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Care of the Self, Foucauldian Ethics, and Contemporary Subjectivity

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Historian and philosopher Michel Foucault's intellectual focus experienced a great shift throughout the last four years of his life, from 1981-84. Deviating, to an extent, from his previous studies concerning epistemology and power, Foucault began to unravel the genealogy of the "Care of the Self," uncovering, theorizing, and mapping the details and techniques of classical, philosophically driven self-care practices. By exploring Foucault's lectures from this period compiled in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* (1981-82) and *The Courage of Truth* (1983-84), I will illustrate how Foucault uncovers the Classical and Hellenistic cultures of the self, the characteristics of which differ widely from those found in contemporary Western culture. By addressing ethics, the care of the self, the art of life, ascetics, and truth-speaking, I will discuss the ways in which the possibility of self-fashioned subjectivities was a widespread—at times even all encompassing—mode of existence in antiquity. I will then explain how Foucault's lectures offer that the institutionalization of Christianity, the subsequent formation of pastoral power, and the increasing prevalence of scientific and academic discourses collectively functioned to phase out antiquity's practices of self-finalizing subjectivity, and instead introduced into Western culture and thought an understanding that the self is already and always determined, and that its fashioning and formation is beyond the ability of the subject. Contemporary Western subjectivity thus appears to be limited and inescapable; however, I pose that, by turning towards ethics, the driving force of ancient philosophy's self-care practices, the contemporary Western subject can escape the limits of subjectivation that have existed since the institutionalization of Christianity, and may instead form his own subjectivity through the possibility of an ethical mode of life.

Foucault begins his 1981-82 lectures in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* by taking up antiquity's momentously important philosophical practice of *epimeleia heautou*, "the care of the

self" (*The Hermeneutics of the Subject* 8). *Epimeleaia heautou* was paramount to Platonic,

Socratic, Epicurean, and later Stoic and Cynic philosophical practice, as its various concepts,

rules, and techniques "remained a fundamental principle for describing the philosophical attitude

throughout Greek, Hellenistic, and Roman culture" (8). In antiquity, the care of the self involved

a multitude of practices that were performed on the self, by the self, such as memorization,

meditation, abstinence, and "examination of conscience" (11). Through examining its one-

thousand-year genealogy, Foucault illustrates that *epimeleia heautou* may be understood as not

just a prevalent, widespread philosophical culture of antiquity, but as constituting a complex,

multifaceted, and constantly changing framework of self-subjectivity. The most profound result

of Foucault's genealogical work throughout his lectures from 1981-84 in regard to *epimeleia

heautou* rests in his descriptions of the transformation of antiquity's care-of-self practices into

"the first forms of Christian asceticism" (11). Practices of Christian asceticism began to change

modes of Western subjectivity, and (as they later became paired with bio-political discourse of

the 19th and 20th centuries) they have come to substantially affect contemporary epistemes of

subjectivity.

By addressing Plato's *Alcibiades*, Foucault points to *epimeleia heautou*'s early

fundamental notions. In this text, Socrates exclaims, "One must care about oneself," but quickly

realizes that there are intrinsic intricacies and complications to work out within this expression.

Foucault notes Socrates' daunting query: "who knows exactly what "taking care of one's self"

is?" (*Hermeneutics* 51). Delving more intuitively into the predicament, Plato's "text then

naturally divides into two parts": First, "what is this thing, this object, this self to which one must

attend?" Second, "What form should this care take, in what must it consist?" (51). The general

answer to the latter question will remain constant—although the specific practices will vary

depending on circumstance—throughout antiquity: The care of the self must consist of a *tekhnē*, a set of techniques performed by the self on the self (51). Likewise, the answer to the former inquiry is composed of a general constant thread throughout the period of antiquity in question. What is this object that one must care for? It is the "element which is the same on both the subject side and the object side" (53): "You have to take care of yourself: It is you who takes care; and then you take care of something which is the same thing as yourself, [the same thing] as the subject who "takes care," this is your self as object" (53). However, the specifics of this answer—the specifics of "self"—prove quite malleable throughout Foucault's lectures.

Proper governing was the aim of care-of-the-self practices in early Socratic dialogue. A young ruler must care for oneself, govern oneself, and do so ethically (I will return to the importance of this ethics) in order to properly care for and govern others as a ruler (*Hermeneutics* 51-52). Thus, the self one cares for in this instance is the self-as-governor, self-as-ruler with the aim of being able to rule properly. In later Socratic dialogue regarding *epimeleia heautou*, however, the self for which one must care becomes one's *psukhē*, one's "soul" (53). In this later dialogue, Socrates illustrates that *epimeleia heautou* practices are no longer limited to the realm of young men associated with political governance, but have instead transcended to a more generally applicable philosophical practice: "in the *Apology*, for example," Foucault explains, "Socrates says that he encourages his fellow citizens, and *everyone he meets*, to care for their soul (*psukhē*) in order to perfect it" (53, emphasis added). Notwithstanding, the care of the self in later Socratic dialogue is still a principle that is generally directed toward youth. As was the case with the young ruler, those who are directed to take care of themselves do so with the aim of reaching a perfected old age: "The young man will not take care of himself in order to become the citizen, or rather the leader who is needed. The adult must take care of

himself…to prepare…[f]or his old age" (75). There is a paramount point to be expounded upon

in regard to this soul-as-object that must be cared for. By caring for the soul-as-object, one does

not *discover* the "soul-substance" (as will become common with Christianity), but rather *forms*

the soul-subject (57). Foucault clearly reiterates his understanding of the distinction: "It seems to

me that the outcome of the argument of the *Alcibiades* on the question "what is oneself and what

meaning should be given to oneself when we say that one should take care of the self?" is the

soul as subject and not at all the soul as substance" (57).

By continuing to navigate the *Alcibiades*, Foucault points to another momentous concept

that will prove substantially important throughout care-of-self practices of antiquity (as well as

throughout future Christian ascetic practices, within realms of bio-political knowledge, and

within the framework of contemporary subjectivity). What is the necessary first step of taking

care of one's self? Foucault explains the essential feature, asserting, "Well, quite simply, it

consists in knowing oneself" (*Hermeneutics* 67). *Epimeleia heautou*—"care of the self"—is

paired with, as well as necessarily accompanied by throughout antiquity, *gnōthi seauton*—

"knowledge of the self" (67), which is accessed by employing various pre-established

philosophical practices:

> [I]t seems to me that by taking over and reintegrating a number of
> these prior, archaic, preexisting techniques, the whole movement
> of Platonic thought with regard to the care of the self is one of
> organizing them around and subordinating them to the great
> principle of know yourself. It is in order to know oneself that one
> must withdraw into the self; it is in order to know oneself that one
> must detach oneself from sensations which are the source of
> illusions; it is in order to know oneself that one must establish
> one's soul in an immobile fixity which is not open to external
> events, etcetera. (*Hermeneutics* 68)

Although *gnōthi seauton* plays a critical role in antiquity's self-care practices (it was, indeed, "the major if not exclusive form of the care of the self" in the *Alcibiades*), the philosophical cultures that employed *epimeleia heautou* pursued aims and performed techniques that extended vastly beyond simple knowledge of the self and self-knowledge practices (*Hermeneutics* 82). The care of the self came to incorporate "autonomous, self-finalized practice[s]" that would comprise in some cases—in the Neo-Platonic movements, for example— "the fundamental definition of philosophy" (86). In many instances of Classical and Hellenistic philosophy, the care of the self would come to incorporate and run parallel with "the famous *tekhnē tou biou*," the art of life, the art of living (86). Unlike the care of the self depicted in Plato's *Alcibiades*, the *epimeleia heautou* "was no longer a sort of preliminary condition for an art of living that would come later" (125), but was rather denoted by work on the self, by the self, "[a]nd the end of this practice of the self is the self," all of which was practiced with the continual formation of *the current self* as the ultimate aim (126).

This *tekhnē tou biou*, this "art of life," was comprised of various practices exercised on the self by the self, and by which one continuously fashions oneself as subject (*Hermeneutics* 11). As the *tekhnē tou biou* is carried out on the self, Foucault explains, the self will "actually be fashioned by himself as the object of his own care," composing a self-formed subject (*Hermeneutics* 119). Knowledge continues to function as a prevalent concept in art-of-life practices throughout antiquity, for "[t]he theme that all the knowledge we need must be knowledge prescribed by the *tekhnē tou biou* is found equally in the Stoics, Epicureans, and Cynics" (*Hermeneutics* 259). The subject must find in himself the knowledge of "the truth of his being," with which he will find "a mode of being, which is one of happiness and of every perfection of which he is capable" (*Hermeneutics* 308). One arrives upon the truth of one's being

via practices of *askēsis*, "the progressive consideration or mastery over oneself" ("Technologies of the Self" 238). *Askēsis*, Foucault simply and definitively states, "equips, it provides" (*Hermeneutics* 320). Specifically, *askēsis* provides *paraskeuē*, a set of moves, practices, and abilities that will equip and prepare an individual for whatever difficulty he may encounter. *Askēsis* was entirely positive work for the Greeks, and was a personal choice with the purpose of giving one's own life a certain value ("On the Genealogy of Ethics" 271). Attaining this art of life was accomplished via a multitude of fashions and practices, such as taking care of one's physical health and properly attending to the needs of one's property and family. Xenophon's ascetic techniques, Foucault explains, included exercising knowledge of one's home—both inside and out ("Genealogy" 269). *Askēsis* also included a fair amount of individual and social practices of intellectuality for the Greeks—studying, reading, writing, note taking, and letter writing were key. Additionally, *askēsis* occasionally entailed preparing for death or earthly hardship. Epictetus and Seneca devised an *askēsis* centered on exercises of the self in preparation of an event in which one would find oneself in deep deprivation. For example, their ascetic principles involved severely limiting one's food and pleasure in preparation for a situation, such as prison, in which one is forced to exist deprived of such essential life-elements ("Genealogy" 269).

And this *paraskeuē* is itself made up of truth in the form of "*logoi* (discourses)"—truth that the subject firmly knows, has actually uttered, repeated, written, rewritten, and solidified eternally (*Hermeneutics* 322). Further, Foucault explains, "[a]s the word *logos* indicates, [true discourses] are propositions justified by reason. Justified by reason means that they are rational, that they are true and constitute acceptable principles of behavior" (*Hermeneutics* 323). The self was fashioned through practices of *askēsis*, which resulted in forming a complete, perfect, full

relationship with oneself, and produced a constant "self-transfiguration" (*Hermeneutics* 319). *Askēsis* was comprised of "practices of truth" that not only "b[ound the subject] to the truth," but also to an acceptable and exemplary mode of existence (*Hermeneutics* 317).

Understanding only the interrelatedness of ancient *askēsis* and *paraskeuē*, however, does not fully explain the manner in which one would constitute himself as a subject of *tekhnē tou biou*. Further discussion of concepts relative to the above-mentioned "rational…principles of behavior" and subsequent acceptable mode of existence is entirely paramount in explaining the way in which *askēsis* functioned as only a facet of *tekhnē tou biou.* The full substance, function, and interrelatedness of *tekhnē tou biou*, *epimeleia heautou*, and ancient *askēsis* (as well as an associated aesthetics) may be most completely demonstrated by discussing them concurrently within the discourse of ethics. One of the driving forces behind *epimeleia heautou* is a relationship of the self to the self, which constitutes an artistic labor on the self by the self in order to obtain an acceptable and exemplary mode of life, an *ethōs*—a presentation to the world of a certain mode of being, an attractive life, an ethics. Foucault describes this ethical self-to-self relationship as consisting of four major aspects: the "ethical substance," elements or a particular area of one's life that are worked over by ethics; the "mode of subjectivation," the manner in which the individual is "invited or incited" to recognize how they should exist morally; "asceticism" (*askēsis*), an activity of molding the self—simply, what techniques one is to execute in order to reach the fourth aspect, the "*telos*," the ultimate goal and end ("Genealogy" 263). Within this framework, *askēsis* is labor—an artistic labor, an aesthetic labor—in the form of "an exercise of the self on the self by which one attempts to develop and transform oneself, and to attain a certain mode of being" ("The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom" 282). "[T]he objective of ascesis in Antiquity," Foucault concisely explains, "is in fact the

constitution of a full, perfect, and complete relationship of oneself to oneself," which is apparent

through one's conduct and behavior (*Hermeneutics* 320). Thus, this "mode of being," this ethical

tekhnē tou biou is itself the *telos* of *epimeleia heautou*. The self works on the self in a

continuous, aesthetically laborious manner, while the object and constant aim is the self, one's

life, one's existence, which itself may be understood as a work of art, a canvas in need of

constant ethical attention.

The care of the self continued to become even more generalized throughout antiquity.

Epimeleia heautou became a staple of not only aristocratic circles geared towards philosophical

practice, but also began to permeate the lower classes through the establishment of various

philosophical "cults" (thus defined because they "often [contained] ritualized procedures") and

philosophical schools (*Hermeneutics* 114). Many groups were all encompassing, even allowing

membership to those of "the most disadvantaged classes" (113-14):

> In most of the groups I am talking about, the distinctions between
> rich and poor, between someone high-born and someone from an
> obscure family, or between someone who exercises political power
> and someone who lives in obscurity, were in principle not
> endorsed, recognized, or accepted…it seems that most of these
> groups did not accept even the distinction between a free man and
> a slave, in theory at least. (*Hermeneutics* 118)

Virtually all men were theoretically competent and capable of *epimeleia heautou*. Although

Foucault explains that this principle was only achieved by a few ("[l]ack of courage, strength, or

endurance" usually prevailed), "[t]he care of the self is expressed as an unqualified principle,"

meaning that it may apply to and be practiced by everyone, regardless of

"status…[or]…technical, professional, or social aim" (118, 126). And not only was the care of

the self no longer limited by social qualifications, it became a practice that extended well beyond

a practice of youth. There was a *tekhnē* for *epimeleia heautou* that applied to a range of ages, from youth to old age, "[a]nd the *epimeleia heautou*, now that its scale encompasses the whole of life, consists in educating oneself through all of one's misfortunes" (439). Self-forming practices involving the relationship between self-as-object and self-as-subject greatly permeated the philosophies of the first and second centuries A.D., during which time Western civilization "arrive[d] at a culture of the self, a practice of the self of considerable proportions, with extremely rich forms…" (316).

Throughout his 1983-84 lectures compiled in *The Courage of Truth*, Foucault dedicates significant attention to Cynicism, exemplifying, describing, and detailing a widespread and entirely nonexclusive philosophical school of antiquity. Cynicism may be understood as "a sort of universal philosophy which is valid for and accessible to everyone" (200). In order to practice Cynicism, one did not require an elevated cultural or social status, nor formal schooling, training, or apprenticeship, nor any extensive regiment (198). Instead, Cynicism was "universal, entirely natural, and demand[ed] no study" because its aims could be accomplished by simply "choos[ing] what is decent out of desire for virtue and aversion to vice" (200). All have or can easily acquire knowledge of the basic philosophical notions and virtues driving Cynicism, thus in-depth instruction or a multitude of texts were not required (201). Cynicism considered all men philosophers by way of their very nature, by birth, and its "discourses and interventions were addressed to a wide and consequently not very cultured public, and its recruits came from outside the educated elites who usually practiced philosophy" (202). Cynic philosophy was simple, easy, normal, and practical, and offered what was considered, as Foucault explains, "a short cut to virtue," "the quick way to virtue" from which no one was excluded (206).

As with the aforementioned philosophical schools of antiquity, Cynicism was based around practices of truth. Cynic philosophy included *parrhēsia*, "truth-telling," "freedom of speech," which was directly incorporated in the Cynic's mode of life (*Courage* 169). The Cynic spoke freely, and lived a life that consisted totally of, and fully exemplified, truth. In order to "play the role of truth teller," the Cynic must renounce all attachments and desires that extend beyond mere natural necessity (170), and must live the life which is only truly essential. Thus, the Cynic donned the beggar's attire and position, standing at temples and on street corners wearing rags, a beard, and nothing more than sandals or bare feet (203, 170). Foucault notes that "the mode of life (staff, beggar's pouch, poverty, roaming, begging) has very precise functions in relation to this *parrhēsia*, this truth-tellling"—specifically, he explains, "[t]he mode of life is…a condition of possibility of this *parrhēsia*" (171). If one speaks freely and truthfully, one may adopt and exemplify a life of truth, for Cynicism makes "the form of existence an essential condition of truth-telling…[and] it makes the form of existence a way of making truth itself visible in one's acts, one's body, the way one dresses, and in the way one conducts oneself and lives" (172). At its essence, Cynicism is directly linked with practices of truth-telling, which themselves allow the Cynic to live a life of truth. Yet, the true life one lives is itself a *parrhēsia*, a truth-telling, in that it is an utter exemplification of what is true and natural and what is only and undeniably necessary (217). Additionally, the Cynic's life is also true in that it is never hidden and "does not harbor any shadowy part" (221). This "unconcealed life" is also shameless of what it presents, for what it presents is always truth. A life that is entirely visible depicts what is entirely true and natural, and a life that was true and natural is entirely good (254).

Despite their beggarly attributes, the Cynics considered themselves to exemplify a beautiful existence through the true life that they sought and the truth-telling that it exhibited

(*Courage* 165). As with the previously mentioned philosophical schools and practices of antiquity, the desired Cynic mode of life was achieved via "the way of exercise, of *askēsis,* of practices of destitution and endurance" (207). Through minimizing desires, possessions, consumption, social status, and virtually all other aspects of existence that extend beyond what is essential and naturally necessary, the Cynic developed a "difficult, arduous" mode of being that points to the very essence of *askēsis*—"truth as discipline…and bareness of life" (207, 173). And as with other philosophies of antiquity, Cynicism—by way of true discourse, *askēsis*, virtue, and a specific *epimeleia heautou*—produced its very own exemplary ethics, for "[a] true life is the life which allows its *ethōs* to be easily recognized" (223 f.). Despite its slovenly characteristics, Cynicism projected a life that was moral, ethical, and therefore beautiful by way of its mode and practices, denoting yet another instantiation of a certain art of life fashioned by the self through modes of truth, a fully self-finalized self-subjectivation.

The Cynics minimized their lives to the level of revealed and shameless natural necessity by practicing numerous tests of self. The aim of such tests was to "simply reveal[] what life is in its independence, its fundamental freedom, and consequently…what life ought to be" (*Courage* 171). In order to answer such tests and attain the true life, Cynic practice revolved around the metaphoric imperatives: "alter your currency" or "change the value of your currency," in which one's life was equated to the effigy on a coin (241). This notion of alteration—"*parakharaxon to nomisma* (revalue your currency, alter your currency, change its value)"—was not just "regarded as a principle of life," but, Foucault asserts, was considered "the most fundamental and typical Cynic principle" (241). Along with the imperative "know yourself" (accomplished through establishing one's life as a life of truth), revaluing one's life was the most paramount underlying

aim of Cynic philosophical practice (241). Foucault clarifies the interconnection between "know

yourself" and *parakharaxon to nomisma*, and takes note of their interaction's subsequent end:

> [T]he fundamental precept is "revalue your currency"; but this
> revaluation can only take place through and by means of "know
> yourself," which replaces the counterfeit currency of one's own
> and others' opinion of oneself, with the true currency of self-
> knowledge. One can handle one's own existence, take care of
> oneself as something real, and have the true currency of one's true
> existence in one's hands, on condition that one knows oneself.
> (*Courage* 242)

By discovering knowledge of self through converting oneself and one's life to truth, one may

change the very value of his existence from a "counterfeit" value to "true currency." This

revaluating self-morphing arises through one's own accumulation of self-knowledge via actions

of the self. And, most momentously, the ability to fashion oneself as the effigy of one's true

currency rests solely in "one's hands." Through the fundamental Cynic practice *parakharaxon to*

nomisma, Foucault describes a philosophical mode of antiquity in which one may fully change

one's existence from that which is "counterfeit" to that which is nothing less than naturally

necessary, positive, and wholly true—that which is ethical, beautiful, and exemplary of an

aesthetic existence resulting from a self-fashioning driven by ascetic practices.

Foucault additionally sheds light upon an interpretation of this principle that describes the

aim as more than just breaking from the untrue self. *Parakharaxon to nomisma* may be further

understood as breaking from convention, from custom, and from established practices of

society—"breaking up the rules, habits, conventions, and laws" (*Courage* 242). The conventions

which one breaks from may be equated to the untrue, the false, the "counterfeit," and the

breaking from them may be seen as an instantiation, formation, and establishment of the true

value of one's life. The Cynic's life is replaced by one that is other, better, and more adequate,

and the result marks a paramount uncovering of Foucault's last lectures. This "other life (*vie autre*)" allows access to the "other world (*l'autre monde*)"—by living an ethical and truthful life, the Cynic is able to access a world of actual, natural truth which is other than that which is believed to be true (245). This true other world that breaks from normal social practice, custom, and belief is at the very fingertips of the Cynic philosopher. And as Cynicism was entirely nonexclusive, easy to practice, and thus prevalent throughout various cultures and social classes, we find a culture of the self, a practice of art and beauty, a vast practice of self-subjectivating ethics within antiquity in which individuals from all walks of society could access an other life and an other world through nothing more than their own practices of *askēsis*. Through his treatment of the Cynics, Foucault describes a philosophical culture and practice of antiquity in which anyone and everyone had the power to alter their self and their world by forming not only a self and world that are other, but *the* self and world that are true. Foucault's uncovering is monumental, for he illuminates a time in Western culture in which one had the ability to create not only one's self, but one's world. Self was understood as malleable, fashionable, as a canvas, as a project, and by altering this self, one could form a world which was true and other than what was prior, a world that was no longer "counterfeit," conforming, standard, or within the confines of social and cultural limitations. The Cynics could break from that which seems real, absolute, and definite, and could thus form a reality of self that was true in actuality.

But such concepts and processes have been phased out of Western thought. With the formation of Christianity and its instantiation of pastoral power, antiquity's philosophical notions of self-knowledge, care of the self, ascetic practices, the soul, the other life, and the other world underwent radical transformations. Foucault traces care-of-self practices from Socrates, to the Cynics, to early Christian practices of the third and fourth centuries (*Hermeneutics* 10).

Hesitantly, and apparently for lack of a better term, Foucault points to the "Cartesian moment,"

which denotes a shift from antiquity's conception of *gnōthi seauton*, *epimeleia heautou*, truth,

parrhēsia, and the associated modes of life and ascetic practices to Christian and then modern

conceptualizations (14). The "moment" is better understood, Foucault clarifies, as a

transformation rather than a single event, for "the disengagement, the separation, was a slow

process" (27). As an ultimate result, knowledge of the truth of oneself came to dominate Western

thought and culture, but *askēsis* as a wholly positive practice and the means to an art of life has

been phased out.

Many philosophical schools of antiquity incorporated salvation practices. In Platonic

dialogue, for example, "one must be saved, one must save oneself, in order to save others"

(*Hermeneutics* 180). The dialogue found in the *Alcibiades* clearly depicts this concept, as therein

the young aristocrat must save himself from an immoral, unethical life in order to govern

properly, which would in turn save his subjects from unethical rule. In order to maintain his

ethical state, the ruler must continuously work upon the self through a continual salvation that

requires constant attention, and which is subsequently and always being produced. After

Platonism—during the later Hellenistic and Roman philosophies—salvation continued to

represent a self-effected, -forming, and -finalizing act: "One saves oneself for the self, one is

saved by the self, one saves oneself in order to arrive at nothing other than oneself" (185). In

Christianity, however, "salvation normally appears in a binary system…situated between this

world and the other. Salvation effectuates a crossing over" (181). Whereas the salvation of

antiquity came from constant and continual attention to the self in the form of *askēsis*, salvation

as it is understood in Christianity (as well as modern culture) came to be understood as a quick

shift or switch, "something that brings about passage," such as from impurity to purity or evil to good (181).

The singular sudden change that the Christian experiences following salvation is known as *metanoia*, a conversion. There is a swift alteration from one mode of being to another, from one life to another. Unlike the continual self-care practices of antiquity in which the self constantly forms the self as subject, Christian *metanoia* "can only be conversion inasmuch as a break takes place in the subject" (*Hermeneutics* 211). Whereas self-care philosophical practices of antiquity brought one closer to one as subject and strengthened the relationship between self and self—denoting the concept of *epistrophē* in which one essentially returns to the source of one's soul (217)—Christian *metanoia* separates self from self in a singular instant. Earlier self-care practices *do* incorporate a separation as in Christianity, although not at all a "break" between self and self: "The break must be carried out *with what surrounds the self* so that it is no longer enslaved, dependent, and constrained…but which is *not a break of the self with the self*" (212, emphasis added). Foucault clearly and effectively differentiates between these two distinct relationships of the self by ascribing the term "trans-subjectivation" to the concept of Christian *metanoia*, for it does not at all describe a self-fashioning practice, but rather a new subjectivation as the result of a complete detachment from self (214), and by ascribing the term "self-subjectivation" to the self-to-self relationships of antiquity wherein one constantly and continuously fashions oneself as the object and subject of one's own practices (214). The *epistrophē* clearly indicates a return to self, a strengthening of the relationship between self and self, whereas Christian *metanoia* "involes a drastic change of the mind, a radical renewal…a sort of rebirth…with death and resurrection at the heart of this as an experience of oneself…" (216).

Like the previous philosophical schools of antiquity, Christian conversion of self incorporated and revolved around self-knowledge and truth. In early Christianity, one must accept the truth that is the product of pastoral power—that which is passed down from the institution through its texts and preachers—if one is to reach salvation, be transformed, and thus be saved (*Hermeneutics* 255). Also passed down from pastoral power is the notion that one may only attain the truth of self by deciphering one's inner soul. No longer does one care for the soul-as-object in order to form the soul-as-subject, but the Christian must now interpret the soul-substance in order to uncover the inherent truth of self (255). One must recognize the nature of one's soul in order to "dispel internal illusions, to recognize the temptations that arise within the soul and the heart [such as the devil's nefarious and misleading messages], and also to thwart the seductions to which [one] may be victim" (255-56). With the ancients, the soul could be reached, engaged with, and aesthetically formed, but with Christianity the soul is suspect and must be corrected. Christianity's associated truth-telling principles also come to differ quite drastically from those of the ancient philosophies, as confession varies significantly from the preceding Greek practices of *parrhēsia*. In the latter, the truth-speaker did so in order to live the life of truth, to constitute himself as the object and exemplification of truth, and, most importantly, *parrhēsia*, as with all self-care practice of antiquity, was an entirely positive, productive act. Christian confession, on the other hand, was not done to form oneself but was rather a prerequisite for the trans-subjectivation of conversion, and was not at all a positive act, but instead focused upon one's internal negativity, one's faults, one's sins. Additionally, unlike ancient *parrhēsia*, Christian confession was not a choice, but was rather performed due to demands of the religious institution and pastoral power—it was "a necessary element in the individual's membership of a community [wherein] refusal to confess at least once a year was

grounds for excommunication" (364). One of the most substantial differences between Greco-

Roman philosophy and Christianity—one of the most paramount results of the "considerable

switch…considerable mutation" between these diametrically opposed self-care practices—is

rooted in the ultimate aim of self-knowledge and practices of self. Simply, for the ancients, the

aim of *epimeleia heautou* was the constitution of self, whereas the aim of the Christian self-care

practices described just above—discovering the truth of one's soul, asceticism, confession—was

self-renunciation (407). "In sum," Foucault explains, "I think we can suggest the following"

(332):

> [T]he meaning and function of philosophical ascesis…in the
> Hellenistic and Roman epoch is essentially to ensure what I will
> call the subjectivation of true discourse. It ensures that I myself can
> hold this true discourse, it ensures that I myself become the subject
> of enunciation of true discourse, whereas it seems to me that
> Christian ascesis will have a completely different function, which
> is, of course, self-renunciation…It seems to me that in this
> Christian ascesis there is…a movement of self-reunciation which
> proceeds by way of, and whose essential moment is, the
> objectification of the self in a true discourse. It seems to me that
> pagan ascesis…involves coming together with oneself, the
> essential moment of which is not the objectification of the self in a
> true discourse, but the subjectivation of a true discourse in a
> practice and exercise of oneself on oneself. (*Hermeneutics* 332-33)

Whereas ancient *askēsis* involved the formation of, and deeper, continual relationship with, the

self based on a true life, Christian ascetics involved discovering the truth about oneself in order

to renounce the self—an "exegesis of the self" (*Hermeneutics* 256). Christian asceticism includes

deciphering one's thoughts, what temptations flow within one's mind and through oneself, and

whether or not they are influenced by God or the devil. The Christian searches for faults within

the self with the intention of discovering them then disavowing them, renouncing their inner self

by "flush[ing] out and explor[ing] the secrets of [ones] conscience" (218). This self-renunciation is "one of the most fundamental axes of Christian asceticism," Foucault asserts, because it is precisely the action required for gaining access to "the other life, to the light, to truth and salvation" (250). As opposed to interpreting what makes up the self, *askēsis*, on the other hand, involves "acquiring something we do not have," gaining tools and techniques of the self to prepare oneself for anything and everything that life may present. If the aim of Christian asceticism is to renounce, remove, and reduce, then it exemplifies a concept antithetical to *askēsis*, which "equips [and] provides" (320).

Early Christianity existed alongside Cynicism, from which it appears to have possibly adopted concepts and practices. In his lectures, Foucault points to the "links between Cynicism and Christianity," yet focuses more on their differences, on Christianity's break from ancient philosophical practices of the self. Cynic practices of *askēsis*, Foucault explains, seem to have permeated Christian asceticism: "the bareness of life as a way of constituting the body itself as the visible theatre of truth, seems to have been…a theme throughout the long history of Christianity" (*Courage* 181, 183). In philosophical practices of antiquity the Other (the philosophical instructor or companion) assisted one in his practices of *askēsis* by offering truths, suggestions, tools, and techniques for forming the self and an art of life. Within Christianity, on the other hand, pastoral power prevailed. The Christian Other (the priest) forced actions upon the ascetic, and functioned as both a preacher and disciplinarian with firm instructions from above (whether from God or the institution). The Christian ascetic needed to discover and renounce the truth of himself in the face of such powers, and felt the need to comply fully with pastoral orders, for the Christian came "to fear God and recognize the necessity of submitting to His will, and to the will of those who represent Him" (333). Whereas Cynic *parrhēsia* denoted a positive,

assertive, fearless practice of strength—a "*parrhēsia*-confidence"—Christian truth-telling

became "the principle of trembling obedience" and fearful negativity (333). Foucault further

enunciates the developing ties between Cynicism and early Christianity: "what we see emerging

through Cynicism is the matrix of what has been a significant form of life throughout the

Christian…tradition, that is to say, the matrix of a life dedicated to the manifestation of truth in

fact [and] to veridiction, truth-telling, the manifestation of the truth through discourse" (315).

The significant difference, however, lies in the ultimate aim of such discourses of truth. The

Cynic intends to change his existence and his world by a return to the truth of self via practices

on the self, by the self, in which the formation of a more beautiful, better equipped self is the

ultimate aim. The Christian likewise seeks another life, another world, but does so not by

returning to the truth of self, forming the self, or working on the self, but rather the only way to

salvation for the Christian ascetic is through renunciation of the self, an absolute break from the

self.

Clearly, early Christianity subscribed to notions of *vi autre* and *l'autre monde*, yet with

diametrically different aims and means of achievement. Christianity emphasized "a relation to

the other world (*l'autre monde*), and not to the world which is other," meaning that, unlike

Cynicism, Christianity did not look to transform the current world, but to depart from it

(*Courage* 319). Christian practices did not seek "*the* other world" (*l'autre monde*) which is a

transformation of the current world, but "*an* other world" (*un monde autre*), reached only by

departure from self and this world (319). For the ancients, the true life—that of art, of truth-

speaking, of moral and ethical exemplification—offered a means to access a world that was

other, a world here and now that was not an escape from self and one's surroundings, but which

was rather the result of an even closer self-to-self relationship. For Christianity, however, the

true life did not entail access to a world that was *other*, but rather focused on reaching *another* world.

Notions of the self, self-care practices, truth, and self-knowledge have proven both variable and malleable throughout the philosophical schools of antiquity. However, Christianity has profoundly altered such ideas and practices, as asceticism became a negative practice and the self became a substance to be discovered and disavowed, rather than aestheticized and formed. The very notion of forming one's own subjectivity through a self-fashioning was entirely replaced by the obligation to speak the truth of oneself to pastoral power and answer to the religious institution in a practice that is marked by fear and obedience. Foucault accurately describes *epimeleia heautou* as "a body of work defining a way of being…which makes it an extremely important phenomenon…in the history of subjectivity itself, or, if you like, in the history of practices of subjectivity" (*Hermeneutics* 11). But this philosophical phenomenon was altered and ultimately phased out by practices of Christian ascetics. The Western understanding of "care of the self" has thus been transformed from a positive to a negative practice, from practices that once formed ethical, artistic, morally sound ways of life, to the obligation of necessary self-discovery and -disavowal: "we have the paradox of a precept of care of the self which signifies for us either egoism or withdrawal, but which for centuries was rather a positive principle that was the matrix for extremely strict moralities" (13).

The "Cartesian moment" is additionally marked by alterations in the understanding of self-knowledge and truth that continue to permeate contemporary thought. The "Cartesian moment" marks the beginning of "a different age of the history of relations between subjectivity and truth," which has been influenced by, in addition to practices of Christian asceticisim, continual developments in scientific knowledge (*Hermeneutics* 18). Truth-telling practices were

not only institutionalized through the Catholic Church, but also through various developing

academic and scientific schools. Whereas Christianity has played a substantial role in the

disappearance of ancient practices of *epimeleia heautou*, "a normed, regulated, established

science embodied in institutions[] has no doubt been the other major reason for the

disappearance of the theme of the true life as a philosophical question, as a problem of the

conditions of access to the truth" (*Courage* 235). As scientific schools and the knowledge they

produced began to flood Western society, other means of access to "true knowledge" were

subsequently pushed out. Truth became understood as attainable through scientific and academic

practices, thus living the "true life as the necessary basis for the practice of truth-telling

disappears" (235). Even within philosophical discourses, Foucault asserts, "the question of the

philosophical life has continued to be, I won't say forgotten, but neglected" (236):

> [I]t has constantly appeared as surplus in relation to philosophy, to
> a philosophical practice indexed to the scientific model. The
> question of the philosophical life has constantly appeared like a
> shadow of philosophical practice, and increasingly pointless. This
> neglect of the philosophical life has meant that it is now possible
> for the relation to truth to be validated and manifested in no other
> form than that of scientific knowledge. (*Courage* 236)

Through various sciences, such as psychology, psychiatry, and, most notably, psychoanalysis,

truth could be found and spoken through discovering what is inherent in one's inner substance.

The latter science—psychoanalysis—has had substantially profound effects on Western

subjectivity, for its founder, Sigmund Freud, developed extensive practices for identifying,

defining, labeling and otherwise forming the subjectivity of his patients. Much as in Christian

asceticism, Freud turned all attention to one's inner self, what resided within to be discovered,

worked over, and corrected. In psychoanalysis, the subject is formed through discourses that

discover, identify, and label his inner substance, and subjectivities are, as in Christianity, at the mercy of those speaking such discourses, for the knower of the truth, the psychoanalyst, has inherited a position similar to pastoral power.

Modern practices of self-subjectivation have adopted early-Christian notions of "discover the truth of yourself," soul-as-substance, and self-renunciation. Meanwhile, *epimeleia heautou* and *tekhnē tou biou* as modes for fashioning the self have been "omitted, or at least left in the shadow" (*Hermeneutics* 12). Modern subjectivity does not include antique practices of self-formation, but rather has been dominated by negative self-deciphering techniques brought forth by "forms of knowledge developed later in the Christian world and the modern world" (*Hermeneutics* 253). Modern Western thought relies upon discovering the truth of oneself, "one's inner self," and "coming to terms with oneself," the result of which is more often than not geared towards self-acceptance or -correction. School children, for example, abide by the imperative "be yourself," never "form yourself." Notions of truth changed during the sixteenth century, Foucault explains, as the importance of scientific knowledge began to surpass that of spiritual knowledge (*Hermeneutics* 309). Modern practices of subjectivity and truth have left by the wayside the concept of fashioning oneself through ethics and an art of life. Instead—since the birth of academic and scientific discourses which began to identify, group, and label individuals by certain physical and psychological characteristics—the Western subject expresses the truth of himself solely in terms of scientific knowledge and the understanding of a preexisting inner-self. The changes resulting from this shift in practices of subjectivity are paramount, for Foucault clearly notes that "the task of having to discover and tell of the soul's being" "will leave its mark in the entire history of our thoughts" (*Courage* 161).

In contemporary Western thought, there is no other way to truth than through scientific knowledge (*Courage* 237). Thus, the self may only be understood in terms of science, and may no longer be understood as a work of art, an ethical canvas in constant formation. Further, science is understood as constant; thus, the self that is understood through scientific discourse has been discovered, *definitively* identified, and *permanently* labeled. Clearly, Western practices of subjectivity have unarguably broken from that which they once were. In antiquity, he who practiced self-subjectivation was free—free to form the self in any manner he desired, free to work on the self constantly as if his life was a canvas in need of constant attention, which resulted in an exemplary *ethōs* that was beautiful and true. In contemporary Western society, however, practices of subjectivity function not as harbingers of freedom, but as modes of imprisonment.

Throughout centuries of Western Civilization a relationship between self-as-object and self-as-subject dominated philosophical discourse. At times throughout the culture of the self, all ages, all classes, anybody, and everybody could practice self-forming techniques, and all could thus equip themselves for every necessity that one may require. Classical Western practices of self-subjectivity included exercises in which one may change one's very value of existence from that which is "counterfeit" and untrue to that which is nothing less than naturally necessary, positive, and wholly true—that which is ethical and beautiful. The opportunity to fashion a self that is other, better, and more adequate than that which one is—a self that could break from convention, customs, and rules, habits, laws, perceptions, and the consensual beliefs of society— has been widely available throughout various times, schools, and locations of Western culture. The question thus becomes: May modern Western society once again establish practices of the self that will disavow the limits of contemporary subjectivity? May one arrive at a point in which

a self-fashioning becomes the only form of subjectivity and thus free oneself from the prison of contemporary self-knowledge? "Is it possible," Foucault asks, "to constitute, or reconstitute, an aesthetics of the self?" (251).

Foucault clearly explains that the culture of the self and self-care practices of antiquity may not simply be reapplied to contemporary Western society. When asked whether "the Greeks offer an attractive and plausible alternative" to contemporary Western culture, he emphatically responds: "No!...you can't find the solution of a problem in the solution of another problem raised at another moment by other people" ("Genealogy" 256). However, an awareness of the past that illustrates that the limitations imposed upon Western subjectivity are not as definite as they may appear, an awareness that acknowledges that other modes and forms of self-subjectivation are possible within Western thought and society, is extremely substantial to the the contemporary Western subject. "[T]here is no exemplary value in a period that is not our own," but examples exist of a time when practices of Western subjectivity were radically different than they are today, a time when the Western subject was not defined, limited, and constrained by scientific knowledge, notions of an immutable inner substance, and binding truths of self (259). We may not be able to reinstate our past, "[b]ut we do have an example of an ethical experience" that we may consider as a possibility for contemporary existence (259). The major problem lies, however, in that the notion of the ethical life as the means by which one may form his own subjectivity has been almost entirely forced from Western culture and thought (274). With institutionalized Christianity, the renunciation of the self replaced the formation of the self, and the problem of purification, confession, deciphering the truth of oneself, and disclosing truth inherent in oneself replaced the self-subjectivating culture of antiquity. Yet, much as the "Cartesian moment" is not marked by a single event or date, the culture of the self did not simply

disappear from Western civilization with the institutionalization of Christianity: "You may find elements that have simply been integrated, displaced, reutilized in Christianity [such as the aforementioned Cynic characteristics]" (277). Although "the classical care of the self…lost a large part of its autonomy," Western society has been witness to sporadic uprisings of ethical self-care practices, such as through certain Renaissance religious groups, as well as impressive instances of ethical, artistic modes of life and self-formation found in, for example, the literary works, speeches, and diaries of Virginia Woolf (278). The culture of the self has long since vanished from Western society, but forms of its practices still remain as accomplishable possibilities.

In contemporary Western society, the notion of "the care of the self" has been replaced by the imperative "know yourself," thus limitations of self-subjectivation prevail, and the ability for self-formation lacks. Western thought has firmly adopted the idea that the "self" is an inherent substance to be discovered, thus the notion of self-formed subjectivities seems generally improbable, if not impossible. Therefore, in order to disavow such limitations, and instead open vast possibilities of self-formation and subjectivity, the individual member of Western society must relinquish the imperative "know yourself" and all of its links to academic, scientific, psychoanalytical, and pastoral "truths" and discourses, and must instead adopt practices related to one's care of the self ("Technologies" 226). As noted just above, the care of the self is not a concept that has ceased to exist since the "Cartesian moment," it is a contemporary potentiality that has sprung up occasionally and has produced substantial ends in terms of subjectivity throughout the centuries since Christianity. So, can ideas of care of the self that resemble, mimic, or are even quasi-reinstantiations of those of the classical Greek and Roman epochs once again occupy Western society? "Absolutely," Foucault offers, but he is exceedingly quick to explain

further, noting that it will not suffice "just to say, "We have unfortunately forgotten about the care of the self; so here, here it is, the key to everything"" ("Concern" 294). The West may, however, turn to the examples found in its history for insight into the possibilities for contemporary modes of life.

Although the culture and care of the self in their totality cannot adequately be reactivated within contemporary Western culture, an art of life may be considered an adequate means of transcending the limitations of contemporary subjectivity. Considering Western society's past— marked by consecutive centuries in which one's life, one's whole mode of existence, could be understood as a work of aesthetics—what Foucault finds intriguing is "that, in our society, art has become something that is related only to objects and not to individuals or to life" ("Genealogy" 261). Ideas of the soul and self as objects to be worked over much as canvases in need of constant artistic attention have long since transformed into notions of the inherent inner soul-as-substance, the formation of which is beyond the control of its associated subject. The soul and self are considered to be handed down, placed, or otherwise come to occupy their spaces by forces that are beyond the subject's control (by the hands of God, by nature, by "truths" spoken by scientific and academic discourses). Thus, if the Western individual begins to disavow the concept of soul-substance, and instead subscribes to the notion that the self-as-object and the self-as-subject may exist and function concurrently, and may be formed continually, then the art of life begins to become a possible contemporary mode of self-subjectivity. If the Western individual indeed disavows the notion of self-as-substance, and instead subscribes to notions of the self-as-object to be worked over aesthetically, then, Foucault explains, "[f]rom the idea that the self is *not* given to us, I think that there is only one practical consequence: we have to create ourselves as a work of art" ("Genealogy" 262, emphasis added). Perhaps the exact practices,

modes of life, drives, aims, and ends of antiquity's culture of the self cannot be reinstated into contemporary Western society, but, Foucault bluntly and rhetorically poses, "[C]ouldn't everyone's life become a work of art? Why should the lamp or the house be an art object but not our life?" ("Genealogy" 261).

Likewise, may not ethics and the relationship one has with oneself underlie this art of life? Surely, but again, the specific concepts, thoughts, and practices of antiquity regarding the ethical self-to-self relationship may not simply be reinstated. To form an ethical self-to-self relationship, the contemporary Western subject must first overcome the prevailing, Christianity-inspired understandings of morals and ethics that are entirely different from their ancient counterparts. Morals and their associated ethical actions in contemporary Western society are guidelines that are defined and structured around the treatment of others, not practices normally attributed to the self. The Western subject has inherited the Christian notion that one must renounce the self, thus applying morals and ethics to the self as a means of forming the self is seen, to an extent, as an action opposite from that which is required, as a "means of escape from all the rules" ("Technologies" 228). However, much as the care of the self has not entirely disappeared from Western culture, still embedded within the moral code is the important "relationship you ought to have with yourself…which [Foucault] call[s] ethics, and which determines how the individual is supposed to constitute himself as a moral subject of his own actions" ("Genealogy" 263).

By returning to Foucault's four aspects of ethics, it becomes apparent that the ethical life does not just hold on as a theoretical possibility, but may rather be consider a contemporary mode of existence open to all members of Western society. As with the Cynics, the contemporary ethical mode of life may apply to any and all Western subjects, any situation,

anytime, anywhere, and may be exercised in innumerable manners, for various aims, and may subsequently produce countless and singular ends. Foucault's four aspects of ethics are entirely dependent upon the subject, their aims, and the period of time in which they live. They are so dependent upon the individual and their situation that they may be defined in any way that the subject sees fit. The first aspect is, again, the "ethical substance"—that which is going to be worked over by ethics—which is singularly malleable and adaptable to the individual in question: "It's not always the same part of ourselves or of our behavior, which is relevant for ethical judgment" ("Genealogy" 263). The second aspect, the "mode of subjectivation," the way that the individual is "invited or incited to recognize their moral obligations," also changes on a situational basis, and thus may surely apply to any and all contemporary subjects: "Is it," Foucault asks, "divine law that has been revealed in a text?...Is it a rational rule? Is it the attempt to give your existence the most beautiful form possible?" ("Genealogy" 264). Likewise, the third aspect, "asceticism," the work that one does to constitute the self as a subject of ethics, to form an ethical life, also varies because it is dependent upon the first two aspects. Lastly, the forth element of ethics, the "telos," the aim of an ethical life, what one desires to become as the result of such ethical practice, is of course as shifting as the three aspects needed to attain it: "[S]hall we become pure, or immortal, or free, or masters of ourselves, and so on?" ("Genealogy" 265).

There is no question that Foucault's four elements of ethics may, in some manner, function within contemporary society, that is, of course, if the subject can overcome the notion that the self is not something to be treated ethically. If this contemporary roadblock concerning self-renunciation may be overcome, then the Western individual may no doubt attempt an ethical mode of life in its entirety. Subsequently, "the subject as a subject of ethical actions" may once again be seen as a possible form of contemporary Western subjectivity ("Genealogy" 266). As a

result, the Western subject no longer must be he who is determined by severely limiting

institutional practices, scientific and academic knowledge and discourses, labels, pastoral power,

and the "truth-speaking" in regards to oneself that such forces demand. Instead, through an

ethical mode of being, the contemporary Western subject may fully disavow the knowledge and

"truth" of self presented to him by various institutions and belief systems, and become, instead,

he who is the subject of his relationship to himself, the self-formed subject of his own actions,

behavior, ethics, and aesthetics of life.

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