things, on his *ethos*.’³⁵⁴ *Ethopoiein* means making *ethos*, producing *ethos*, changing, transforming *ethos*, the individual’s way of being, his mode of existence. A knowledge of something is useful when it has the form and functions in such a way that it can produce *ethos*. A spiritual knowledge is a knowledge that is *ethopoiein*. Knowledge of things in the world might never have an effect on the subject’s mode of being.

Spiritual knowledge is a form of knowledge and a form of truth of ourselves in the world. This spiritual knowledge is not in any way a matter of constituting knowledge

³⁵² Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 191.

³⁵³ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 236

³⁵⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 237.

(*connaissance*) in the domain of objects, as objective truth of the human being, of the soul, of an interiority, alongside a knowledge (*connaissance*) of the world as might be required by an analytic philosophy, using the same conditions of knowledge (*connaissance*). Spiritual knowledge is not achieved by a direct and immediate access to truth as Descartes would have us understand is possible. A spiritual knowing of things in the universe and especially a knowing of one's identity is, according to Foucault, a different and irreducible form of knowing, achieved only by a constant and difficult daily work on the self. In Greece, this work was *epimeleia heautou*, the care of the self. Pierre Hadot suggests that Hellenistic philosophy ought to be considered as a way of life, on the understanding that this ancient interpretation of spiritual knowledge could be a mode of existing-in-the-world, the goal of which was to transform the individual's life.³⁵⁵

Foucault's concept of spiritual knowledge

Spiritual knowledge, according to Foucault, is a mode of knowledge such that the individual must not be simply the receiver of that truth which is immediately given to her by things in the world. It is a realisation, through the objectivation of knowledge, of the content and value in knowledge (*connaissance*) as opposed to the accumulation of knowledge (*connaissance*) of the domain of objects. Foucault suggest that is seeing how Seneca and Marcus Aurelius apply this technology of the self, it seems 'perfectly clear to me that it is not in any way a matter of constituting knowledge (*connaissance*) of the human being, of the soul, or of interiority, alongside, in opposition to, or against knowledge of the world.³⁵⁶ What is involved is a modalisation of knowledge. This modalisation is the result of a critique of knowledge and directs to a different functioning of the same knowledge of external things. It is the constitution of spiritual knowledge. Spiritual knowledge involves four conditions: The subject's change of position, the evaluation of things on the basis of their reality and value within the cosmos, the possibility of the subject seeing himself and grasp himself in his reality, and finally the subject's transfiguration, a finding of freedom in knowledge and in his freedom, he also finds a mode of being through the effect of a spiritual knowledge.³⁵⁷ It will be shown in the following chapter on spiritual exercises that the realisation of spiritual knowledge is achieved in *mathesis*;

³⁵⁵ Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a way of life: Spiritual exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. by Arnold Davidson trans. by Michael Chase, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), p. 265.

³⁵⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 308.

³⁵⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 308.

in the exercise of meditation or *melete*, and in exercises on the body in *gumnazein*. The way of being of the individual must be transformed in gaining access to a spiritual truth. What is grasped in spiritual knowledge, by means of a learned art of living or a technology of living, is the reality and the value of things, the place, relations, and specific dimensions of things in the world as well as their relation to, their importance, and their real power over the individual insofar as she is free. The individual has the ability to see herself, to grasp herself in her reality, to see herself in the truth of her individual being. Thomas Flynn describes spiritual knowledge as the truth to which *epimeleia heautou* strives and it is ongoing and existential. This truth is not primarily cognitive but moral; it is not something one has but a way that one is. It is a question of truth one is rather than a truth that one possesses.³⁵⁸

Foucault suggests that spiritual knowledge is composed of a useful³⁵⁹ and a relational³⁶⁰ mode of knowledge. Useful knowledge is a form of knowledge which directly effects human existence. The acquisition of useful knowledge, knowledge which is all truly useful and necessary science, will benefit the individual in that she will settle in an unalterable calm. All other knowledge is only the diversion of leisure.³⁶¹ Relational knowledge involved taking into account the relation between Gods, men, the world, and things in the world on the one hand and ourselves on the other. Relational knowledge makes the individual appear to herself as the recurrent and constant term of all the relations, and it is in this field of the relation between all things and oneself that knowledge can and must be deployed.³⁶² These relationships should not be considered as pedagogical, endowing the subject with capabilities, aptitudes, or knowledge (*connaissance*). They are psychagogical, modifying the mode of being of the subject to a subject of truth.³⁶³

Accusations of existentialism

The introduction of a spiritual knowledge was quite controversial for commentators who accused Foucault of reverting to a form of existentialism. Thomas Flynn suggests that

³⁵⁸ Thomas Flynn, 'Philosophy as a way of life, Foucault and Hadot', *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 31 (2005), 609-622 (p. 613).

³⁵⁹ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 232.

³⁶⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 235.

³⁶¹ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 233.

³⁶² Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 318.

³⁶³ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 406.

Foucault's understanding of Sartre's authenticity as an appeal to a self as given and to which one must be true, more closely resembles his own notion of self-creation than he may wish to allow.³⁶⁴ Flynn suggests that several features of existentialism have appeared in the characterisation of philosophy as a care of the self, while at the same time acknowledging that the term is so broadly and inconsistently employed as to have become a near meaningless term.³⁶⁵ These include the emphasis of ethics over metaphysics, the stress on exercises/technology that fosters individual choice, and finally the relative neglect of, if not open hostility toward, systematic thought.³⁶⁶ Given his persistent opposition to a concept of essential subjectivity, it is clear that he would adamantly deny this accusation, but the closeness of spiritual knowledge to existentialist knowledge cannot be avoided. For example, Kierkegaard saw that most modern philosophy is not the wisdom that precedes or follows an event in history. It is 'wisdom about wisdom' and has very little to do with any event. Neither the Kantian analysis of the mind nor the Hegelian evolution of thought and history was of any help when one came to the making of one of those human decisions upon which the real course of events depends, and the development of thinking as well. The reality of everyone's existence proceeds from the inwardness of man, not from anything that the mind can codify, for objectified knowledge is always at one or more removes from the truth. Truth, said Kierkegaard, is subjectivity.³⁶⁷ To Martin Heidegger, there is nothing beyond an individual herself that can solve the problem of her existence. He will also contend that one cannot not know (*savoir*) objects as knowledge (*connaissance*), and as a consequence one cannot know oneself as an object of knowledge. For Karl Jaspers, the price of an ever-growing reliance upon objective criteria of thought seems to be an ever-deepening ignorance of the real nature of the truth of human nature and human existence. The surrender of an individual's thinking to a rationalism has consequences which console her with the feeling that she is progressing but make her neglect or deny the fundamental forces of forms of interiority, which are then turned into the forces of destruction.³⁶⁸ The inevitable conclusion must be the death of the subject.

To conclude, the two regimes of truth of self, divided in history by the Cartesian moment, are hugely important to an understanding of Foucault's aesthetics of existence and a

³⁶⁴ Thomas Flynn, 'Philosophy as a way of life, Foucault and Hadot', *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 31 (2005), 609-622 (p. 617).

³⁶⁵ Thomas Flynn, 'Philosophy as a way of life, Foucault and Hadot', *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 31 (2005), 609-622 (p. 617).

³⁶⁶ Thomas Flynn, 'Philosophy as a way of life, Foucault and Hadot', *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 31 (2005), 609-622 (p. 617).

³⁶⁷ Philip Mairet, 'introduction' *Existentialism and Humanism*, trans. by Philip Mairet (York: Methuen, 2007) p. 3.

³⁶⁸ Philip Mairet, 'introduction' *Existentialism and Humanism*, trans. by Philip Mairet (York: Methuen, 2007) p. 10

return of morality. To re-emphasise: the truth of self that belongs to the realm of knowledge (*connaissance*) and the truth of the self that is obtained by a transformation of the Cartesian cogito are absolutely not³⁶⁹ the same form of truth. Among all the transformations that have taken place, there was the transformation concerning the condition of spirituality for access to the truth. Second, the transformation of this notion of access to the truth that takes the form of knowledge (*connaissance*), with its own rules and criteria. And, finally, the transformation of the notion of truth itself. ‘To have access to this truth is to have access to being itself, access which is such that the being to which one has access will, at the same time, and as an after effect, be the agent of transformation of the one who has access to it.’³⁷⁰

³⁶⁹ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 191.

³⁷⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 191.

Spiritual exercises in Hellenistic spirituality and Christian monasticism

In the great development of Hellenistic philosophy as a way of life and as spiritual direction, spiritual exercises played a major role in progress on the path of virtue, self-control, and tranquillity. To ensure its proper functioning, spiritual direction taught a whole ensemble of diverse practices. The value of spiritual exercises or technologies of the self is not that they changed the content of an individual's experience of the world. They were intended to change the relationship of the individual to that content and to herself. All the things that do not concern the individual in a Stoic sense are recognised to be the result of contingencies over which the individual has no control. They are recognised by her as naturalistic processes that happen independent of her volition. She examines them as they arise, recognises them for what they are, and she is not influenced by them. In the end it is the how well or badly she reacts to these contingencies that is a measure of the success of her spiritual practice. To that end, the objective of spiritual exercises or the meaning for the adept must not be confused with the experience of carrying out spiritual exercises. Along with a spiritual knowledge, spiritual exercises must transform the subject. To integrate them into a *bios* requires more than becoming proficient in the technologies. It requires more than the accumulation of knowledge (*connaissance*). Spiritual exercise is a long labour; it is always a work in progress. To achieve the objective, it must contribute to the individual's morality, the transformation of the subject, the constitution of the ethical subject, and it must contribute to the formation of a style of living that is integral to the life of the individual as a whole. These Greek practices were not immediately incorporated into Christianity and one doesn't really see the obligation and rules of spiritual examination defined or the techniques for directing souls developed before the fourth century.³⁷¹ When it did, it took the form of a pastoral power in monasticism where the idea of spiritual direction and spiritual exercises took charge of the life of the monk. The function of direction and exercises was to take charge of an individual's life, guiding it step by step, prescribing it a specific regimen, giving it advice about everyday conduct, and requiring a continuous and unfailing obedience. The importance of these exercises dictate that the thesis should present a somewhat detailed index, using Pierre Hadot and Foucault's histories. It will become apparent that there are important differences of philosophical and historical

³⁷¹ Michel Foucault, *Confessions of the Flesh; The History of Sexuality Volume 4*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Robert Hurley (London: Penguin Classics, 2021), p. 84.

interpretation and emphasis between Hadot and Foucault and these will be examined after the history is complete.

In his work on self-government and morality guided by individual perspectives of truth, Foucault identified the Hellenistic concept of *epimeleia heautou* or care of the self, a technology of the self, enabling a power relationship of self to self, as the foundation for three essential processes. *Epimeleia heautou* enabled the constitution of a free self in the production of *ethos* or ethical subject; it enabled the constitution of a spiritual knowledge, in specific confessional games of truth, of individual truth for and of this self, a truth that can be known and spoken by the self; and it provided the means of constituting a style of life or a morality for the self that was determined by this individual truth. *Epimeleia heautou* could be regarded as the key to distinguish between ancient spirituality and modern rationality, between traditional practices in the production of truth and modern conditions of possibility of knowledge. In a return to a Hellenistic spirituality as a way of life, Foucault conceives of a spirituality as an art of living in this present, from which ‘comes the displacement and transformation of the limits of thought, the modification of received values, and all the work done to think otherwise, to do something else, to become other than what one is.’³⁷² Spirituality provides the foundation for a way of life through criticism and self-constitution rather than compliance to the forces of a pastoral power demanding submission and renunciation.

For Foucault, then, the exercises provided the means by which ancient and modern individuals might carry out the necessary transformations on themselves in order to have access to a truth, a truth which was a spiritual and existential understanding of truth.³⁷³ Foucault insists that ethical subjectivation through spiritual exercises was a Greek invention although they were unaware of their achievement and his aim was to isolate those technologies of the self, the spiritual exercises, which cannot be reduced to a code of good conduct, and whose aim is the exercise of wisdom, the philosophical way of life.³⁷⁴ In this way, a return of a Greek morality, which this thesis will contend is Foucault’s ambition, can be understood as a return of a form

³⁷² Michel Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment', in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp. 303-319 (p.310).

³⁷³ Thomas Flynn, 'Philosophy as a way of life, Foucault and Hadot', *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 31 (2005), 609-622 (p. 609).

³⁷⁴ Arnold Davidson, 'Spiritual Exercises and Ancient philosophy: an Introduction to Pierre Hadot', *Critical Inquiry*, 16 (1990), 475-482 (p. 475).

of self-government by a self-constituted individual truth, and one that does not rely on or submit to imposed forms of truth, imposed rules or code, and on imposed forms of subjectivity.

Hadot wrote of this own index of spiritual exercises: ‘The goal of the present chapter is not merely to draw attention to the existence of spiritual exercises in Greco-Latin antiquity, but above all to delimit the scope and importance of the phenomenon, and to show the consequences which it entails for the understanding not only of ancient thought, but of philosophy itself.’³⁷⁵ Hadot was one of the most significant and wide-ranging historians of ancient philosophy according to Arnold Davidson, who was Foucault’s eminent commentator and friend.³⁷⁶ Davidson claims that Pierre Hadot’s combination of overarching philosophical interest with the detailed historical and literary study of ancient philosophy also aptly characterizes the last published works of Foucault including his last two books, *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self*, both a series of related essays that deal with both ancient philosophy and early Christianity.³⁷⁷ Davidson suggests that in order to understand Foucault’s motivations and his object of study, one must take into account the way in which Hadot’s work on ancient spiritual exercises helped to form his entire project.³⁷⁸ He adds that ‘I do not think it is an exaggeration to claim that Foucault’s study of ancient sexual behaviour is guided or framed in terms of Hadot’s notion of spiritual exercises, and that Foucault’s aim is to link the practices of the self, exhibited in the domain of sexual behaviour, to the spiritual training and exercise that govern the whole of one’s existence. Davidson suggests that by understanding Foucault’s debt to Hadot, one is better able to understand the point of his last work. Hadot’s notion of spiritual exercises provides both the interpretive framework and conceptual basis for Foucault’s study of ancient sexual ethics. Hadot’s history of spiritual exercises makes it possible to see how the history of ethics can be, in certain historical periods, a history of askesis, and how the occlusion of this dimension of the philosophical life is tied to changing representations of philosophy.’³⁷⁹

³⁷⁵ Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a way of life: Spiritual exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. by Arnold Davidson trans. by Michael Chase, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), p. 82.

³⁷⁶ Arnold Davidson, Spiritual Exercises and Ancient philosophy: an Introduction to Pierre Hadot, *Critical Inquiry*, 16 (1990), 475-482 (p. 475).

³⁷⁷ Arnold Davidson, Spiritual Exercises and Ancient philosophy: an Introduction to Pierre Hadot, *Critical Inquiry*, 16 (1990), 475-482 (p. 476).

³⁷⁸ Arnold Davidson, Spiritual Exercises and Ancient philosophy: an Introduction to Pierre Hadot, *Critical Inquiry*, 16 (1990), 475-482 (p. 475).

³⁷⁹ Arnold Davidson, Spiritual Exercises and Ancient philosophy: an Introduction to Pierre Hadot, *Critical Inquiry*, 16 (1990), 475-482 (p. 475).

Hadot's understanding of spirituality and spiritual exercises

It was Hadot who first introduced the idea that two separate discourses emerged from ancient Greek philosophy, the first a theoretical discourse of knowledge (*connaissance*), favouring a knowledge of the self, a knowledge of truth, and a certain access to these forms of knowledge; and secondly an existential praxis or spirituality, a care of oneself, in the form of an art, a style of life. Philosophy as a way of life, as a form of spirituality, implies that philosophy could be a mode of existing-in-the-world, the goal of which was to transform the individual's life.³⁸⁰

Hadot admitted that the use of the term 'spiritual' might discommode some more Modern readers of his books. However, he was inclined to continue with its use as the other adjectives available to him, such as psychic, moral, ethical, intellectual, of thought, or of soul, were inadequate to describe the complexity of the experience he was attempting to describe. The use of any alternative term was feasible only when it allowed for the effect of thought on the material body; however, his meaning must also allow for the articulation of thought and sensitivity; it must allow for a transformation of the worldview of an individual and simultaneously a metamorphosis in the personality of the individual. The alternative term then must refer to the work on thought, but on all the psyche of the individual and on the material self. Hadot uses the word spiritual to try and express a notion which encapsulates thought, imagination, sensitivities, desire and will.³⁸¹ There is no intention to exclude religious or theological connotations, but religious spirituality contributes a very particular understanding to spirituality that lacks the broad understanding used by ancient philosophies. The spiritual act is not situated merely on the cognitive level, but on that of the self and of being. It raises the individual from an inauthentic condition of life to the attainment of self-consciousness, an exact vision of the world, inner peace and freedom.³⁸²

Hadot's focus on the notion of spirituality, embedded in ancient philosophy, is meant to emphasize, in the first place, that in the ancient schools of thought, philosophy was not considered to be a process by which knowledge (*connaissance*) was conceived and accumulated as *episteme*; it was *praxis*, a practice, a series of actions and exercises that

³⁸⁰ Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a way of life: Spiritual exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. by Arnold Davidson trans. by Michael Chase, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), p. 265.

³⁸¹ Arnold Davidson, Spiritual Exercises and Ancient philosophy: an Introduction to Pierre Hadot, *Critical Inquiry*, 16 (1990), 475-482 (p. 476).

³⁸² Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a way of life: Spiritual exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. by Arnold Davidson trans. by Michael Chase, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), p. 83.

constituted a way of life. For Hadot, ancient philosophy is the quest for wisdom, for a form of spiritual knowledge through spiritual exercise. Whoever concretely practices this exercise sees the universe with new eyes, as if he were seeing it for the first time. In the enjoyment of the pure present, he discovers the mystery and splendour of existence. At such moments we say yes not only to ourselves, but to all existence.³⁸³ Following the end of the Hellenistic era, where practices in everyday life did persist, Hadot made the point that they existed as Christian spiritual or mystical techniques but demoted as supports for theological theoretical doctrine. He also suggested that Modern philosophy had moved along the theoretical axis and this event in philosophical history had reduced the practical aspects of the style of living to mere supports to the theoretical evolution.

Hadot insists that, in practice, Hellenistic philosophies did not distinguish between a theoretical discursive part comprising of physics and logic, and the practical part corresponding to ethics. It was only in discourse about philosophy as didactic explanation could the three parts be distinguished. There is a distinction, formulated by the Stoics but admitted implicitly by the majority of philosophers, between philosophical discourse (or the discourse on philosophy) and philosophy as a way of life: According to the Stoics, the parts of philosophy, that is to say, physics, ethics, and logic, were in fact not the parts of philosophy itself, but the parts of philosophical discourse. Since it was a question of teaching philosophy, it was necessary to propose a theory of logic, a theory of physics, a theory of ethics. The requirements of discourse, both logical and pedagogical, obliged one to make these distinctions. But philosophy itself, that is to say, the mode of philosophical life is no longer a theory divided into parts, but a unique act that consists in individuals living logic, physics, and ethics. Philosophy as it was lived inherited three constituent commensurate parts and in this unity was the exercise of all wisdom. One no longer then produces the theory of logic, that is, of speaking and of thinking properly, but one thinks and speaks properly; one no longer produces the theory of the physical world, but one contemplates the cosmos; one no longer produces the theory of moral action, but one acts in a virtuous and just manner. The art of living required an acceptance of human's place in the cosmos, the order of reason in the cosmos, and all desires can only conform to this situation. This point is important as it forms the basis for Hadot's criticism of Foucault's exclusively ethical interpretation of spiritual exercises.

³⁸³ Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a way of life: Spiritual exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. by Arnold Davidson trans. by Michael Chase, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), p. 212.

Hadot reveals that Hellenistic spirituality is an art of living that engages the whole of an individual's existence at every moment. This spirituality must in some fashion change the individual's worldview, the mode of living, the very mode of being of the individual. It is a practice whose aim was to effect a radical change in the very being of the individual. The practice of philosophy as a way of life in antiquity was a series of spiritual exercises.³⁸⁴ Hadot's notion of spiritual exercises and his exposition of the eventual movement from philosophy as exercise, or a way of living, to philosophy as abstraction, provides both the interpretive framework and conceptual basis for Foucault's later work, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*.

This ancient spirituality required the persistent daily use of exercises on the self, that were neither simply exercises of thought nor even moral exercises, but rather, in the full sense of this term, spiritual exercises. Since they aimed at realising a transformation of one's vision of the world and a metamorphosis of one's personality, these exercises had not alone a moral value but equally an existential value. They did not attempt only to ensure behaviour in accordance with a self-imposed moral code of good conduct but involved all aspects of one's being, that is, one's intellect, imagination, sensibility, and will. Spiritual exercises were exercises ensuring a philosophical life, where the conduct of the self was determined by spiritual values as opposed to any value placed on sensible things in the world.³⁸⁵ The philosophical act is not situated merely on the cognitive level, but on that of the self and of being. It raises the individual from an inauthentic condition of life to the attainment of self-consciousness, an exact vision of the world, inner peace and freedom.³⁸⁶

According to Pierre Hadot, the whole phenomenon of spiritual exercises in Hellenistic philosophy is much more complex than one might expect. There are significant differences between the schools and an accurate elucidation of the differences would depend on the metaphysics of each school. Any history of these exercises will reveal a relatively small number of techniques and processes that have persisted through the centuries to the present, in every culture and tradition as arts of living or practices of living, but have taken different forms in different institutional fields, and where there has been an inversion in their objectives and aims. They persist in a contemporary awareness, surviving intact in religious and non-religious

³⁸⁴ Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a way of life: Spiritual exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. by Arnold Davidson trans. by Michael Chase, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), p. 83.

³⁸⁵ Arnold J Davidson Spiritual exercises and Ancient philosophy: an Introduction to Pierre Hadot in *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (Spring, 1990), p. 476.

³⁸⁶ Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a way of life*, ed by Arnold Davidson, trans by Michael Chase, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999) p. 83.

discourse from Socratic teaching, Hellenistic philosophies, through early Christianity, Reformation upheaval, to Modern times. For example, Hadot maintains that the spiritual exercises of Ignatius Loyola are a Christian version of a Greco-Roman tradition.³⁸⁷

Hellenistic spirituality as a way of life consists of a series of spiritual exercises that began with the formation of a relationship to a spiritual knowledge. One cannot care for the self without this relationship of self to knowledge. To care for the self is have a knowledge of the self but it begins with a knowledge of a small number of principles which are at the same time truths. These aphorisms sufficed to sum up the essential dogmas of Hellenistic schools as opposed to an extensive theoretical grounding. Hellenistic spirituality holds that theory is never considered as an end in itself; it is clearly and decidedly put in the service of practice.³⁸⁸ In a complex process of subjectivation of knowledge through meditation on the principles, to care for the self is to fit oneself out with these truths and this is where ethics, defined as the possession of an *ethos*, is linked to the game of truth. This spiritual knowledge provided the adept with a small number of principles, tightly linked together, which derived greater persuasive force because of it. It is a question of making these truths, which are learned, memorised, progressively put into action, a sort of quasi-subject which reigns supremely. It is a question of having these principles tell one in each situation and in some way spontaneously how one should conduct their lives.³⁸⁹ Knowledge is taken as the object of intellectual exercise in *mathesis* or learning, but only as part of a process which must include a meditation on knowledge, a valuation of knowledge, in the form of *melete* which was itself, as a practice of the contemplative life and a spiritual exercise. In a real philosophical life, there was a direct correlation between one's values, what one thought and believed, all directed through the assimilation of *logoi* and how one conducted one's life. All *logoi*, as a spiritual form of knowledge, must in some fashion change the individual worldview, the mode of living, the very mode of being of the individual. Such was the motivation for the worldview held by Socrates. The lesson of ancient philosophy consisted in an invitation for each individual to transform herself and her way of being, through the culture of a 'care of oneself'.

³⁸⁷ Pierre Hadot, *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*, (Paris: Albin Michel, 2002) p 23

³⁸⁸ Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a way of life: Spiritual exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. by Arnold Davidson trans. by Michael Chase, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), p. 23.

³⁸⁹ Michel Foucault, 'The ethic of care for the self as a practice of freedom, an interview with Michel Foucault on Jan 20, 1984', *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 12 (1987), 112-131 (p. 117).

While Foucault will suggest that for the Greeks, truth was a spiritual knowledge, and to practice philosophy well was to achieve spiritual knowledge, Hadot will use the term wisdom in a more conventional Greek understanding, but it refers to the same concept as Foucault's spiritual knowledge. In fact, the term wisdom rarely appears in Foucault's text. Real wisdom, Hadot suggests, does not merely cause one to know, it makes one be in a different way.³⁹⁰ Philosophy, he says, was a way of life, both in its exercise and effort to achieve wisdom, and in its goal, wisdom itself. For real wisdom does not merely cause us to know; it makes one "be" in a different way. Both the grandeur and the paradox of ancient philosophy are that it was, at one and the same time, conscious of the fact that wisdom is inaccessible until after death and convinced of the necessity of pursuing spiritual progress.³⁹¹ Philosophy presented itself as a mode of life, as an act of living, as a way of being and, in the end, a reason for dying.³⁹²

The task of all wisdom, according to Hadot, is to realise the distinction between an individual freedom (attention only to that which depends on the individual) and cosmos (attention to that which does not depend on the individual). Stoic philosophy will require the adept to keep at hand, at all times, the distinction between what depends on one and what does not. Spiritual exercises free the individual from exteriority defined as that which does not depend on oneself, from personal attachment to exterior objects, and from the pleasures they may provide. One seeks to be one's own master, to possess oneself, and to find one's authenticity in freedom and inner independence. In the practice of exercises such as exercises of self-sufficiency (*autarkeia*), endurance (*karteria*), and the avoidance of affectation and the preoccupation with luxury and social standing (*tuphos*), wisdom brought a consciousness which is a kind of spiritual surpassing of oneself. By transforming oneself, one might exceed oneself, surpass oneself.³⁹³ It brought a conversion which overturned all life and changed the very beings of all those who accomplished it. It brings freedom as a way of being, actualised as a freedom from desires (*apatheia*), a peace of mind or tranquillity (*ataraxia*), and a self-sufficiency (*autarkeia*). It raises the individual from an inauthentic condition of life as slavery

³⁹⁰ Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a way of life: Spiritual exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. by Arnold Davidson trans. by Michael Chase, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), p. 265.

³⁹¹ Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a way of life: Spiritual exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. by Arnold Davidson trans. by Michael Chase, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), p. 265.

³⁹² Arnold Davidson, 'Introduction', *Philosophy as a way of life: Spiritual exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. by Arnold Davidson trans. by Michael Chase, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), p. 33.

³⁹³ Pierre Hadot, *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*, (Paris: Albin Michel, 2002), p. 341.

to the attainment of freedom as a self-consciousness, an exact vision of the world, and inner peace.³⁹⁴

Exercises intended as a philosophical therapeutic of the subject are presented by Hadot in three strata. Exercises designed to avoid speculation and error are intellectual exercises of learning, or *mathesis*, to include research, thorough investigation, reading, listening. Second, fundamental exercises of *melete* include meditation on that which has been learned, memorisation, attention, remembrance of good things, pre-meditation on future evils. The third layer of exercises specifies practical exercises to include therapies of the passions through self-mastery, indifference to indifferent things and the accomplishment of duties in social life. There are intended to create habits to which an individual can resort even without conscious effort. Hadot also provides a different categorisation of the same exercises under different headings, such as; learning to live, learning to dialogue, and learning to die. He admits however that there is no systematic index of exercises which might provide history with the descriptions and methods of spiritual exercises. The information must be gleaned from incomplete and inaccurate historical texts written sometime after the Hellenistic era. He adds that it is necessary to conclude that the lack of a contemporary text suggests that the exercises were well-known and embedded in an oral tradition that was part of the daily life of the philosophical schools.

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Learning to live.³⁹⁶

For all philosophical schools, the principal cause of suffering, of disorder, of ignorance, were the passions or disordered desires. The unhappiness of the individual will also be derived from exaggerated fears; fearing those things that one ought not to fear. Philosophy appears, in the first place, as a therapy and every school had their own therapeutic methods. Hadot suggests that Epicureans, for example, understand healing as the transforming the awareness of the soul that is full of the worries of life to the awareness of the simple joy of existing. Therapy consisted of a profound transformation in the manner of seeing and living for the individual enabled by spiritual exercises. The art of living was a concrete attitude, a determined style of living, which encompassed all existence. It involved leaving the state of inauthentic life, dimmed by the lack

³⁹⁴ Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a way of life*, ed by Arnold Davidson, trans by Michael Chase, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999) p. 83.

³⁹⁵ Pierre Hadot, *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*, (Paris: Albin Michel, 2002), p. 25.

³⁹⁶ Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a way of life: Spiritual exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. by Arnold Davidson trans. by Michael Chase, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), p.84.

of consciousness, scourged by worries, to an authentic state of living, in which the individual might attain a consciousness of herself, an accurate and exact vision of the world, and an internal freedom and peace.³⁹⁷ All unhappiness comes from the incessant searching for and striving to obtain those things which one might never be able to have or that might be easily lost and attempting to avoid those evils which are often inevitable. Philosophy attempts to educate the individual, so that she might only aim to acquire the good that she can acquire and that she will attempt to avoid only those evils she can avoid. Both acquisition and avoidance must depend only on the individual, on the freedom of the individual, and become the moral good and the moral bad. Everything else that does not depend on the individual, corresponds to a necessary chain of causes and effects that restrict individual freedom. The individual must achieve indifference and an acceptance of inevitable destiny as a domain of a universal nature. One passes, in a difficult task, a step-by-step interior transformation, from a human vision of reality, a vision in which values depend on passions, to a spiritual vision of all things as an event in a cosmic perspective.

The fundamental and overall attitude governing Stoic spirituality in particular is attention (*prosoche*). Attention (*prosoche*) is a continuous vigilance and presence of mind, a self-consciousness that never sleeps, and a constant tension of the spirit.³⁹⁸ It is only with that permanent state of vigilance or attention (*prosoche*) that philosophy can, as a continuous act, renewed at each instant, as an orientation of the attention, be effective spiritually and is it possible for wisdom to be approached. The exercise of attention to the present moment, the most fundamental of the Stoic exercises, requires that the individual knows and wills her own action fully and at all times. It is a constant vigilance and a presence of mind, a self-consciousness that requires that the philosopher is fully aware of her action at every instant. Attention frees the philosopher from passions which are always caused by the past or the future, two areas which cannot depend on us. Each moment of existence has its value for that instant. This accounts for the Stoic attention to the present moment, to his transformed attitude to the past and the future, both of which are not within our control.³⁹⁹ Attention opens human consciousness to a cosmic conscience and makes the individual conscious of the infinite value of every instant. It allows the individual to accept every moment of existence in the perspective

³⁹⁷ Pierre Hadot, *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*, (Paris: Albin Michel, 2002), p. 23.

³⁹⁸ Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a way of life: Spiritual exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. by Arnold Davidson trans. by Michael Chase, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), p. 84.

³⁹⁹ Pierre Hadot, *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*, (Paris: Albin Michel, 2002), p. 26.

of the universal law of the universe. Right action always will conform to reason. This *prosoche* allows the philosopher to keep fundamental principles which Hadot will call *kanon*, that have been learned, always ready to hand (*procheiron*). Hadot describes how it was essential to Stoics and Epicureans to have at their disposal extremely clear and simple fundamental principles, composed of only a few words, in order that the principle can be present immediately to consciousness and be applicable with the reliability of a reflex. This immediacy allows the application of the principal promptly and surely in particular situations in life. The primary *Kanon* is to keep in mind at all times that which depends on the individual and that which does not, that is, the distinction between individual freedom and universal nature. Hadot also offers the well-known *tetrapharmakos*, or four-fold healing formula: ‘God presents no fears, death no worries. And while good is readily attainable, evil is readily endurable.’⁴⁰⁰ The abundance of collections of Epicurean aphorisms is a response to the demands of the spiritual exercise of meditation. As with the Stoics, the study of the dogmatic treatises was also an exercise intended to provide material for meditation so as more thoroughly to impregnate the soul with the fundamental intuitions.⁴⁰¹ The study of these *kanon*⁴⁰², as the great dogma of the schools, in *mathesis* serve only the subsequent meditation as *melete*.

This ready at hand, *procheiron*, is not a matter of a simple knowing and remembering; it is about a transformation of the individual achieved in *melete*. It involves manifesting in the self *kanon* as the rule of life, in the most living, the most concrete manner. Such is an exercise in memory (*mneme*) and in meditation (*melete*). This *procheiron* allows the individual to react immediately to unexpected events by the immediate application of the *kanon*. Thanks to this *prosoche*, the philosopher is fully aware of what she does at each instant, and she wills her actions fully. One must not separate from these *kanon* in sleep, in waking, when you eat or drink or converse with others.

Hadot points to a series of exercises whose aim is to create habits of self-mastery and self-discipline. There are a series of exercises which are similar to the exercises of thought and meditation listed under attention but relate to practical exercises of mastering the body and the development of a physical indifference. Others constitute practical behaviours such as the accomplishment of duties, mastering the control of anger, the love of riches, the love of gossip,

⁴⁰⁰ Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a way of life: Spiritual exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. by Arnold Davidson trans. by Michael Chase (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), p. 87.

⁴⁰¹ Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a way of life: Spiritual exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. by Arnold Davidson trans. by Michael Chase, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), p. 87.

⁴⁰² Foucault uses the terms *parastema* and *logoi* to refer to these *kanon*

curiosity, the mastering of envy and hate. The simple method of all these exercises is to start exercising mastery over the easiest of things to acquire little by little a stable and solid habit of life.⁴⁰³

Learning to dialogue.⁴⁰⁴

The figure of Socrates, according to Arnold Davidson, provides Hadot with the first clear illustration of the practice of spiritual exercises. As a master of dialogue with others and with himself, Socrates would be seen as a master of this practice of dialogue.⁴⁰⁵ A Socratic dialogue is a spiritual exercise practiced in common and it incites one to give attention to oneself, to take care of oneself, through inner spiritual exercises. Socrates is the *basanos*, the touchstone, and through confrontation with him, one will be able to distinguish between what is and what is not good in one's life. The object of Socratic dialogue is the emergence of life, of the mode of life, a life in relation to which it is necessary to carry out an operation which will be a test. One's mode of living should be submitted to a test throughout all of life in order to make an exact division between what one is and how one lives.⁴⁰⁶ Hadot quotes Victor Goldschmidt's remark that dialogue intends to form more than to inform, to form the interlocutor and reader so as to lead him to conversion, to a transformation of his way of life. In dialogue, what is important is not the solution to a particular problem, but the path traversed in arriving at the solution. In Socratic dialogue, Hadot recognises a form of exercise where the question truly at stake is not what is being said, but who is in fact talking.⁴⁰⁷ Socrates' mission consists in inviting his contemporaries to take care of their inner progress and in doing so participate in forms of spiritual combat aimed at a total transformation of one's way of being as a certain settled mental attitude or philosophical *ethos* as Foucault might call it. His role is as a spiritual director. The exercise is not an intellectual exercise but a spiritual one. The essential dimension of the dialogue is a struggle with oneself in a concrete and practical exercise, in a form of spiritual combat, aimed at the transformation of one's way of being. Whereas most people will concern

⁴⁰³ Pierre Hadot, *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*, (Paris: Albin Michel, 2002), p. 29.

⁴⁰⁴ Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a way of life: Spiritual exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. by Arnold Davidson trans. by Michael Chase, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), p. 89.

⁴⁰⁵ Arnold Davidson, Spiritual Exercises and Ancient philosophy: an Introduction to Pierre Hadot, *Critical Inquiry*, 16 (1990), 475-482 (p. 476).

⁴⁰⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Courage of truth, Lectures at the Collège de France 1983-1984*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 145.

⁴⁰⁷ Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a way of life: Spiritual exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. by Arnold Davidson trans. by Michael Chase, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), p. 89.

themselves power and fortune, status and reputation, Socrates invites one to focus on thought, on truth, on the soul. Dialogue becomes an examination of conscience, an attention to the self. It is not about exposing or refining a doctrine but to conduct the interlocutor to a certain and definite mental attitude.

Extending this practice of authentic Socratic dialogue to an authentic dialogue with oneself in the form of an examination of conscience is a practice of authentic presence to the self, a practice of knowing the self, and a relationship of the self to the self. Hadot suggests that the basis for all spiritual exercises in ancient philosophy is this relationship of the self to the self. The exercise is dialogical insofar as it is an 'exercise of authentic presence of the self to itself, and of the self to others.'⁴⁰⁸ The dialogue is not a theoretical or dogmatic account; it is a concrete and practical exercise guiding the individual to certain settled mental attitudes, transforming all aspects of being, that is, intellect, imagination, sensibility, and will. Dialogue is exercise in that it requires a practicality, great effort and training. The point is not to set forth a doctrine but rather to guide towards a determinate mental attitude. In every spiritual exercise, the individual must allow, in a most voluntary way, herself be changed in her points of view, attitudes and convictions. It is combative, amicable, but at the same time, a concrete, practical exercise in self-transformation.⁴⁰⁹

Learning to die and training for death⁴¹⁰

The exercise of learning to die is a spiritual exercise which consists of changing perspective, to pass from a vision of things dominated by individual passions to a representation of the world governed by the universality and objectivity of thought. All of the contemplative and speculative work of the philosopher becomes a spiritual exercise in the degree to which, elevating thought to the perspective of the whole, it liberates it from the illusions of individuality. It is a conversion of thought that directs the whole of the soul to the divine. Death, in this instance, is a spiritual separation between the soul and the body. This is not to be confused with the death of Socrates who died because he refused to deny the imprescriptible form of the *logos*. Neither is it a state of trance or of catalepsy, in which the body loses conscience and thanks to which the soul is in a state of supernatural awareness. Death, as a

⁴⁰⁸ Arnold Davidson, 'Spiritual Exercises and Ancient philosophy: an Introduction to Pierre Hadot', *Critical Inquiry*, 16 (1990), 475-482 (p. 476).

⁴⁰⁹ Pierre Hadot, *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*, (Paris: Albin Michel, 2002), p. 38.

⁴¹⁰ Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a way of life: Spiritual exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. by Arnold Davidson trans. by Michael Chase, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), p. 93.

metaphor, describes a freeing of the soul, a stripping away of all the passions linked to the body, to acquire an independence of thought, in order to submit the soul to the demands of *logos* and the norm of the Good. To die is to lose one's individuality, one's passions, to see things in their universal and objective perspective, that is to say, it is the exercise of pure thought.⁴¹¹ In the study of death, one studies freedom. The thought of death changes the tone and the level of the interior life.

Foucault and spiritual exercises

It is generally admitted that Hadot provides a more accurate account of ancient philosophy than Foucault.⁴¹² Foucault shares with Hadot the view that the main objective of the Greek schools of philosophy was the transformation of the individual but he marginalises the spiritual exercises of the dissolution of the subject in a cosmic totality. Unlike Foucault, Hadot was a self-declared 'agnostic mystic' who focussed on self-knowledge understood as a release from the individual and an access to the universal. He understood spiritual knowledge as an awareness of the fact that one is a part of nature and of a universal nature.⁴¹³ Foucault was only interested in providing a conceptual framework for a process of self-constitution of the ethical subject. He considered the idea of a work of the self on the self to be capable of reacquiring a contemporary meaning.⁴¹⁴

Spiritual exercises, for Foucault, are an attempt to control inner discourse, in an effort to render it coherent, to see the world *qua* world. Coherence of inner discourse is a self-mastery. It enables one to grasp both the reality and the value of things, to grasp 'their real power over the human subject insofar as he is free'.⁴¹⁵ Through exercises one learns to control and select thoughts, one learns to cultivate the ability to differentiate thoughts and by controlling them, one learns to live differently and ethically. This aim of spiritual exercises is to transform the representation of the world in inner discourse, a transformation that will also transform modes of existence and modes of behaviour. For Foucault, they allow the change in the mode of being

⁴¹¹ Pierre Hadot, *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*, (Paris: Albin Michel, 2002), p. 40.

⁴¹² This has been noted by Arnold Davidson and Martha Nussbaum. James Porter, an eminent classicist, aims to raise a historiographic complaint in his essay *Foucault's ascetic agents*.

⁴¹³ Cristian Iftode, 'Foucault's idea of philosophy as 'care of the self': Critical assessment and conflicting metaphilosophical views', *Procedia: Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 71 (2013), 76-85 (p. 81).

⁴¹⁴ Paul Veyne, 'The Final Foucault and his Ethics', *Critical Inquiry* 20 (1993), 1-9 (p. 7).

⁴¹⁵ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 308.

of the subject as a direct result of practice. The individual transforms through his experience and practice to become the subject who thinks truth, and from this subject who thinks the truth, the individual become the subject who acts based on this truth.

Foucault suggests that *epimeleia heautou*, the care of oneself, as an organisation of spiritual exercises, implies a sequencing of a time-consuming labour of learning truths or *mathesis*, along with an essential regime of mental exercises and physical exercises of self-mastery and self-discipline, that collectively Foucault will call *askesis*. *Askesis* consists of mental exercises of understanding, meditation, examination of conscience and the modalisation or subjectivation of knowledge, *melete*, and constant daily activity on the body, *gumnazein* or *gymnasia*.⁴¹⁶ The role and function of *askesis* was to establish the strongest possible link between the subject of truth and the truth that would enable that subject.⁴¹⁷ *Askesis* enables the acquisition of these true discourses in the form of knowledge (*savoir*), to become the subject who tells the truth and who is transfigured by this enunciation of the truth. This process, Foucault describes as the subjectivation of true discourse.⁴¹⁸ As Foucault suggests ‘making the truth your own, is the very core of philosophical *askesis*’⁴¹⁹ *Epimeleia heautou*, understood as a way of life, required the persistent daily use of exercises on the self, that were neither simply exercises of thought nor even moral exercises, but rather, in the full sense of this term, spiritual exercises. Since they aimed at realising a transformation of an individual’s vision of the world and a metamorphosis of one’s personality, these exercises had not alone a moral value but equally an existential value. It involves introspection, checking of representations as they appear in the mind, practical tasks of learning, techniques of meditations, examination of the day past, memorisation of the past, the acquisition of precepts and examples that will provide inspiration, and by contemplating a life reduced to its essentials, to rediscover the basic principles of rational conduct.⁴²⁰ It involves Stoic testing procedures of privation designed specifically to prepare oneself for possible privations by discovering how easy it was to dispense with everything to which habit, opinion, education, attention to reputation, and taste

⁴¹⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 356-359.

⁴¹⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 371.

⁴¹⁸ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 333.

⁴¹⁹ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 333.

⁴²⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self: The History of Sexuality:3* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 51.

for ostentation have attached humanity. These task of testing oneself, learning oneself, examining oneself, of monitoring oneself in a series of clearly defined exercises, constitutes the spiritual truth of the self, free of external and internal domination, the truth of what one is, what one does, and what one is capable of doing. These tasks are central to the formation of the subject of *ethos*. What distinguishes *epimeleia heautou* in its Hellenistic form, whatever the effects of austerity, renunciation, prohibition, and prescriptiveness they may induce, is that they never were the effect of obedience to a morality or submission to the authority of the law. They were not and never were a question of what one ought to in the quotidian; they were never a moral code. They ask the question of what to make of oneself. They constitute, in Greco-Roman philosophy as a way of life, a practice of truth; they are a way of binding the self or the individual to a perception of her individual spiritual truth.

Mathesis (learning), a relationship of the self to knowledge (*connaissance*) constituting a spiritual knowledge

According to Foucault. philosophical discourse in Hellenistic and Roman eras was not devoted to the development of systems of knowledge (*connaissance*) and truth about the self or things in the universe. Philosophical discourse in Hellenistic and Roman eras was not systematic in that it wanted to provide a total systematic explanation of the whole of reality. Philosophy is the process by which the self can take a certain view of itself in the world in ‘as much as our existence is linked to a set of determinations and necessities whose rationality we understand’⁴²¹ It does not give rise to knowledge (*connaissance*) of the self that would have meant the investigation and decipherment of ‘interiority, of the inner world’. *Mathesis* is a series of intellectual exercises, to include research (*zetesis*), thorough investigation (*skepsis*), reading (*anagnosis*), writing (*graphein*), listening (*akroasis*).

Seneca stresses the importance of the practice of *mathesis*, for one could not draw everything from one's own stock or arm oneself by oneself with the principles of reason that are indispensable for self-conduct. By learning the nature of reality and one's place in it, the more effective will be the engagement in spiritual exercises. In this philosophy, the concept of learning is not a cognitive exercise, as it might be understood in more modern notions of pedagogy. It is not the accumulation of knowledge (*connaissance*) for the purpose of building and collecting a truth content of knowledge or of eliciting the causes of events in the world.

⁴²¹ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 279.

Hadot insists that following his studies of the Ancient philosophical texts, he could only suggest that they were psychagogic. Hadot opines that ‘various logoi, situated as they are within a highly specific problematic, are responses to precise questions. They are adapted to the needs of his disciples and are an attempt to bring about in them a specific psychagogic effect.’⁴²² The function of text or the dialogue was to reform the interlocutor and reader, who lived in an inauthentic condition of life, so as to lead him to conversion, to a transformation of his way of life. Hellenistic philosophy was not considered to be a process by which knowledge (*connaissance*) of the self and the world was accumulated or appreciated as true. To read the texts is to practice an activity of training and of transformation of the self rather than an activity of theoretical proposition and conceptualisation.⁴²³ It was a practice to constitute a psychic disposition in those contemporaries who read or listened to the texts. They were a means to reform the mind rather than to inform the mind.

Mathesis, for Foucault, was a technology to provide the mind and body with a small number of principles, *parastema*, *kanon*, or *logoi*, tightly linked together, which derived greater persuasive force because of it. *Mathesis* is the learning of these principles, vigorously articulated together. Aphorisms sufficed to sum up the essential dogma. These are universally valid principles for those who wish to give their existence an honourable and noble form. Greek morality was one in which the individual did not make herself into an ethical subject by universalising the principles that informed action and objectifying herself. The notion of *parastema* is not the equivalent of Kant’s Categorical Imperative. To be ethical was to act individually, to choose to act in a certain manner. *Parastema*, as acts of personal choice, constituted a lawless universality of the aesthetics of existence.⁴²⁴ Foucault will suggest that the principles, *parastema*, is not a precept,⁴²⁵ It is not an expression of something to be done. It is not a rule or a code of conduct. *Parastema* is something to which one must hold fast, which one must have in mind, which one must always keep before one’s eyes. It is the statement of a fundament truth as well as the founding principle of behaviour.⁴²⁶

⁴²² Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a way of life: Spiritual exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. by Arnold Davidson trans. by Michael Chase, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), p. 106.

⁴²³ Pierre Hadot, *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*, (Paris: Albin Michel, 2002), p. 72.

⁴²⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self: The History of Sexuality:3* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 185.

⁴²⁵ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 291.

⁴²⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 291.

On another occasion, Foucault suggested that that the assimilation of *logoi* is a question of making these truths, which are learned, memorised, progressively put into action, a sort of quasi-subject which reigns supremely in the self.⁴²⁷ These principles, these *logoi*, must be kept clear and simple, precisely so that it remains easily accessible to the mind and applicable with the constancy of a reflex. Through the *logos*, through reason and the relations to truth that it governed, such a life was committed to the maintenance and reproduction of an ontological order.⁴²⁸ The *logoi* 'will enable one to be stronger than anything that may happen in our lives.'⁴²⁹ One does not acquire discourses for the purposes of improving one's mind or the accumulation of knowledge (*connaissance*), but in order to prepare for events. It is a knowledge (*savoir*) of actions required which helps to act correctly with regard to circumstances, and as a preparation for life. As Foucault says, whatever the exercises may be, one thing is worth noting, which is that they are all practised by reference to situations that the subject may also have to confront. It involves the most accurate measure of the place one occupies in the world and the system of necessities in which one is inserted.⁴³⁰

These *logoi* or principles are not to be considered as codes or rules, nor are they a supply of true propositions, principles, axioms. They are inductive schemas of action which, in their inductive value and effectiveness, are such that when present in the head, thoughts, heart and even body of someone who possesses them, that person will then act as if spontaneously. It is as if it were that these *logoi* themselves, gradually becoming as one with one's own reason, freedom and will, were speaking for him; not only telling her what one should do, but actually doing what one should do, as dictated by necessary rationality. 'You will have become the *logos* or the *logos* will have become you.'⁴³¹ It results in the individual being so profoundly convinced of thought that she believes it to be true, engraving the truth in the mind in such a way that it is recalled immediately the need arises, and in such a way that she has it ready to hand.

⁴²⁷ Michel Foucault, 'The ethic of care for the self as a practice of freedom, an interview with Michel Foucault on Jan 20, 1984', *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 12 (1987), 112-131 (p. 116).

⁴²⁸ Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality:2* (London: Penguin books, 1992), p. 89.

⁴²⁹ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 322.

⁴³⁰ Cited by Frédéric Gros, 'Course Context', in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject, Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982* (New York: Picador, 2005), pp.507-550 (p. 538).

⁴³¹ Michel Foucault, 'The ethic of care for the self as a practice of freedom, an interview with Michel Foucault on Jan 20, 1984', *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 12 (1987), 112-131 (p. 117).

The first *parastema* or *logos* to learn for the individual is that she keeps to the fore of the mind what she will consider to be a good, to be a good for herself, in the provision of the ontological support for her *ethos*. Stoic value systems were based on the contention that notions of good and bad were not inherent in nature but were entirely properties of people's attitudes, their subjective views, their characteristics, and their actions. The values Stoics believed that referred to properties of nature was beneficial or harmful. That which is essentially beneficial ought to be good; that which is harmful ought to be bad. Everything else is in the category of indifferent things. The spiritual knowledge aimed at is of what is best for the individual and of the conditions of its realisation. This knowledge is of the highest possible import, for only in the light of it can life be well guided. This knowledge is not of the nature of humanity and her conditions, it is the knowledge of what is best for the individual, of what the individual's supreme end or good might consist. Marcus Aurelius will suggest that what is good is what is one's rational interest. If something or some action is in one's interest as a rational being, then follow it. The individual will see for herself through the use of reason what is good, that is, the ends she ought to pursue. Ultimately, Foucault suggests, one lives for oneself but giving this 'for' a completely different meaning than it is given in the traditional expression 'living for oneself'.⁴³² The individual acts not for an end outside herself, but for the sake of her own well-being. One lives, keeping in mind the relationship to oneself as the fundamental project of existence. The second *parastema* concerns freedom and the fact that in reality, for the individual, everything depends upon one's freedom to form an opinion. The *parastema* suggests that nothing should quell or master this power; one should always be free to form an opinion as one wishes. The third declares that there is basically only one level of reality for the individual, and the only level of reality that exists is the moment itself, the present, prior to which nothing exists any longer and after which everything is still uncertain. Stoic philosophy requires the adept to keep at hand, at all times, the distinction between what depends on one in this present and what does not. As will be seen, these three *parastema* will form the basis for the attitudes of the ethical subject in modernity.

Askesis

⁴³² Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 448).

Mathesis was to fit oneself out with *logoi* as truths and to learn about the world and the self but something extra was required.⁴³³ Take the *logos* which suggests that death is not an evil. To have learned theoretically that death is not an evil does not suffice to no longer fear it. In order for this truth to be able to penetrate to the depths of one's being, so that it is not believed only for a brief moment but becomes an unshakeable conviction, so that it is always ready; one must exercise oneself constantly and without respite. In the Hellenistic age, Foucault identified *askesis*, as a relationship of the self to the self, as a form of spiritual exercise. No technique, no professional skill can be acquired without exercise; nor can the art of living, the *tekhne tou biou*, be learned without knowledge to begin with and 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.⁴³⁴ *Askesis* is the exercise by which the ethical subject attains a mode of being that he ought to have, not only in as much as he knows the truth in *mathesis*, but inasmuch as he says it, practices it, and exercises it, at every moment of the day.

The *askesis* to which Foucault refers is antithetical to the tradition of Christian asceticism. Christian asceticism has as its ultimate aim the renunciation of the self, whereas *askesis* has as its goal the constitution of a specific relationship of the self to self. Christian asceticism takes as its principal theme a detachment from the world whereas *askesis* is concerned with the formation of the individual in the world and a preparation to fully confront the world in an ethical and rational manner by determining her own rules of conduct. *Askesis*, despite its derivative's asceticism more modern interpretation as a loss or a deprivation, involves providing oneself with something one has not got, something one does not have by nature. It provides an armature, a *paraskeue*, which is the equipping, the preparation of the subject and the soul so that they will be properly, necessarily, and sufficiently armed for whatever circumstance of life may arise. It is what will make possible resistance to every impulse and temptation that may come from the external world.⁴³⁵ This protection from the vicissitudes of the world is not something that is natural, and lost to humanity, waiting to be revealed by the removal of repressive powers. The term *askesis* is used in a very general sense.

⁴³³ Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a way of life: Spiritual exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. by Arnold Davidson trans. by Michael Chase, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), p. 22.

⁴³⁴ Michel Foucault, 'Self-Writing', in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp. 207-222. (p. 209).

⁴³⁵ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 240.

There is no sense of a Christian or modern self-abnegation but that of an exercise of the self on the self by which one tries to work out, to transform one's self, and to attain a certain mode of being. *Askesis* is a type of action, a type of activity, a mode of practice of the self on the self, an exercise of self on self.⁴³⁶

A long philological exploration of ancient text reveals two technically distinct forms of *askesis*, *Melete* and *Gumnazein*. In essence, *melete* is a form of meditation but not as a form of withdrawal as might be understood in other spiritual traditions. *Melete* is a series of exercises of thought on thought. *Gumnazein* is a training and a test of the body in real life in the form of abstinence from that which one might desire and of resistance when presented with the temptation of that which one might desire. Both involve being present in a real situation, contrived or encountered, by which one tries out the effectivity of the *logoi* that have been imbibed in *mathesis*.

Meletai (thought exercises and experiments)

Meletai, as a series of spiritual exercises ensures that all of the events of one's life are viewed in the light of an attention to, a spiritual concentration on, the *logoi*, which, as a result, will deliver the individual from the passions that do not depend on her. It allows introspection, meditations, examination of the self and the actions of the day, and by contemplating a life reduced to its essentials, to rediscover the basic principles of rational conduct.⁴³⁷ Through *meletai*, one is always reminded of the *logoi or parastema* as they are re-actualised for the individual at every moment. One keeps in mind the definition of the good, the definition of freedom and the definition of reality.⁴³⁸

Foucault divides the Hellenistic forms of *meletai* into two categories.⁴³⁹

The first aims to criticise and control impressions and appearances in the form of *phantasia* or the flux of representation in the mind, exercises concerning the examination of the truth of what one thinks. The second are thought experiments or exercises in thought, especially

⁴³⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 312.

⁴³⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self: The History of Sexuality:3* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 291.

⁴³⁸ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 291.

⁴³⁹ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 462-463.

understood as a preparatory practice supporting forms of critical and ethical action. The test oneself as the subject of truth.⁴⁴⁰

The first category, described as the examination of representation, allows for the change in the mode of being of the individual as a direct result of a steady and permanent screening of human representations, one that aims to test the representations, to distinguish one from the other and thus prevent one from accepting the first arrival.⁴⁴¹ A representation cannot be accepted as truth merely by the fact that it has appeared in the mind, There is no direct access to truth. While a theoretical logic concerns itself with a study of formal logic which a modern might describe as an epistemology, the screening of representations consists of a lived logic, making sure that representations do, in fact, correspond to reality before one accepts them. Epictetus insists that one must be in an attitude of constant supervision over the representations that may enter the mind. He expresses this attitude in two metaphors: that of the night watchman who does not let just anyone come into the town or the house; and that of the moneychanger or inspector, the *arguronomos*, who, when presented with a coin, examines it, weighs it in his hand, and checks the metal and the effigy.⁴⁴² Neither the quality not the value of anything must escape. One must always define and describe the object whose image (*phantasia*) appears in the mind.⁴⁴³ One should define and describe the object whose image appears in the mind in such a way that one sees it distinctly, as it is in its essence, naked, whole, and in all its aspects. Always see them in such a way that they will be considered at the same time with regard to in what kind of universe each is useful. Foucault describes the process where one keeps a watch on representations as they appear, seeing in what they consist, to what they are related, whether the judgments we pass on them, and consequently the impulses, passions, emotions, and effects they may arouse, are true or not. The origin of this flux is accepted in its psychic reality and its origin from the external world. It is not an illusion. Nothing is admitted into thought which ought not be admitted. This screening does not aim at the object of the representation, which is the things of the world, but the subjective acceptance of the representation. Foucault will suggest that ‘it is a game of truth that thought plays on the

⁴⁴⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 463.

⁴⁴¹ Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self: The History of Sexuality:3* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 63.

⁴⁴² Michel Foucault, 'The Hermeneutic of the Subject', in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp. 93-108 (p. 103-104).

⁴⁴³ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 290.

subject, rather than a game of truth that the subject plays with his thoughts.’⁴⁴⁴ One must intervene in a flux of representations as they appear, as they occur, as they file past in the mind. In the Stoics in particular, it was a frequently occurring theme; screening the flux of representations, taking hold of the representation as it occurs, as it appears on the occasion of the thoughts appearing spontaneously in the mind, or on the occasion of anything falling within the field of perception, or on the occasion of the life we lead, the encounters we have, the objects we see, etc; taking then the spontaneous and involuntary flux of representation and focussing on it a voluntary attention whose function is to determine the objective content. The spiritual exercise consists precisely in allowing the thread and the flux of representations to unfold spontaneously. It involves the free movement of representation and work on this free movement. Rather than reject the representation as in a form of scepticism, each representation is intercepted as it appears, in order to grasp its objective content as in a form of criticism.

Foucault differentiates between two possible forms of screening of representations, one related to spiritual exercise and one relating to a more modern intellectual exercise. In a spiritual exercise, one allows the thread and flux of representation to unfold spontaneously. It involves a free movement of representations and work on this free movement. Intellectual method will consist, rather, in providing oneself with a voluntary and systematic definition of law of succession of representations, and only accepting them in the mind if there is a sufficiently strong, constraining, and necessary link between them for one to be conveyed, logically, without doubt or hesitation, from the first to the second. He adds that the Cartesian progression belongs to the realm of the intellectual method and the transition from spiritual method to intellectual method is very clear in Descartes.⁴⁴⁵

Foucault describes two particular and specified spiritual exercises to enable the examination of representation.⁴⁴⁶ The first exercise combines an eidetic and onomastic meditation. Eidetic exercises define and describe in such a way that the object, whose image appears in the mind, is seen in its essence, naked, in its entirety, and from every side; and then saying the name to the self and the name of the elements of which it is composed and into which it will be resolved. One must see and name in order to recognise how the object is

⁴⁴⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 358.

⁴⁴⁵ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 294.

⁴⁴⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 294.

currently composed, but also what its future will be, into what it will be resolves, when and how and under what conditions it will come apart and be undone. The second phase of the exercise is to try and assess the value of things. Nothing, in fact, is so able to enlarge the soul for us as being able to identify methodically and truthfully each of the objects which appear in life and to see them always in such a way that we consider at the same time in what kind of universe each is useful, what the use is, and what value it possesses with regard to the whole and with regard to man. Spiritual knowledge can be discovered by a knowledge of content of the flux of all representations as they pass through the mind but also the value of these representations within the individual's universe.⁴⁴⁷ Foucault will suggest that through this exercise, we grasp the complex plenitude of the object's essential reality and the fragility of its existence in time.

Objective eidetic and onomastic tests, in themselves, will have no moral value. Acknowledging this permits us to make a comparison between what we can call intellectual method and spiritual exercise. Intellectual method will consist in providing ourselves with a voluntary and systematic definition of the law of succession of representations, and only accepting them in the mind if there is a sufficiently strong, constraining, and necessary link between them for us to be conveyed, logically, without doubt or hesitation, from the first to the second. He adds that the Cartesian progression is typical of the intellectual method and the transition from spiritual exercise to intellectual method is clear. Spiritual screening suggests, however, that there is a necessary mobile, variable, and changing flux of representations.

A second category of *melete* is to be conceived as a collection of 'thought exercises', exercises that are exercises of thought on thought. This form of *meletē* is especially understood as a preparatory practice supporting other forms of critical and ethical action. This *meletē* is the action of thought on the mode of being of the individual, rather than the action of the subject on his thoughts as was seen in eidetic and onomastic *melete*. This *melete*, as a form of meditation, Foucault suggests, does not involve thinking about the thing in itself as practicing the thing we are thinking about. For example, he suggests that meditating on death does not mean thinking about dying. Meditating death is a subjectivation, placing oneself in the situation of someone who is in the process of dying or who is living her last days. This meditation is not a game that subject plays with her own thought, with the object of her thought. A completely

⁴⁴⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 293.

different game is involved, a game that thought performs on the subject. Meditation is becoming, through thought, the person who is dying.

Meditation on death; *melete thanatou*

Foucault points to the most famous example of *meletē*, the meditation on death. He says that in the sense that the Greeks and Latins understood *melete thanatou* did not mean thinking you were dying. It does not mean convincing yourself that you are going to die. Meditating on death is placing yourself, in thought, in the situation of someone who is in the process of dying, or who is about to die, or who is living his last day. It is the becoming, through thought, the person who is living their last day. *Melete* consists in thinking that death will take one while engaged in some type of activity. Through the critical gaze on the last day and the activities of the last day, one can evaluate as to whether there is a finer and morally more worthy activity one could be involved in when death arrives. In performing one's last activity, it could be stripped of all falsity and casualness, and its value revealed.

Premeditation on future evils; *praemeditatio malorum*

This is an ethical, imaginary experience. In appearance it is a rather dark and pessimistic vision of the future.⁴⁴⁸ In this exercise, the individual represents to herself, events such as poverty, suffering and, in its ultimate form, death. It is through this confrontation that one keeps the fundamental *kanon* of present reality to the fore when confronted unexpectedly in worldly everyday life experience. As the 'evils' do not depend on us; they cannot be considered as evils but part of the course of the world and therefore will not cause a deviation from attention to the present. By this pre-meditation, the philosopher trains the self in thought to assume that all possible evils are bound to occur shortly and without delay. It is inevitable but that does not make one responsible for them. Foucault tells us that the Stoics developed three eidetic reductions of future misfortune. First, it is not a question of imagining the future as it is likely to turn out but to imagine the worst which can happen, even if there's little chance that it will turn out that way, the worst as certainty, as actualizing what could happen, not as calculation of probability. Second, one shouldn't envisage things as possibly taking place in the distant future but as already actual and in the process of taking place. For example, imagining not that one might be exiled but rather that one is already exiled, subjected to torture, and dying. Third, one does this not in order to experience inarticulate sufferings but in order to convince oneself

⁴⁴⁸ Michel Foucault, "Technologies of the self" in *Technologies of the self, a seminar with Michel Foucault*, ed by Luther Martin and Huck Gutman and Patrick H Hutton (London: Tavistock Publications, 1988), pp. 16-49 (p. 16).

that they are not real ills. The reduction of all that is possible, of all the duration and of all the misfortunes, reveals not something bad but what we have to accept. It consists of having at the same time the future and the present event.⁴⁴⁹ The Epicureans were hostile to it because they thought it was useless. They thought it was better to recollect and memorize past pleasures in order to derive pleasure from present events.

Melete as an examination of conscience

This examination of conscience is not the same as the Christian form that has become well known in Western practices of confession. It could be looked on as a process of retrospective self-examination, but not to discover guilt or wrongdoing in the day past, and not to discover infractions of a moral law but to strengthen the rational equipment of the individual that ensures a wise behaviour into the future, and in particular ensures some alignment with the end one wishes to achieve in one's style of life. Self-examination is taking stock.⁴⁵⁰ One can therefore characterize this examination in a few words. First, the goal of this examination is not at all to discover the truth hidden in the subject, it is rather to recall the truth forgotten by the subject. Two, what the subject forgets is not himself, nor his nature, nor his origin, nor a supernatural affinity. What the subject forgets is what he ought to have done, that is, a collection of rules of conduct that he had learned. Three, the recollection of errors committed during the day serves to measure the distance which separates what has been done from what should have been done. And four, the subject who practices this examination on himself is not the operating ground for a process more or less obscure which has to be deciphered. He is the point where rules of conduct come together and register themselves in the form of memories. He is at the same time the point of departure for actions more or less in conformity with these rules. He constitutes-the subject constitutes-the point of intersection between a set of memories which must be brought into the present and acts which have to be regulated.⁴⁵¹ One discovers errors of management, of administration.⁴⁵² It is kind of administrative scrutiny which enables one to reactivate the *parastema* or *logoi* in order to make them more vivid, permanent, and effective for future behaviour. There is no repentance, self-punishment, and allocation of one's guilt.

⁴⁴⁹ Michel Foucault, 'Technologies of the self' in *Technologies of the self, a seminar with Michel Foucault*, ed by Luther Martin and Huck Gutman and Patrick H Hutton (London: Tavistock Publications, 1988), pp. 16-49 (p. 16).

⁴⁵⁰ Michel Foucault, 'Technologies of the self' in *Technologies of the self, a seminar with Michel Foucault*, ed by Luther Martin and Huck Gutman and Patrick H Hutton (London: Tavistock Publications, 1988), pp. 16-49 (p. 33).

⁴⁵¹ Michel Foucault, 'Subjectivity and Truth', in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp. 87-94. (p. 254).

⁴⁵² Michel Foucault, *On the Government of the Living, lectures at the College de France 1979-1980*, ed. by Michel Senellart trans. by Graham Burchell (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 243.

There is simply a formulation of a conduct for the future, a rule of conduct which enables one to attain the aim sought. One does not have to drag out internal secrets, in an extensive hermeneutic of the self, deposited in the recesses of the heart because these explain one's bad conduct.⁴⁵³ One does not have to reveal the secrets within which the roots of sin are to be found. Self-examination will take the form of an inspection of the actions taken during the day. It is an examination of the style of conduct, it is the making the style of life a philosophical problem. Self-examination is carried out in order to strengthen the rational equipment that ensures wise behaviour. The Stoics spiritualized the notion of *anachoresis*, as a form of self-examination, a general attitude and also a precise act every day; you retire into the self to discover, not faults and deep feelings but to remember rules of action, the main laws of behaviour.

The practice of self-examination by writing

Writing was also an important exercise in the culture of taking care of oneself. One of the main features of taking care involved taking notes on oneself to be reread, writing treatises, and keeping notebooks in order to reactivate for oneself the truths one needed. Seneca's letters are an example of this self-exercise. It seems that, among all the forms taken by this training, writing, the act of writing for oneself and for others, came to play a considerable role. In any case, the texts from the imperial epoch relating to practices of the self placed a good deal of stress on writing. It is necessary to read, Seneca said, but also to write. And Epictetus, who offered an exclusively oral teaching, nonetheless emphasizes several times the role of writing as a personal exercise: one should "meditate" (*meletan*), write (*graphein*), and train oneself (*gumnazein*).⁴⁵⁴ Writing appears regularly associated with *melete* as that exercise of thought on itself that reactivates what it knows, calls to mind a principle, a rule, or an example, reflects on them, assimilates them, and in this manner prepares itself to face reality. Yet one also sees that writing is associated with the exercise of thought in two different ways. One takes the form of a linear "series": it goes from meditation to the activity of writing and from there to *gumnazein*, that is, to training and trial in a real situation, a labour of thought, a labour through writing, a labour in reality. The other is circular: the meditation precedes the notes which enable the rereading which in turn reinitiates the meditation. In any case, whatever the cycle of

⁴⁵³ Michel Foucault, *On the Government of the Living, lectures at the College de France 1979-1980*, ed. by Michel Senellart trans. by Graham Burchell (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 245.

⁴⁵⁴ Michel Foucault, 'Self-Writing', in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp. 207-222. (p. 209).

exercise in which it takes place, writing constitutes an essential stage in the process to which the whole *askesis* leads, namely, the fashioning of accepted discourses, recognized as true, into rational principles of action as *bios*.

Gumnazein is the third layer of exercises specifying practical exercises to include therapies of the passions, the accomplishment of duties in social life, self-mastery (*enkrateia*), and indifference to indifferent things (*autarkeia*) *Gumnazein* consists of a series of tests on the subject, criticising the subject, a questioning of the self by the self. It is a matter of locating the self as it is in the present. The test becomes a general attitude towards reality and the whole of life becomes a test. These tests were the means to contemplate a life reduced to its essentials. The test always includes a certain questioning of the self by the self where the subject adopts a certain enlightened and conscious attitude towards the task and the self. The test is a self-questioning of preparedness and endurance. It is a form of attention to preparedness. It will be the set of necessary and sufficient moves, of necessary and sufficient practices, which will enable us to be stronger than anything that may happen in our life.⁴⁵⁵ There are intended to create habits to which an individual can resort even without conscious effort. *Gumnazein* is a physically austere practice, an exercise, an action on the material self.

Gumnazein consists of exercises of indifference, *autarkeia*, where indifference is the removal or distancing away from things in order that a true vision is possible. Indifferent, enabled by an individual *ethos* of freedom is what one must manifest in the chosen style of life. It must enter into the very marrow of the bones. One must constitute an attitude of indifference. One must act indifferent as naturally as any other innate disposition. It is an existential distance from things that can only be self-appropriated. Man moves in the midst of these things, not with unconcern, but with indifference by exercise or by choice. Man seeks to assert the true self in the different dimensions of his human existence. *Gumnazein* is constituted of practices of abstinence designed to prepare the individual for possible privations, to dispense with everything to which habit, opinion, education, attention to reputation, and the taste for ostentation have attached one. It is a means to guard against the least apprehension at the thought of privation. It is the integration of abstinence as a sort of recurrent, regular exercise to which one returns from time to time and which enables a form to be given to life and which enables the individual to have an appropriate attitude to herself and the events of her life;

⁴⁵⁵ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 322.

sufficiently detached to be able to bear misfortune when it arises; but already sufficiently detached to be able to treat the wealth and goods around her with the necessary indifference and with the correct and wise nonchalance.⁴⁵⁶ Its objective is not to achieve through enforcing abstinence but to assess the indifference of the self.

One should distinguish carefully between these spiritual concepts and the Modern sense of the word, asceticism. This modern sense defines asceticism as the abstinence and restriction of food, drink, sleep, dress, and property. There is no sense of self-abnegation or of a self-renunciation in *askesis* but that of an exercise of the self on the self by which one tries to work out, to transform one's self, and to attain a certain mode of being. There is no sense of this *askesis* revealing a true essence of the individual that had been lost in repressive domination. There is no sense that this *askesis* is the submission to or self-renunciation in favour of a law or dogma.

Christian *exomologesis* and *exagoreusis*

In the vast study of desiring man, Foucault identifies three distinct phases and publishes three volumes of his history. The *Use of Pleasure* might be interpreted as the way that Foucault understood ancient Greeks, with no concept of subjectivity or individual self, might think about sexual behaviour, along with other behaviours and habits, as a technology of living, as a way of living with a simple and logical design, as an acceptable code of conduct for everyone. This code will establish a positive value for the conduct as opposed to prohibit it, and the emphasis was to bring about a beautiful life in the form of *bios*, a life found on a code of living corresponding to a *logos*, and a use of practical reason that would benefit the city and society in general. *The Care of The Self* is viewed as Foucault analysis of this same problematisation of sexual behaviour by the Ancients in the first two centuries of our era, a problematisation carried out within schools of philosophy as a way of life that is preoccupied with the self as opposed to the city, with the development of an individual *ethos* of freedom, rather than a subjectivity, and a *bios* that reflects intimately this *ethos*, and with the development of a uniquely Greek individual morality founded on the development of an ethical subject through Hellenistic technologies of the self. Foucault insists that what prevents us from really grasping a sense of *ethos* and *bios* is the fact that we have what may be called a Christian framework for codifying and thinking subjectivity. This subjectivity is constituted by a relationship to a

⁴⁵⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 429.

beyond, by an operation of conversion, and by the existence of an authenticity, a deep truth to be discovered and that constituted the foundation, the base, the ground of subjectivity.

Subjectivity then is a concept introduced with Christian spiritual exercises. Foucault opines, ‘the technologies of living are, at bottom, procedures of constitution of a subjectivity or of subjectivation, and this is how they should be understood.’⁴⁵⁷ Foucault suggests that certain mutations appeared within Christianity exercises in the third and fourth century when the spiritual exercises developed by late and classical antiquity were replaced by technologies of trans-subjectivation, as a new technology of living. According to Foucault, the monastic institution deployed a whole ensemble of procedures designed to ensure the remission of evil by expelling, correcting or healing it. At one extreme one finds *exomologesis* and at the other *exagoreusis*. In the *Confessions of the Flesh*, Foucault presents the argument that the relationship of subjectivity to universal forms of truth that predominates modernity finds its genealogical origin in these modifications of Hellenistic technologies of the self as they were manipulated in the first five centuries of our era, and in particular in the foundation of the Christian monastic tradition. The evolution of the Christian Pastorate from the third century A.D. and the intermingling of the confessional processes of *exomologesis* and *exagoreusis*, as injunctions of verbalisation by a subject of the truth of the subject, as truth obligations developed for a confessional Church, subsequently constituted a new form of individualising and totalising power that was integrated into the forms of governmentality of individuals and societies in modern secular regimes such as psychiatry and criminology.

In Hellenistic philosophy as a way of life, Foucault presents technologies as interested on the *ethopoietic* dimensions of experience. The basic philosophical question that each individual must ask is what she must do to constitute herself as an ethical subject. Within the Christian monastic tradition in the fourth century, Foucault opines, a new definition of the relations between subjectivity and truth will give the prescriptive core that is shared with Hellenistic philosophy as a way of life and earlier Christian technologies of living a completely new significance. It is not so much the law and its contents changed, but ‘experience as a condition of knowledge.’⁴⁵⁸ It is this imposition of an experience of knowledge (*connaissance*) and it is this imposition that has ensured the development of modern institutions of pastoral

⁴⁵⁷ Michel Foucault, *Subjectivity and Truth: Lectures at the Collège de France 1980-1981*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 254.

⁴⁵⁸ Michel Foucault, *Confessions of the Flesh; The History of Sexuality Volume 4*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Robert Hurley (London: Penguin Classics, 2021), Appendix 1.

power. ‘This change needs to be linked to the entire very complex evolution of the Christian Churches that led to the creation of the Christian Empire. More specifically it can be correlated to the establishment of two new elements in Christianity; penitential discipline, starting in the second half of the second century; and monastic asceticism, starting at the end of the third.’⁴⁵⁹ The monastic spiritual exercises or forms of technology of the self, according to Foucault, defined and developed a certain mode of relation of oneself to oneself in the direction of conscience and the different forms of penance. What is at issue is not the actual conduct of the individual, but the conduct of her conduct. As he says, it is ‘the form of subjectivity: the exercise of oneself upon oneself, knowledge of oneself, the constitution of oneself as an object of investigation and discourse, the liberation or purification of oneself and salvation by means of operations that carry light to one’s innermost being and drive one’s deepest secrets up to the light of redemptive exposure. It is a form of experience, understood as both a mode of presence to oneself and a mode of self-transformation, that was developed in that period.’⁴⁶⁰ Penitential discipline and monastic asceticism constituted a new mode of experience for the individual which Foucault calls ‘flesh’. It is a mode of knowledge (*connaissance*) and a transformation of oneself by oneself using technologies of the self that manifest the truth of the self and enable two new forms of conducting one’s conduct.

Within the truth procedure of a form of manifestation of the truth of the self, known as *exomologesis*, commonly employed from the second to the fourth century, through this spiritual exercise or technology of the self, the sinner recognises his own sins and would confess privately to offences committed and subsequently perform public and ostentatious penitential acts. The verbal confession however does not constitute an integral or essential part of the practice.⁴⁶¹ It is necessary only prior to the penitential procedure and is outside it. Its role is to define the sin with the characteristics by which it might be assessed with regard to the required penance. The essential manifestations of *exomologesis* do not aim to make the sin itself appear in the form that it was truly committed; their purpose is to make the penitent herself emerge into the light at once truly a sinner and already no longer truly a sinner, as a result of the penitence. *Exomologesis* does not seek to identify the subject’s identity or responsibility. It does not constitute a mode of knowledge(*connaissance*) of oneself or one’s past. It is the

⁴⁵⁹ Michel Foucault, *Confessions of the Flesh; The History of Sexuality Volume 4*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Robert Hurley (London: Penguin Classics, 2021), p. 35.

⁴⁶⁰ Michel Foucault, *Confessions of the Flesh; The History of Sexuality Volume 4*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Robert Hurley (London: Penguin Classics, 2021), p. 35-36.

⁴⁶¹ Michel Foucault, *Confessions of the Flesh; The History of Sexuality Volume 4*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Robert Hurley (London: Penguin Classics, 2021), p. 67.

manifestation of a rupture: a temporal break, a renunciation of the world, and an inversion of life and death. The rites of *exomologesis* ensure that this rupture of identity is produced.⁴⁶²

The modification of this exercise of *exomologesis* to an exercise of *exagoreusis* was mediated through a change in the nature and function of an essential spiritual direction. As has been shown earlier, in the great development of Hellenistic philosophy as spiritual direction, which was mirrored to a great extent the Christian technologies of living of the first two centuries of our era, the examination of conscience plays a major role. Through this examination, the disciple is able to reveal the condition of her soul to the director, so that the latter might be able to render a judgement and determine the appropriate remedy. In Hellenistic philosophy as a way of life, and in early Christian direction, this examination, once the period of direction is over, allows the adept to prolong the effect of direction, to achieve philosophical autonomy, and to conduct the permanent direction of her own soul. However, the practices of direction and examination in Christianity saw, to begin with, a development of new forms and effects only within the institutions of monasticism. This development gave rise to a new technology, one of a more intense, perpetual and purposeful spiritual direction, an art or *tekhne* which Foucault identifies as the art of arts, or *ars artium*.⁴⁶³ It involved the permanent direction of individuals in this worldly life, the management of their souls, the guidance, step by step, of their progress, the exploration of the secret impulses of their hearts, with the final objective of a salvation of the individual in the next life. ‘In all cases the singular relation binding a disciple to master, placing him under the latter’s continuous control, obliging him to comply with the least of his orders and confide his soul to him without any hesitation, is mandatory.’⁴⁶⁴ In Hellenistic philosophy, direction was instrumental and limited in that it had a definite object to attain a certain state or ethos. It was a temporary submission of the adept that would cease as soon as the goal was achieved. This new spiritual direction however consists in an obedience training, understood as a permanent renunciation of one’s own wishes through submission to another’s will. No aspect of life, no moment of existence, must escape the form of obedience. The monk must obey simply in order to attain the state of obedience as a general and permanent structure of existence. Obedience is an unending relationship of the self to the self, that is willing what others will, as subject-to or *subdito*. Obedience is willing an absence of one’s own

⁴⁶² Michel Foucault, *Confessions of the Flesh; The History of Sexuality Volume 4*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Robert Hurley (London: Penguin Classics, 2021), p. 78.

⁴⁶³ Michel Foucault, *Confessions of the Flesh; The History of Sexuality Volume 4*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Robert Hurley (London: Penguin Classics, 2021), p. 87.

⁴⁶⁴ Michel Foucault, *Confessions of the Flesh; The History of Sexuality Volume 4*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Robert Hurley (London: Penguin Classics, 2021), p. 88.

will or *patientia*. Obedience is refraining from willing, renouncing the least of one's desires, or *humilitas*.⁴⁶⁵ In the progression to perfection in this life and salvation in the next, one must first renounce the self.

Compare this to the aim of Hellenistic direction which was essentially to establish the conditions for a sovereign exercise of one's will upon oneself, to desire only that which is attainable by the self. The adept is led to the point where she might conduct herself. To achieve this perfect and exhaustive Christian monastic obedience, technologies of the self, such as constant examination of oneself and perpetual confession to the director, are essential. Man's heteronomy is fundamental, and it is never himself that he should rely on to define the standards of his behaviour. There is a reason for this belief, according to Foucault. Since the fall, monastic rule asserts, that the spirit of evil has established its empire over man. It weakens the soul, sending it suggestions, images, thoughts, whose origin is hard to determine. The Other, Satan, is in a position to disguise the thoughts that come from him, to get them taken for divine inspiration and to conceal the evil they actually carry.⁴⁶⁶ In the very working of thought, the monk can be fooled. The Hellenistic adept could appeal to her reason against the involuntary pressure of her passions, the monk must appeal to a discretion which is an act of discernment and measure which is lacking in the monk, not only owing to the presence of passions, but owing to the power of illusion that perpetually threatens thought. This discretion is granted, according to monastic tradition, by Divine grace but what will teach it to the monk is the combination of observing and opening of the soul, the exercise of examination inseparably combined with confession in a relation of spiritual direction.⁴⁶⁷ Foucault proposes that 'in the general form of obedience and the renunciation of one's will, direction has as its major tool the continuous practice of 'the examination-confession' what is called in Eastern Christianity *exagoreusis*. It has been noted already the existence of the daily and nightly examination of past acts in Hellenistic philosophy as a way of life. The most salient part of *exagoreusis* is that it focusses, not on past acts but on the thoughts that occur. Which may happen to be the memory of an act committed or an act to be carried out.⁴⁶⁸ But thought itself is the object of the examination. It is not a matter of knowing if thought as an idea is correct or not, that is, if one's

⁴⁶⁵ Michel Foucault, *Confessions of the Flesh; The History of Sexuality Volume 4*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Robert Hurley (London: Penguin Classics, 2021), p. 94.

⁴⁶⁶ Michel Foucault, *Confessions of the Flesh; The History of Sexuality Volume 4*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Robert Hurley (London: Penguin Classics, 2021), p. 99.

⁴⁶⁷ Michel Foucault, *Confessions of the Flesh; The History of Sexuality Volume 4*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Robert Hurley (London: Penguin Classics, 2021), p. 100.

⁴⁶⁸ Michel Foucault, *Confessions of the Flesh; The History of Sexuality Volume 4*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Robert Hurley (London: Penguin Classics, 2021), p. 103.

judgement is correct as in Stoic examination. The examination is to seek out the source of the idea. By carefully examining thought, by deciding between those thoughts that that should be welcomed and those that should be rejected, the obedient and well-directed monk does not consider the content of the thought but the action of the thought within the thinker. The examination is a questioning of the relationship between the thought and the subject. The question asked in *exagoreusis* is who is thinking the thought. Stoic examination asks whether the thought of the individual is in fact correct or reasonable in its relationship with the object of thought. *Exagoreusis* asks whether the thinker of the thought, Satan, is deceiving the subject. As the result of the examination is a thought or an idea, a paradox arises. How can one be sure that the thought following examination is not an illusion derived and constituted by Satan. It is here that the necessity of confession is established.⁴⁶⁹

Confession clears away illusions, ruses, and deceptions. Verbalisation verifies. The spiritual director to whom one confesses can see what eludes the subject herself. Foucault, citing Cassian who attributes the effect of elimination and purification to the simple act of verbalisation, discovers that deliverance is not directly due to the words of the spiritual director but to the words of the sinner who confesses. In a strict sense, the confession that brings evil spirits to light causes it to vacate the premises.^{470 471} So, in the very form of confession, in the fact that the secret is formulated in words and these words are addressed to another, there is a specific power to expel and to free. The truth confessed is something that is not yet known by the subject. It is not an admission of something known and repressed. It is not a taking of responsibility for a state or act. It is a matter of exposing as truth something that is not yet known to anyone. *Exagoreusis* is not intended to establish oneself in one's own sovereignty. It is not intended to enable one to identify oneself. We have noted that in the technology of trans-subjectivation known as *exagoreusis*, an individual's search for the truth about herself must constitute a certain way of dying to herself. The other technology of subjectivation discussed, *exomologesis*, also involves highlighting a set of discontinuities, a break with one's former life, an estrangement from the community, a break with one's own body in ascesis in a clash

⁴⁶⁹ Michel Foucault, *Confessions of the Flesh; The History of Sexuality Volume 4*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Robert Hurley (London: Penguin Classics, 2021), p. 105.

⁴⁷⁰ Michel Foucault, *Confessions of the Flesh; The History of Sexuality Volume 4*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Robert Hurley (London: Penguin Classics, 2021), p. 107.

⁴⁷¹ Compare this to the early treatment of madness referred to in this thesis' chapter on technology citing Foucault's Dartmouth College lectures. Here Foucault suggests that he would wish, rather, to take it as a point of departure for a more general reflection on this practice of confession, and on the postulate, which is generally accepted in Western societies, that one needs for his own salvation to know as exactly as possible who he is and also, which is something rather different, that he needs to tell it as explicitly as possible to some other people.

between life and death in this world. In exomologesis, it is not the wrongs committed that are made manifest in detail but the very body of the individual in a form of alethurgy. This exomologesis is a long-term remoulding of her life as an art that is learned and practiced and involves a self-renunciation. The manifestation peculiar to exagoreusis is expressed through language; it involves a mandatory discourse, frequent and as thorough as possible, address to a spiritual director. It involves the task of verbalising the truth as a result of acts of knowledge (*connaissance*) which in the depths of oneself light up the unperceived and reveals the presence of Satan. Exagoreusis, then, is not carried out in order to know what one is at one's core. It is not carried out in order to extract the authentic subject. It is carried out in order that the adept might abandon all illusory personal will in favour of God's will and the lessons of the spiritual director. It is not a process of restoration of oneself. It is not carried out to ensure the emancipation of the subject. 'On the contrary, it is a definitive relinquishment of any will of one's own, a way not to be oneself, or attached to oneself by any tie. A paradox essential to these practices of Christian spirituality: the veridiction of oneself is fundamentally bound together with self-renunciation. The endless effort to see and tell the truth about oneself is an exercise in self-mortification.'⁴⁷²

To conclude what is effectively a historical codex of exercises, it is interesting to note the response given to a question asked by Michael Chase.⁴⁷³ He asked; 'Are spiritual exercises still possible today? They were thought up in the very distant past, as responses to specific social structures and material conditions, but our current living conditions bear very little resemblance to those of antiquity. Is it still possible to practice the spiritual exercises of antiquity, separating them from the systems of which they were a part, and substituting our own basic hypotheses for the outmoded ones of antiquity?'⁴⁷⁴ Hadot answered as follows: To reply to your question, I refer you to the beginning of the chapter entitled "Spiritual exercises," where I quote Georges Friedmann in his book *La Puissance et La Sagesse*: "A 'spiritual exercise' every day - either alone or else in the company of someone who also wants to improve himself Step out of duration ... try to get rid of your own passions." I think this testimony suffices to prove that spiritual exercises are still being practiced in our day and age. Spiritual exercises do not correspond to specific social structures or material conditions. They have been,

⁴⁷² Michel Foucault, *Confessions of the Flesh; The History of Sexuality Volume 4*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Robert Hurley (London: Penguin Classics, 2021), p. 110.

⁴⁷³ Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a way of life: Spiritual exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. by Arnold Davidson trans. by Michael Chase, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), p. 282.

⁴⁷⁴ Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a way of life: Spiritual exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. by Arnold Davidson trans. by Michael Chase, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), p. 282.

and continue to be, practiced in every age, in the most widely diverse milieus, and in widely different latitudes: China, Japan, India; among the Christians, Muslims, and Jews. If one admits, as I do, that the various philosophical schools of antiquity were characterized above all by their choice of a form of life, which is then justified after the fact by a given systematic construction (for instance, Stoicism is the choice of an attitude of coherence with oneself, which is later justified by a general theory of the coherence of the universe with itself) then it is easy to understand how one can remain faithful to one's choice of a form of life without being obliged to adhere to the systematic construction which claims to found it.⁴⁷⁵

⁴⁷⁵ Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a way of life: Spiritual exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. by Arnold Davidson trans. by Michael Chase, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), p. 282.

Hellenistic conversion and salvation

It must have seemed strange to modern commentators to witness Foucault discuss ancient conceptions of conversion of the soul with reference to subject formation and ethics. There is however a good reason to understand why such a discussion is warranted. Foucault suggests that the notion of conversion, of the return to the self, of the turning around towards oneself, is certainly one of the most important technologies of the self the West has known, referring in particular its importance in Christianity.⁴⁷⁶ He suggests that at the same time, the notion of conversion is also an important philosophical notion that played an important role in practical philosophy. The notion of conversion is also crucially important in connection with morality.⁴⁷⁷

Hadot suggests that the idea of conversion represents one of the constitutive notions of Western consciousness and conscience: in effect, one can represent the whole history of the Western tradition as a ceaseless effort at renewal of the self by perfecting the techniques of conversion, which is to say the techniques intended to transform human reality, immanent or metaphysical. Foucault suggests that the notion of conversion is an important philosophical concept that played a decisive role in all cultures and throughout history in religious systems of thought and in secular practical philosophies. While in a Western history of thought, the notion of conversion is gauged as important mainly in connection with Christian religion, in its secular conceptions in the history of Stoic philosophy as a way of life and the more recent history of revolutionary subjectivity and the like, conversion is an important notion of return to self that must also be appreciated.⁴⁷⁸ Conversion as a secular and a philosophical concept has been as important in the history of Western thought as a religious conversion.

This chapter will examine the ancient concepts of conversion and will demonstrate how the strategies and technologies of conversion are also closely linked to Foucault's theorisation of trans-subjectivation and self-subjectivation and will note that the transformation of the subject from a constituted form of Cartesian Cogito to a new constituted form of subject, is

⁴⁷⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 208.

⁴⁷⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 208.

⁴⁷⁸ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 208.

considered as an equivalent to a conversion and a salvation of subjectivity within a modern philosophical crisis.

In Antiquity, Hadot suggests, the phenomenon of conversion appeared less in the religious realm than in the political and philosophical domain.⁴⁷⁹ It is in the political domain initially that the ancient Greeks describe the experience of conversion. The practice of judicial and political debate in a democracy revealed to them the possibility of “changing the soul” of the adversary through the skilful handling of language, through the use of methods of persuasion. The techniques of rhetoric, the art of persuasion, were constituted and codified little by little. So, they discovered the political power of ideas, the value of “ideology,” to use a modern expression. Just as technologies of living in pre-Socratic thought were aimed at the survival of the city state and of others, pre-Socratic conversion was aimed at how a life might be transformed for the good of the city, as opposed to how an individual, herself, might be transformed; the notion of care of the self had not yet achieved prominence and the necessity to transform or convert the self for the salvation of the self, had not yet become a priority.

With the prioritisation of *epimeleia heautou* in Hellenistic philosophy, the notion of conversion refers to the recurring theme of spirituality that the self/subject, as it is, cannot have access to the truth of itself. To gain access to truth, the subject must be transformed or converted. Following the Cartesian moment in Platonic metaphysics, philosophy determines that a direct access to the truth is possible to forms of soul, to forms of empirical subject, whether it is a reasoning entity or an empiric entity. This is the foundation for Cartesian access to truth. Consequently, there is no need for conversion of the subject in order to have access to truth and truth of itself. The thesis has shown that spirituality postulates that in and of itself an act of knowledge (*connaissance*) which philosophy proposes, could never give access to the truth unless it was completed by a transformation of the subject, in his being as subject.⁴⁸⁰ Spirituality when providing the technology to achieve access to the truth of the self, postulates that the truth is never given to the Cartesian subject by right. This subject has access to a domain of a knowledge (*connaissance*) which is not an access to the truth. Truth is not given to the subject by a simple act of knowledge (*connaissance*), which would be founded and justified simply by the fact that he is subject.⁴⁸¹ Foucault asks how there can be a truth of this subject,

⁴⁷⁹ Pierre Hadot, 'Conversion', trans. by Andrew Irvine, *Encyclopedia Universalis*, 4 (1968), 979-981

⁴⁸⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 16.

⁴⁸¹ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 15.

when there can only be a truth for the subject?⁴⁸² Spirituality requires that, in all cases, the individual must carry out necessary transformations on herself, in an elaboration of the self by the self, by means of spiritual exercises of *melete* and by *askesis* in particular, in order to have access, not to a knowledge (*connaissance*) of the domain of objects but to the domain of a spiritual knowledge and truth. This lengthy and difficult work on the self is the price paid for access to spiritual truth following spiritual awakening. It follows from this point of view that there can be no truth without a conversion and a transformation of the (Cartesian) subject.⁴⁸³

Foucault tells of Seneca's suggestion that to convert to the self is to turn around towards oneself. However, for any individual to have a relationship of the self to the self, to think about the self, to turn critical activity on the self, according to Foucault, is not a matter of constituting knowledge of the human being, of the soul, or of interiority, alongside, in opposition to, or against knowledge of the world.⁴⁸⁴ Yes, one turns one's conscious gaze from others and the world, but one does not open up the self as an object of analysis, exegesis, decipherment, and reflection. One does not become a field of knowledge (*connaissance*) for oneself.⁴⁸⁵ One does not substitute oneself for the other as the object of a possible or necessary knowledge. The subject cannot be the subject and object of knowledge of itself. It is not in any way a matter of constituting knowledge of the human being, of the soul, or of interiority alongside, in opposition to, or against knowledge of the world.⁴⁸⁶ Through exercises, practice and training in the form of ascesis rather than a submission to knowledge (*connaissance*) as a discourse of truth, conversion of the self is achieved as a subject of a spiritual knowledge. The object of exercises is not to change the object and content of knowledge (*connaissance*) but to become the subject of a new knowledge. It is a real movement of subjectivity. One turns one's conscious gaze from others and the world; one does not open up the self as an object of analysis, decipherment, and reflection. One does not become a field of knowledge (*connaissance*). Instead, one is looking at one's aim; what one must do to achieve the aim, and the possibility

⁴⁸² Michel Foucault, *Subjectivity and Truth: Lectures at the Collège de France 1980-1981*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 10.

⁴⁸³ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 15.

⁴⁸⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 308.

⁴⁸⁵ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 222.

⁴⁸⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 308.

of achieving the aim. One is aware of the effort, the practice and not the subject. One acts, one practices, but one does not take oneself as the object of knowledge. All attention is concentrated on the trajectory from self to self.

Foucault relates these technologies of conversion and transformation directly to his technologies of subjectivation and the deployment of a truth of the self. As conversion is a technology of the self, it is the individual who must voluntarily convert themselves, even if the process of conversion is mediated by a spiritual director. He suggests that self-subjectivation as a technology of the self was invented by the Greeks as a secular form of conversion to the self, of looking to the self by the self, of turning to the self, whereas early Christian conceptions of conversion of the self to a form determined by discourses claiming truth provided the foundations for processes of trans-subjectivation that have been so influential in Western thought.⁴⁸⁷ Foucault's theorisation of self-subjectivation suggests that 'it is the deployment of spiritual knowledge, that Foucault designated subjectivation of true discourse, which enables us to become subjects of this true discourse, which enables us to become the subject who tells the truth, and who is transfigured by this enunciation of the truth.'⁴⁸⁸ Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg suggest that 'perhaps the newness of the concept and the term, as well as the lack of time to refine its use, led Foucault to designate as subjectivation, both the modalities through which the subject acted upon itself, and the specific modality through which the enunciation of truth arose from the subject's own freedom and not from the relationship with an unquestioned authority, as in Christian monasticism.'⁴⁸⁹ The sharp contrast between these two modalities through which the subject relates to itself has profound implications for the trajectory of the West.⁴⁹⁰ Conversion designates both a transformation of the subject in a long process of spiritual work from one form of subject to another, and also a renunciation of the self in a sudden and complete break with an original ontology. Conversion, as an ancient concept, mirrors both of these processes of subjectivation where self-subjectivation involves a long exercise of the self on the self to transform subjectivity and trans-subjectivation requires a

⁴⁸⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 173.

⁴⁸⁸ Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg, 'The Aesthetic and Ascetic dimensions of an ethics of self-fashioning: Nietzsche and Foucault', *Parrhesia*, 2 (2007), 44-65 (p.56).

⁴⁸⁹ Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg, 'The Aesthetic and Ascetic dimensions of an ethics of self-fashioning: Nietzsche and Foucault', *Parrhesia*, 2 (2007), 44-65 (p. 56).

⁴⁹⁰ Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg, 'The Aesthetic and Ascetic dimensions of an ethics of self-fashioning: Nietzsche and Foucault', *Parrhesia*, 2 (2007), 44-65 (p.56).

voluntary submission to knowledge (*connaissance*) in a leap of faith or a sudden voluntary acceptance of knowledge (*connaissance*) as a discourse of truth.

The technology of conversion

Foucault opines that in the Hellenistic era, all philosophy as spirituality was essentially conversion, which is to say a return to the self, through a violent tearing oneself away from the alienation of unconsciousness. In Hellenistic philosophy as a way of life, a Hellenistic notion of conversion from an inauthentic or immature state to the free self, to a self that is free, enables an individual to move attention from all which does not depend on one to all which does depend on one. In Stoic, Epicurean, and Neoplatonic schools, the function of the necessary spiritual director was to convert individuals by guiding their spiritual exercise in their everyday life. Philosophy as a way of life became essentially an act of conversion. This conversion is an event provoked in the soul by the words of the spiritual director. Foucault identifies three notions of conversion that are of particular interest to him in his examination of the relationship of forms of subject to truth and in particular to a notion of renunciation of the self as an essential part of conversion. Platonic *epistrophe*, Hellenistic conversion, and Christian *metanoia*.

Hadot informs us that the Latin word *conversio* corresponds to two Greek words with different meanings, on one hand, *epistrophe*, which signifies change of orientation and on the other hand *metanoia*, which signifies change of mind, repentance.⁴⁹¹ Hadot identifies three modes of conversion. One converts the subject either by bringing it back to its original essence (conversion-return), or by radically modifying it (conversion-mutation). He also suggests that conversion by fidelity-rupture has strongly marked Western consciousness and conscience since the appearance of Christianity.⁴⁹² In this mode of conversion, belief in a Christian narrative and dogma and the obligations of that belief demand of the followers, requires a rupture or a complete break between one form of subject and another. It is not a matter of transformation. It is the constitution of a new and completely different form of subject of knowledge (*connaissance*) as a radical change of thought and consciousness regarding knowledge and the notion of the truth.

⁴⁹¹ Pierre Hadot, 'Conversion', trans. by Andrew Irvine, *Encyclopedia Universalis*, 4 (1968). 979-981

⁴⁹² Pierre Hadot, 'Conversion', trans. by Andrew Irvine, *Encyclopedia Universalis*, 4 (1968). 979-981

For both Foucault and Hadot, Platonic *epistrophe* or turning towards the self is a process of recollection of the divine state by the soul, opposing the knowledge (*connaissance*) of the immanent world to the knowledge (*connaissance*) of the other world, in the form of a recollection of the other world as a more original state. This form of return would refer to Hadot's notion of conversion-return. Knowledge or the truth of the immanent world might only be considered as illusion soon to be replaced by remembering the forgotten objective truth of the Ideal. Conversion is enabled by a technology of remembering by a renunciation of the corporeal self and the world in which it lives. In Platonic conceptions of *epistrophe*, the philosopher is himself converted because he knew to turn his gaze away from the shadows of the sensible world and turn it towards the light which emanates from the idea of the Good. Every soul has the possibility of seeing this light of the Good. But the un-awakened soul's gaze is badly oriented and the key to education consists in turning this gaze in the right direction. One must turn away from everything that is not part of oneself, everything around one, that might grab one's attention, one's diligence, or that might arouse one's zeal. One's attention, eyes, mind, and finally one's whole being must be turned towards the self throughout one's life.⁴⁹³ Wisdom, consists, rather of never letting oneself be induced to make involuntary movements at the behest of or through the instigation of an external impulse.⁴⁹⁴ Only then might a total transformation of the soul follow.

Classical Hellenistic conversion, again according to both Foucault and Hadot, was the attempt for the self to strive for the status of subject as she has never known at any moment in her life. She has to replace the non-subject with the status of subject defined by the fullness of the self's relationship with self. She has to constitute herself as subject.⁴⁹⁵ Consequently, Foucault suggests, the subject should not strive for a form of knowledge (*connaissance*) to replace her ignorance. It is not just the transmission of knowledge (*connaissance*) capable of replacing ignorance. It is a protreptic education, a transmission of spiritual knowledge, that can turn the mind in the right direction. Only then will the self arrive at tranquillity or inner freedom, in a word, beatitude. Hellenistic conversion does not complete in the break from the body in the form of a renunciation of the self, but in the relationship to the immanent self. It is

⁴⁹³ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 206.

⁴⁹⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 207.

⁴⁹⁵ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 129.

a conversion-mutation in Hadot's categorisation. Hellenistic conversion is the establishment of a complete, perfect, and adequate relationship of self to self.⁴⁹⁶

Religious conversion, however, in early Christian culture, is characterised as *metanoia*, as a radical change of thought and mind regarding knowledge and the notion of the truth. This form of conversion will correspond to Hadot's fidelity-rupture. Religious *metanoia* reveals a radical and totalizing aspect taking the form of an absolute and exclusive faith in the word and in the salvific will of God. Christian transformation is provoked by faith in the reign of God announced by Christ, that is, in the eruption of divine power which manifests itself by miracles and the fulfilment of prophecies. These divine signs will be the first apologetic arguments, the first causes of *metanoia*. The Christian message of rupture and renunciation clearly appears in the writings of Clement of Alexandria. Commenting on the Gospel saying: "Who loses his life finds it," Clement writes: "To find his life, this is to know oneself. This conversion to divine things, the Stoics say, takes place by an abrupt change, the soul transforming itself into wisdom; as for Plato, he says that it is accomplished by the turning of the soul towards the best and that this very conversion turns it away from darkness."⁴⁹⁷

It is with conversion as trans-subjectivation, Foucault contends, with a voluntary rupture in the self rather than for the self, the breach in identity for the individual, that the problems of subjectivity and truth were originally formed for analytic philosophy and continued unabated through the centuries for Western philosophy. If conversion takes the form of a break, a caesura, within the self, as a result of the submission of subjectivity to knowledge (*connaissance*), then Foucault opines that a Christian *metanoia* can be called a sort of trans-subjectivation.⁴⁹⁸ Conversion is understood in a fundamental relationship of power, a submission of the self to truth in the forms of knowledge (*connaissance*), that is, text and revelation and the hermeneutic method of avowal for self-knowledge (*savoir*) as the truth of the self. Foucault identifies Christian *metanoia* or conversion of the self as a voluntary rupture, break or a change within the self in the form of a renunciation of the self and a sudden and dramatic change of the subject's being.⁴⁹⁹ Trans-subjectivation of knowledge (*connaissance*)

⁴⁹⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 210.

⁴⁹⁷ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata IV*, vi, 27, 3).

⁴⁹⁸ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 214.

⁴⁹⁹ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 217.

involves a sudden change in knowledge (*savoir*) through a deployment of truth as in exegesis and self-examination which drastically transfigures the subject's mode of being at a single stroke.⁵⁰⁰ There is a transition from one type of ontological being to another and there can only be conversion inasmuch as a break takes place in the very being of the individual. A fundamental element of Christian conversion is renunciation of the self, dying to oneself, and being reborn in a different self and a new form which, as it were, no longer has anything to do with the earlier self in its being, its mode of being, in its habits or its *ethos*.⁵⁰¹

Salvation

Foucault insists that he would want to emphasise that whatever the origin of the notion of salvation, and whatever reinforcement it may have received from the religious theme, in the Hellenistic and Roman period it is not a notion that is heterogeneous to philosophy. Indeed, salvation developed and appeared as an objective of philosophical practice and of the philosophical life.⁵⁰² For example, spirituality postulates that once access to truth has really been opened up, it produces effects that are the consequence of the spiritual approach taken in order to achieve this. Foucault calls these effects rebound effects.⁵⁰³ The truth enlightens the subject, the truth gives beatitude to the subject, the truth gives the subject tranquillity. The truth can transfigure and saves the subject. The modern age of the relationship between the subject and truth is defined as the age of transformation of knowledge (*connaissance*) into a form of truth, truth which has no rebound effects on the subject.⁵⁰⁴ The modern age of the relations between the subject and the truth begins when it is postulated that, such as he is, the subject is capable of truth but that, such as it is, the truth cannot save the subject.⁵⁰⁵

Epimeleia heautou, within which one can see the full extent and function of the care of oneself as a technology of conversion, was constituted and centred round the notion of a

⁵⁰⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 211.

⁵⁰¹ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 211.

⁵⁰² Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 182.

⁵⁰³ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 16.

⁵⁰⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 19.

⁵⁰⁵ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 19.

movement towards salvation of the self, a movement that requires a change, a transformation of the individual's relationship to herself, her truth, and her *bios*. An important element in this culture of the self is the notion of salvation: salvation of the self and salvation of others.⁵⁰⁶ The pre-Cartesian Hellenistic understanding of a philosophy as a way of life or an individual ethic, whose aim is salvation, must be examined and understood without a reference to the immanent world. In Hellenistic philosophy, salvation does not refer to any kind of after life or divine judgement. Hellenistic philosophies, such as Cynicism, Epicureanism and Stoicism, placed salvation of the self at the centre of the art of living aimed at turning to oneself, of transforming the self in conversion and returning to the truth of oneself as a salvation of the self.⁵⁰⁷ Salvation is an activity, the individual's constant activity on oneself, which finds its reward in certain relationship of the self to self when one has become inaccessible to external disorders and finds a satisfaction in oneself, needing nothing but oneself. Someone is saved when she is suitably armed and equipped to be able to defend herself effectively if necessary. The person saved is a person in a state of alert, in a state of resistance, and of mastery and sovereignty over the self.⁵⁰⁸ Salvation means escaping domination or enslavement; escaping a restraint that threatens one and being restores to one's rights, finding one's freedom and independence again. It means that nothing can change, whatever events occur around the self; there is no reference to anything like death, immortality, or another world in the notion of salvation found in Hellenistic texts. It is not with reference to a dramatic event or to the action of a different agency that you are saved, saving yourself is an activity that takes place throughout life and that is executed solely by the subject himself. The aim, the end of this salvation is to render you inaccessible to misfortune, disorders, and all that external accidents and events may produce in the soul. When the end has been attained, you need nothing and no one but yourself.⁵⁰⁹

Saving oneself is an activity that takes place throughout life and that is executed solely by the subject herself. The two great themes of ataraxy (the absence of inner turmoil, the self-control that nothing disturbs one) and Autarchy (the self-sufficiency that ensures that one needs nothing but the self) are the two forms in which salvation carries on throughout life. One saves

⁵⁰⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 180.

⁵⁰⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self: The History of Sexuality:3* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 45.

⁵⁰⁸ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 181.

⁵⁰⁹ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 184.

oneself for the self, one is saved by the self, one saves oneself in order to arrive at nothing other than the self. There is no reward in an other world. The self is the agent, object, instrument, and end of salvation.⁵¹⁰ Salvation ensures an access to the self that is inseparable from the work that one carries out on oneself within the time of one's life and in life itself.⁵¹¹

With this work on conversion and salvation, the thesis completes the examination of the historical technologies that Foucault identifies as essential for a return of a form of a Greek morality that had been dominated by Christian and modern moralities whose emphasis lay in code and rule of conduct rather than ethical subjectivation. The return of morality might even be understood as the means by which the subject could bring about her own salvation. The thesis will suggest at this stage that the technologies assessed in the examination do indeed provide a coherent methodology and a credible pathway to develop a new style of living, a new mortality for today, a resistance to pastoral power, and surprisingly for Foucault scholarship, a restoration of subjectivity, albeit it an ethical subjectivity as defined by Foucault as opposed to a Cartesian or Kantian subject, to a centre stage in a modern philosophy. The following chapters will return to the present and examine the use of technology in a morality for today, technologies whose ends and objectives have been restored almost exactly to the Hellenistic versions. The thesis will examine whether this return, this restoration, of technology is warranted given that its aim is to resist pastoral power of the disciplines, the same pastoral power that originated in Christian totalising and individualising practices that had already dominated Hellenistic philosophy as a way of life in Antiquity.

⁵¹⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 185.

⁵¹¹ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 185.

The return of a Greek unified morality for the present day

Foucault suggests that in a Greek morality, individuals are not required 'to behave in such a way as to be truthful to their wives, to not touch boys, and so on. But if they want to have a beautiful existence, if they want to have a good reputation, if they want to be able to rule others, they have to do this. So, they accept those obligations in a conscious way for the beauty or glory of existence.'⁵¹² In his historical ontology of the subject, Foucault cannot avoid raising the question of why sexual conduct became an object of moral solicitude in Greece. Why this ethical concern? On a general enquiry, one might ask why any human experience might become an object of moral solicitude. He suggests that this was a proper task of a history of thought: to define the conditions in which human beings problematise what they are, what they do, and the world in which they live.⁵¹³ To answer this question, Foucault suggests that in the history of an ancient sexual ethic, he was led to substitute a history of ethical problematisations based on practices of the self, for a history of systems of morality based, hypothetically on indictments.⁵¹⁴ Whereas in modernity there was the problematisation of madness and illness arising out of social and medical practices and defining certain practices of normalisation; and a problematisation of crime and criminal behaviour emerging from certain punitive practices conforming to a disciplinary model, Foucault suggests that he would like to show how, in classical antiquity, sexual activity and sexual pleasures were problematised through the practices of the self.⁵¹⁵ The original problematisation of sexuality and experience, he noted, was linked, in Greek and Greco-Roman culture, to the aesthetics of existence; 'those intentional and voluntary actions by which men not only set themselves rules of conduct, but seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and make their lives into an oeuvre that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria.'⁵¹⁶ Sexual activity was problematised not for the acts themselves but the way that relationships fitted into an overall way of life

Foucault insists on the importance of individual conduct: it is one thing for individuals to have rights protected by code and rules of behaviours, but what really matters are individual attitudes and the attitudes of others and whether or not the code is respected. Foucault

⁵¹² Michel Foucault, 'On the genealogy of ethics', in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp. 253-280 (p. 266).

⁵¹³ Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure, The History of Sexuality:2* (London: Penguin books, 1992), p. 10.

⁵¹⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure, The History of Sexuality:2* (London: Penguin books, 1992), p. 13.

⁵¹⁵ Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure, The History of Sexuality:2* (London: Penguin books, 1992), p. 12.

⁵¹⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure, The History of Sexuality:2* (London: Penguin books, 1992), p. 10-11.

understands that at some point during the modern period an ethic of caring of oneself ceased to be regarded as a viable conception of morality and subjectivity. Modern political thought is by no means the sole culprit in marginalizing this *epimeleia heautou* and a Greek form of morality derived from it. Foucault is clear that parallel developments in modern philosophy and theology also work to deprioritise a Greek morality. A tradition that had organised the moral and spiritual imagination of a thousand years vanished from the mainstream. Foucault implies that modern political thought is not only inhospitable to a morality based on the care of the self, but that it actively opposes itself to it. Foucault opines that ‘it seems to me that contemporary political thought allows very little room for the question of the ethical subject.’⁵¹⁷ A modern morality is no longer a question of how the subject constitutes itself in relation to a code, as it was for the ancients. It becomes a matter of how the self is constituted by and through the prescriptions of a code. The movement from a morality of antiquity to modernity is a movement from a morality that was essentially the search for a personal ethics to a morality as obedience to a system of rules. When the constitution of the subject is accomplished through the prescriptions of a code, modernity effectively jettisons ethics as a unique dimension of morality and moral experience. Ethics loses its place and standing as a distinctive component of morality.

What opposes Hellenistic philosophy as a way of life, a Greek morality, to this modern morality, is not a difference of tolerance and austerity. It is an opposition of forms of austerity, one linked to an aesthetics of existence as a technology of the self, and the second to a different technology of the self that consists of the necessity to decipher the truth of the self and to simultaneously renounce the self. Both technologies are different processes of subjectivation and yet establish similar forms of behaviours. In one, the individual objectifies herself as a form of subordination and is obliged to follow an imposed code and in the other the individual will impose her own code on herself.

In this chapter, the thesis proposes that Foucault’s ambition for a return of a Greek unified morality is to establish a possible form of unique self-government in all and every life experience, by a spiritual truth for all individuals, and especially when faced with a multitude of modern institutions of pastoral power, such as those attached to the totalising disciplines of pedagogy, psychiatry, medicine, and penology, that attempt to govern both the individual’s

⁵¹⁷ Michel Foucault. “The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom.” In *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*. Edited by Paul Rabinow. New York: The New Press, 1997, pp. 281–302.

identity and conduct.⁵¹⁸ In this morality, Foucault opines that ‘an action is not only moral in itself, in its singularity; it is also moral in its circumstantial integration and by virtue of the place it occupies in a pattern of conduct.’⁵¹⁹ He adds; ‘a moral action tends towards its own accomplishment; but it aims beyond the latter, to the establishing of a moral conduct that commits the individual, not only to other actions always in conformity with values and rules, but to a certain mode of being, a mode of being characteristic of the ethical subject.’⁵²⁰ This is what defines a unified morality. Morality is, for Foucault, no longer a commitment to a moral code to which the individual will comply. Morality is centred around, founded by, and acted on by the individual as an ethical subject with a unique and self-constituted moral attitude to all her experiences in the world. All her actions are guided by this moral attitude which could be, for example, an attitude of temperance, freedom, criticism of and resistance to power, or a criticism of ideology.

Rejecting the Cartesian Cogito and Kant’s transcendental subject which mark the current presentation of a modern judicial morality and instead taking as a starting point, for the present day, one aspect of Kant’s philosophy that might be called an ontology of the present, of present reality, an ontology of modernity, and, secondly, the spiritual self-experiments performed by Descartes prior to his leap of faith, Foucault explores the prospect of extricating oneself from a self-incurred tutelage, one’s present mode of subjectivity, through which one will exist under the authority of others, an authority imposed through a pernicious pastoral power. Foucault opines that ‘pastoral power gave rise to an art of conducting, directing, leading, guiding, taking in hand, and manipulating men, an art of monitoring them and urging them on step by step, an art with the function of taking charge of men collectively and individually throughout their life and at every moment of their existence.’⁵²¹ Foucault opines that pastoral power ‘is a prelude to governmentality through the constitution of a specific subject, of a subject whose merits are analytically identified, who is subjected in continuous networks of obedience, and who is subjectified through the compulsory extraction of truth.

⁵¹⁸ Michel Foucault, *Confessions of the Flesh; The History of Sexuality Volume 4*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Robert Hurley (London: Penguin Classics, 2021), p. 310.

⁵¹⁹ Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality:2* (London: Penguin books, 1992), p. 28.

⁵²⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality:2* (London: Penguin books, 1992), p. 28.

⁵²¹ Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College de France 1977-1978*, ed. by Michael Senellart trans. by Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 222.

Well, I think this typical constitution of the modern Western subject makes the pastorate one of the decisive moments in the history of power in Western societies.⁵²²

It is clear that when Foucault uses the term “ethics” he does not mean something interchangeable with “morality,” as we often do in a modern interpretation. His concept of ethics does not refer to what that word designates in Anglo-American philosophy, namely the metaphysical and epistemological examination of ethical concepts (metaethics) or the investigation of the criteria for evaluating actions (normative ethics). For Foucault, rather, ethics designates the relation the self establishes with itself through a moral code, and, more specifically, the work the individual undertakes on herself in order to achieve a form of self-subjectivation, that is, to become an ethical subject of that code. Ethics for Foucault, is redefined as the work, enabled by technologies of the self-subjectivation, an individual must carry out on herself to transform herself and to constitute a new ethical subjectivity in a relationship of the self to the self. No longer is the subject identified by herself and others as that which is formed by a trans-subjectivation, an objectification of self, enabled by technologies of the self that are attached to the institutions of disciplinary power. An individual will not confess, in an objectification of herself, to being a criminal, to being mad, to being sexually deviant, or to being such and such a patient. Foucault thought of ethics proper, of the self’s relationship to itself, as ‘having four main aspects: the ethical substance, that part of oneself that is taken to be the relevant domain for ethical judgment; the mode of subjection, the way in which the individual establishes his or her relation to moral obligations and rules; the self-forming activity or ethical work that one performs on oneself in order to transform oneself into an ethical subject; and, finally, the telos, the mode of being at which one aims in behaving ethically.’⁵²³

Morality, for Foucault, comprises two elements, codes of behaviour and modes of subjectivation. For any action to be moral it must not be reducible to an act or a series of acts conforming to a rule or code. It must involve a relationship of self to self and the formation of an ethical subject.⁵²⁴ Every morality then, in the broad sense, comprises of two main elements

⁵²² Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977-1978*, ed. by Michael Senellart trans. by Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 240.

⁵²³ Arnold Davidson, 'Ethics as ascetics: Foucault, the history of ethics, and ancient thought' in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, ed. by G. Gutting (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 115-140 (p. 126).

⁵²⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality:2* (London: Penguin books, 1992), p. 28.

that pre-exist moral action, codes of behaviour and modes of subjectivation.⁵²⁵ While they can never be dissociated, they can develop a certain independence from each other. In certain modalities, the main emphasis is placed on the code and in others it is placed on forms of subjectivation. Foucault explains that ‘there is no moral action that does not refer to a unified moral conduct; no moral conduct that does not call for the forming of oneself as an ethical subject: and no forming of the ethical subject without modes of subjectivation and the aesthetics or practices of the self that support them.’⁵²⁶ Foucault also opines, that ‘for an action to be truly moral, it must not be reducible to an act or a series of acts conforming to a rule, a law, or a value. There must some element of ethical subjectivation, that is, the process in which the individual, through technologies of the self, ‘delimits that part of himself that will form the object of his moral practice; defines his position relative to the precept he will follow; and decides on a certain mode of being that will serve as his moral goal.’⁵²⁷ Foucault thought of this technology of the self, this ethics or work on the self, as having four main aspects. First, selecting that part of the self, the ethical substance, that is to be the relevant domain for ethical judgement, for example desires and passions. Second, the formation for oneself of rules and mode of conduct that one will apply to the self which constitutes a style of living, which he calls the mode of subjection. Third, the performance of a work on the self which will allow the individual to know herself, to monitor herself, to test and improve herself, and to transform herself and finally, a decision on the mode of being such as freedom that will serve as a goal or *telos* for the individual.⁵²⁸ In this understanding of morality, any particular action, is not only moral in itself, in its singularity; it is also moral by virtue of the place it occupies in a pattern of conduct; it is moral by virtue of the place it occupies in a pattern of conduct that commits the individual to a certain mode of being.⁵²⁹ Moral action is indissociable from these forms of self-activity, and they do not differ any less from one morality to another.⁵³⁰

This morality will include the imposition of a code or rule that the individual would constitute for herself and impose on herself. In developing the processes such that a moral action could no longer be defined as one that complies to an external rule, or a code of

⁵²⁵ Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality:2* (London: Penguin books, 1992), p. 29.

⁵²⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality:2* (London: Penguin books, 1992), p. 28.

⁵²⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality:2* (London: Penguin books, 1992), p. 28.

⁵²⁸ Arnold J Davidson, Spiritual exercises and Ancient philosophy: an Introduction to Pierre Hadot, in *Critical Inquiry*, 16 (1990), 475-482 (p. 481).

⁵²⁹ Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality:2* (London: Penguin books, 1992), p. 27-28.

⁵³⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality:2* (London: Penguin books, 1992), p. 27.

behaviour determined by external influences, Foucault's intention was to restore for the present the processes enabling a form of self-government that existed in the Hellenistic era but that disappeared somewhat in the Imperial age and completely by the fifth century A.D. with the introduction of pastoral power. For Foucault, this true morality must include a unified moral governance, that is a governance not just related to, for example, a sexual morality but one that relates to all human experience. He will call this form of morality a Greek morality. Morality for Foucault is the deliberate practice of freedom. Freedom is the ontological condition of ethics, but the ethical subject is the deliberate form assumed by freedom.⁵³¹

The thesis contends that this return to forms of self-government is an intensely personal ambition for Foucault that might be understood almost as his legacy. As the thesis has pointed out previously, Foucault insists that 'the search for a form of morality acceptable to everyone in the sense that everyone should submit to it, strikes me as catastrophic.'⁵³² Foucault explains that 'even if we are hardened, there are means by which we can recover, correct ourselves, and become again what we should have been but never were. To become again what we never were, is, I think, one of the most fundamental elements, one of the most fundamental themes of this practice of the self.'⁵³³

Greek morality

Foucault insists that a Greek tradition is that one moral tradition that is centred on the exhortation to care for the self or self-subjection. 'What we have there,' he suggests, 'is an entire ethics that pivoted on the care of the self and that gave ancient ethics its particular form. I am not saying that ethics is the care of the self, but that, in antiquity, ethics as the conscious practice of freedom has revolved around this fundamental imperative: Take care of yourself.'⁵³⁴ In Foucault's proposal to restore these technologies of self-subjection that were invented by the Greeks, Foucault aspires to enable, in the present, forms of self-government, a return of a morality comprising self-imposed codes of behaviours and the formation of the ethical subject. Davidson reminds that 'Foucault argued that our histories of morality should not be

⁵³¹ Michel Foucault, 'The ethic of care for the self as a practice of freedom, an interview with Michel Foucault on Jan 20, 1984', *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 12 (1987), 112-131 (p. 115).

⁵³² Michel Foucault, 'The Return of Morality', in *Politics Philosophy Culture: Interviews and other writings 1977-1984*, ed. by Laurence Kritzman trans. by Alan Sheridan and others (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 242-255 (p. 255).

⁵³³ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 95.

⁵³⁴ Michel Foucault, 'The ethics of a concern of the self as a practice of freedom', in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp. 281-303 (p. 285).

exclusively focused on the history of codes of moral behaviour, and that we must also pay careful attention to the history of the forms of moral subjectivation, to how we constitute ourselves as moral subjects of our own actions'⁵³⁵ When power is voluntarily, systematically, theoretically and practically questioned, the relationship between truth and the empirical subject transforms. On the basis of a technology of the self, the individual understands that there is no relationship between truth and the empirical subject despite all self-evidence. In the movement of freeing the self from power, one reveals the transformation of the empirical subject to the ethical subject and the constitution of a relationship of truth of the self and the ethical subject. This morality is founded, 'not on the suspension of every certainty, but on the non-necessity of all power, of whatever kind.'⁵³⁶

Foucault's return of a Greek morality is a return of an individual and unique form of self-government which is not a series of specific moral actions or a series of behaviours in itself. A Greek morality is not an elaboration of an ethical code derived from an ethics intimately related to knowledge (*connaissance*) or ideology. It is a government or a conduct of the conduct of the individual, by the individual herself. It is a self-constituted and self-imposed unified moral conduct⁵³⁷ for today, that is, a unified governance that is not just related to, for example, a sexual morality alone, but one that relates to all human experience of the individual. This unified governance is founded on the self-constitution of an 'ethical' subject, enabled by technologies of the self or the aesthetics of existence, the basis for which Foucault extracted from the spiritual exercises of Greco-Roman spirituality. The ethical subject determines 'the manner in which one ought to conduct oneself.'⁵³⁸ There are different ways for the acting individual to operate, not just as the active agent, but as the ethical subject of the action. Many individuals might act in the same manner as if conforming to a common moral code. However, the motivation for each individual's action might differ completely. This explains why the thematic of sexual austerity appears to be shared by Hellenistic ways of living and Christian moral codes, yet the foundations for such austerity differ completely.

This particular model of Greek morality was chosen by Foucault because, as he says, 'what strikes me is that in Greek ethics people were concerned with their moral conduct, their

⁵³⁵ Arnold Davidson, 'Ethics as ascetics: Foucault, the history of ethics, and ancient thought' in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, ed. by G. Gutting (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 115-140 (p. 126).

⁵³⁶ Michel Foucault, *On the Government of the Living, lectures at the College de France 1979-1980*, ed. by Michel Senellart trans. by Graham Burchell (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 78.

⁵³⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality:2* (London: Penguin books, 1992), p. 28.

⁵³⁸ Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality:2* (London: Penguin books, 1992), p. 26.

ethics, their relations to themselves and to others much more than with religious problems. For instance, what happens to us after death? What are the gods? Do they intervene or not? These are very, very unimportant problems for them, and they are not directly related to ethics, to conduct. The second thing is that ethics was not related to any social, or at least to any legal-institutional system. For instance, the laws against sexual misbehaviour were very few and not very compelling. The third thing is that what they were worried about, their theme was to constitute a kind of ethics which was an aesthetics of existence.⁵³⁹

For Foucault, the moral problem is the practice of freedom; He asks: 'how can one practice freedom?'⁵⁴⁰ A Greek morality is essentially a practice, a style of liberty, a practice of ethics. Of course, there had also been certain norms of behaviour that governed each individual's behaviour. But the will to be a moral subject and the search for an ethics of existence are an attempt to affirm one's liberty and to give to one's own life a certain form in which one could recognize oneself, be recognized by others, and which even posterity might take as an example. He opines; 'for what is morality if not the practice of freedom, the deliberate practice of freedom.'⁵⁴¹ He adds 'freedom is the ontological condition of morality. But morality is the deliberate form assumed by freedom.'⁵⁴² Individualisation asserts the right of the individual to be different and underlines everything that makes the individual truly individual. A government of this individualisation by forms of pastoral power questions the status of the individual. It defines an identity and ties the individual to an identity in a constraining way, to the extent that the individual believes she is defining her own identity for herself. While beginning as a religious and a moral power, it is manifest in a secular world, for example, in the power of psychiatry over the mentally ill, the power of the discipline of medicine over the population, and in welfare administration power over the way people live.⁵⁴³

Modern pastoral power

⁵³⁹ Michel Foucault, 'On the genealogy of ethics', in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp. 253-280 (p. 255).

⁵⁴⁰ Michel Foucault, 'The ethic of care for the self as a practice of freedom, an interview with Michel Foucault on Jan 20, 1984', *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 12 (1987), 112-131 (p. 115).

⁵⁴¹ Michel Foucault, 'The ethic of care for the self as a practice of freedom, an interview with Michel Foucault on Jan 20, 1984', *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 12 (1987), 112-131 (p. 115).

⁵⁴² Michel Foucault, 'The ethic of care for the self as a practice of freedom, an interview with Michel Foucault on Jan 20, 1984', *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 12 (1987), 112-131 (p. 115).

⁵⁴³ Michel Foucault, 'The Subject and Power' in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, ed. by Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 208-226 (p. 211).

Foucault opines that Christianity is the first religion to organise itself as a Church and that the power this Church exercises over each and every member of the faithful might be known as pastoral power.⁵⁴⁴ Derived from Eastern influences on early Christian practice, a pastorate form of governmentality gives rise to an experience where individuals are treated, and consider themselves, as sheep in a flock guided by a handful of pastors, the role of the pastor who exercises power is to guide the flock to salvation and to compel an absolute obedience to his rule and the discourses he himself will enounce. What Foucault shows is that the technologies used by pastoral power, that of hermeneutics or self-examination, of confession and truth telling, are precisely the same technologies as those used by Hellenistic spirituality. However, the objective of the technologies is no longer the self-formation of a subjectivity and a way of life that accurately reflects it, but, for Foucault, a pernicious government of individualisation. Obedience, examination and confession, processes that inhere in pastoral power, will determine the range of permitted conducts, and produce self-renouncing subjects.

As has been shown, a modern pastoral power is a development of this power that was initially introduced by the Christian Church which ‘proposed and spread new power relations throughout the ancient world.’⁵⁴⁵ A modern pastoral power is a form of power relation that governs men through the manifestation of their individual truth. Truth has become the decisive operator, in the dual form of a doctrinal conformity that the pastorate must know and spread, and individual secrets that must be uncovered, even if it means punishing and correcting.⁵⁴⁶ Pastoral power is exercised by the setting in place of institutions and procedures designed to conduct the ‘conduct’ of men throughout society, a form of power very different from existing forms of power and government. Pastoral power became an institution that was at the same time global (that concerns in principle all the members of the community), specialised (since it has particular objectives and methods), and relatively autonomous. The thesis contends that Foucault’s particular target for his form of self-government were these pervading pastoral institutions and their effects of the individuals, and by extension, the effect of these institutions

⁵⁴⁴ Michel Foucault, *Confessions of the Flesh; The History of Sexuality Volume 4*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Robert Hurley (London: Penguin Classics, 2021), p 310.

⁵⁴⁵ Michel Foucault, 'The Subject and Power', in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, ed. by Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 208-226 (p. 213).

⁵⁴⁶ Michel Foucault, *Confessions of the Flesh; The History of Sexuality Volume 4*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Robert Hurley (London: Penguin Classics, 2021), p. 314..

on self-identity. As Foucault says: ‘what I am working on now is the problem of individuality, or I should say, self-identity as referred to the problem of individualising power.’⁵⁴⁷

The question of sex and sexuality appeared, in Foucault’s view, to constitute along with the practices of psychiatry, clinical medicine and criminality, possible examples of the formation of procedures by which the individual is led ‘to observe himself, analyse himself, interpret himself, recognise himself as a domain of a possible knowledge.’⁵⁴⁸ Rather than examining the historical integration of pastoral power with institutions of knowledge and the resulting constitution of biopower which focussed on the development of knowledge of man around two roles: one globalising and quantitative, concerning the population; the other analytical, concerning the individual,⁵⁴⁹ Foucault focus was on the struggle against institutions of pastoral power that abound in the welfare state. Along with the integration of pastoral power into state power, a new series of ‘worldly’ aims took the place of the religious aims of the traditional pastorate, suddenly spreading out into the whole social body, finding support in a multitude of disciplinary institutions. Foucault reveals that in the development of the welfare state ‘instead of a pastoral power and a political power, more or less linked to each other, there was an individualising tactic which characterised a series of powers; this of the family, medicine, psychiatry, education and employers.’⁵⁵⁰ While Foucault initially revealed power/knowledge relationships and subjectification as the most important effects of these institutions of disciplinary, the introduction of the concept of technologies of the self revealed a more pervasive effect of these institutions. According to Foucault, ‘the well-known welfare state problem must be recognised for what it is: one of the extremely numerous reappearances of the tricky adjustments between political power wielded over legal subjects and pastoral power wielded over live individuals.’⁵⁵¹ Foucault opines that never in the history of human societies has there been such a tricky combination in the same political structures, namely the modern state, of individualisation techniques and of totalisation procedures. He adds: ‘the well-

⁵⁴⁷ Michel Foucault, 'Pastoral power and political reason', in *Religion and Culture: Michel Foucault*, ed. by Jeremy R Carrette (New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 134-152 (p. 136).

⁵⁴⁸ Michel Foucault, 'Foucault', in *Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology* ed by James D. Faubion, trans by Robert Hurley and others, (New York: The New Press, 1998), pp 459-463 (p. 461).

⁵⁴⁹ Michel Foucault, 'The Subject and Power', in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, ed. by Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 208-226 (p. 215).

⁵⁵⁰ Michel Foucault, 'The Subject and Power', in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, ed. by Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 208-226 (p. 215).

⁵⁵¹ Michel Foucault, 'Pastoral power and political reason', in *Religion and Culture: Michel Foucault*, ed. by Jeremy R Carrette (New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 134-152 (p. 141).

known welfare state problem does not bring to light only the needs or the new governmental techniques of today's world. It must be recognised for what it is: one of the extremely numerous reappearances of the tricky adjustment between political power wielded over legal subjects and pastoral power wielded over live individuals.'

A return of morality for the individual or for all?

Speaking of the origin of pastoral power, Foucault tells us that for the Greek and Roman societies, the exercise of political power did not involve the right, or the possibilities, of a government, understood as an activity that undertakes to conduct individuals throughout their lives by placing them under the authority of a guide responsible for what they do and for what happens to them. Never in Greek or Roman antiquity would one have had the idea to demand a total, absolute and unconditional obedience in relation to someone else.⁵⁵² Foucault suggests that 'over millennia, Western man has learned to see himself as a sheep in a flock, something that assuredly no Greek would have been prepared to accept. Over millennia he has learned to ask for his salvation from a shepherd who sacrifices himself for him.'⁵⁵³ Foucault opines that 'maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are, but to refuse what we are. We have to imagine and to build up what we could be to get rid of this kind of political "double bind," which is the simultaneous individualization and totalization of modern power structures. The conclusion would be that the political, ethical, social, philosophical problem of our days is not to try to liberate the individual from the state, and from the state's institutions, but to liberate us both from the state and from the type of individualization which is linked to the state. We have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries.'⁵⁵⁴

Foucault's proposal of a return of a Greek morality is not and was not intended as a political struggle against the welfare state or against any form of political system. Foucault suggests that 'for centuries we have been convinced that between our ethics, our personal ethics, our everyday life, and the great political and social and economic structures, there were analytical relations, and that we couldn't change anything, for instance, in our sex life or our

⁵⁵² Michel Foucault, 'Security, Territory, and Population', in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp. 67-71 (p. 67-68).

⁵⁵³ Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College de France 1977-1978*, ed. by Michael Senellart trans. by Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 174.

⁵⁵⁴ Michel Foucault, 'The Subject and Power', in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, ed. by Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 208-226 (p. 216).

family life, without ruining our economy, our democracy, and so on. I think we have to get rid of this idea of an analytical or necessary link between ethics and other social or economic or political structures.’⁵⁵⁵ Foucault also suggests that ‘my idea is that it's not at all necessary to relate ethical problems to scientific knowledge. Among the cultural inventions of mankind there is a treasury of devices, techniques, ideas, procedures, and so on, that cannot exactly be reactivated but at least constitute, or help to constitute, a certain point of view which can be very useful as a tool for analysing what's going on now-and to change it. We don't have to choose between our world and the Greek world. But since we can see very well that some of the main principles of our ethics have been related at a certain moment to an aesthetics of existence, I think that this kind of historical analysis can be useful.’⁵⁵⁶ His return of a Greek morality is an attempt at spiritual renewal and salvation of the individual subject, for the sake of the subject and the individual self, and a salvation of the subject in the world in which she lives and in the immediate time in which she lives.

In *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, Foucault explains that ‘if we take the question of power, of political power, situating it in the more general question of governmentality understood as a strategic field of power relationships in the broadest and not merely in the political senses of the term...then I do not think that reflection on this notion of governmentality can avoid passing through, theoretically and practically, the element of the subject defined in the relationship of self to self.’⁵⁵⁷ He adds: ‘Though the theory of political power as an institution refers to a juridical conception of the subject of right, it seems to me that the analysis of governmentality, that is to say, of power as a reversible relationship, must refer to an ethics of a subject defined by the relationship of the self to the self.’⁵⁵⁸ In a Greek culture of the self, the practice of arts of living, *tekhne tou biou* as *epimeleia heautou*, saw the possibility of the constitution of a life as an individual form of morality and not as a rule of life or a universal morality to be complied with by all. The essence of a care of the self is the recognition of the freedom of the self to form the ethical self, and as a practice of freedom from the unenlightened self. The notion of *tekhne tou biou* was transformed as a phenomenon in

⁵⁵⁵ Michel Foucault, 'On the genealogy of ethics', in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp. 255-280 (p. 261).

⁵⁵⁶ Michel Foucault, 'On the genealogy of ethics', in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp. 255-280 (p. 261).

⁵⁵⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 252.

⁵⁵⁸ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 252.

Hellenistic tradition where relations of the self to the self were intensified and valorised. All this in order to behave ‘properly’, in order to practice freedom properly.⁵⁵⁹ Foucault’s point, which he admits is plodding and meticulous,⁵⁶⁰ is that in the analysis of governmentality and the government of the self, one must take into account the individual’s perception of her own truth, one must take into account the subject constituted in the relationship of the self to the self as opposed to the relationship to knowledge (*connaissance*) or law, rule, or code.

Scholarly commentary general focuses on the problematic of resistance to relationships of power/knowledge and biopower. Such commentary suggests that Foucault’s morality ought to inspire an aesthetics of existence, fitted to our times, conceived as the only possible resistance to biopolitical normalisation.⁵⁶¹ While power/knowledge and biopower relationships defined, by means of technologies of power and domination, forms of passive subjectivity and passive bodies for each individual and for society as a whole, in the exercise of pastoral power, the individual is compelled, or led, to use technologies of the self to objectify herself in the process of trans-subjectivation. While theorising resistance by a passive form of subjectivity is recognised as problematic without a conscious agency, by restoring Greek technologies of the self whose objective is the critical self, untrammelled by power, as supplied by Foucault in his aesthetics of existence, each individual might be able to voluntarily struggle against pastoral power by using processes of self-subjectivation, or the self-constitution of subjectivity. As Foucault will insist; all struggle against pastoral power is a struggle for a new subjectivity.⁵⁶² In the formation of the ethical subject, there is no caesura or renunciation of the self. The emphasis is on the absolute priority of the relationship of the self to the self, in her different actions, thoughts, and feelings as she endeavours to form her *ethos* or to constitute an ethical subject. In this process of self-subjectivation, using technologies of the self, the individual, through the subjectivation of true knowledge, and a problematisation of experience, constitutes her own subjectivity. As has been shown, the Christian experience, and by extension modern pastoral power, greatly differs from the spiritual experience of a Greek morality. According to Foucault, Christianity prescribes and constitute a universal form of morality, a

⁵⁵⁹ Michel Foucault, 'The ethic of care for the self as a practice of freedom, an interview with Michel Foucault on Jan 20, 1984', *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 12 (1987), 112-131 (p. 114).

⁵⁶⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 252.

⁵⁶¹ Cristian Iftode, 'Foucault's idea of philosophy as 'care of the self': Critical assessment and conflicting metaphilosophical views', *Procedia: Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 71 (2013) 76-85 (p. 81).

⁵⁶² Michel Foucault, 'The Subject and Power', in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, ed. by Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 208-226 (p. 213).

form of government of the self and the living to which all must submit as a form of renunciation of self. It does not require and indeed actively suppresses all attempts at the self-constitution of an ethical subject in the processes of self-subjection. The ultimate strategy of this power relationship is the salvation of the universal subject in an other world and another time.

In one of his last interviews, entitled “*An Aesthetics of Existence*”, Foucault speaks of moralities turned towards ‘ethics’ and of moralities turned towards codes as the same distinction as that between Greco-Roman moralities and those that emerge with Christianity. He opines that ‘with Christianity, there occurred a slow, gradual shift in relation to the moralities of Antiquity, which in Christianity, with the religion of the text, the idea of the will of God, the principle of obedience, morality took on increasingly the form of a code of rules. From Antiquity to Christianity, we pass from a morality that was essentially the search for a personal ethics to a morality as obedience to a system of rules.’⁵⁶³ He also suggests that if he ‘was interested in Antiquity, it was because, for a whole series of reasons, the idea of a morality as obedience to a code of rules is now disappearing, has already disappeared. And to this absence of morality corresponds, must correspond, the search for an aesthetics of existence.’⁵⁶⁴ He opines: ‘well, I wonder if our problem nowadays is not, in a way, similar to this one, since most of us no longer believe that ethics is founded in religion, nor do we want a legal system to intervene in our moral, personal, private life. Recent liberation movements suffer from the fact that they cannot find any principle on which to base the elaboration of a new ethics. They need an ethics, but they cannot find any other ethics than an ethics founded on so-called scientific knowledge of what the self is, what desire is, what the unconscious is, and so on. I am struck by this similarity of problems.’⁵⁶⁵

Foucault’s ambition is to enlighten individuals to the internal ruse which has, for centuries, submitted generations to a form of pastoral power, in order to produce men’s subjection.⁵⁶⁶ Foucault insists that ‘one has to be completely taken in by this internal ruse of confession in order to attribute a fundamental role to censorship, to taboos regarding speaking and thinking; one has to have an inverted image of power in order to believe that all these voices which have spoken for so long in or civilisation, repeating the formidable injunction to

⁵⁶³ Michel Foucault, ‘An Aesthetics of Existence’, in *Politics Philosophy Culture: Interviews and other writings 1977-1984*, ed. by Laurence Kritzman trans. by Alan Sheridan and others (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 47-57 (p. 49).

⁵⁶⁴ Michel Foucault, ‘An Aesthetics of Existence’, in *Politics Philosophy Culture: Interviews and other writings 1977-1984*, ed. by Laurence Kritzman trans. by Alan Sheridan and others (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 47-57 (p. 45).

⁵⁶⁵ Michel Foucault, ‘On the genealogy of ethics’, in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp. 255-280 (p. 255-256).

⁵⁶⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality: I* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 60.

tell what one is and what one does, what one recollects and what one has forgotten, what one is thinking and what one thinks he is not thinking, are speaking to us of freedom.’⁵⁶⁷ This ruse is the apparent voluntary choice of trans-subjectivation, but which is in a fact an imposed objectification of the self by the self. His ambition is to expose the generally accepted and absolutely inverted image of a pastoral power and technology, prevalent in the West, which suggests that what Foucault perceives as man’s subjection is, in fact, perceived in the West as man’s freedom to choose. This pastoral power, originating as a religious power in the early Christian institutions but through the centuries transformed into a moral power, gives form to the Western experience of subjectivity. Foucault opines that all the movements which took place on the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and which had the reformation as their main expression and result should be analysed as a great crisis of the Western experience of subjectivity and a revolt against a kind of religious and moral power which gave form to this subjectivity.⁵⁶⁸ Foucault says that ‘what is interesting is that during the Renaissance you see a whole series of religious groups (whose existence is, moreover, already attested to in the Middle Ages) which co-exists with this pastoral power and which claim the right to make their own statutes for themselves. According to these groups, the individual should take care of his own salvation independently of the ecclesiastical institution and of the ecclesiastical pastorate. We can see, therefore, a reappearance, up to a certain point, not of the culture of the self which had never disappeared, but a reaffirmation of its autonomy.’⁵⁶⁹ Foucault suggests that ‘if it is true that the pastorate is a highly specific form of power with the object of conducting men, I mean, that takes as its instrument the methods that allow one to direct them, and as its target, the way in which they conduct themselves, the way in which they behave, if the objective of the pastorate is men’s conduct, I think equally specific movements of resistance and insubordination appeared in correlation with this that could be called specific revolts of conduct, again leaving the word “conduct” in all its ambiguity.’⁵⁷⁰ He adds that ‘they are movements that also seek, possibly at any rate, to escape direction by others and to define the way for each to conduct himself.’⁵⁷¹ These movements are distinct from political revolts against

⁵⁶⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality: I* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 60.

⁵⁶⁸ Michel Foucault, 'The Subject and Power', in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, ed. by Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 208-226 (p. 212).

⁵⁶⁹ Michel Foucault, 'On the genealogy of ethics', in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp. 255-280 (p. 250-251).

⁵⁷⁰ Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977-1978*, ed. by Michael Senellart trans. by Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 260.

⁵⁷¹ Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977-1978*, ed. by Michael Senellart trans. by Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 259.

power exercised by a form of sovereignty, and they are also distinct from economic revolts against power. 'There are revolts of conduct.'⁵⁷²

Greek morality as a form of individualism

Foucault seems to predict the commentary that will accuse him of promoting an elite individualism. He says that 'a more general question needs to be asked concerning this individualism that is so frequently invoked, in different epochs, to explain very diverse phenomena. Quite often with such categories, entirely different realities are lumped together.'⁵⁷³ Three things need to be distinguished. First the individualistic attitude, characterised by the absolute value attributed to the individual in his singularity and by the degree of independence conceded to him vis-a-vis the group to which he belongs and the institutions to which he is answerable. Second, the positive valuation of private life, and third, the intensity of the relationship to self, that is, of the forms in which one is called upon to take oneself as an object of knowledge and a field of action, so as to transform, correct, purify, and find salvation. It is with regard to this third category that Foucault redefines for of ethics and morality, as forms of self-government in which the relationships to the self are intensified and developed, without this resulting, as if by necessity, in the strengthening of the values of individual singularity or of private life.

The factors integral to a voluntary choice of self-subjectivation and Greek morality.

Why might an individual choose processes of self-subjectivation over trans-subjectivation? While it might appear that a historical, cultural, and personal context that an individual might find themselves thrown into is important, there is a factor which seems to be common in every individual's choice of self-subjectivation, and which is contingent on an access to technologies of the self. Foucault indicates that it is the critical attitude of the individual, constituted by technologies of the self, which appear to be integral to an individual choice of self-subjectivation over trans-subjectivation. A critical attitude does not appear to be present where objectification of the self occurs in trans-subjectivation, whether ancient or contemporary.⁵⁷⁴

⁵⁷² Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College de France 1977-1978*, ed. by Michael Senellart trans. by Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 259.

⁵⁷³ Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self: The History of Sexuality:3* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 42.

⁵⁷⁴ Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg, 'The Final Foucault: Government of others and Government of the self', in *A Foucault for the 21st century: Governmentality, Biopolitics and discipline in the new millennium*, ed. by Sam Binkley and Jorge Capetillo (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), pp 63-71 (p. 70).

To begin with, there is an attitude of resistance to prevailing power relations, which seems to be integral to the kinds of subjectivation that characterises self-fashioning and autonomy. There is a critique of knowledge in the form of a transformation and deployment of knowledge of the self and truth of the self. Foucault explained the constitution of different moralities for a modern age and explained how people might think differently. He says: 'Maybe the problem of the self is not to discover what it is in its positivity; maybe the problem is not to discover a positive self or the positive foundation for the self. Maybe our problem now is to discover that the self is nothing else than the historical correlation of the technology built in our history. Maybe the problem is to change those technologies (or maybe to get rid of those technologies, and then, to get rid of the sacrifice which is linked to those technologies.) And in this case, one of the main political problems nowadays would be, in the strict sense of the word, the politics of ourselves.'⁵⁷⁵ He opines that 'what I am afraid of about humanism is that it presents a certain form of our ethics as a universal model for any form of freedom. I think there are more secrets, more possible freedoms, and more inventions in our future than we can imagine in humanism as it is dogmatically represented.'⁵⁷⁶ Finally, such a mode of self-subjectivation entails of a problematisation of the contemporary world, as opposed to an accommodation with it. These are all the critical attitudes of modernity which will be discussed further in the following chapter.

⁵⁷⁵ Michel Foucault, 'Christianity and Confession', in *The Politics of truth*, ed. by Sylvère Lotringer trans. by Lysa Hochroth and Catherine Porter (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2007), pp. 169-191 (p. 190).

⁵⁷⁶ Rux Martin, 'Truth, power, self: an interview with Michel Foucault', in *Technologies of the self, a seminar with Michel Foucault*, ed by Luther Martin and Huck Gutman and Patrick H Hutton (London: Tavistock Publications, 1988), pp. 9-15 (p. 15).

The critical attitudes of modernity, concepts of *ethos* for a modern age.

Foucault examines Kant's definition of Enlightenment as '*Ausgang*' or 'way out' in his own essay entitled *What is Enlightenment*.⁵⁷⁷ He explains that Kant characterises Enlightenment 'as a process which releases us from the status of immaturity.'⁵⁷⁸ According to Foucault, Kant describes Enlightenment as the moment when humanity is going to put its own reason to use, without subjecting itself to any authority.⁵⁷⁹ Foucault adds that by immaturity, Kant means 'a certain state of our will which makes us accept someone else's authority to lead us in areas where the use of reason is called for.'⁵⁸⁰ Foucault cites these examples; when a book takes the place of our understanding, when a spiritual director takes the place of our conscience, when a doctor decides for us what our diet is to be. This short chapter will show that Foucault grounds his ambition for a return of Greek morality and self-government firmly on Kant's recognition of how modern forms of pastoral power perpetuate humanity's immaturity and that Enlightenment will be re-defined by a modification of the pre-existing relation linking will, authority, and the use of reason.⁵⁸¹ This modification of will, authority, and the use of reason, is the movement from trans-subjectivation to self-subjectivation following the constitution of an individual's critical attitude or *ethos*.

Foucault declares that modern man, for Baudelaire, is not the man who goes off to discover himself, his secrets, and his hidden truth; he is the man who tries to invent himself. This modernity does not liberate man in his own being; it compels him to face the task of producing himself. Foucault opines that 'it has to be supposed that man will be able to escape from immaturity only by a change that he himself will bring about in himself. Men are at once the actors in the process, and the process occurs to the extent that men decide to be its voluntary actors.'⁵⁸² Foucault, referring to Kant's definition of Enlightenment suggests that 'by looking

⁵⁷⁷ Michel Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment', in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp. 303-319.

⁵⁷⁸ Michel Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment', in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp. 303-319 (p. 305).

⁵⁷⁹ Michel Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment', in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp. 303-319 (p. 308).

⁵⁸⁰ Michel Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment', in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp. 303-319 (p. 305).

⁵⁸¹ Michel Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment', in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp. 303-319 (p. 305).

⁵⁸² Michel Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment', in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp. 303-319 (p. 306).

at it is this way, we can recognise a point of departure: the outline of what one might call the attitude of modernity.⁵⁸³ This attitude of modernity, this modern *ethos*, will be enabled by the return of a Greek aesthetics of existence or technology of the self and will provide the condition of possibility for two forms of struggle; a struggle against the government of individualisation modern forms of pastoral power and a struggle against totalisation enabled by the imposed obedience to the pastorate.

Technologies of the self, enacted by individuals, transform individuals and reform their attitudes, their 'ways of being'; transform them into individuals who govern their own identity and their own conduct, determine their own life in freedom. It is not the liberation of an essence, waiting to be discovered. It is by the self-identification of ethos, and the appearance of the ethical subject, that self-government and the formation of a style of living is made possible by Foucault's morality. Without these attitudes, there can be no transformation of self-consciousness and there can be no relationship between the ethical subject and truth of the self. As a result of a relationship of the self to the self, mediated by technologies, the individual transforms her self-awareness and becomes, for the first time, aware of her own truth. Whereas before, her passive awareness was constituted for her by discourses of truth that objectified her, or she voluntarily objectified herself by submitting to the power of discourse, now, in a process of self-subjectivation, she becomes aware of her truth, that is, her freedom to choose, to govern herself, and to think differently. Whether in the Hellenistic era or in the modern era, the technology of the subjectivation of a spiritual knowledge, a process of self-subjectivation, constitutes a form of subject with a relationship to the truth of the self. This spiritual truth is not the equivalent to an objective truth, but, for Foucault, it is the search for objective truth in the human sciences that has led to illusory concepts of ethics and morality.

Foucault indicates a number of elements that appear to be characteristic of his modern attitude, or a modern *ethos*. They are subjective stances or existential attitudes. These elements are manifest to the individual and to others. Referring to Greece and to modernity, Foucault opines that *ethos* or attitude was a deportment. It was the ethical subject's mode of being and a certain manner of acting that is visible to others. First, there is an attitude of resistance, a resistance to prevailing power relations, which seems integral to the kinds of subjectivation that characterises self-fashioning and autonomy. Second, there is an attitude linked to

⁵⁸³ Michel Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment', in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp. 303-319 (p. 309).

parrhesia, the telling of truth. Third, an attitude of critique of the self that seems integral to the deployment of knowledge of the self and finally a problematisation of the contemporary world, as opposed to an accommodation with it.⁵⁸⁴ It is through these concrete attitudes that the ethical subject is made manifest to the individual and to others, much like a philosophical *ethos* of freedom in antiquity. Ethical subjectivity is attitude. Foucault opines that in antiquity ‘the will to be an ethical individual . . . was principally an effort to affirm one’s freedom and to give one’s life a certain form in which one could recognise oneself, be recognised by others, and in which posterity would find an example of the good life.’⁵⁸⁵ The aesthetics of existence, as a modern technology of the self, is proposed to achieve this same attitude in the modern individual, enabling enlightenment and a possibility of self-government in truth.

A modern attitude is described certain way of thinking, speaking and acting, a certain relationship to what exists, to what one knows, to what one does, a relationship to society, to culture and also a relationship to others.⁵⁸⁶ It is a voluntary choice made by certain people, a stance; in the end, a way of thinking and feeling; a way of acting and behaving that at the one and the same time marks a relation of belonging and presents itself as a task.⁵⁸⁷ Attitude is a unique ontological reality in the form of qualities of being, qualities of existence, or ways of being.⁵⁸⁸ It is not an innate disposition, but one constituted in a daily and incessant practice of the art of living.

Foucault identifies two models for this attitude, one already noted in Hellenistic philosophical *ethos* and the other in a much later era than Antiquity. Foucault suggests that between ‘the high Kantian enterprise and the little polemical professional activities that are called critique, it seems to me that there has been in the modern Western world (dating, more or less, empirically from the 15th to the 16th centuries) a certain way of thinking, speaking and acting, a certain relationship to what exists, to what one knows, to what one does, a relationship to society, to culture and also a relationship to others that we could call, let’s say, the critical

⁵⁸⁴ Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg, 'The Final Foucault: Government of others and Government of the self', in *A Foucault for the 21st century: Governmentality, Biopolitics and discipline in the new millennium*, ed. by Sam Binkley and Jorge Capetillo (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), pp 63-71 (p. 70).

⁵⁸⁵ Michel Foucault, 'The Return of Morality', in *Politics Philosophy Culture: Interviews and other writings 1977-1984*, ed. by Laurence Kritzman trans. by Alan Sheridan and others (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 242-255 (p. 253).

⁵⁸⁶ Michel Foucault, 'What is critique ' in *The Politics of truth*, ed. by Sylvère Lotringer trans. by Lysa Hochroth and Catherine Porter (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2007), pp 41-81 (p. 42).

⁵⁸⁷ Michel Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment', in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp. 303-319 (p. 310).

⁵⁸⁸ Michel Foucault, *Subjectivity and truth, Lectures at the Collège de France 1980-1981*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 31.

attitude.⁵⁸⁹ The Christian church inasmuch as it acted in a precisely and specifically pastoral way, developed this idea, singular and quite foreign to ancient culture, that each individual, whatever his age or status, from the beginning to the end of his life and in his every action, had to be governed and had to let himself be governed, that is to say directed towards his salvation, by someone to whom he was bound by a total, meticulous, detailed relationship of obedience.⁵⁹⁰ The critical attitude might be looked upon as a line of development of the arts of governing, a kind of general cultural form, both a political and moral attitude, a way of thinking, which Foucault would very simply call the art of not being governed quite so much or the art of not being governed like that.⁵⁹¹

For Foucault, critique as a modern philosophical technology is the work that thought brings to bear on itself. The end result of all this work is an elaboration of individuals as free to constitute her ethical subject and her own life. They are free to make up their own minds, to choose, in the light of all this, their own existence.⁵⁹² It is the endeavour to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what it already known.⁵⁹³ What a critical attitude achieves is an exposure of how social mechanisms had been able to operate, how the forms of repression and constraint had acted. People were left to make up their own minds, to choose, in the light of all this, their own existence.⁵⁹⁴ Foucault suggests: 'Maybe the problem of the self is not to discover what it is in its positivity; maybe the problem is not to discover a positive self or the positive foundation for the self. Maybe our problem now is to discover that the self is nothing else than the historical correlation of the technology built in our history. Maybe the problem is to change those technologies (or maybe to get rid of those technologies, and then, to get rid of the sacrifice which is linked to those technologies.) And in

⁵⁸⁹ Michel Foucault, 'What is critique ' in *The Politics of truth*, ed. by Sylvère Lotringer trans. by Lysa Hochroth and Catherine Porter (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2007), pp 41-81 (p. 42).

⁵⁹⁰ Michel Foucault, 'What is critique ' in *The Politics of truth*, ed. by Sylvère Lotringer trans. by Lysa Hochroth and Catherine Porter (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2007), pp 41-81 (p. 42).

⁵⁹¹ Michel Foucault, 'What is critique ' in *The Politics of truth*, ed. by Sylvère Lotringer trans. by Lysa Hochroth and Catherine Porter (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2007), pp 41-81 (p. 44).

⁵⁹² Michel Foucault, 'An Aesthetics of Existence', in *Politics Philosophy Culture: Interviews and other writings 1977-1984*, ed. by Laurence Kritzman trans. by Alan Sheridan and others (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 47-57 (p. 50).

⁵⁹³ Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality:2* (London: Penguin books, 1992), p. 8-9.

⁵⁹⁴ Michel Foucault, 'An Aesthetics of Existence', in *Politics Philosophy Culture: Interviews and other writings 1977-1984*, ed. by Laurence Kritzman trans. by Alan Sheridan and others (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 47-57 (p. 47).

this case, one of the main political problems nowadays would be, in the strict sense of the word, the politics of ourselves.⁵⁹⁵

A modern critical attitude involves the understanding by the individual that she is historically determined and at the same time a refusal of the contemporary limits of the necessary. This philosophical *ethos* may be characterized as a limit-attitude. Foucault will suggest that individuals have to be at the frontiers. The point, in brief, is to transform the critique conducted in the form of necessary limitation into a practical freedom that takes the form of a possible transgression. The attitude of freedom is a way of refusing subordination to established authority and at the same time an obligation to constitute the self every day in a long and difficult practice of freedom. Freedom is not achieving liberty from authority; it is not a mode of resistance; it is the capacity, because of a practiced and habitual attitude enabled by Foucault's technologies, to refuse subordination to begin with. 'It is the movement of freeing oneself from power that should serve as revealer in the transformation of the subject and the relation the subject maintains with the truth'⁵⁹⁶

Foucault opines that the core of critique is basically made of the bundle of relationships that are tied to one another, or one to the two others, power, truth and the subject. And if governmentalisation is indeed this movement through which individuals are subjugated in the reality of a social practice through mechanisms of power that adhere to a truth, critique is the movement by which the subject gives himself the right to question truth on its effects of power and question power on its discourses of truth. Critique will be the art of voluntary insubordination, that of reflected intractability. Critique would essentially ensure the de-subjugation of the subject in the context of what we could call, in a word, the politics of truth.⁵⁹⁷

Resistance to power

Resistance to power is an analysis made by the individual of what she is willing to accept in our world, to accept, to refuse, and to change, both in herself and in her circumstances. Categories, principles, rules, standards, criteria, procedures, beliefs, and practices, formerly accepted as purely and simply rational, in Foucault's opinion, will be revealed as being in the

⁵⁹⁵ Michel Foucault, 'Christianity and Confession' in *The Politics of truth*, ed. by Sylvère Lotringer trans. by Lysa Hochroth and Catherine Porter (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2007), pp. 169-191 (p. 190).

⁵⁹⁶ Michel Foucault, *On the Government of the Living, lectures at the College de France 1979-1980*, ed. by Michel Senellart trans. by Graham Burchell (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 77.

⁵⁹⁷ Michel Foucault, 'What is critique' in *The Politics of truth*, ed. by Sylvère Lotringer trans. by Lysa Hochroth and Catherine Porter (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2007), pp 41-81 (p. 47).

service of particular interests and constellations of pastoral power that have to be disguised in advance or as performing particular functions in maintaining power relations that would not be subscribed to if generally recognised by the individual. Because things are not always what they seem to be, and because awareness of this can create critical distance and because awareness can undermine the authority that derives from presumed rationality, universality, and necessity, these technologies can be a force for change in the life of the individual. Resistance to power enables the individual to expose the unrecognised forms of power relationships that control the games of truth in their lives. They enable the individual to expose and move beyond the forms in which they are entrapped in relation to the diverse ways that they act and think ⁵⁹⁸

This *ethos* or attitude consists in thinking that no external power goes without saying; that no power, of whatever kind, is obvious or inevitable, and consequently, no power warrants being taken for granted. There is no universal, immediate, and obvious right that can everywhere and always support any kind of relation of power. By denying the legitimacy of inevitable and obvious power relationships, the fundamental relationship between the subject and her own form of truth is redefined not as the suspension of every certainty but as the non-necessity of all power of whatever kind.⁵⁹⁹ *Ethos* is a matter of putting non-power or the non-acceptability of power, not at the end of the critical enterprise, but rather at the beginning of thought, in the form of questioning all the ways in which power is, in actual fact, accepted. It is not a question of saying all power is bad and criticising it but starting from a point that no power whatsoever is acceptably right and absolutely and definitively inevitable.⁶⁰⁰

Critique of knowledge

Foucault is often seen more as an historian than a philosopher. Some would even argue that he is not a philosopher at all. However, he states in *The Use of Pleasure*, ‘What is philosophy today—philosophical activity, I mean—if it is not the critical work that thought brings to bear on itself? In what does it consist, if not in the endeavour to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known?’ He adds

⁵⁹⁸ Michel Foucault, *On the Government of the Living, lectures at the College de France 1979-1980*, ed. by Michel Senellart trans. by Graham Burchell (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 28.

⁵⁹⁹ Michel Foucault, *On the Government of the Living, lectures at the College de France 1979-1980*, ed. by Michel Senellart trans. by Graham Burchell (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 77-78.

⁶⁰⁰ Michel Foucault, *On the Government of the Living, lectures at the College de France 1979-1980*, ed. by Michel Senellart trans. by Graham Burchell (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 78.

‘There is always something ludicrous in philosophical discourse when it tries, from the outside, to dictate to others, to tell them where their truth is and how to find it, or when it works up a case against them in the language of naive positivity. But it is entitled to explore what might be changed, in its own thought, through the practice of a knowledge that is foreign to it. The “essay”—which should be understood as the assay or test by which, in the game of truth, one undergoes changes, and not as the simplistic appropriation of others for the purpose of communication—is the living substance of philosophy, at least if we assume that philosophy is what it was in times past, i.e., an “ascesis,” *askesis*, an exercise of oneself in the activity of thought.’⁶⁰¹

The thesis places Foucault’s later work firmly in the philosophical milieu in that it recognises that Foucault’s notion of the historical a priori remains central in his later work on morality, under the guise of ‘conditions of acceptability’, ‘regimes of truth’ or ‘problematizations’. In addition, as Beatrice Han Pile will suggest, ‘what drives Foucault’s enquiries is a concern for freedom. If you can understand what makes you think the way you think, then you are in a better position to disengage from your own conditions of intelligibility so as to think differently.’⁶⁰² Foucault holds that the reason for any radical change in human thought founded on an objective knowledge is a fundamental modification of the historical a priori so that something which was accepted as knowledge at a given time can be later rejected as not ‘in the true’ anymore: not even false, or just not knowledge or truth at all. The key question for Foucault asks of this inconsistency is why something might count as a form of knowledge at one point and not at another?’ What are the epistemic conditions that need to be in place for something to be counted as knowledge at a particular time and place. Each historical a priori is necessarily binding when and where it exists but it is only binding for a certain time and in a certain geographical area. For Foucault historical a priori themselves change and what counts as a priori knowledge is subject to historical change. For philosophers such as Kant, however, by definition, the a priori is immune to historical and empirical change but this universal a-historical grounding for knowledge (*connaissance*) and truth was seen by Foucault as impossible and the modern episteme that supported an epistemological humanism must be recognised as incoherent and coming to an end.

⁶⁰¹ Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality:2* (London: Penguin books, 1992), p. 8-9.

⁶⁰² <https://www.thephilosopher1923.org/post/the-analytic-of-finitude> [accessed 2 December 2022]

A critical attitude to knowledge suggests that the return to morality as the deployment of a spiritual knowledge, is an ‘ascetic’ and ‘mystical’ method that Foucault uses to avoid and nullify the influence of the modern episteme, that pernicious epistemological phenomenon that makes one blind to the contingency of history. Foucault contrasted the historical epistemic conditions around subjectivity and sexuality that inhered in Christianity and the non-epistemological understanding of an ethos and morality enabled by a spiritual form of knowledge. Because these phenomena, that look like the same concepts, come with very different understandings depending on whether one looks from the historical a priori considered in ideology as a discourse claiming truth or the individual understanding of own’s own truth which avoids the episteme. As Han-Pile suggests, ‘although you can never escape your historical a priori you can nonetheless borrow the eyes of another time or place, so to speak, through this archeo-genealogical work of tracing concepts back to the practices that gave rise to them: then you begin to acquire some emancipatory distance from your own concepts and practices.’⁶⁰³ It is possible, by the use of a spiritual knowledge derived from an exercise of criticism, that Foucault was able to escape the effect of the modern episteme on his own thought.

Foucault’s criticism of Kant’s transcendentalism is well documented. The knowing subject pre-exists the transcendental framework; and yet without this transcendental framework the very idea of the knowing subject as an empirical object is not intelligible. This circular movement is what Foucault calls ‘the analytic of finitude’ in *The Order of Things*. For Foucault, 19th and 20th century thought is characterised by this circle whereby Man is both the epistemic condition of possibility of knowledge on the one hand, and a causally determined object within the epistemic field thus opened on the other. Without Man nothing can be known, but as soon as there is knowledge Man appears to itself as empirically pre-existing the very opening of the epistemic field, in a sort of paradoxical prehistory. Foucault thinks that this is a very pernicious structure. However, Han-Pile does not think, and the thesis agrees, ‘that the turn to spirituality was directly motivated by Foucault’s critique of Kant. The main figure Foucault is opposing in his later work on spirituality is Descartes, and what is now at stake is the relation between self-transformation and the ability to know the truth.’⁶⁰⁴ She adds that the reason why Descartes is criticised by Foucault is that at the beginning of the *Discourse on Method*, Descartes claims that anyone can be a subject of knowledge so long as they follow the appropriate method. You

⁶⁰³ <https://www.thephilosopher1923.org/post/the-analytic-of-finitude> [accessed 2 December 2022]

⁶⁰⁴ <https://www.thephilosopher1923.org/post/the-analytic-of-finitude> [accessed 2 December 2022]

don't need to transform yourself; you're already equipped for knowledge: you just have to adopt the right heuristic tool.

As we have seen, Foucault thinks that with Descartes spirituality begins to be ruled out as a pre-condition of knowledge of the self while a philosophy of the subject begins to be modelled on the human sciences. A form of valid knowledge of the self, independent of an episteme, is lost in this change of process. Han Pile agrees that Foucault's return to a spirituality was to put into practice an understanding of what it means to be a philosopher that departs from the dominant scientific model: not to seek a disembodied, third person point of view on what there is to understand, a view determined by the current episteme. This return to spirituality is a return to an older tradition in which the connection between the thinker and their thought is a vital aspect of such thought; unless you do this transformative work on yourself you can't see deep enough into what you are investigating. In order of to be a good philosopher, one doesn't just need to acquire an objective knowledge (*connaissance*) of the subject matter as is demanded in modernity; you also need to acquire a deeper, reflective understanding of yourself as a subject of this knowledge, and this is a matter of establishing a critical relation to both the historical and epistemological conditions under which something becomes knowledge on the one hand, and to how this knowledge is deployed by the self on the other.

Han-Pile agrees. She opines that critique, both of the historical tradition and of the self, is the tool whereby the self-awareness and knowledge of the self that is central to spiritual practices can be developed. Whereas critique was known in the Kantian tradition as the conditions of possibility of knowledge in general, and securing a foundation for knowledge and universality, critique is, in spirituality, a powerful tool of self-transformation. This is where the later Foucault's work links back to his early interest in the critical tradition and conditions of possibility of knowledge: for him critique, as a technology of the self, is a reflective movement which allows one to be, inasmuch as possible, aware both of one's own thought processes and of the historical tradition one is immersed in, and of how the second shapes the first. Critique is what allows one, by looking at the difference between how one thinks and how people of the past thought, between how one thinks now and how one thought before, to acquire the self-knowledge and self-distance that are central to the practice of transformation that inheres in spirituality.

Critique of ourselves

The reason why Foucault finds a Greek morality such a valuable ethic to pursue today is because it helps the individual to gain a critical distance from herself. Foucault suggests that there has been in the modern Western world a certain way of thinking, speaking and acting, a certain relationship to what exists, to what one knows, to what one does, a relationship to society, to culture. Foucault suggests that a new attitude that uses a technology of critique that is not aimed to discover the truth of what one might be as Cartesian questioning would ask, but one that refuses what individuals are today, as a truth that had been imposed on them. The strategy of the technology, then is not to discover, as Kant wished to do, what we are but to refuse what we are when trapped in history. Critique is not a game of truth that seeks to determine the conditions and the limits of our possible knowledge of the subject as object but seeks the conditions and the indefinite possibilities of transforming the subject, of transforming ourselves.”⁶⁰⁵ A new attitude of critique of ourselves will serve to transform what individuals have been impelled to become over the last two thousand years, a destiny determined by a metaphysical discourse and imposed truths. Technologies, under the guise of critique of ourselves, are orientated towards the contemporary limits of the necessary, that is, towards what is not or is no longer indispensable for the constitution of oneself as an autonomous subject. A critical attitude is the movement by which the subject gives himself the right to question truth on its effects of power and question power on its discourses of truth. This attitude will be the art of voluntary insubordination, that of reflected intractability and it would essentially insure a transformation of the subject in the de-subjugation of the subject in the context of the politics of truth.

This modern attitude is a permanent and daily historical investigation into the self, the events that have led us to constitute ourselves and to recognise ourselves as subjects of what we are doing, thinking, saying.⁶⁰⁶ Foucault tried to isolate and define a more agonistic style of critical thinking, less sure of prior or unchanging norms or deductive argumentation, more closely tied to material conditions, uncertain and questioning.⁶⁰⁷ This critique of what we are is at one and the same time the analysis of the limits imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them.

⁶⁰⁵ Michel Foucault, 'About the beginning of the hermeneutics of the self', *Political Theory*, 21 (1993), 198-227 (p. 201).

⁶⁰⁶ Michel Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment', in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp. 303-319 (p. 315).

⁶⁰⁷ John Rajchman, 'Enlightenment today' in *The Politics of truth*, ed. By Sylvère Lotringer trans. by Lysa Hochroth and Catherine Porter (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 1989), pp. 9-27. (p. 9).

The heroization of the present; a mode of relating to a contemporary reality

Following Kant, Foucault identifies an attitude of critique founded on a technology of the self which might be called a technology of critique, which directs the attention of the individual to the present, and asks what the contemporary field of possible experience of a 'way of being' might consist of? Foucault suggests that Kant was asking the following questions: what is going on now, what is happening to us, what is this world, this period, this precise moment in which we are living; or in other words, what are we today?⁶⁰⁸ The modern individual must refuse to look upon the present as a transitional era to a better other world or as a firm commitment to a notion of necessary progression, as a steppingstone to a better future for future generations. This relationship to the present, according to Foucault, must reflect Baudelaire's precept; 'you have no right to despise the present.'⁶⁰⁹

Using an example of a perception of modernity as an epoch, situated on a calendar, preceded by a pre-modernity, and followed by a post-modernity, Foucault wonders whether it might be possible to envisage this notion of a modernity as an attitude rather than a period of history.⁶¹⁰ By the term modern attitude, Foucault means a 'way of being' for the individual that is a mode of relating to her contemporary reality. This modern *ethos* is, in the end, a way of thinking and feeling; a way, too, of acting and behaving for the modern individual, that at one and the same time marks a relation of belonging to her present and presents itself as a task, an obligation once one has been enlightened or modernised.

The modern attitude is characterised in terms of a consciousness of the discontinuity of time: The attitude of freedom will look at the present as a break with the demands of tradition, as a constant feeling of novelty, as a vertigo in the face of the passing moment, somewhat akin to Baudelaire's definition of modernity as the ephemeral, the fleeting, the contingent.⁶¹¹ The attitude of modernity, then, is to be able to accept the ephemeral, the fleeting, the contingent, that constitutes the novel present day, not just as a change from a past or a present that has simply broken with tradition and consistent narrative and has no hold on a future, but in order

⁶⁰⁸ Michel Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment', in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp. 303-319 (p. 309).

⁶⁰⁹ Michel Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment', in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp. 303-319 (p. 310).

⁶¹⁰ Michel Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment', in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp. 303-319 (p. 309).

⁶¹¹ Michel Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment', in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp. 303-319 (p. 310).

to create a new norm for each individual, a new morality that is not dependent on rules or indictments inherited from a past or that might be expected to persist into the future. Modernity is the attitude that makes it possible to grasp the heroic aspect of the present moment, the present truth, present knowledge, present moralities. The notions of the past and future hold no obligation of the modern individual.

Neither, however, does the attitude of modernity treat the passing moment as sacred in order to try and preserve it, to maintain it or perpetuate it. That would be to deny its contingency and fleetingness. Foucault opines that it certainly does not involve harvesting it as an interesting curiosity as Baudelaire's flaneur might do. The high value of the present is indissociable from a desperate eagerness to imagine it, to imagine it otherwise than it is, and to transform it not by destroying it but by grasping it in what it is.

In sum, the attitudes of modernity would relate to what one is willing to accept in the world, to accept, to refuse, and to change, both in oneself and in one's circumstances. In sum, it is using technology to carry out a kind of Kantian critical philosophy but not his critical philosophy that seeks to determine the conditions and the limits of our possible knowledge of the object, but one 'that seeks the conditions and the indefinite possibility of transforming the subject, of transforming ourselves.'⁶¹² From these attitudes come the displacement and transformation of the limits of thought, the modification of received values and all the work done to think otherwise, to do something else, to become other than what one is. It is a way of reflecting on our relation to the truth. But it must not end there. It's a way of asking oneself, if such is the relation that we have with truth, then how should we conduct ourselves? As Foucault says 'It has done and continues today to do a very considerable and multiple labour, which modifies at the same time both our connection to the truth and our way of conducting ourselves. And this in a complex conjunction between a whole series of researches, and a whole set of social movements. It's the very life of philosophy.'⁶¹³

⁶¹² Michel Foucault, *Subjectivity and truth, Lectures at the Collège de France 1980-1981*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 254.

⁶¹³ Michel Foucault, 'The Masked Philosopher' in *Foucault Live Collected Interviews 1961-1984* ed. by Sylvère Lotringer trans. by Lysa Hochroth and John Johnston (New York: Semiotext (e), 1986) pp. 302-307 (p.307).

Conclusion

Valid questions might be asked of this thesis. How does this thesis on governmentality, whose task includes examining Foucault's methodology for a return of a Greek form of morality, add to Foucault scholarship on politics and correct hegemonic ideas in such scholarship? How might it criticise Foucault's later genealogical work, especially on Christian monasticism or his understanding of cultures of the self in Antiquity, from a historical perspective? Is his work on spiritual exercises truly a truly historical work as might be said of Hadot's work on the same exercises? Is there an attempt in the thesis to valorise a Greek ethic as a normalising code for today or to constitute a modern ethic for the individual which is consistent with such a Greek ideology? Is Foucault referring to a return to a Greek form of morality or a return of a Greek morality? What is Foucault's motivation for a return of morality. The conclusion will attempt to answer these questions.

Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg will suggest, and the thesis will support this view, that Foucault's extremely close reading of ancient texts, which are a hallmark of his lecture series in the 1980's, do not seem to constitute claims of historical accuracy. They opine that his interpretations do not challenge and were never intended to challenge other interpretations proffered by specialists in the ancient worlds. Foucault offers alternative readings which expose issues and dilemmas for the present.

Foucault's early work effectively destroys the pretensions of rationalism and the human sciences regarding the self and human nature. Scholarly commentary on Foucault's later genealogy suggests that the root of modern Western governmentality is to be found in the practices of objectivation and domination that emerged in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. It also suggests that Foucault's most comprehensive analysis of modern social and political relations is to be found in his analysis of power/knowledge apparatuses. From this perspective, the two poles of modernity are the disciplines and biopolitics, the exhaustive control of the body and the regulation of populations.⁶¹⁴ Foucault certainly argues that the emergence of these normalising powers in modernity was a very important event in the history of subjectivity. The thesis concludes, however, that Foucault, because of his untimely death, was unable to answer the political questions of how best to be governed, the acceptance of government and who might be best to govern humanity, in their entirety. While there is an

⁶¹⁴ Alexandre Macmillan, 'Michel Foucault's Techniques of the Self and the Christian Politics of Obedience', *Theory Culture and Society* 28 (1977), 3-25 (p. 5).

analysis of political systems, of biopower, and of the coercive relationships of power/knowledge to be found in Foucault's work, there is no judgement made on these systems or no comprehensive attempt to formulate an opposition to these powers. When asked about his lectures on the hermeneutics of the subject where there is a passage stating that the first and only useful point of resistance to political power is in the relationship of the self to the self, Foucault replies that he does not believe that the only possible point of resistance to power—understood, of course, as a state of domination—lies in the relationship of the self to the self. He says that 'governmentality implies the relationship of the self to itself, and I intend this concept of governmentality to cover the whole range of practices that constitute, define, organize, and instrumentalize the strategies that individuals in their freedom can use in dealing with each other. Those who try to control, determine, and limit the freedom of others are themselves free individuals who have at their disposal certain instruments they can use to govern others. Thus, the basis for all this is freedom, the relationship of the self to itself and the relationship to the other. Whereas, if you try to analyse power not on the basis of freedom, strategies, and governmentality, but on the basis of the political institution, you can only conceive of the subject as a subject of law. One then has a subject who has or does not have rights, who has had these rights either granted or removed by the institution of political society; and all this brings us back to a legal concept of the subject. On the other hand, I believe that the concept of governmentality makes it possible to bring out the freedom of the subject and its relationship to others which constitutes the very stuff of ethics.'⁶¹⁵ The thesis will conclude from this that Foucault's intention for ethics was not yet political. As he said when asked in the same interview if the problematic of the care of the self could be at the heart of a new way of thinking about politics, of a form of politics different from what we know today; 'I admit that I have not got very far in this direction, and I would very much like to come back to more contemporary questions to try to see what can be made of all this in the context of the current political problematic. But I have the impression that in the political thought of the nineteenth century—and perhaps one should go back even farther, to Rousseau and Hobbes—the political subject was conceived of essentially as a subject of law, whether natural or positive. On the other hand, it seems to me that contemporary political thought allows very little room for the question of the

⁶¹⁵ Michel Foucault, 'The ethics of a concern of the self as a practice of freedom', in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp. 281-303 (p. 299-300).

ethical subject. I don't like to reply to questions I haven't studied. However, I would very much like to come back to the questions I examined through ancient culture.'⁶¹⁶

It is generally agreed that Foucault's later work on ethics suggests that he was still interested in a notion of a self with agency. The same scholarly commentary, however, suggest that Foucault appears to give no guidance on how subjects can become agential selves through the creation of new self-identities with discourses, while at the same time dominated by these constitutive technologies of power. The thesis concludes that it would be incorrect to assume that there was a way to insulate the individual from normative frameworks constructed by power/knowledge relationships and the coercive technologies of power and domination. Recognising the fact that Foucault did not examine opposition and resistance to these phenomena in any depth, the thesis must rely on his statement in *The Will to Knowledge*; 'If the representation of power, the use made of it and the position it is accorded, is that it is constitutive of human experience itself, as in the technologies of power/knowledge then 'the result can only be that one is always already trapped.'⁶¹⁷

Despite these revelations, in his later work Foucault seems interested in an implicit notion of the self with agency or at least self-reflexivity as a transgressive counterforce to self-subjugation.⁶¹⁸ The thesis shows that, despite Foucault's trenchant anti-humanism and his rejection of essential subjectivity, his later work might well be characterised as the return of a central role in self-government and agency for a form of ethical subjectivity. This ethical subjectivity is self-constituted, however, through technologies of the self, by the self, and there is no return of the a priori theory of the subject as we have examined in Cartesian philosophy. His late work is still a rejection of this a priori theory. His work was 'an analysis of the relationships which can exist between the constitution of the subject or different forms of the subject and games of truth, practices of power etc.'⁶¹⁹ It was an analysis of different forms of subjectivation, of self-constitution which remains faithful to his rejection of ontological dualism and epistemological realism. In agreement with Caldwell, the thesis concludes that 'Foucault's work is an original and often powerful attempt to break with subjective and humanistic notions of intentionality or centred agency founded on rationality,

⁶¹⁶ Michel Foucault, 'The ethics of a concern of the self as a practice of freedom', in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp. 281-303 (p. 294).

⁶¹⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality: I* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 83.

⁶¹⁸ Raymond Caldwell, 'Agency and Change: Re-evaluating Foucault's legacy', *Organization*, 14 (2007), 1-22 (p. 12).

⁶¹⁹ Michel Foucault, 'The ethic of care for the self as a practice of freedom, an interview with Michel Foucault on Jan 20, 1984', *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 12 (1987), 112-131 (p. 121).

knowledge/expertise, autonomy and reflexivity.⁶²⁰ In its place, technologies of the self provide the possibility of a reformed agency in the form of an ethical subjectivity which allows new possibilities for struggle against subjugation of the subject and for change in the self-government of the individual. In a sense, reflexivity is transformed into a critical attitude of the world and also of the self. on the contrary, Thomas McCarthy claims, we would merely be left with an overly deterministic and holistic account cobbled together with an overly voluntaristic and individualistic account. McCarthy writes about Foucault's early work saying 'everything was a function of context, of impersonal forces and fields, from which there was no escape—the end of man. Now the focus is on 'those intentional and voluntary actions by which men not only set themselves rules of conduct but also seek to transform themselves . . . and to make their life into an oeuvre'—with too little regard for social, political, and economic context. Neither scheme provides an adequate framework for critical social inquiry.'⁶²¹

This thesis concludes that Foucault's later work on the technologies of the self, and in particular on the technologies of self-subjectivation, specifies a link between self-transformation, ethical agency, and resistance to power, and yet as a caution, opines that at the same time it has too little regard for social, political and economic context. This conclusion is supported by Caldwell who suggests that 'one detects a clear shift towards a positive reading of self-constitution and self-creation through strategic modes of self-discipline.'⁶²² Foucault's work on technologies of the self constitutes a significant break with this work on objectivation and subjectification and the production of the passive subjectivity. It is to support the coherence of the use of these technologies that necessitated the extensive examination of the history of Greek spirituality and its use as the foundation for his modern aesthetics of existence. The thesis concludes that Foucault implicitly favours self-subjectivation where individuals might have a choice and the role of the ethical subjectivity as agent in a form of self-government as opposed to a compliance with any or all moral code. The heavy cost of a self-renunciation is an encouragement 'towards a dogmatic filiation with a singular ethical vision rather than impelling them towards the interpretative work that might allow individuals to discriminate between a multiplicity of ethical models and relationships.'⁶²³ The self-subjectivation process

⁶²⁰ Raymond Caldwell, 'Agency and Change: Re-evaluating Foucault's legacy', *Organization*, 14 (2007), 1-22 (p. 3).

⁶²¹ Thomas McCarthy 'The Critique of Impure Reason, Foucault and the Frankfurt School', *Political Theory*, 18 (1990), 437-469 (p. 437).

⁶²² Raymond Caldwell, 'Agency and Change: Re-evaluating Foucault's legacy', *Organization*, 14 (2007), 1-22 (p. 13).

⁶²³ Nancy Luxon, 'Ethics and subjectivity; Practices of self-governance in the late lectures of Michel Foucault', *Political Theory*, 36 (2008), 377-402 (p. 380).

is always the result of a critical attitude of the present, of knowledge, and of power, constituting the possibility of a resistance that aims for self-government. This government is founded on an individualisation of conduct, a self-reflected understanding of the self, of a spiritual knowledge of the self, and the telos of the individual. The subject of struggle however must operate within a limitation, and that limitation is the extent of a spiritual knowledge. As Foucault suggests in his final interview; ‘what I am aiming for is a use of philosophy which may enable us to limit the areas of knowledge (*connaissance*).’⁶²⁴

McCarthy’s criticism introduces the other line of scholarly objections to the ethical turn of Foucault. McCarthy argued that Foucault’s individualism resides in his misunderstanding of what normative ethics really is: Foucault’s representation of universal morality, geared as it is to substantive codes, misses the point of formal, procedural models, namely, to establish a general framework of justice within which individuals and groups may pursue different conceptions of the good or beautiful life. Foucault’s aesthetic individualism is no more adequate to this social dimension of autonomy than was the possessive individualism of early modern political theory. Richard Rorty claimed that, although Foucault’s ethics could be useful for the private projects of self-creation, it remains politically problematic due to its lack of concern about the public sphere. These arguments are very difficult to refute. However, it is true that Foucault’s ethics lacks a rational model of ethical evaluation. This is why it would be unable to advocate between moral disagreements, or to give an account of moral progress. The presupposition of such a demand lies in the expectation that ethics can reveal moral truths and, in this way, it can set out an objective decision making procedure. The aim of this moral philosophy is to find a practical solution, which can be embodied in laws, policies and other institutional regulations. But to ask this from Foucault would obviously be a misunderstanding. Foucault is criticised for not giving a normative and political ethic, but this is precisely what Foucault avoids. For him, the positive task of philosophy is the critique itself, not the discovery of an objective truth, nor a politics of imperatives.

With the re-introduction of the problem of the individual’s unique conduct of her conduct into the constitution of her experience, Foucault introduced a number of new and very important questions. How to govern oneself, how to be governed, by whom should we accept to be governed, how to be the best possible governor? The answers to the questions are to be

⁶²⁴ Michel Foucault, 'The Return of Morality', in *Politics Philosophy Culture: Interviews and other writings 1977-1984*, ed. by Laurence Kritzman trans. by Alan Sheridan and others (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 242-255 (p. 255).

found by using technologies of the self. It is while searching for the origin of the technologies controlling a penitent/confessor relationship in early Christianity, or the relationship between the delinquent and those who control the prisons, or the patient/psychiatrist relationship, that Foucault finds in Hellenistic philosophy a non-coercive relationship of teaching and learning between spiritual director and adept that teaches technologies of the self that help the individual redefine her experience of her own truth, and subsequently her self-government as irreducible to the objectivation of the self by the self or by discourses claiming truth.

Foucault's study of *ethos*, ethical subjectivity, and styles of existence will highlight the cultural forms of experience that once characterised Western morality but that were lost in the transformation of technologies of the self during the long transition to modernity and a modern definition of morality as code and rule. Whereas the ethical subject constitutes herself and conducts herself in an active manner using technologies of the self and imposing her own rules of conduct as a style, the early Christian and by extension the modern subject forgoes any autonomy to voluntarily follow an abstract and impersonal rule, yet still using the same technologies of the self. The difference is that Hellenistic technologies develop within a spiritual experience of truth and knowledge, whereas the modern experience of truth is associated with a methodological and juridical experience of truth imposed by human sciences that demand truth acts of confession and renunciation. The thesis concludes that, by introducing technologies of the self and the possibilities of self-conduct, Foucault coherently introduces the possibility of a self-liberation of the individual from relationships of pastoral power. To be clear, this is not the liberation of the essential subject as agent; it is the liberation of the individual who has learned to use technologies of the self and had developed the critical attitudes of modernity.

With regard to the government of the self, Foucault reveals that, starting with the Christian church inasmuch as it acted in pastoral way, an idea developed, singular and quite foreign to an ancient Hellenistic culture, that each individual, whatever his age or status, from the beginning to the end of his life and in his every action, had to be governed and had to let himself be governed. These ideas extended to the welfare state and to the practices of the human sciences and related disciplines which also attempt to govern the identity and the individualisation of people today. The thesis concludes that there can be little doubt that Foucault judged pastoral power and the pastorate that exercise it, through the internal ruse it enables and the inversion of its own image that it promotes, to be the greatest threat to the self-aware individual in modernity to a possibility of a government of the self in freedom, a form

of self-government that was the hallmark of Hellenistic culture. Foucault himself admits that the history of this problem of subjectivity and individualisation, the internal ruse and the inversion of the image of pastoral power may seem somewhat remote, even though they span the entirety of Western history. He insists however that ‘they are still highly important in contemporary society. They deal with the relations between political power at work within the state as a legal framework of unity, and a power we can call pastoral, whose role is constantly to ensure, sustain, and improve the lives of each and every one.’⁶²⁵ He adds: ‘the well-known welfare state problem does not bring to light only the needs or the new governmental techniques of today’s world. It must be recognised for what it is: one of the extremely numerous reappearances of the tricky adjustment between political power wielded over legal subjects and pastoral power wielded over live individuals.’⁶²⁶

The form of individualization assured by the exercise of pastoral power will be defined by a whole network of servitude that involves the general servitude of everyone with regard to everyone and, at the same time, the exclusion of the self, of the ego, and of egoism as the central, nuclear form of the individual. What the history of the pastorate involves, therefore, is the entire history of procedures of human individualization in the West. As Foucault suggests ‘let’s say also that it involves the history of the subject.’⁶²⁷ Western man is individualized through the pastorate insofar as the pastorate leads him ‘to his salvation that fixes his identity for eternity, subjects him to a network of unconditional obedience, and inculcates in him the truth of a dogma at the very moment it extorts from him the secret of his inner truth. Identity, subjection, interiority: the individualization of Western man throughout the long millennium of the Christian pastorate was carried out at the price of subjectivity.’⁶²⁸ Foucault alternative form of individualisation will emphasise the salvation of the subject in transformation, freedom from subjection, and a true discourse of the self.

The only conclusion one can make is that the development of Foucault’s critical attitudes of modernity will serve to expose the technologies of domination, serving to enlighten

⁶²⁵ Michel Foucault, 'Pastoral power and political reason' in *Religion and Culture: Michel Foucault*, ed. by Jeremy R Carrette (New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 134-152 (p. 141).

⁶²⁶ Michel Foucault, 'Pastoral power and political reason' in *Religion and Culture: Michel Foucault*, ed. by Jeremy R Carrette (New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 134-152 (p. 141).

⁶²⁷ Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College de France 1977-1978*, ed. by Michael Senellart trans. by Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 239.

⁶²⁸ Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College de France 1977-1978*, ed. by Michael Senellart trans. by Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 308.

the individual and to shift the balance to once again to forms of ethical subjectivation. Foucault declares that 'the philosopher's role, which is to say what is happening, perhaps today consists in demonstrating that mankind is starting to discover that it can function without myths. No doubt the disappearance of philosophies and religions would correspond to something of that kind.'⁶²⁹ It seems that to carry out this role of the philosopher, Foucault promotes the role of technologies of the self, attitudes of modernity, and self-subjectivation in particular, in the constitution of individual moralities as forms of self-government. Foucault's challenge is not to liberate the self and one's conduct from oppression and law but to constitute the self and conduct free from oppression and law. What he challenges is the discourses, and those who direct using these discourses, which shape, control and determine conduct. No longer will it be required to govern the self by subjection in a trans-subjectivation to historical myths to explain the functioning role of the individual. The individual functions by means of technologies. By exposing the forms of technology, Foucault explains the present in terms of technology and not purpose or progression. He enlightens by enabling the constitution of individual moralities based on the capacity to control our own function rather than have a discourse claiming truth determine the function of the individual.

Foucault had a philosophical ambition for his aesthetics of existence. They are an experiment with the possibility of going beyond the limits imposed on us. As Davidson will suggest: 'For Foucault philosophy was a spiritual exercise, an exercise of oneself in which one submitted oneself to modifications and tests, underwent changes, in order to learn to think differently. This idea of philosophy as a way of life and, I shall argue, of ethics as proposing styles of life is one of the most forceful and provocative directions of Foucault's later thought'⁶³⁰ The question remains as to whether a return to a morality will be a coherent political strategy? Veyne suggests: 'The self is the new strategic possibility. Foucault, who knew how to see things on a large scale, nonetheless did not claim to be delivering a fully armed ethics. But he did suggest a way out. He took the rest of his strategy with him.'⁶³¹

Did Foucault intend to construct a normative ethic?

⁶²⁹ Michel Foucault, 'Who are you, Professor Foucault?' in *Religion and Culture: Michel Foucault*, ed. by Jeremy R Carrette (New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 87-104 (p. 104).

⁶³⁰ Arnold Davidson, 'Ethics as Ascetics: Foucault, the history of ethics, and ancient thought' in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, ed. by Gary Gutting (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 115-140 (p. 131).

⁶³¹ Paul Veyne, 'The Final Foucault and his Ethics', trans. by Catherine Porter and Arnold I. Davidson, *Critical Inquiry*, 20 (1993), 1-9 (p. 2).

Paul Rabinow suggests⁶³² in *The Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*, that the organisation of the series follows one proposed by Foucault himself when he wrote that his objective has been to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects. His work has dealt with three modes of objectification which transform human beings into subjects. In Volume One, following his course summaries from the Collège de France, which provide a powerful synoptic view of his many unfinished projects, the texts address the way a human being turns himself or herself into a subject. Rabinow entitled this volume *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*. This is the clearest answer possible to the question of whether Foucault did ethics. Yes, he did, but in his own nuanced and very particular way. Ethics for Foucault consists of the work done by the individual to transform the Cogito, to a form of subject, an ethical subject, that has a true relationship with the truth of the self. Ethics is about the essential and necessary conversion of the Cartesian subject to establish a relationship between subjectivity and truth.

When Foucault returned to his lectures at the *Collège de France* in 1981, his audience expected to hear a continuation of his analysis of biopower and governmentality. His lectures on ancient ethics, however shocking a turn for Foucault's interlocutors at the time, instead developed the arts of government in a very different manner.⁶³³ The complex of issues around which these lectures and books revolve is a series of daring problematisations undertaken by Foucault.⁶³⁴ His second concern in this period was the possibility of new modes of subjectivity based on self-fashioning, the technologies for which were revealed in the confessional technologies in his work on the history of sexuality

Foucault's interest was in the use of ancient spiritual exercises as the foundation for an individual's critical attitude and the self-formation of the 'ethical' or transformed subject, in the process of self-subjectivation. Foucault's interest in the ancient world was not motivated by a conviction that he could find there a solution to the problems of the technologies of modernity. His attempt was to reimagine a technology of self-subjectivation in the constitution of a morality, a form of self-government, that would be meaningful in a world already shaped by biopower. Foucault asks, in his so-called ethical phase, how do we constitute ourselves as

⁶³² Paul Rabinow, 'Series preface', in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp. vii-viii (p. viii).

⁶³³ Nancy Luxon, 'Ethics and subjectivity; Practices of self-governance in the late lectures of Michel Foucault', *Political Theory*, 36 (2008), 377-402 (p. 384).

⁶³⁴ Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg, 'Michel Foucault; Crises and Problemization', *Review of politics*, 67 (2005), 335-351 (p. 332).

moral or ethical subjects of our own technologies? He states that he has sought to study the way a human being turns himself into an ethical subject.⁶³⁵ Morality, for Foucault, is a form of ethical self-governance where ethics is the formation of a self-consciousness that has been transformed to have a relationship with existential forms of truth and that has not been contaminated by discourses claiming truth.

Davidson suggests that Foucault is not merely doing ethics as it might be understood in a modern society. Rather, Foucault thought of ethics as that component of morality that concerns the self's relationship to itself.⁶³⁶ A modern understanding of ethics, conceived and developed as a result of a prior theorisation of a universal morality, is challenged with helping decide what is right and what is wrong, which in turn enables us to decide what to do. Davidson suggests that Foucault is, instead, radically transforming how morality ought to be done. It ought not be the development of a moral code and a series of behaviours to which all will submit. Veyne suggests that Foucault had constructed a singular conception of morality that he doubted if an ethics possible.⁶³⁷ It was a morality with no claim to universality. Davidson thinks that Foucault asks us to think about the aesthetics of existence as a technology aimed at transforming us into different types of moral subjects.⁶³⁸ This notion follows the suggestion made by Foucault himself in *The Use of Pleasure*. A new ethics is the 'manner in which one ought to form oneself as an ethical subject of one's actions. There are different ways for the acting individual to operate, not just as agent of the action, but as the ethical subject of this action.'⁶³⁹

It seems evident that an aesthetics of existence, as a technology to form the ethical subject, is the primary matter of a philosophical ethics and was never intended as a first order normative ethic. To live life as a work of art could never be a solution to the many problems that exist in reality. This ethic was never intended to provide some form of normative guidance when confronted with pressing contemporary political and social problems. Foucault never

⁶³⁵ Michel Foucault, 'The Subject and Power' in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, ed. by Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 208-226 (p. 208).

⁶³⁶ Arnold Davidson, 'Ethics as Ascetics: Foucault, the history of ethics, and ancient thought' in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, ed. by Gary Gutting (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 115-140 (p. 125).

⁶³⁷ Paul Veyne, 'The Final Foucault and his Ethics', trans. by Catherine Porter and Arnold I. Davidson, *Critical Inquiry*, 20 (1993), 1-9 (p. 2).

⁶³⁸ Arnold Davidson, 'Ethics as Ascetics: Foucault, the history of ethics, and ancient thought' in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, ed. by G. Gutting (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp 115-140. (p. 125).

⁶³⁹ Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality:2* (London: Penguin books, 1992), p. 26.

characterises his work as comprising archaeology, genealogy and normative ethics. He makes it abundantly clear in 1983 that in his final work was a historical analysis of the pragmatics of the self and the forms it has taken in order to define the possibility of the history of what could be called experiences.⁶⁴⁰

With regard to a formation of a normative ethic, in fact Foucault was quite scathing. He says ‘that for a rather long period, people have asked me to tell them what will happen and to give them a program for the future. We know very well that, even with the best intentions, these programs become a tool, an instrument of oppression. Rousseau, a lover of freedom, was used in the French Revolution to build up a model of social oppression. Marx would be horrified by Stalinism and Leninism.’⁶⁴¹ Foucault suggests that when today, ‘we see the meaning given to some nonetheless very familiar expressions which continue to permeate our discourse, like getting back to oneself, freeing oneself, being oneself, being authentic, etcetera, when we see the absence of meaning and thought in all these expressions we employ today, then I do not think we have anything to be proud of in our current effort to reconstitute an ethic of the self.’⁶⁴² He adds, ‘and in this series of undertakings to reconstitute an ethic of the self, in this series of more or less blocked and ossified efforts, and in the movement we now make to refer to ourselves constantly to this ethic of the self without ever giving it any content, I think we may have to suspect that we find it today impossible to constitute an ethic of the self, even though it may be an urgent, fundamental, and politically indispensable task, if it is true after all that there is no first or final point of resistance to political power other than in the relationship one has to oneself.’⁶⁴³

He also suggests that recent liberation movements suffer from the fact that they cannot find any principle on which to base the elaboration of a new ethics. ‘They need an ethics, but they cannot find any other ethics than an ethics founded on so-called scientific knowledge of what the self is, what desire is, what the unconscious is, and so on. He adds ‘my point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad.

⁶⁴⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others, lectures at the College de France 1982-1983*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 5.

⁶⁴¹ Michel Foucault, "Technologies of the self in *Technologies of the self: a seminar with Michel Foucault*, ed by Luther Martin and Huck Gutman and Patrick H Hutton (London: Tavistock Publications, 1988), pp. 16-49 (p. 10).

⁶⁴² Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 251.

⁶⁴³ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject, Lectures at the College de France, 1981-1982* (New York: Picador, 2005), p. 251-252

If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do. So, my position leads not to apathy, but to a hyper and pessimistic activism.’⁶⁴⁴

Foucault defined his activism as his ambition to show people that they are much freer than they feel; that people accept as truth, as evidence, some themes which have been built up at a certain moment during history, and that this so-called evidence can be criticized and destroyed. To change something in the minds of people—that’s the role of an intellectual.⁶⁴⁵ Foucault, again, puts it most poignantly in a last interview where he claims that he is competent to speak only of what he knows: ‘the role of an intellectual is not to tell others what they have to do. By what right would he do so? The work of an intellectual is not to shape others’ political will; it is, through the analyses that he carries out in his own field, to question over and over again what is postulated as self-evident, to disturb people’s mental habits, the way they do and think things, to dissipate what is familiar and accepted, to re-examine rules and institutions.’⁶⁴⁶

A return of morality

According to Davidson, ‘this idea of philosophy as a way of life and, I shall argue, of ethics as proposing styles of life is one of the most forceful and provocative directions of Foucault’s later thought.’⁶⁴⁷ Davidson recognises, and the thesis will concur, that all of Foucault’s philosophical work over the years might be focussed on a single venture in his last years. This was the return of a morality, one that shifted the balance between code and ethical subjectivation firmly to the subject. By stylising morality, one removed all aspiration to universality. A style of life is one that had a corresponding fundamental inner attitude or unique *ethos*. What Foucault wanted, after all, was the exploration of ‘new lifestyles not resembling those that have been institutionalised.’⁶⁴⁸

Foucault describes Paul Veyne as ‘one of those individuals, (rare nowadays) who are willing to face the hazard that the history of truth poses for all thought.’⁶⁴⁹ It will be interesting

⁶⁴⁴ Michel Foucault, ‘On the genealogy of ethics’, in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp. 253-280 (p. 256).

⁶⁴⁵ Rux Martin, ‘Truth, power, self: an interview with Michel Foucault’, in *Technologies of the self, a seminar with Michel Foucault*, ed. by Luther Martin and Huck Gutman and Patrick H Hutton (London: Tavistock Publications, 1988), pp. 9-15 (p. 10).

⁶⁴⁶ Michel Foucault, ‘The Concern for Truth’, in *Politics Philosophy Culture: Interviews and other writings 1977-1984*, ed. by Laurence Kritzman trans. by Alan Sheridan and others (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 255-267 (p. 265).

⁶⁴⁷ Arnold Davidson, ‘Ethics as Ascetics: Foucault, the history of ethics, and ancient thought’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, ed. by Gary Gutting (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 115-140 (p. 131).

⁶⁴⁸ Michel Foucault, *Foucault Live*, trans. John Johnston, ed. Sylvère Lotringer (New York: Semiotext(e), 1989), p. 229.

⁶⁴⁹ Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality:2* (London: Penguin books, 1992), p. 8.

then to examine Veyne's analysis of Foucault's conception of morality based on this history of truth. Veyne suggests that Foucault, 'who knew how to see things on a large scale, nonetheless did not claim to be delivering a fully armed ethics; such academic exploits seemed to him to have died out along with the old philosophy. He would not have claimed in any case to have supplied a true or definitive solution, for humanity is constantly on the move, to such an extent that each current solution soon reveals that it too involves danger: every solution is soon imperfect, and this will always be so.'⁶⁵⁰ In effect, he implies that Foucault believed classical political and ethical truth is dead. He reminds that Foucault asks: 'how is it that there is so little truth in truth.'⁶⁵¹

Veyne opines that Foucault constructed for himself a singular conception of morality, a morality with no claim to universality.⁶⁵² Foucault insists that 'the search for a form of morality acceptable to everyone in the sense that everyone should submit to it, strikes me as catastrophic.'⁶⁵³ Foucault himself notes that the unity of a style of morality began to be thought of only during the Roman empire and it was thought of immediately in terms of code and truth and found expression only within the framework of a religious style.⁶⁵⁴ Greek morality addresses itself to only to individuals, and it does not require everybody to obey the same pattern of behaviour. As Foucault suggests 'we are very far away from the moral conformities, the structures of which are elaborated by sociologists and historians by appealing to a hypothetical average population.'⁶⁵⁵

This idea of a singular morality was not without its detractors. By claiming that there are no universally applicable principles, no normative standards, no order of human life, or way we are, or human nature, that one can appeal to in order to judge or evaluate between ways of life, Foucault, according to Charles Taylor, relinquishes any critical power that his historical

⁶⁵⁰ Paul Veyne, 'The Final Foucault and his Ethics', trans. by Catherine Porter and Arnold I. Davidson, *Critical Inquiry*, 20 (1993), 1-9 (p. 8).

⁶⁵¹ Paul Veyne, 'The Final Foucault and his Ethics', trans. by Catherine Porter and Arnold I. Davidson, *Critical Inquiry*, 20 (1993), 1-9 (p. 8).

⁶⁵² Paul Veyne, 'The Final Foucault and his Ethics', trans. by Catherine Porter and Arnold I. Davidson, *Critical Inquiry*, 20 (1993), 1-9 (p. 2).

⁶⁵³ Michel Foucault, 'The Return of Morality', in *Politics Philosophy Culture: Interviews and other writings 1977-1984*, ed. by Laurence Kritzman trans. by Alan Sheridan and others (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 242-255 (p. 255).

⁶⁵⁴ Michel Foucault, 'The Return of Morality', in *Politics Philosophy Culture: Interviews and other writings 1977-1984*, ed. by Laurence Kritzman trans. by Alan Sheridan and others (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 242-255 (p. 244).

⁶⁵⁵ Michel Foucault, 'The Return of Morality', in *Politics Philosophy Culture: Interviews and other writings 1977-1984*, ed. by Laurence Kritzman trans. by Alan Sheridan and others (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 242-255 (p. 245).

analyses might have. Without such a normative yardstick, according to Jurgen Habermas, Foucault's historical analyses cannot be genuinely critical.⁶⁵⁶ Veyne suggests that Foucault constructed for himself such a singular conception of morality that there is a real problem: within his philosophy, was an ethics for Foucault even possible?⁶⁵⁷ He adds that it is a morality with no claim to universality. He adds 'if the self frees us from the idea that between morality and society, or what we call by those names, there is an analytic and necessary link, then it is no longer necessary to wait for the revolution to begin to realise ourselves: the self is the new strategic possibility.'⁶⁵⁸

Veyne suggests, as the thesis has shown, that Greek ethics is quite dead. However, he adds, that Foucault 'considered one of its elements, namely, the idea of a work of the self on a self, to be capable of reacquiring a contemporary meaning in the manner of one of those pagan temple columns that one occasionally sees reutilised in more recent structures. We can guess what might emerge from this diagnosis: the self, taking itself as a work to be accomplished, could sustain an ethic that is no longer supported by either tradition or reason: as an artist of itself, the self would enjoy an autonomy that modernity can no longer do without.'⁶⁵⁹ Veyne reminds his reader of a pithy saying. 'Everything has disappeared', said Medea, 'but I still have one thing left: myself.' This self, Veyne suggests, is the new strategic possibility. Foucault did suggest a way, but, according to Veyne, he took the rest of his strategy with him.

Davidson informs us that 'one of the great virtues of ancient thought is that knowledge of oneself, care of oneself, and one's style of life are everywhere so woven together that one cannot, without distortion, isolate any of these issues from the entire philosophical thematics of which they form part. If we ignore these dimensions of the moral life, we shall be able to do justice to neither history nor philosophy. And, without doubt worse, we shall not be able to take account of ourselves, of who we have become, of how we might become different.'⁶⁶⁰ Foucault's work on the necessity of the struggle against the disciplines of penology, human sciences, and psychiatry, shows how even the most coercive relationships could not

⁶⁵⁶ James Bernauer and Michael Mahon, 'Michel Foucault's ethical imagination' in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, ed. by Gary Gutting (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 149-175 (p. 149).

⁶⁵⁷ Paul Veyne, 'The Final Foucault and his Ethics', trans. by Catherine Porter and Arnold I. Davidson, *Critical Inquiry*, 20 (1993), 1-9 (p. 2).

⁶⁵⁸ Paul Veyne, 'The Final Foucault and his Ethics', trans. by Catherine Porter and Arnold I. Davidson, *Critical Inquiry*, 20 (1993), 1-9 (p. 2).

⁶⁵⁹ Paul Veyne, 'The Final Foucault and his Ethics', trans. by Catherine Porter and Arnold I. Davidson, *Critical Inquiry*, 20 (1993), 1-9 (p. 7).

⁶⁶⁰ Arnold Davidson, 'Ethics as Ascetics: Foucault, the history of ethics, and ancient thought' in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, ed. by Gary Gutting (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 115-140 (p. 131).

independently control all human conduct, but required the voluntary participation of the individual, who, by internalising knowledge (*connaissance*) and law, was dominated. By introducing a Greek morality that constituted ancient thought, and the technologies of the self, that constituted the critical attitudes for the present day, Foucault's final work, no matter how unfinished and uneven, bequeaths an astonishing resource for thinking about possible forms of resistance to all forms of individualising power and for the possibility of a self-government and self-identification. Such a resistance is possible, but it is neither a rule nor an imperative for everyone. As has been shown, this morality lays no claim to universality.

The thesis hopes to have outlined the necessity for a continuation of Foucault's work on governmentality which was first revealed in *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College de France 1977-1978*. In this work, Foucault suggests that effects of the human sciences as dominant ideologies, the use of pastoral power by the institutions of human sciences, and the predominance of processes of trans-subjection in their technologies, are best resisted by a counter conduct. Foucault opines that 'if it is true that the pastorate is a highly specific form of power with the object of conducting men – I mean, that takes as its instrument the methods that allow one to direct them (*les conduire*), and as its target the way in which they conduct themselves, the way in which they behave – if the objective of the pastorate is men's conduct, I think equally specific movements of resistance and insubordination appeared in correlation with this that could be called specific revolts of conduct, again leaving the word "conduct" in all its ambiguity. They are movements whose objective is a different form of conduct, movements that also seek, possibly at any rate, to escape direction by others and to define the way for each to conduct himself.'⁶⁶¹ These movements and counter-conducts constitute the return of morality.

Rather than examining the historical integration of pastoral power with institutions of knowledge and the resulting constitution of biopower which focussed on the development of knowledge of man around two roles: one globalising and quantitative, concerning the population; the other analytical, concerning the individual,⁶⁶² the thesis contends that Foucault's focus was on the voluntary struggle of the individual for identity and self-governance, a struggle against institutions of pastoral power that abound in the welfare state.

⁶⁶¹ Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College de France 1977-1978*, ed. by Michael Senellart trans. by Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 259.

⁶⁶² Michel Foucault, 'The Subject and Power', in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, ed. by Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 208-226 (p. 215).

The next work envisaged, and possibly a work intended by Foucault, asks whether by removing the influence of pastoral power in particular through a modern asceticism and mysticism, and by prioritising the deployment of spiritual knowledge as opposed to knowledge (*connaissance*), might one consciously be able to resist the hitherto unconscious imposition of technologies of biopower and domination by ensuring at all times the possibility of the enlightened and transformed and ‘ethical’ subject. Foucault, when asked whether an aesthetics of existence might become the centre for a new philosophical thought, of another kind of politics than the one we are seeing today, said: ‘I don’t like answering questions which I have not examined. I would, however, like to take up again those questions which I have raised through the culture of Antiquity.’⁶⁶³ Later he opines that he had ‘not gone very far in that direction and he would rather come back to some more contemporary problems, in order to try and see what we can do with all that in the actual political problematic. In turn, it seems to me that that the question of an ethical subject does not have much place in contemporary political thought.’⁶⁶⁴

The next work then will ask whether Foucault’s return of morality could finally provide the answer to the question ‘What is Enlightenment’ for today? Could the answer lie in Foucault’s own advice when he says ‘a critical philosophy is that which calls into question domination at every level and in every form in which it exists, whether political, economic, sexual, institutional, or what have you. To a certain extent, this critical function of philosophy derives from the Socratic injunction ‘Take care of yourself,’ in other words, ‘Make freedom your foundation, through the mastery of yourself.’⁶⁶⁵

⁶⁶³ Michel Foucault, ‘The ethics of a concern of the self as a practice of freedom’, in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp. 281-303 (p. 294).

⁶⁶⁴ Michel Foucault, ‘The ethics of a concern of the self as a practice of freedom’, in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp. 281-303 (p. 294).

⁶⁶⁵ Michel Foucault, ‘The ethics of a concern of the self as a practice of freedom’, in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow trans. by Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp. 281-303 (p. 300-301).