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Senecan Moods: Foucault and Nietzsche on the Art of the Self

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It is well known that self-examination and the guidance of conscience was widespread among ... the Stoics and the Epicureans as a means of daily taking stock of the good or evil performed in regard to one's duties ... The guidance of conscience was also predominant in certain cultured circles, but as advice given ... in particularly difficult circumstances: in mourning, or when one was suffering a setback. (Foucault)¹

Introduction

In this epigraph, taken from a lecture he gave during the early stages of his research into the practices of the self, we find Foucault, the archaeologist of culture, at work excavating and reconstructing the fragments of the Hellenistic practices of the self. What he unearths beneath two millennia of Christian civilization are practices of the self that differ "radically", as he puts it, from Christian conscience-vivisection. Nor, as the epigraph makes clear, do the cultural practices of self-cultivation he pieces together from the fragments of antiquity bear much resemblance, if any, to the vain self-display and preciousness of the nineteenth-century Dandy. Rather, Foucault uncovers a "golden age of self-cultivation" in which individuals undertook the work of the self not in order to attain salvation from this world or aristocratic distinction within it, but as a therapy that enabled them to remain composed in the face of the sufferings and losses of mortal life.²

According to Didier Eribon, this excavation of the Hellenistic and Roman care of the self left an unmistakable mark on Foucault's writing style.

1 Michel Foucault, 'Omnes et Singulatum: Toward a Criticism of 'Political Reason' in *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values II*, ed. Sterling McMurrin (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1981), 238, emphasis added. The published essay is the text of two lectures Foucault delivered at Stanford University on October 10 & 16, 1979.

2 Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self*, trans. by Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1986), 45. (Hereafter CS).

In his last two works, Eribon notes, many of his former admirers and fellow travellers found themselves disappointed by this change of style, much as a century earlier Nietzsche's readers and erstwhile friends were alienated by the dramatic transformation that Nietzsche's own turn to Hellenistic philosophy had wrought on his style. Indeed, this parallel goes further, for Foucault's interpreters describe his stylistic shift in almost identical terms to those that Nietzsche's critics had employed to define his transformation from disciple of Dionysus to sober positivist. Foucault's interpreters, Eribon reports, contrasted the "fiery" style of his early works with the calm, dispassionate, "sober" style of his late research on antiquity.³ Eribon claims that the style of Foucault's life and work in his last years bears testimony to the extent to which he assimilated Stoicism, especially in its Senecan moods:

It is as if approaching death and the foreboding he had of it for several months had led Foucault onto the path of serenity. Seneca, whose works were among his favorite reading, would have praised such a model of 'the philosophical life'. Foucault seemed to have internalised the ancient wisdom to such a point that it had become imposed upon his style itself – his style as a writer and his style as a man.⁴

The sober, dispassionate style of Nietzsche's middle works and Foucault's late works signpost their return to the conception of the philosophical life and practice that dominated philosophy from Epicurus to Seneca, that is to say, to the idea of philosophy as a therapy of the soul. Both turned back to the Hellenistic therapies as the question of the self, or more specifically and pressingly, of their "*ego ipsissimum*," took centre stage in their thinking.⁵

3 Didier Eribon, *Michel Foucault*, trans. Betsy Wing (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 331. Eribon quotes from Deleuze and Blanchot, respectively. In his last interview Foucault himself discusses his stylistic change in strangely enigmatic terms; see Michel Foucault, 'The Return of Morality', John Johnston (trans) in ed. Sylvère Lotringer, *Foucault Live: Interviews 1966-1984* (New York:Semiotext(e), 1989), 317-331, 317-318. Paul Veyne also notes that Seneca's Stoicism played an important role in Foucault's "interior life" in his last years as he was living under the threat of AIDS; see Paul Veyne, *Seneca: The Life of a Stoic*, trans. David Sullivan (New York: Routledge, 2003), ix-x.

4 Eribon, *Michel Foucault*, 331, emphasis added. According to Paul Veyne, in the last stages of his life Foucault himself practised this Stoic mode of philosophising and writing of the self: "Throughout the last eight months of his life, writing his two books played the same part for him that philosophical writing and personal journals played in ancient philosophy – that of the work performed by the self on the self, of self-stylization" (quoted in Eribon, *Foucault*, 325). By contrast, James Miller attempts to downplay the importance of this Stoic turn in Foucault's work; James Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault* (London: Flamingo, 1994), 342.

5 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits* vol. 2, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), Preface §1. (Hereafter

Nietzsche in his middle works and Foucault in his last, incomplete researches both draw on the Hellenistic and Stoic traditions that analyse and treat the pathologies which threaten to arise from “setbacks” to our wishes, especially from that “most touchy point in the narcissistic system”: the mortality that shadows our lives and loves and which compels us to learn how to work on ourselves and mourn our losses.⁶ Toward the end of his own life, Foucault himself was evidently captivated by this motif of Greco-Roman philosophy: “That life, because of its mortality, has to be a work of art is a remarkable theme”.⁷

Of course, the more common Foucault-Nietzsche discussions turn on perceived similarities or linkages in their ideas of power and knowledge, genealogy and interpretation, will and agency. Indeed, on this latter point, there is almost universal agreement that the critique of the metaphysics of subjectivity that forms the theoretical underpinning of Foucault’s thinking in the 1970s largely derives from Nietzsche’s genealogical analysis of the fabrication of subjectivity. The disagreements in this debate do not concern the extent of Nietzsche’s influence on Foucault, but the philosophical validity and political implications of his Nietzschean-inspired critique of the “magisterial illusions of subjectivity”.⁸ There is also widespread agreement that in his late texts Foucault once again returns to Nietzsche, but this time to rescue a positive model of the exercise of subjectivity from his own unrelenting critique of the illusions of agency; as Keith Ansell-Pearson explains:

(I)n his later works on ethics Foucault was to recognise that his notion of the subject as a mere effect of power constituted one of the major deficiencies in his thinking, and it was precisely to a Nietzschean

HAH 2). Hollingdale translates *ego ipsissimum* as “my innermost self”. Nietzsche’s use of this phrase deliberately underlines the Latin roots of his idea of the care of the self.

6 Sigmund Freud, ‘On Narcissism’, trans. James Strachey in *On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis*, Penguin Freud Library, Vol. 11 (London: Penguin, 1991), 85.

7 Michel Foucault quoted in Timothy O’Leary, *Foucault and the Art of Ethics*, (London: Continuum, 2002), 175, footnote 14.

8 Michael Janover, ‘The Subject of Foucault’ in Clare O’Farrell (ed.), *Foucault: The Legacy* (Queensland: QUP, 1997), 215-227. The nature and extent of Foucault’s debt to Nietzsche’s critique of the metaphysics of subjectivity has been rehearsed too often to require further elaboration here; for a lucid discussion of this issue see Peter Dews, *Logics of Disintegration: Post-Structuralism and the Claims of Critical Theory* (London: Verso, 1987); and Peter Dews, ‘The Return of the Subject in the Late Foucault’, *Radical Philosophy*, 51, Spring (1989), 37-41.

aesthetic conception of ethics that he turned in his thinking about an alternative non-judicial model of selfhood.⁹

However, as we have noted, the shift in Foucault's philosophical orientation and style derives from a tradition that can be better understood in *therapeutic* rather than *aesthetic* terms. Foucault clouds the true nature and significance of the Hellenistic and Stoic care of the self insofar as he presents it as a purely aesthetic project akin to nineteenth-century Dandyism.¹⁰ On the other hand, if we bracket Foucault's comments glossing these practices as purely aesthetic, and examine instead his historical analyses of the care of the self we discover the clear outlines of Hellenistic philosophy and Stoicism as philosophic *therapeia* of the soul.¹¹ In other words, Foucault's research reveals a much richer conception of the work of the self than he can capture with this aesthetic gloss. As we shall see, it is this richer conception of the self that stands at the centre of Nietzsche's middle works. Once we suspend Foucault's misleadingly aestheticised rendering of the Hellenistic and Roman tradition, therefore, we can use his historical excavation of the practices of the self to clarify the ethics of subjectivity (or agent-centred ethics, to use analytic parlance) that lies at the heart of Nietzsche's middle works. Indeed, in his 1981-1982 lectures Foucault himself suggests in passing that it might be possible and fruitful to re-read Nietzsche's thought as a difficult attempt to reconstitute the Hellenistic ethics of the self.¹² Finally, as we saw above, the care of the self addresses the psychological traumas of loss and transience, and it is for this reason that Nietzsche's renovation of this tradition can be explicated as a treatment that addresses the loss of narcissistic plenitude and

9 Keith Ansell-Pearson, 'The Significance of Michel Foucault's Reading of Nietzsche: Power, The Subject, and Political Theory', in Peter Sedgwick (ed.), *Nietzsche: A Critical Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 13-30. 26-27, emphasis added.

10 In his remarkable systematic reconstruction of Foucault's ethics, Timothy O'Leary makes a similar point. He claims that Foucault often imposes a nineteenth-century aestheticist cult of beauty onto a Greco-Roman philosophic tradition that was preoccupied with aesthetics in the much narrower sense of a series of *technai* (techniques) for working on and transforming the self, and that he overstates the extent to which beauty was the *telos* or aim of these techniques; see O'Leary, *Foucault and the Art of Ethics*, 14-15, 86, 102-104, 172. For a rigorous account of the Stoics' *technical* conception of philosophy - i.e., its understanding of philosophical wisdom as a technical knowledge analogous to the expert knowledge of the craftsmen - which functions to transform one's *bios* or way of living see John Sellars, *The Art of Living: The Stoics on the Nature and Function of Philosophy* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).

11 David M. Halperin develops another angle on why we should avoid reducing Foucault's aestheticism to Baudelairean or Wildean dandyism; see *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

12 Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France 1981-1982*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 251. (Hereafter HS).

its pathological manifestations, which, in one way or another, seek to restore the magisterial illusions of subjectivity.

Foucault's recuperation of the Hellenistic care of the self establishes two points that clear the way to comprehending Nietzsche's ethics of subjectivity: (1) that the Christian hostility to pagan self-love blocks our comprehension of Hellenistic ethics and continues to pervert the critical reception of its modern renovations and (2) that the ethics of the care of the self, properly conceived, is a philosophical therapy guided by the notion that the self constitutes itself through the voluntary exercise of a range of reflexive techniques and practices oriented towards treating the affects of revenge, envy and anger. In sum, Foucault's recuperation of Hellenistic ethics clarifies both the general conception of ethical practice and some of the substantive ethical and psychological issues at stake in Nietzsche's middle works.

For our purposes, the significance of Foucault's resurrection of the Hellenistic and Roman practices of self-cultivation lies in the way he clears several obstacles that stand in the path of comprehending Nietzsche's own concern with these practices. In the first place, Foucault demonstrates the extent to which the reception of Hellenistic self-cultivation has been marred by Christian polemics against self-love, which its early theologians consider the besetting sin of all paganism. These polemics, Foucault shows, have cast a long shadow over every attempt to recover a positive notion of the work of the self on itself. In other words, one of the great merits of Foucault's excavation of the Hellenistic practices of the self lies in the way it frees the reception of this tradition from the incrustations of Christian polemics. He demonstrates that Christianity wrongly interprets Hellenistic self-cultivation as closely connected, either historically or analytically, with a "conceited ontology" that gives license to various brands of hyper-individualism.¹³

Foucault's interpretation of Hellenistic self-cultivation sets it apart from individualism understood either as a solipsistic withdrawal into the private sphere, a crude exaltation of singularity, or, as indeed Augustine saw it, an inflamed self-love that blossoms into a love of power over others.¹⁴ According to Foucault, an intense labour of the self on itself can, as it did with the Stoics, fuse with fulfilling one's obligations to humankind, to one's fellow citizens and to a denunciation of social withdrawal.¹⁵ Once it emerges from the shadows of Christianity, he argues, the Hellenistic tradition can be rightfully seen as a rich vein of philosophical therapy that takes as its starting

13 Romand Coles constructs pagan subjectivity as founded on a "conceited ontology"; see Romand Coles, *Self, Power, Others: Political Theory and Dialogical Ethics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992).

14 CS, 42-43; and Michel Foucault, 'On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress', in Paul Rabinow (ed.), *The Foucault Reader* (London: Penguin Books, 1984), 350 (Hereafter GE).

15 CS, 42

point a conception of the subject as a series of reflexive spiritual and material exercises. We can then recover the remnants of a philosophical therapy, “a treasury of devices, techniques, ideas and procedures”, focussed on analysing how the self can work on itself in such a way that it does not rage vengefully either against the mortal losses it suffers or against those who brim with such vengefulness.¹⁶

It follows that if Nietzsche anchors his middle works in the Stoic tradition’s intensification and valorisation of the practices of the care of the self then his ethical project must also be sundered from any necessary connections with the chain of synonyms that Augustine associates with this tradition: perverse self-love, love of domination, apostasy from God and the sin of pride.¹⁷ If this can be established then it is also plausible that those critics who equate Nietzsche’s ideal of self-cultivation with narcissistic self-involvement and/or grandiose exaltation of the self over others, merely reprise Christianity’s moral and hermeneutic prejudices against the Hellenistic arts of living.

Secondly, Foucault’s schematic presentation of the concepts and practices of Hellenistic self-cultivation, especially his analysis of the Roman Stoics, can be used to clarify the extent to which Nietzsche takes up not just its general ethical orientation, but its substantive conception of the work of the self.¹⁸ Like the Hellenistic thinkers, Nietzsche conceives this ethics as a continuous, difficult and sometimes painful *labour* that the self performs on itself, rather than as a heightening of narcissistic self-preoccupation. We can measure the distance between narcissistic self-absorption and self-cultivation by the fact that both the Hellenistic thinkers and Nietzsche see it as a labour mediated through social practices that draw on and enrich the bonds of friendship.¹⁹ Nietzsche’s ethics of self-cultivation also rests on the *central* organising principle of Hellenistic discourse: its analogy between the arts of medicine and philosophical therapy. Nietzsche follows the Epicureans, but especially the Stoics, in charting the movements of the soul as a series of cycles of illness, convalescence and health, in conceptualising philosophers as doctors to the soul, and in employing medical metaphors to designate the operations necessary to perform the care of the soul.

Foucault’s research opens up an ethical perspective that, with the exception of Nietzsche’s middle works, modern philosophy has until very

16 GE, 349

17 John M. Rist, *Augustine: Ancient thought baptised* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 190.

18 The analysis here follows CS, 39-68.

19 For an excellent synopsis of Nietzsche’s shifting reflections on and evaluations of friendship see Ruth Abbey, ‘Circles, Ladders and Stars: Nietzsche on Friendship’ in Preston King and Heather Devere (eds.), *The Challenge to Friendship in Modernity* (London: Frank Cass, 2000), 50-73.

recently neglected.²⁰ Yet his reconstruction of the ethics of the care of the self is marred by the conceptual limitations and blindnesses of his own formulations of an aesthetics of existence. Foucault's recasting of the work of the self in terms of Baudelairean Dandyism or the freedom of undefined, unrestricted self-invention, elides something fundamental to this ethics: *viz.*, the fact that it addresses the *pathos* that arises from mortality and loss, and that it does so in order to identify, temper and overcome the individual and political pathologies that arise from these wounds to our narcissistic wish for immortality and omnipotence. In closing, this paper suggests that we can establish a better grasp of Stoic and Nietzschean ethics of subjectivity by framing their central concerns in terms of the psychoanalytic problem of narcissism, its pathologies and cures, rather than, as Foucault does, in terms of aesthetic modernism's ideal of radical creativity. Both the Stoics' and Nietzsche's ethics of the care of the self, it is argued, can be seen as attempts to analyse and overcome various pathological expressions of the desire for narcissistic omnipotence. If this is so, then we must sharply demarcate both from the aesthetic modernist currents that Foucault advocates. By framing his aesthetics of existence in terms of the Baudelairean Dandy's feline "cult of oneself as the lover of oneself", the paper argues, Foucault reduces the idea of the self as a work of art to a personality *tour de force*, and in the process he suppresses the important therapeutic and psychological concerns that both the Hellenistic thinkers and Nietzsche made central to the work of the self on itself.²¹ To state the difference in bold terms, the Stoic and Nietzschean ethic of self-constitution analyses and attempts to treat narcissism, whereas Foucault's Baudelairean aesthetic self-fashioning is merely a symptom of narcissism.

Foucault: Classical, Roman and Modern Arts of Living

Foucault's critics and defenders in philosophy and social theory, rarely, if ever, recognise that his historical investigation of subjectivity uncovers a series of quite different practices of ethical self-constitution, rather than a single, uniform art of living.²² They devote most of their interest to demonstrating that his history of practices of self-constitution contradicts his earlier genealogical unmasking of humanist notions of a centred, self-determining subject. As a result, they have shown much less discernment in mapping the historical terrain that Foucault covers in this research.

20 On this point see Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1994), 4-5.

21 See Charles Baudelaire, *Intimate Journals*, trans. Christopher Isherwood (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1983), 49.

22 For an exception to this rule see O'Leary, *Foucault and the Art of Ethics*, Ch. 3.

Yet an examination of his history of the self suggests that he detects three quite distinct forms of the artistic elaboration of the self: the Greek or classical arts, the Roman Stoic practices of self-cultivation, and the distant echoes of antiquity he claims to discover in Baudelaire's Dandyism.²³ His critics particularly neglect the distinction he draws between the classical Greek and Roman arts of living. In casting doubt on the contemporary significance or desirability of these ancient practices commentators invariably frame their concerns in terms of the *classical Greek* practices. "In what way" as one critic asks "is the liberty of the *Greeks* ours?"²⁴ According to Foucault, however, the Stoics of the imperial age significantly modified the classical Greek arts of existence. Stoicism, so he argues, refined and reworked pre-existing classical forms. It did so, he suggests, by refashioning the way in which subjects recognised themselves as ethical subjects, the ascetic practices which they used to constitute themselves as subjects, and the very *telos* of those practices.²⁵ Unlike the classical practice of self-fashioning, as he sees it, Stoic self-cultivation was not pursued for the sake of exercising domination over others or attaining personal glory. For the Stoics, caring for oneself was not a prelude to, a primer for, or an analogical representation of political authority.²⁶ Rather, he claims that Roman Stoics like Seneca and Epictetus conceived self-cultivation as an occupation that revolved around "the question of the self, of its dependence and independence, of its universal form and of the connections it can and should establish with others".²⁷ Importantly, yet seldom noted, Foucault describes this Stoic art of living, as "*the summit of a curve, the golden age in the cultivation of the self*".²⁸ Foucault, in other words, chronicles Stoicism as the crowning glory of the ancient ethics of the care of the self.

23 Foucault twice mentions the Renaissance arts of living as distant echoes of antiquity, but this remains nothing more than a gesture. It is impossible, therefore, to assess whether he believed that a study of these Renaissance practices might yield a distinct form of self-cultivation; GE, 362, 370.

24 Christian Bouchindhomme, 'Foucault, morality and criticism' in *Michel Foucault: Philosopher*, trans. Timothy J. Armstrong (New York: Harvester, 1992), 317-27, 324; Andrew Thacker also claims that "(p)erhaps the main problem with Foucault's map is that it is a Greek one"; see Andrew Thacker, 'Foucault's Aesthetics of Existence', *Radical Philosophy*, 63, Spring (1993), 19.

25 Of the four structural features of the practices of the self that Foucault identifies, Stoicism leaves only the 'ethical substance' unchanged; see GE, 357.

26 See HS, 75, 82-83

27 CS, 238

28 CS, 45, emphasis added; see also CS, 238-39; GE, 348, 357-58; and HS, 81. Foucault seems to have Hegel's deprecation of Hellenistic philosophy in his sights. Hegel treats the Hellenistic schools and the Stoic care of the self as little more than poor substitutes for civic participation in the *polis*; see Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The History of Philosophy*, trans. J. Sibree (London: George Bell and Sons, 1900), 328; The editors of Foucault's 1981-1982 lectures elaborate this point; see HS, 23, n 47.

While his critics devote much of their attention to contextualising Foucault's history of the different practices of the self in terms of its place in his overall philosophical development and its significance for contemporary critical theory, they give less attention to his efforts to reshape the assumptions that frame the reception of Greek and Roman practices of the self, and to his conceptualisation of these practices themselves.²⁹

Foucault contributes to this neglect by blurring the lines that separate the ancient practices of the self from aesthetic modernist cults of self-fashioning. He emblematises modern self-fashioning through Baudelaire's figure of the Dandy. Baudelaire's decadent self-absorption is, he claims, "the attitude of modernity".³⁰ Glossing over the differences separating Greco-Roman technologies of the self from the aesthetic modernist's manner of fusing life and art, he describes Baudelaire's attitude as "a way of thinking and feeling ... [a] bit, no doubt, like what the Greeks called an *ethos*".³¹ Foucault makes the same casual association in lamenting the demise of the Greco-Roman *ethos* of self-stylisation:

We have hardly any remnant of the idea in our society, that the principal work of art which one has to take care of, the main area to which one must apply aesthetic values, is oneself, one's life, one's existence ... We find this in the Renaissance ... *and yet again in nineteenth century dandyism*, but those were only episodes.³²

Encouraged no doubt by such cavalier associations, when they analyse Foucault's late works his critics also tend to neglect the radical differences between the Greco-Roman arts of living and aesthetic modernism. As Foucault does in this passage, they are inclined to reduce the arts of living to one undifferentiated category, the "aesthetics of existence". However, Foucault's historical analyses demonstrate that this category conceals a number of disparate conceptions of the self, each of which demands analysis on its own terms. This becomes apparent when we examine the philosophical and ethical chasm dividing the self-fashioning of Baudelaire's Dandy and the ethical practices of Stoicism. Between Baudelaire's "exclusive cult of the passions" and Stoicism one could reasonably admit only the very faintest, *if any*, family resemblance.³³ It is true that in defining Dandyism, Baudelaire briefly touches on its penchant for stoic *gestures*, but the accent he places on

29 See for example Rainer Rochlitz, 'The Aesthetics of Existence: Post-conventional morality and the Theory of Power in Michel Foucault' in *Michel Foucault: Philosopher*, 248-59.

30 Michel Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment?' in Paul Rabinow (ed.), *The Foucault Reader* (London: Penguin Books, 1984), 33-50 (Hereafter WE).

31 WE, 39

32 GE, 362, emphasis added.

33 GE, 421

originality and excess demonstrates just how far removed this *ethos* is from Stoic philosophy and morals. The grandeur of folly and excess Baudelaire describes in the following passage is antithetical to the Stoic ideal of rational self-mastery:

It is, above all, the burning desire to create a personal form of originality, within the external limits of social conventions. It is a kind of cult of the ego ... A dandy may be blasé, he may even suffer pain, but in the latter case he will keep smiling, like the Spartan under the bite of the fox. Clearly, then, dandyism in certain respects comes close to spirituality and to stoicism, but a dandy can never be a vulgar man. If he were to commit a crime, he might perhaps be socially damned, but if the crime came from some trivial cause, the disgrace would be irreparable. Let the reader not be shocked by this mixture of the grave and the gay; let him rather reflect that there is a sort of grandeur in all follies, a driving power in every sort of excess.³⁴

Here we might invoke one of Foucault's own rhetorical strategies to correct his tendency to gloss such differences: while some of the Dandy's ascetic precepts and gestures might distantly echo the classical and Stoic arts of living, the Dandy's moral *ethos* in fact defines a very different modality of the relation to the self.³⁵ Even if Foucault occasionally *fails* to adhere to them, and his philosophic critics rarely recognise them, it is important to acknowledge the significant differences between the various artistic practices of the self.³⁶ Stoicism's philosophical therapy should not be confused with the

34 Charles Baudelaire, 'The Painter of Modern Life', in *Baudelaire: Selected Writings on Art and Artists* trans. by P. E. Charvet (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972), 420, emphasis added. It is worth noting that in *Discipline and Punish* Foucault took umbrage at Baudelaire and other nineteenth-century writers' recasting of crime as a game played by the elite for aesthetic stakes, which replaced the far more politically charged eighteenth-century popular broadsheets and gallows speeches that had once served to transform petty criminals into epic heroes and saints. Through literature like Baudelaire's *Fleur du Mals*, Foucault lamented, "the people was robbed of its old pride in crimes; the great murders had become the quiet game of the well-behaved"; see Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 65-69, 69. However, if in *Discipline and Punish* Foucault laments Baudelaire's aestheticization of evil and crime, its sublimation into a literary game for the cultural elite, he does so, according to James Miller, in the name of a nostalgia for the splendour of the carnivals and rituals of cruelty that were banished from the stage of public life with the emergence and spread of modern disciplinary technologies; see James Miller, "Carnivals of Atrocity: Foucault, Nietzsche, Cruelty", *Political Theory*, vol. 18, no. 3 (August 1990), 470-491.

35 This is how Foucault argues that despite the presence of similar precepts in the Late Hellenistic practices of the self and early Christianity, they are in fact radically different ethical systems and practices; see CS, 239.

36 Martin Jay rightly claims that the analysis of every 'aestheticisation' of politics or existence must begin by identifying what notion of aesthetics it is invoking; see

Dandy's project of elaborating one's existence according to the principles of aesthetic formalism, a project fuelled by the desire to establish aristocratic social distinctions against the rising tide of democratic vulgarity.³⁷ Nor, as we shall see below, should Stoicism simply be equated with the classical Greek practices of the self.

In truth, however, Foucault passes over such crucial distinctions in his pronouncements about the contemporary relevance of the arts of the self.³⁸ By contrast, his historical analyses of these practices, especially his 1981-1982 lectures published as *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, identify and reinforce the notion that there are significant discontinuities between these practices of the self. Indeed, in mining the philosophical, moral and medical texts of Hellenistic antiquity, Foucault discovers the lineaments of a conception of the self's relationship to itself that seems more properly called *therapeutic* than *aesthetic*, or, in which 'aesthetic' practices merely serve as part of a larger philosophical therapy. It is this account of Hellenistic therapy, especially the Roman Stoics' care of the self, rather than his fleeting glances towards Baudelairean self-invention, that provides a schema for interpreting what Nietzsche identifies, self-consciously advertising its Latin foundations, as his "*disciplina voluntatis*".³⁹

The Flaming Gaze of Vanity

In order to excavate and then distinguish the classical Greek and late Roman technologies of the self, Foucault first had to challenge the Christian polemics against the immorality of pagan "self-pleasers".⁴⁰ Such criticisms, he observes, first appeared among the early Church Fathers who cast a suspicious eye on pagan self-love. The early Church Fathers, he recollects, saw the care of the self as a source of diverse moral faults, and gladly denounced it as "a kind of egoism or individual interest in contradiction to the care one must show others or the necessary sacrifice of the self".⁴¹ As the inheritors of the Christian traditions and their secularised derivatives, Foucault claims, 'we' moderns easily fall into the trap of conceiving the care of self as intrinsically immoral:

Martin Jay, "'The Aesthetic Ideology' as Ideology; or, What Does It Mean to Aestheticize Politics?", *Cultural Critique*, Spring (1992), 42-61, 43.

37 Cesar Grana, *Modernity and its Discontents: French Society and the French Man of Letters in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1964), 148-54.

38 On this point see also, Thacker, 'Foucault's Aesthetics of Existence', 13.

39 HAH 2, Preface, 2

40 Augustine, *City of God Against the Pagans*, trans. Henry Bettenson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), Bk. XIV, ch. 13.

41 Michel Foucault, 'The Ethics of the Care of the Self as a Practice of Freedom', trans. J. D. Gauthier, *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, XII, no. 2-3 (1984), 113-131, 115-116 (Hereafter ECS).

We find it difficult to base rigorous morality and austere principles on the precept that we should give ourselves more care than anything else in the world. We are more inclined to see taking care of ourselves as an immorality, as a means of escape from all possible rules. We inherit the tradition of Christian morality which makes self-renunciation the condition of salvation ... We also inherit a secular tradition which respects external law as the basis of morality. How then can respect for the self be the basis of morality? ⁴²

Erich Fromm supports Foucault's historical point. According to Fromm, beginning with Christian theology and reaching through Protestantism, German Idealism and psychoanalysis, the notion of caring for oneself or self-love has been maligned and salvation associated exclusively with austere self-renunciation. Freud's assertion that the more love the ego reserves for itself the less it has for others, he argues, merely sums up in quasi-positivistic terms the entire drift of the dominant strand of moral discourse:

The doctrine that love for oneself is identical with 'selfishness', and that it is an alternative to love for others has pervaded theology, philosophy and the pattern of daily life ... According to Freud, there is an almost mechanical alternation between ego-love and object-love. The more love I turn toward the outside world the less love I have for myself, and vice versa. Freud is thus moved to describe the phenomenon of falling in love as an impoverishment of one's self-love because all love is turned to an object outside of oneself.⁴³

Fromm claims that the Christian construction of self-love as a negation of altruism has shaped the very foundations of philosophical thinking about the self's relationship to itself, including the psychoanalytic conception of the subject. He argues, as Foucault does in his later works, that Christianity's highly charged critique of self-love profoundly distorts modern ethical discourse. It has impaired our philosophical and ethical thinking, he suggests, by conflating all self-love with a disavowal or negation of others.⁴⁴ One legacy

42 Michel Foucault, 'Technologies of the Self', in L. H. Martin, H. Gutman, P. Hutton (eds.), *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 16-49, 22, emphasis added (Hereafter TS).

43 Erich Fromm, 'Selfishness and Self-Love', first published in *Psychiatry: Journal for the Study of Interpersonal Process*, The William Alanson Psychiatric Foundation, Washington, Vol. 2 (1939), 507-523; reprinted in the *Yearbook of the International Erich Fromm Society*, Vol. 5 (Münster: LIT-Verlag 1994), 173-197.

44 Heinz Kohut's challenge to the psychoanalytic tradition also supports this point. See Heinz Kohut, 'Forms and Transformations of Narcissism' in *Self Psychology and the Humanities: Reflections on a New Psychoanalytic Approach* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1985), 97-123. Graham Little sums up his central point nicely "[Kohut's] heresy was to think that in certain forms and in certain respects self-love, the *bête noire* of

of Christianity, therefore, is the presumption that anything other than the self's abasement before God (or his secular representatives) is a symptom of the pagan vice of pride or self-love. Foucault sets out to demonstrate that the Christian conception of the self's relationship to itself, a relationship in which the self submits itself to a divine law, is not the only practice through which the self can constitute itself as an ethical subject.⁴⁵ "(T)here is," he hypothesises, "a whole rich and complex field of historicity in the way the individual is summoned to recognise himself as an ethical subject".⁴⁶

However, unlike Fromm, Foucault also establishes specific historical sources that make it possible to theorise different practices and discourses of self-love. His excavation of classical and Hellenistic practices enables him to flesh out the claim that, at least in this theoretical and historical context, self-love takes the form of a complex work of the self on itself. Christianity's polemical interpretation of classicism and Hellenism, he maintains, elides from our philosophical and ethical heritage a fertile tradition that offers us alternative images, techniques, ideas and practices for theorising the self's relationship to itself. In Greco-Roman antiquity he discovers an ethical tradition which accentuates the self's relationship to itself as its central concern, and whose philosophies and schools elaborate or invent a series of practices through which the self becomes an ethical agent. Here the self's fashioning of itself is not considered antithetical to, but *constitutive* of, ethics. For the classical and Hellenistic philosophers, he argues, ethics is self-cultivation.

Fromm and Foucault, then, trace back to Christianity a peculiar torsion in our ethical discourse: the condemnation of self-love as the 'sin' of self-deification. Foucault adds that this torsion has erased the Greco-Roman ethics of the care of the self from our ethical landscape. Foucault believes contemporary attempts to renovate various Greek and Roman conceptions of the arts of living continue to be stymied by this Christian polemic. In our conception of the self, according to Foucault, we still live in the shadows of the Christian God. "There is a certain tradition" as he puts it "that dissuades us (us, now, today) from giving any positive value to all [the] expressions, precepts, and rules" concerned with caring for the self, and "above all from making them the basis of a morality".⁴⁷ (If in political theory we have yet to cut off the

psychoanalysis as it had been of religion, could be both a good thing and psychologically essential"; Graham Little, *Friendship: Being Ourselves With Others* (Melbourne: The Text Publishing Company, 1993), 48.

45 See Michel Foucault, 'About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self', *Political Theory*, vol. 21, no. 2 (May 1993), 198-227 (Hereafter BHS).

46 Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1985), 32 (Hereafter UP).

47 HS, 12

king's head, as Foucault claims, then in the theory of the self we have yet to kill God).

The Ethics of the Care of the Self: From Classical Greece to Imperial Rome

Foucault's first step towards throwing off the constraints of Christian prejudices against the care of the self is methodological. In order to understand antique ethics he introduces a tripartite framework for interpreting the history of morality. In *The Uses of Pleasure*, he distinguishes three fields of inquiry, which, he claims, encompass three different realities: moral codes, moral behaviours and what he calls ethics. The history of moral codes studies the system of values, rules and interdictions operative in a given society, the history of behaviours investigates the extent to which the actions of individuals and groups are consistent with these rules, and the history of ethics examines the "way in which individuals are urged to constitute themselves as subjects of moral conduct" and concerns itself "with the models proposed for setting up and developing relationships with the self, for self-reflection, self-knowledge, self-examination, for the decipherment of the self by oneself, for the transformations that one seeks to accomplish with oneself as object".⁴⁸ Simplifying this framework, Foucault identifies a field of 'moral' problems concerning codes or interdictions and their application, and another field of 'ethical' problems about how the self turns itself into a moral agent.

According to Foucault, the decisive transformations in the history of moral experience lie not in the history of codes, which reveals only the "poverty and monotony of interdictions", but in the history of ethics, where this is understood "as the elaboration of a form of relation to self that enables an individual to fashion himself into a subject of ethical conduct".⁴⁹ In concrete historical terms, he suggests that we can distinguish the Greek, Roman and Christian traditions not so much in terms of their moral prescriptions, which, he claims, remain "formally alike", but in terms of the different forms of self-relationships which they encourage individuals to practice.⁵⁰ Although Foucault acknowledges that in any attempt to identify the break between Christianity and antiquity "the topography of the parting of the waters is hard to pin down", he nonetheless selects two key points of differentiation.⁵¹

48 UP, 29

49 UP, 251

50 UP, 250; see also GE, 355.

51 Foucault quotes Peter Brown in "The Battle for Chastity" in Phillippe Aries and André Béjin (eds.), *Western Sexuality: Practice and Precept in Past and Present Times*, trans. Anthony Forster (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 14-25, 25.

In the first place, he claims that although the necessity of respecting the law and customs was often underscored in Greek and Roman antiquity,

... more important than the content of the law ... was the attitude that caused one to respect them. The accent was placed on the relationship with the self that enabled a person to keep from being carried away by the appetites and pleasures, to maintain a mastery and superiority over them, to keep his senses in a state of tranquility, to remain free from interior bondage to passions, and to achieve a mode of being that could be defined as full enjoyment of oneself, or the perfect supremacy of oneself over oneself.⁵²

While Foucault clearly compresses many different conceptions of the practices of the self into this passage, he nevertheless believes they share a close family resemblance insofar as they place the accent not on the strict codification of conducts or the authority that enforces it, but on what is required of individuals in their relationship to themselves, to their actions, thoughts, and feelings as they seek to form themselves as an ethical subjects.⁵³ In Greco-Roman culture, he argues, both the codes and the practices through which the self constitutes itself, its forms of self-examination and self-elaboration, were *supplements* or *luxuries* that individuals voluntarily adopted. Its various schools proposed rather than imposed “different styles of moderation or strictness, each having its specific character or ‘shape’”.⁵⁴

Secondly, Foucault claims that in the Greco-Roman tradition the choice to apply these codes and practices to the shaping of one’s existence, and the constitution of oneself as a self-disciplined subject, was determined by the aim of transforming one’s existence into a work of art. “From Antiquity to Christianity” he asserts “we pass from a morality that was essentially a search for a personal ethics to morality as obedience to a system of rules”.⁵⁵ For the classical Greeks, for example, sexual austerity was not a matter of internalising, justifying or formalising general interdictions imposed on everyone, rather it was a means of developing an “aesthetics of existence”, or “a stylisation of conduct for those who wished to give their existence the most graceful and accomplished form possible”.⁵⁶ In the Greco-Roman world, this aesthetic care for the self was, as Foucault puts it, “the manner in which individual liberty ... considered itself as ethical”.⁵⁷

52 UP, 31

53 UP, 29-30

54 UP, 21

55 Michel Foucault, ‘An Aesthetics of Existence’, in Sylvère Lotringer (ed.), *Foucault Live: Interviews 1966-1984*, trans. John Johnston (New York: Semiotext(e), 1989), 309-316, 311.

56 UP, 253, 250-51

57 ECS, 115

However, if we narrow our focus to Foucault's treatment of ethics *within* Antiquity, it quickly becomes apparent that he differentiates between the classical Greek practices of liberty and the late Roman Stoics' care for the self. During the golden age of self-cultivation, so he claims, important shifts occur in the mode in which the self recognises itself as an ethical subject, the ascetic practice through which it constitutes itself, and the goal of its work on itself. In the classical Greek perspective, he claims, the self defines its relationship to rules or norms as the means through which it achieves "beauty, brilliance, nobility, or perfection".⁵⁸ Foucault describes this as an aesthetic mode of adjustment to norms. The Stoics, by contrast, recognise norms as those which apply to all rational beings.⁵⁹ Between classical Greek ethics and Stoicism, he claims, there is also a dramatic shift in the range and type of ascetic or self-forming practices. Indeed, he associates Stoicism with a veritable burgeoning of self-forming activities, exercises and practices. Finally, Roman Stoicism changes the *telos* of ethical subjectivity.⁶⁰ While the Roman Stoics, in conformity with the classical tradition, still define the art of the self in terms of achieving the rule of the self over itself, "this rule broadens out into an experience in which the relation to self takes the form not only of domination but also of an enjoyment of oneself without desire or disturbance".⁶¹ Foucault correlates this shift towards the enjoyment of oneself with a shift away from the goal of domination over others:

I think that the difference is that in the classical perspective, to be master of oneself meant, first, taking into account only oneself and not

58 UP, 27

59 UP, 354, 356. The classicist Pierre Hadot correctly observes that in treating the Hellenistic and Stoic spiritual exercises as sources for his own idea of aesthetic self-fashioning Foucault fails to "sufficiently stress" the connection between self-cultivation and the exercise of reason that was integral to these traditions. By contrast with the Hellenistic traditions, Hadot maintains, Foucault's own notion of the cultivation of the self was "too purely aesthetic – that is to say, I fear, a new form of dandyism, a late twentieth century version", and for that reason could not legitimately claim descent from ancient sources. In this respect, Hadot confirms one of the central claims of this paper: that Foucault anachronistically attributes a late twentieth-century dandyism to the ancient practices of the self; see Pierre Hadot, 'Reflections on the notion of the "cultivation of the self"' in *Michel Foucault, Philosopher*, 225-232, 230.

60 Timothy O'Leary correctly observes that while in volumes 2 and 3 of the *History of Sexuality* Foucault clearly distinguishes between the *teloi* of classical and late Stoic ethics - the former aiming at political power, and the latter at self-composure and self-enjoyment - in his interview he nevertheless insists on attributing a single, purely aesthetic *telos*, the cultivation of beauty, to these two ethical traditions. O'Leary claims that Foucault deliberately engaged in this mystification for the sake of a contemporary project, *viz.*, jolting his readers out of a habitual acceptance of a particular form of universalist morality. See O'Leary, *Foucault and the Art of Ethics*, 7, 86, & 172.

61 CS, 68, emphasis added; see also, UP, 63, 70.

the other, because to be master of oneself meant that you were able to rule others. So the mastery of oneself was directly related to a dissymmetrical relation to others ... Later on ... mastery of oneself is something which is not primarily related to power over others: you have to be master of yourself not only in order to rule others ... but you have to be master of yourself because you are a rational being. And in this mastery of yourself, you are related to other people, who are masters of themselves. And this new kind of relation to the other is much less non-reciprocal than before.⁶²

Stoicism and Nietzsche: The Golden Age of Self-Cultivation

A brief examination of Foucault's schematic depiction of the golden age of Stoic self-cultivation suggests that it is precisely this kind of self-cultivation which provides the groundwork for Nietzsche's conception of the art of living.⁶³ Foucault follows in Nietzsche's footsteps by identifying the origin of the tradition of caring for oneself, the organising principle of the classical art of existence, in the early Socratic dialogues. It is the neglect of this Socratic tradition, Nietzsche asserts, that "transforms the earth for so many into a 'vale of tears'".⁶⁴ Like Foucault, Nietzsche takes the figure of Socrates in the *Apology* as the seminal source of the Greco-Roman ethic of caring for oneself. Unfortunately, Nietzsche laments, the Christian orientation to the "salvation of the soul" has buried this tradition:

Priests and teachers, and the sublime lust for power of idealists of every description ... hammer into children that what matters is ... the salvation of the soul, the service of the state, the advancement of science, or the accumulation of reputation and possessions, all as a means of doing service to mankind as a whole; while the requirements of the individual, his great and small needs within the twenty-four hours of the day, are to be regarded as something contemptible or a matter of indifference. Already in ancient Greece Socrates was defending himself with all his might against this arrogant neglect of the human for the benefit of the human race, and

62 GE, 357-358, emphasis added. Gretchen Reydam-Schils amplifies and clarifies this quick gloss on the connection the Stoics drew between the care of the self and relationality; see Gretchen Reydam-Schils, *The Roman Stoics: Self, Responsibility, and Affection* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2006), Ch. 2.

63 Jim Urpeth makes a similar claim about the "fundamental, though largely implicit contribution" Foucault's history of the ancient care of the self makes to arriving at a clear understanding of Nietzsche's idea of *askēsis*. Urpeth, however, conceives Nietzsche's 'affirmative ascesis' as in some sense 'Dionysian' rather than Stoic. See Jim Urpeth, 'Noble Ascesis: Between Nietzsche and Foucault', *New Nietzsche Studies*, vol. 2, no. 3-4 (summer 1998), 65-91, p. 72.

64 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Wanderer and His Shadow*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), §6 (Hereafter WS).

loved to indicate the true compass and content of all reflection and care with an expression of Homer's: it comprises, he said, nothing other than 'that which I encounter of good and ill in my own house'.⁶⁵

According to Foucault, this Socratic ethic of caring for the self reaches its summit in Roman Stoicism. In the Hellenistic and imperial periods, he observes, the Socratic notion of 'taking care of oneself' became a common philosophical theme. The Roman Stoics, in particular, conceived the care of the self as an end in itself and transformed it into a way of living that extended across the whole of the individual's life.⁶⁶ In Seneca and Marcus Aurelius, Foucault contends, the thematic of caring for oneself, their "meticulous attention to the details of daily life, with the movements of the spirit, with self-analysis", became the centre of philosophical life and "gradually acquired the dimensions of a veritable 'cultivation of the self'".⁶⁷ Indeed, they defined human existence as a permanent exercise of the self on itself. As the imperative to care for oneself assumed centre stage in Roman philosophic culture it organised itself around a conception of the self as a reflexive exercise, an exercise of the self on itself mediated through certain forms of self-examination and ascetic practices. A brief analysis of Stoicism's care for the self, as Foucault presents it, suggests that in his middle works Nietzsche self-consciously assumed its conception of the self, its ethics and its practices, as his own.⁶⁸

Like Seneca, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, Nietzsche extracts the principle of caring for oneself as the key Socratic legacy, and he identifies the chief cause of all psychical frailties as the failure to attend to this principle and undertake the continuous, careful observation of the most minute and closest details of one's mode of life.⁶⁹ In common with the Stoics, Nietzsche conceptualises self-observation as labour of the self on itself. The Greek term *epimeleia*, as Foucault points out, designates not a preoccupation with oneself, or an 'idle' gazing at oneself, but a whole set of occupations, a work of the self on itself.⁷⁰ *Epimeleia heautou*, Foucault observes, describes the activities of the

65 WS §6; see Plato, *Apology* 29e, Homer, *Odyssey*, Bk. IV, l. 392; Foucault cites this passage from the *Apology* as the fountainhead of the ethics of the care of the self in CS, 44 and TS, 20.

66 See HS, Lecture 5.

67 TS, 28, CS, 44

68 Günter Götter demonstrates that the Hellenistic therapeia are the starting point for Nietzsche's (and Freud's) notion of the work of the self; see Günter Götter, 'Die Antike Therapeutik als Gemeinsamer Bezugspunkt für Nietzsche und Freud', *Nietzsche-Studien*, Bd, 32 (2003), 206-225

69 WS §6; see also Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, trans. R. J. Hollindale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), §462 (Hereafter D).

70 CS, 50

master of the household, the work of agricultural management, and a doctor's treatment of patients. Nietzsche's middle works are studded with examples of these forms of labour being used as metaphors for the work of the self on itself.⁷¹ In criticising those who take pity on others, for example, he alleges that their actions and prescriptions prevent the pitied from properly managing their own domestic economy.⁷² In other places, he takes gardening as the metaphor of the self's cultivation of itself, and the flourishing garden as the image of its purpose:

Gardener and garden. – Out of damp and gloomy days, out of solitude, out of loveless words directed at us, *conclusions* grow up like fungus: one morning they are there, we know not how, and they gaze at us, morose and grey. Woe to the thinker who is not the gardener but only the soil of the plants that grow in him!⁷³

In the 1886 preface to the second volume of *Human, All Too Human*, he recasts the entire enterprise as a work he undertook on himself in order to weed out Schopenhauer's pessimistic judgements from his own soul. Here he brings together Stoic notions of the exercise of the self, its insistence on constant inward vigilance, with the Stoic emphasis on self-composure and equanimity in the face of loss and sorrow, and its resolute defence of life against the judgements of melancholia. Nietzsche confronts what we might describe as Schopenhauer's revolt against mourning - or against the possibility of coming to terms with loss - with the Stoic endurance of separation and solitude.⁷⁴ In this context, he portrays himself *as* a Stoic and the work he undertakes on himself as a Stoic spiritual exercise:

[In *Human, All Too Human*, volume 2, and *The Wanderer and his Shadow*] there is a *determination* to preserve an equilibrium and composure in the face of life and even a sense of gratitude towards it, here there rules a vigorous, proud, constantly watchful and sensitive will that has set itself the task of defending life *against* pain and of striking down all those inferences that pain, disappointment, ill-humour, solitude and other swamp grounds usually cause to flourish like poisonous fungi.⁷⁵

71 GE, 49-50. Graham Parkes gives a brilliant and exhaustive treatment of Nietzsche's metaphors of the soul; see Graham Parkes, *Composing the Soul: Reaches of Nietzsche's Psychology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994).

72 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974), §338 (Hereafter GS).

73 D §382; see also D §560.

74 For Schopenhauer's Augustinian inspired critique of Stoic eudaimonism see *The World as Will and Representation*, volumes 1 & 2 (New York: Dover Publications, 1969), vol. 1, §16, esp., 86-91 and vol. 2, Ch. XVI.

75 HAH 2, Preface, §5

But Nietzsche, again following the Stoics, in whom this tendency reaches its zenith, reserves a privileged place for *medical* metaphors in his articulation of the art of living. The Hellenistic schools, and most comprehensively Roman Stoics, correlate the care of the self with medical thought and practice. Indeed, as Nussbaum observes, this correlation had become so pervasive in Stoic thought that Cicero felt the need to complain of their “excessive attention” to such analogies.⁷⁶ Cicero succinctly expresses the medical analogy on which Hellenistic philosophy pivots:

There is I assure you, a medical art for the soul. It is philosophy, whose aid need not be sought, as in bodily diseases, from outside ourselves. We must endeavour with all of our resources and all our strength to become capable of doctoring ourselves.⁷⁷

Like his Hellenistic predecessors, Nietzsche obsessively returns to the idea that philosophy is a therapeutic art that heals the sufferings and diseases of the soul.⁷⁸ Unsurprisingly, therefore, he contests or challenges other philosophic perspectives by accusing them of quack-doctoring or medical negligence.⁷⁹ Nietzsche adopts the collectively shared view of the Cynics, Epicureans and Stoics that such maladies are often perpetuated and reinforced by erroneous beliefs and value judgements that translate into disorders or affects that carry the soul away from itself. Nietzsche interprets his own philosophy as so many signs and symptoms in his soul’s cycle of illness, convalescence and health. He frames his writings in much the same way as Seneca, who reports to Lucilius that he is recording the stages in his self-treatment for those who “are recovering from a prolonged spiritual sickness” and on “behalf of later generations”:⁸⁰

I am writing down a few things that may be of use to them; I am committing to writing some helpful recommendations, which might be compared to *formulae of successful medications, the effectiveness of which I have experienced in the case of my own sores, which may not have been completely cured but have at least ceased to spread.*⁸¹

76 Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, quoted in Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire*, 316.

77 Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, quoted in Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire*, 316.

78 Nietzsche mines this seam of Hellenistic thought in countless places and contexts; for just a few examples see, D §52, §449, §534 and the 1886 Prefaces to HAH, vols. 1 & 2, and GS.

79 WS §83

80 Lucius Annaeus Seneca L.VIII.2 in *Letters from a Stoic*, trans. Robin Campbell (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977). All subsequent references to Seneca’s *Letters* are taken from this translation except where noted.

81 L.VIII, emphasis added.

In recounting his own middle works, Nietzsche adopts Seneca's rhetorical pose, describing them as "the history of an illness and recovery", "a spiritual cure" and "self-treatment" which teach "*precepts of health* that may be recommended to the more spiritual natures of the generation just coming up as a *disciplina voluntatis*".⁸² Nietzsche, like Seneca, recommends these precepts, and he also counsels that these spiritual natures "in whom all that exists today of sickness, poison and danger comes together" become doctors to their own soul. Permanent medical care, as Foucault relates, is one of the central features that the Stoics introduced into the practice of self-cultivation. In the imperial age, he explains, *paideia* increasingly took on a medical coloration that was absent in Platonic pedagogy.⁸³ "One must" according to the Stoics "become the doctor of oneself".⁸⁴

In the 1886 preface, in what is indisputably a homage to Stoic and Cynic practices of the self, Nietzsche describes how he forged his philosophy as an attempt to become the doctor of his own soul. In a passage overloaded with allusions to the figure of Diogenes and to the Stoic soul-doctors, Nietzsche reports that it was their disciplines that enabled him to overcome that pessimistic malaise, whose main symptom he identifies as an oscillation between extreme denial and manic affirmation. It is worth quoting this passage at length in order to gauge the full extent to which Nietzsche identifies his philosophy with Cynicism and Stoicism from this passage:

Just as a physician places his patient in a wholly strange environment so that he may be removed from his entire 'hitherto', from his cares, his friends, letters, duties, stupidities and *torments of memory* and learn to reach out with new hands and senses to new nourishment, a new sun, a new future, so I as physician and patient in one compelled myself to an opposite and unexplored clime of the soul, and especially a curative journey into strange parts, into *strangeness* itself, to an inquisitiveness regarding every kind of strange thing ... A protracted wandering around, seeking, changing followed from this, a repugnance towards all staying still, toward every blunt affirmation and denial; likewise a dietetic and discipline designed to make it easy as possible for a spirit to run long distances, to fly to great heights, above all again and again to fly away. A *minimum* of life, in fact, an unchaining from all coarser desires, an independence in the midst of all kinds of unfavourable outward circumstances together with pride in being *able* to live surrounded by these unfavourable circumstances; a certain amount of cynicism, perhaps, a certain amount of 'barrel' but just as surely a great deal of capricious happiness, capricious cheerfulness, a great deal of stillness, light, subtler folly, concealed enthusiasm – all this

82 HAH 2 Preface, §2, §5

83 CS, 55

84 TS, 31

finally resulted in a great spiritual strengthening, an increasing joy and abundance of health. Life itself *rewards* us for our tough will to live, for the long war that I then waged with myself against the pessimism of weariness with life, even for every attentive glance our gratitude accords to even the smallest, tenderest, most fleeting gift life gives us.⁸⁵

Nietzsche spells out here his debt to the philosophic therapy of Cynicism and Stoicism without any reservations, a debt so great that a complete interpretation of this passage would entail an exposition of almost every significant aspect of these two philosophical schools. For the moment, we need only note that Nietzsche explicitly affirms the Stoic medical analogy and its notion that philosophic practice should act as a tonic to the soul, a means of overcoming the torments of memory and the violent oscillation between melancholia and mania that disturbs the soul's equanimity and composure.

The Stoics took the medical analogy with sufficient seriousness that they could designate the procedures of the care of the self with a whole array of medical metaphors. Foucault reports a series of medical metaphors that they regularly employed: "put the scalpel to the wound; open an abscess, amputate; evacuate the superfluities, give medications; prescribe bitter, soothing or bracing potions".⁸⁶ Nietzsche borrows many of these metaphors to describe his art of psychological examination and its objects, confirming his commitment to reviving their therapeutic model of philosophy. In *Human, All Too Human*, he proposes that we see his work as a "psychological dissection table" and his analyses as the "knives and forceps" he uses to remove diseased moral, religious, aesthetic, and social "sensations"; and he writes of applying conceptual "icepacks" to reduce the fevers of the soul produced by metaphysical and religious errors.⁸⁷ This conception of philosophic procedures and the ethics of the care of the self it carries with it pervades Nietzsche's thinking, down to the most minute details, which are easily lost in the polemical storm that surrounds his work. We can see this, for example, in the way Nietzsche urges a medical response to the treatment of human suffering. Following the Stoics, Nietzsche believes individuals must cure themselves of pity and self-pity, otherwise they will be incapable of enabling others to overcome their own sufferings. Nietzsche makes this case against pity in the name of an alternative medico-philosophic therapy. In doing so, he

85 HAH 2 Preface, §5, emphases added. Nietzsche also touches on Diogenes the Dog at HAH §1, §34, §275. For a recent account of Nietzsche's relation to the Cynic tradition see Heinrich Nichues-Pröbsting, 'The Modern Reception of Cynicism', in R. Bracht Branham & Marie-Coile Goulet-Gaze (eds.), *The Cynics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 329-365, 354ff.

86 CS, 55

87 HAH 1, §37, §38; D §53.

leans on the Stoic conception of the philosopher as physician who skilfully employs various procedures in search of a cure:

... to serve mankind as a physician *in any sense whatever* one will have to be very much on guard against pity – it will paralyse him at every decisive moment and apply a ligature to his knowledge and his *subtle helpful hand*.⁸⁸

Finally, to complete this picture Nietzsche, along with the Stoics, believes this medical practice of the self is best pursued through the application of tests that function as diagnostic procedures for assessing the health of the soul and, if applied frequently and rigorously, as partial cures or tonics for the soul. The Stoics famously counsel the practice of *praemeditatio* as a means of testing the extent to which the soul has risen above the tumult of anger, vengeance and envy, and as a way of moving towards achieving the goal of philosophical therapy.⁸⁹ The practice aims to establish a rational soul whose self-composure is founded on a joy in itself that cannot be perturbed by the sufferings and deprivations fortune ceaselessly inflicts on mortals. Foucault correctly notes that the purpose of these testing procedures “is to enable one to do without unnecessary things by establishing a supremacy over oneself that does not depend on their presence or absence. The tests to which one subjects oneself are not successive stages of privation. They are ways of measuring and confirming the independence one is capable of with regard to everything that is not indispensable and essential”.⁹⁰ Seneca exhorts Lucilius to ‘rehearse’ poverty, suffering and death not because he ought to value renunciation or mortification for their own sake, but so that he can maintain his equanimity in the face of all circumstances.⁹¹ Foucault correctly observes that this relationship of the self to itself is antithetical to the Christian hermeneutic of self-decipherment and self-renunciation.⁹² In Stoic self-testing, one does not seek to decipher a hidden truth of the self for the sake of self-renunciation. Rather, in the philosophic tradition dominated by Stoicism, *askēsis* “means not renunciation but the progressive ... mastery over oneself,

88 D §134; For the Stoic critique of pity, see Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *On Mercy*, esp. Ch. 6 in *Minor Dialogues*, trans. Aubrey Stewart (London: George Bell and Sons, 1902).

89 See for example Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Helvia*, in *Minor Dialogues*, trans. Aubrey Stewart (London: George Bell and Sons, 1902), 324-325. Foucault treats the Stoic practice of *praemeditatio* in HS, Lecture 23, 468-473.

90 CS, 59. Foucault elaborates the Stoic notion of life as a test in HS, Lecture 22.

91 See L.XVIII, XXIV & XXVI where he counsels Lucilius to rehearse poverty and death so that he can maintain his liberty and equanimity should he in fact lose his fortune or suffer the threat of the Emperor’s sword.

92 Foucault develops this point in BHS.

obtained not through the renunciation of reality, but through the acquisition and assimilation of truth".⁹³

Nietzsche explicitly recalls the Stoic tradition of self-testing to explain the philosophic therapy he undertook in the middle works. Like the Stoics, he claims that if we wish to "return to health, we have no choice: we have to burden ourselves more heavily than we have ever been burdened before ...".⁹⁴ He explains his own exploration of a resolutely post-metaphysical perspective as part of a campaign that "I conducted with myself as a patient", or as a form of "self-testing" that all pessimists should use as a signpost to the health of their soul.⁹⁵ Nietzsche's most famous test of the soul, the potentially crushing burden of the eternal recurrence, the "greatest weight", as he calls it, is cut from the Stoic cloth: it is both diagnostic and curative.⁹⁶ Bernd Magnus's groundbreaking study of Nietzsche's doctrine of eternal recurrence (unwittingly) discloses the close link between the goals of Stoic *askēsis* and Nietzsche's doctrine. He structures his entire account of Nietzsche's philosophy in terms of the Stoic medical analogy without, however, acknowledging its Hellenistic and Stoic provenance.⁹⁷ According to Magnus, Nietzsche's philosophy centres on the diagnosis of a particular disease, 'kronophobia', the identification of its various symptoms (Platonism, Christianity, and romantic pessimism) and its treatment or therapy. He conceives Nietzsche's philosophy, in short, as a therapeutic treatment of the 'kronophobic' malaise. Platonism and Christianity and romantic pessimism, each in their own way, express the kronophobe's "need to arrest becoming, the need to make transience abide. The flux cannot be endured without transfiguration. Time, temporality must be overcome".⁹⁸ In this context, Magnus claims that the "value of eternal recurrence ... lies primarily in its diagnostic thrust"; that is to say, he sees it as a test that the self applies to itself to determine the extent to which it suffers from the disease of kronophobia.⁹⁹ Indeed, he sees the idea of eternal recurrence as a diagnostic tool which enables us to become aware of suffering from a disease, a morbid suffering that we would otherwise fail to detect in ourselves.

For Nietzsche the testing of the self that the eternal recurrence enacts shares a goal in common with the ethical practices of his Hellenistic and Stoic predecessors. According to Foucault, they aim at a "conversion to the self"

93 TS, 35. Foucault spells out the difference aims of Stoic and Christian *askēsis* in HS, Lecture 16, esp. 321-327

94 HAH 2 Preface, §5

95 HAH 2 Preface, §5

96 GS §341

97 Bernd Magnus, *Nietzsche's Existential Imperative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), p. 7, 42-43.

98 Magnus, *Nietzsche's Existential Imperative*, 194

99 Magnus, *Nietzsche's Existential Imperative*, 156.

that expresses itself in a certain relationship or disposition of the self to itself.¹⁰⁰ This conversion succeeds where the self takes joy in itself in the same way that one takes pleasure in a friend. “What progress have I made?” Seneca writes to Lucilius “I am beginning to be my own friend”.¹⁰¹ “Such a person” he adds “*will never be alone, and you may be sure he is a friend of all [amicum omnibus]*”.¹⁰² The Hellenistic thinkers believe that the labour of establishing this friendship between the self and itself enables individuals to sustain themselves without vengefulness, and take joy in their existence regardless of the blessings or curses of fortune. Hellenistic ethics is not about fortifying oneself against loss, which, if the Stoics are right, is an impossible, self-defeating and anxiety-inducing project, but about fortifying oneself against a vengeful *response* to loss. “The geometrician teaches me how to keep my boundaries intact,” Seneca quips, “but what I want to learn is how to lose the whole lot cheerfully”.¹⁰³

In formulating the doctrine of eternal recurrence, Nietzsche echoes the Stoic notion that the aim of self-testing is to transform one’s relationship to oneself, or to become, as Seneca puts it, one’s own friend: “(H)ow well disposed to yourself and to life”, Nietzsche remarks in the concluding line of his famously dramatic invocation of recurrence, “to crave nothing more fervently than this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal”.¹⁰⁴ It is a test, in other words, that is designed to measure and move one towards acquiring the virtue of being well disposed or friendly towards oneself. Here the point of Foucault’s distinction between morality and ethics, and its application to the Stoics and Nietzsche becomes apparent: their ethics of the care of the self principally concerns the manner in which agents or subjects relate to, and transform themselves in the process of becoming agents or subjects of action, rather than with establishing or adjudicating normative codes. How the self relates to itself, especially to “the greatest weight” it is burdened with, its memories and its losses, lies at the heart of Nietzsche’s and Stoicism’s *therapeia*.¹⁰⁵ Like the

100 CS, 64

101 L.VI

102 L.VI, emphasis added.

103 L.LXXXVIII.11 in C. D. N. Costa’s translation, *Seneca: 17 Letters*, (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1988); Seneca here takes the loss of property as an allegory for all the losses we must endure, including mortality. His point then is that Stoics must *learn* how to lose their property, and ultimately their ownmost property, *cheerfully*; it is thus the difficult art of learning how to lose without bitterness or vengefulness that is central to the Stoic’s practices.

104 GS §341, emphasis added.

105 Commentators often neglect the Stoics’ account of the therapeutic function of memory in the composition of the soul. As Gretchen Reydam-Schils observes, “(b)ecause memory is ranked among the indifferents, and time is one of the incorporeals in the Stoic system, the importance of these two notions has been overlooked in assessments of the Stoic idea of selfhood. But they are, in fact,

Stoics, then, Nietzsche's conception of the self's work on itself is more properly speaking therapeutic than 'aesthetic'. In elaborating the nature and purpose of the specifically 'artistic' elements of the self's work on itself Nietzsche makes it clear that they are subordinate parts of a therapeutic task or work (*Aufgabe*) that treats outbreaks of psychical fears and torments:

Against the art of works of art. – Art is above and before all supposed to beautify life, thus make ourselves endurable, if possible pleasing to others: with this task in view it restrains us and keeps us within bounds, creates social forms ... Then art is supposed to conceal or reinterpret everything ugly, those painful, dreadful, disgusting things which all efforts notwithstanding, in accord with the origin of human nature again and again insist on breaking forth: it is supposed to do so especially in regard to passions and psychical fears and torments ... After this great, indeed immense task of art, what is usually termed art, that of the work of art, is merely an appendage.¹⁰⁶

It is not surprising therefore that when Foucault turns to elaborating a new perspective on Hellenistic philosophy in his 1981-1982 lectures, he very briefly identifies Nietzsche's philosophy as one of several nineteenth-century German attempts at reconstituting the Hellenistic and Roman arts of living.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, it seems that Foucault undertook his journey back to the golden age of self-cultivation for the sake of understanding how Nietzsche and other representatives of modern German philosophy sought to resurrect the Hellenistic conception of philosophy as a way of life, to borrow Pierre Hadot's term.¹⁰⁸ Foucault claims that this strand of German philosophy attempted to recover the Hellenistic model by once again connecting the "activity of knowing" with "the requirements of spirituality".¹⁰⁹ Following Hadot, Foucault draws a sharp divide between this Hellenistic therapeutic-practical conception of philosophy, on the one side, and the strictly cognitive understanding of philosophy that has dominated the discipline since Descartes, on the other.¹¹⁰ Hadot and Foucault share the view that Hellenistic

revealing and crucial to the question". See Reydam-Schils, *The Roman Stoics*, 29, & 29-34.

106 HAH 2, §174, emphasis added.

107 HS, 28 & 251.

108 See Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, trans. Michael Chase (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), esp. Ch. 11.

109 HS, 28

110 HS, 14-16. Foucault actually refers to the 'Cartesian moment' rather than Descartes. Foucault uses this phrase merely as a convenient signpost for a broad shift in the conception of philosophy rather than as a comment upon Descartes' philosophy. His caution here relates to the fact that even in Descartes' philosophy, as Hadot observes, elements of the ancient spiritual exercises such as *meditatio* survive; see Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 271

and Roman philosophy differs dramatically from post-Cartesian philosophy insofar as it pivots on the assumption that the activity of philosophic knowing is always tied “to a transformation of the subject’s being”.¹¹¹ If they are correct, the acrimonious contemporary conflict between ‘Continental philosophy’ and analytic philosophy revolves around the issue of whether the practice of philosophy can and ought to transform the whole of the individual’s way of being, or, in Hadot’s words, whether wisdom should not merely cause us to know, but to make us ‘be’ in a different way.¹¹²

As we have seen, Foucault is undoubtedly correct to identify Nietzsche as a key figure in the German philosophic movement that sought to reanimate the spiritual-cum-therapeutic ambitions of Hellenistic philosophy, though he errs slightly in claiming that Nietzsche and his fellow travellers do so only “implicitly”.¹¹³ It is clear that in his middle works Nietzsche explicitly assumes the stance of a philosophical therapist on the model of the Hellenistic and Roman examples. Indeed, as early as his inaugural Basel lecture (1869), Nietzsche memorably invokes Seneca’s lament that the rise of sophistic teaching had transformed philosophy, the study of wisdom, into philology, the study of mere words.¹¹⁴ In what he calls a “confession of faith”, Nietzsche declares his intention of performing the reverse operation: turning philology into philosophy; that is to say, of transforming a discipline that teaches us how to commentate into one that teaches us how to live.¹¹⁵ Nietzsche self-consciously models his philosophic enterprise on the Senecan/Stoic notion of philosophy as a mode of knowing that transforms who one is.

In his 1981-1982 lectures Foucault follows Nietzsche’s lead: his positivistic account of the shifts and transformations in the history of the ancient care of the self is fuelled by a similar enchantment with the prospect of rekindling a mode of knowing that transfigures or liberates the self. Like Nietzsche, Foucault seems to lament the fact that philosophy after Descartes came to be conceived as a purely cognitive activity that ought to be purged of the misguided Hellenistic notion that the acquisition of truth must transform one’s being. In one of the rare moment of pathos in these lectures, Foucault conjures up the lonely figure of Faust lamenting that all his scholarly lucubrations, “philosophy, jurisprudence, medicine and theology” have

111 HS, 14-16.

112 Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 265. Simon Critchley takes up Hadot’s distinction in his attempt to mediate the debate between analytic and ‘Continental’ philosophy; see, Simon Critchley, *Continental Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), Ch. 1.

113 HS, 28

114 LCVIII. 23 “*Itaque quae philosophia fuit facta philologia est*”.

115 “*Philosophia facta est quae philologia fuit*”. The passage is from Nietzsche’s inaugural Basel lecture (May 1869), later privately published as ‘Homer and Classical Philology’; quoted in James I. Porter, *Nietzsche and the Philology of the Future* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 14 & 35.

yielded nothing “by way of his own transfiguration”.¹¹⁶ Foucault himself clearly sympathises with this Faustian nostalgia for the ancient figure of knowledge as a source of spiritual transfiguration.¹¹⁷

At the same time, however, he remains sceptical about the possibility of any attempt to reconstitute an ethics of the self. Though he declares that establishing a contemporary care of the self is “an urgent, fundamental and politically indispensable task”, Foucault suspects that not only are all nineteenth-century German attempts like Nietzsche’s “blocked and ossified”, but that despite our recent efforts in this direction we may well simply find it “impossible to constitute an ethics of the self”.¹¹⁸ Regrettably, Foucault never had the opportunity to explore the different ways German philosophy sought to renovate and recover the ancient arts of living and their spiritual modalisation of knowledge. We will never know, therefore, the exact reasons for his scepticism about both Nietzsche’s and his own efforts to restore philosophy as a spiritual and therapeutic adventure. It seems reasonable to suppose, however, one of the central difficulties that may have prompted this note of doubt is the collapse of the cosmological and mythical beliefs that were essential to the conceptual structure and psychological efficacy of the Hellenistic *therapeia*. It is a problem Nietzsche also faced insofar as he found it impossible to frame his key ‘spiritual exercise’, the thought of eternal recurrence, without recourse to Stoicism’s cyclical cosmological doctrine.¹¹⁹ We might surmise that Foucault saw how problematic it is to think that Stoicism’s spiritual exercises are philosophically sustainable or psychologically plausible in the absence of the Stoics’ foundational belief in a providential or divine *logos*.¹²⁰

Foucault’s account of the Hellenistic and Roman *therapeia* remains then a prolegomenon to a study of their modern renovations that he never had the

116 HS, 310.

117 In UP Foucault puts the point in the form of a rhetorical question: “After all, what would be the value of the passion for knowledge if it resulted in a certain amount of knowledgeableness and not *in one way or another* ... in the knower’s straying afield of himself?” The answer obviously is that pursuing knowledge would have very little value unless it put at stake the very being of the knower. The question Foucault does not raise here, and which I discuss below, is whether his way of straying afield of himself is compatible with Stoicism’s fundamental normative assumptions; see UP, 8 (emphases added).

118 HS, 252, 251.

119 The exact nature of Nietzsche’s doctrine of eternal recurrence remains a matter of considerable dispute. It is still a matter of debate whether Nietzsche considered it a cosmological doctrine or an existential test that one could undertake without committing oneself to belief in the literal eternal return of all things. For the latest installment in this debate see Lawrence J. Hatab, *Nietzsche’s Life Sentence: Coming to Terms with Eternal Recurrence* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

120 Pierre Hadot attempts to address this problem in *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 273, 282-284.

opportunity to undertake. As we have seen, in the 1981-1982 lectures he goes a long way to establishing that their fundamental point of convergence between the ancient and modern ethics of the self is the link they establish between knowledge and self-transformation. However, these lectures only give us a tantalising intimation of the manner in which Nietzsche and others sought to rework the Hellenistic *therapeia* and to challenge the Cartesian separation of knowledge and spirituality, truth and subjectivity. It is perhaps because Foucault only had the opportunity to gloss these issues that he never fully comes to grips with the possibility that some of the currents of thought he considers reinventions of the ancient care of the self, most notably Baudelaire's aestheticism, seem to radically diverge from the normative assumptions of the Hellenistic and Stoic traditions. Indeed, from the Stoic and Nietzschean perspective (or at least the Nietzsche of the middle works), the limitless, perpetual self-transformation that Foucault champions must surely count as one of the pathologies that the care of the self is designed to cure, *viz.*, the restlessness that Stoics refer to as '*stultitia*', and which they argue derives from a lack of self-sufficiency.

The Limits of Foucault's Limit-Attitude

Foucault's re-examination of the Stoic practices of the self, then, makes it possible to see one of the key philosophical sources of Nietzsche's ethics of subjectivity. However, Foucault's own approach to self-fashioning as the continuous estrangement of the self from itself, as an *askēsis* aimed at *nothing* other than getting "free of oneself" or "straying afield of (one)self", also strays far from the Stoics' and Nietzsche's *therapeia*.¹²¹ Foucault's aesthetic modernist conception of self-fashioning as a release from all pre-given limits is too often and too easily identified as a continuation of Nietzsche's project:

The work of Foucault... explicitly adopted Nietzsche's advocacy of aesthetic fashioning as an ideal. Rather than being true to the alleged 'authentic' self advocated by existentialists like Sartre, he insists, "we have to create ourselves as a work of art". The result might well resemble the elite and narcissistic world of the nineteenth century Dandy, who deliberately rejected the *telos* of a natural self in favour of a life of contrived artifice, and did so with minimal regard for others.¹²²

121 UP, 8, see, 8-9. For an excellent treatment of Foucault's notion of 'limit experiences' as a transgression of the limits of coherent subjectivity see Martin Jay, *Songs of Experience: Modern American and European Variations on a Universal Theme* (Berkeley:University of California Press, 2005), 390-400.

122 Martin Jay, 'The Morals Of Genealogy: Or is there a Post-Structuralist Ethics?' *The Cambridge Review* (June 1989), 73, emphasis added.

Yet, as we have seen, Nietzsche's primary debt lies with Hellenistic and Stoic philosophical therapy, not Baudelaire's aesthetic modernism. By anchoring Nietzsche in this tradition it becomes apparent that his conception of the self and self-fashioning must in fact be distinguished from Foucault's Baudelairean fantasy of 'unrestricted', open-ended self-invention. The differences can be seen by comparing this tradition with Foucault's conceptualisation of aesthetic self-fashioning:

What strikes me is the fact that in our society, art has become something which is related only to objects and not to individuals, or to life ... *But couldn't everyone's life become a work of art? Why should the lamp or the house be an art object, but not our life? ... From 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.*¹²³

The analogy Foucault draws here between life and the raw materials of artistic *poiesis* immediately indicates the gulf separating him from the conceptual framework of Stoic and Nietzschean therapy. Foucault appears to be advocating "an *arbitrary* stylisation of life", as one commentator expresses it, a stylisation that eschews the possibility that the material it shapes has an intrinsic *telos* and that is independent of all external or objective norms.¹²⁴ He claims that the justification for this notion of aesthetic fashioning lies in the fact that the self is "not given to us". In other words, Foucault challenges the notion that liberation is the discovery and expression of an authentic self that pre-exists the exercise of liberty.¹²⁵ If, however, as Taylor points out, the self is not given to us in this sense, it is not clear what justifies Foucault's normative judgement that we *have to* (or "*must*" as he says elsewhere) create ourselves as a work of art.¹²⁶

123 GE, 350-51, emphasis added.

124 See Dews, 'The Return of the Subject in Foucault', 40.

125 Foucault warns that there is a danger that liberation "will refer back to the idea that there does exist a nature or a human foundation which, as a result of a certain number of historical, social or economic processes, found itself concealed, alienated, imprisoned in and by some repressive mechanism. In this hypothesis it would suffice to unloosen these repressive blocks so that man can be reconciled with himself, once again find his nature or renew contact with his roots and restore a full a positive relationship with himself"; ECS 113.

126 "If I was interested in Antiquity it was because, for a whole series of reasons, the idea of morality as disobedience to a code of rules is now disappearing, has already disappeared. And to this absence of morality corresponds, *must* correspond, a search for an aesthetics of existence"; AE, p. 311, emphasis added; and Charles Taylor, 'Foucault on Freedom and Truth' in D. C. Hoy (ed.), *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 69-102. O'Leary claims that we should read Foucault's imperative as a historical, rather than a moral necessity. However, if we recall that both philosophically and methodologically Foucault is deeply committed to an anti-teleological perspective, it seems highly implausible to believe that he

More importantly, while Nietzsche might also eschew the notion that the self is given to us in the sense of an 'authentic' or natural self, his philosophical therapy implies that the self *is* given to us in another sense: the 'self' that is already there consists of the powerful affects and moods that derive from the loss of our phantasy of majestic plenitude. Nietzsche does not therefore conceptualise the material of self-fashioning as analogous to the indifferent, indeterminate material of artistic *poiesis*, as Foucault sometimes does; rather, he describes this material as the "passions and psychical fears and torments" which break forth from human nature.¹²⁷ Nietzschean self-cultivation is not the all-too-easy and purely cognitive acknowledgement of the self's historical 'contingency'. What the self confronts in the "immense task of art", Nietzsche suggests, is not an abstract, contingent 'otherness', but its own powerful desire for narcissistic plenitude and the history of its attempts to console itself for the loss of this ideal state. For Nietzsche, then, self-fashioning is the working-through of those affects or passions that derive from the human subject's loss of its narcissistic majesty and which, so he claims, engender an array of pathological modes of interaction through which it consoles itself for this loss:

The oldest means of solace.— First stage: man sees in every feeling of indisposition or misfortune something for which he has to make someone else suffer – in doing so he becomes conscious of the power he still possesses and this consoles him.¹²⁸

Foucault's purely aesthetic and formalistic conception of self-fashioning empties the Nietzschean and Hellenistic tradition of this psychological significance.¹²⁹ Rather than being oriented toward the 'aesthetic' achievement

would resort to the notion of historical necessity to support his normative judgements or intuitions. We might be better served seeing Foucault's imperative as illustrating Nietzsche's quip: "There is a point in every philosophy when the philosopher's 'conviction' appears on the stage - or to use the language of an ancient Mystery: *Adventavit asinus/Pulcher et fortissimos* (The ass arrived, beautiful and most brave)"; see O'Leary, *Foucault and the Art of Ethics*, 7 and BGE, 8.

127 HAH 2, §174. There is significant debate about how Foucault might have understood basic material from which a subject is formed; see, for example, O'Leary, *Foucault and the Art of Ethics*.; Chris Falzon, 'Foucault's Human Being', *Thesis Eleven*, no. 34, (1993), 1-16; Paul Patton, 'Taylor and Foucault on Power and Freedom', *Political Studies*, vol. XXXVII, no. 2 (June 1989); and Paul Patton, 'Foucault's Subject of Power', *Political Theory Newsletter*, vol. 6, no. 1 (May 1994), 60-71.

128 D §15

129 Joel Whitebook brilliantly analyses Foucault's theoretical and personal resistance to psychoanalytic theories, and cogently argues that many of the philosophical and ethical problems of Foucault's notion of self-fashioning result from this resistance; see Joel Whitebook, 'Freud, Foucault and the Dialogue With Unreason', *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, vol. 25, no. 6 (1999), 29-66 and 'Against Interiority: Foucault's

of an original 'personal' style, Nietzschean and Stoic philosophic therapy attempts to overcome the social and psychological pathologies that derive from the loss of narcissistic wholeness. In both cases, the necessity of self-cultivation is established in the face of the pathologies generated by the narcissistic origins of subjectivity.¹³⁰

What the Stoics and Nietzsche confront is the *pathos* or suffering that arise from the self's discovery of its powerlessness and the phantasies through which it allays this suffering, the earliest primitive forms of which Nietzsche nominates as compensatory vengeance and the exchange logic of guilt and atonement.¹³¹ The pathologies that Stoicism attempts to cure, as Foucault's account already implies, derive from what we might call the narcissistic problem of separation and individuation. Stoic therapy focuses on how the self can negotiate the tension between dependence and independence, or, "presence" and "absence" – to use the terms Foucault finds himself compelled to adopt in describing this therapy.¹³² Recast in these terms, Stoicism investigates how the self can establish supremacy over itself, or perhaps more accurately, joy in itself. Through Stoic therapy the self seeks to constitute itself so that it can experience the uncontrollability and potential absence of cherished objects as something other than its own annihilation.

In contrast with Foucault, Nietzsche and the Stoics frame their accounts of the self in terms of the problem of the loss of majestic plenitude. They identify the pathologies of the self as borne of the loss of this phantasy of plenitude, which, according to Nietzsche and Freud, the self first experiences in its inability to control objects and ensure their eternal presence. Nietzsche and the Stoics critically examine the array of consolations which reproduce, displace and exacerbate, rather than temper the problem of narcissistic loss. Unlike Foucault, then, Nietzsche draws on the Stoic and Hellenistic schools not as a remnant of a purely aesthetic program of self-fashioning, but as a philosophy that identifies the narcissistic foundations of subjectivity and which elaborates a therapy, a work of the self on itself, designed to address these narcissistic excesses and pathologies. In the middle period, Nietzsche discovers in the Hellenistic and Stoic arts of the self models

Struggle with Psychoanalysis' in Gary Gutting (ed.), *Cambridge Companion to Foucault* (New York, Cambridge University Press: 2005), 312-349.

130 I have tried to reframe Nietzsche's ethics of self-cultivation as a treatment of narcissistic disorders in 'Stoic Comedians: Nietzsche and Freud on the Art of Arranging One's Humours', *Nietzsche-Studien*, no. 34 (2005), 186-216. Martha C. Nussbaum attempts to illuminate and modify the Stoic's theory of the emotions with the aid of Freud's theory of narcissism in *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of the Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), Ch. 4.

131 D §15

132 CS, 59 (quoted above)

for the work of memory and mourning which is integral to the analysis and cure of the self.

In his failure to take seriously the ethical implications of the Stoic and Nietzschean critique of the emotions, Foucault not only fails to recognise, or at least fully acknowledge and define, the extent to which his own aesthetics of self-transformation is something quite different from the Stoic and Nietzschean therapeutic work on the self, he leaves himself without the conceptual resources for understanding the maladies that these *therapeia* seek to treat. Indeed, by presupposing rather than critically probing the feeling of powerlessness and restlessness that fuels the transgressive drive to flee from oneself or tear oneself from oneself, Foucault transforms what the Stoics and Nietzsche conceive of as a compulsive malady, explicable in terms of narcissistic wounding, into a virtue.¹³³

Despite Foucault's backward glances to the Stoics' and Nietzsche's philosophical therapy, his own model of the work of the self is in fact one of the pathologies for which they seek a diagnosis and cure. For Stoic therapy aims at establishing a sovereignty over oneself that abolishes all striving to become other to oneself, and it achieves this composure through weeding out the emotional attachments or investments that hold us in bondage to chance events. If we fail to achieve this sovereignty, this state of self-completion, the Stoics argue, we must suffer from *Stultitia*, a kind of restlessness or irresolution that compels the *stultus* to "constantly chang(e) his way of life".¹³⁴ Ironically, Foucault's analysis of the Stoic goal of self-completion and self-sufficiency reveals exactly how his own version of *askēsis*, which makes a virtue of constantly seeking to become other to oneself, is at odds with Stoicism's fundamental normative and therapeutic orientation.

From the Stoic perspective, Foucault's *askēsis* of constantly losing oneself is symptomatic of a failure to care for oneself. Foucault himself recognises that the Roman care of the self was "not a way of marking an essential caesura in the subject".¹³⁵ As he observes, the Stoics deployed a series of terms to refer to a break between the self and everything else, but these terms did *not* refer to a "break of the self with the self".¹³⁶ Foucault's own notion of *askēsis*, in other words, seems to take up the Hellenistic and Stoic therapeutic-practical conception of philosophy, but to sever it from its central normative ideal of self-sufficiency and the analysis and critique of the emotional agitations or pathologies on which this ideal is premised. In the Stoic scheme Foucault's celebration of the limit experiences that create radical

133 Paul Patton argues that Foucault must presuppose "something like a feeling of powerlessness" in order to account for the desire to constantly transform oneself and enhance one's feeling of power. See Patton, 'Foucault's Subject of Power', 71

134 HS, 132

135 HS, 214

136 HS, 212

caesuras within the self can only be seen as symptomatic of a failure to understand, analyse and treat the emotional agitations which compel us to constantly seek out another place, another time or another self.

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