

- A. Foucault provides a framework for the transformation of the self in an ongoing critical and creative process with the aim of fortifying the subject and redefining its relationships, as an artisan refines their craft over a lifetime. Foucault's ideal mode of caring of the self does not entail extreme spiritual practices related to prostration or abstinence, but rather self creation through principle, philosophy, reflection and integration. Spiritual activities are indeed adopted, however they serve to reshape and restyle an individual creatively with the desired result of a developed and thoughtful engagement with truth games and discourse. Consistent modification requires what Foucault refers to as "askesis", the Greek word for self discipline, or "tapas", one of Pantajali's Niyamas which is Sanskrit for the fire of inspiration generated through regular, dedicated and heartfelt practice. Foucault's historical study of the link between the obligation to tell the truth and the prohibitions weighing on the autonomy of the subject, lead him to study the historical relation of asceticism and truth, particularly in late antiquity, with a considered preference for the ancient Greek practices of Epimeleia Heautou (care of the self). Care of the self is a philosophical practice that not only promises access to truth and a way of being, but also requires one to risk what one thinks true, and thus, what one is. Care of the self then, is a self-critical labour. The discipline of the subject through rigorous introspection is an effort to master what threatens to master the subject if not kept in check. It was paramount in the Greco-Roman era "not to be a slave (of another city, of people around you, of those governing you, of your own passions)", (1997a, 285), or else your ethics, what Foucault defines as "the conscious practice of freedom" (1997a, pg. 284) risk being nullified. In order to combat this in Greco-Roman times, self training was deployed in various forms. Writing functions as a touchstone of the conscience and in late antiquity, the Stoics deployed the "Hupomnemata" or notebook/journal as an "agent of the transformation of truth into ethos", (1997b, 209) not in a purificatory sense, rather a storage of what is already heard or read for the purpose of shaping oneself. In Seneca's writings, he employs a judicial tone and contemplates his actions as both the judge and the accused, so self examination becomes a kind of trial, wherein the outcome is always a realisation of ones mistakes, where hopefully, "errors are of strategy, not of moral character" (1997c, 237) and a process of detailing the truest course of action, from a retrospective angle, is undertaken. The stoics spiritualised the notion of retreat into nature and oneself. Not to judge oneself negatively or praise oneself righteously but to remember codes of conduct; "it is a mnemotechnical formula" (1997c, 238) used to reinforce logos and ethics in the psyche.
- B. Foucault predominantly focuses on writing as a technology of self. In the same vein as Melete (training in thought) and Gymnasia (training in reality), writing to oneself and to others was the means of which important personal and social principles could be maintained. Writing to oneself is matter of constituting oneself as a subject of rational action through the unification and subjectivation of principles and philosophy. In an epistolary account of oneself, the subject "brings into congruence the gaze of the other and that gaze which one aims at oneself when one measures ones everyday actions according to the rules of a technique of living" (1997b, 221). The self examination is applied to fortify ones thoughts and deeds against a broader philosophical background of Epimeleia Heautou (care of oneself), Gnōthi Seauton (know thyself), truth, Parrhēsia (telling truths boldly), and the associated modes of life and ascetic practices. Consider Marcus Aurelius' 'Meditations' and his dictum that one should not react to circumstances outside ones control. He observes that "everyone loves himself more than anyone else, but rates his own judgement of himself below that of others", expounding the importance of writing and listening to oneself as the master of oneself, whilst also devoting oneself to oneself as a dedicated slave. This relation to oneself is compounded and strengthened by correspondence, in that whilst writing to others, the subject must project himself and his addressee into view and have them gaze at each other. Through calling into

imagination the image of the person whom is being addressed in the letter, the writer must open up to the gaze of the other and put the correspondent in the place of the inner god. “It is a way of giving ourselves to that gaze about which we must tell ourselves that it is plunging into the depths of our heart at the moment we are thinking” (1997b, 217). Writing to the subject as a sole practice and writing to others is a technology of self in that the subject is an agent of change through his thoughts, words and deeds and the practice of writing them for oneself and the other, is a practice of self creation wherein the writer is choosing which words to write and which words not to write. In a sense, the writer is undergoing a deliberate “moneychanging” process “of our own representations, of our thoughts, vigilantly testing them, verifying them, their metal, weight, effigy” (1997c, 240). Next, consider Foucault’s dictum that subject is “a form not a substance” (1997a, 290); his anti-humanist/non-essentialist understanding of the subject aids the cognisance of the function of writing (to oneself and others) inasmuch as the sorting of thought and word requires a certain discernment by the subject to decide what will constitute their text, and more broadly what will represent them in written word, therefore fashioning something particularly from an individual’s schema in a unique style.

- C. Foucault traces care-of-self practices from Socrates, to the Cynics, to early Christian practices of the third and fourth centuries. As a “historian of the self”, he admits “at a time that is very difficult to pinpoint, the care of the self became somewhat suspect” (1997a, 284). According to Foucault, the Delphic prescription “Gnōthi Seauton” (know thyself), that was isolated and made central in the Western conception of the relation between truth and subjectivity was only one aspect of an entire set of spiritual practices of care of the self in ancient Greece and Rome. Whereas the salvation of antiquity came from constant and continual attention to the self in the form of Askēsis, salvation as it is understood in Christianity (as well as modern culture) came to be understood as a quick conversion from ‘selfishness’ to obedience and service. The modern age is marked by the assumption that what gives access to the truth, is knowledge, without anything else being demanded of the subject and without having to undergo radical self transformation or psychological inquiry into oneself. In early Christianity, if thoughts lead away from God, provoked desire or moved one’s spirit, they were scrutinised on the basis that they were caused by a covert concupiscence. Foucault describes this tendency to shun thought as the “Christian hermeneutics of the Self with its deciphering of inner thoughts” (1997c, 247). The casting away of thoughts implies that there is something evil hidden in oneself or that we are under an illusion which only a faith in God can shatter. In Cassian, “self-examination is subordinated to obedience and the permanent verbalisation of thoughts” (1997c, 248); the knowing of the self was constituted through renouncing sinful deeds and sinful thoughts to a monk who discriminates and then absolves. In this way, everything that was private in Stoicism, became public in Christianity, the will of the subject was handed over to the Church to ensure salvation in the next life. *Vita Antonii* of Athanasius is one of the oldest Christian texts on the subject of spiritual writing and demonstrates a propinquity with the writings of Stoics, Epicureans and Pythagoreans but with a different set of values and procedures. Athanasius is a proponent for spiritual writing; he acknowledges the efficacy of writing down actions and impulses of the soul as if telling them to each other. This confessional writing was supposed to generate shame and disapproval as the writer imagines the gaze of the ascetic discriminating him. Foucault acknowledges that this style of noting functioned to “dispel the darkness where the enemy’s (the Devil) plots are hatched” (1997b, 208), or renounce the parts of the self that did not serve God. The subject does not undergo introspection aiming at a complete self-mastery or possession of the self. Foucault’s emphasis of the Christian ethics and also the source of the modern difficulties of selfhood: the fact that this Christian hermeneutics of the self was not a means of fortifying

one's identity, but merely a step towards the renunciation of the self. It was and still is in some communities, a complete non-wavering understanding that knowing oneself is knowing one is a simply a germ unfolding God's plan, and with no right to govern or transform oneself on one's own terms.

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