

## Self or Cosmos: Foucault *versus* Hadot

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This chapter discusses the relationship between the late work of Michel Foucault and that of his colleague at the Collège de France, Pierre Hadot.<sup>1</sup> Foucault referred to Hadot's work as a key point of reference for his own work on ancient practices of the self, and Hadot recounted that they also spoke on a number of occasions.<sup>2</sup> Arnold Davidson, who knew both men and played a key role in introducing Hadot's work to the English-speaking world, noted that Foucault had been "a careful reader of Hadot's work" (Davidson 1990, 481), and has commented on Foucault's "enthusiasm" for Hadot's work (Davidson 1995, 1). Foucault's interest in what he called "technologies of the self" (*techniques de soi*) drew in part on Hadot's accounts of ancient "spiritual exercises" (*exercices spirituels*). Hadot would later comment on Foucault's use of his work, noting their common ground but also suggesting some distance between them on certain key points, and arguing that in some respects Foucault's account of ancient practices was misleading. In particular, Hadot claimed that Foucault's stress on an aesthetic cultivation of the self placed too much stress on the self and downplayed the cosmological aspects of Stoic ethics. This chapter will assess whether Hadot's criticisms of Foucault are fair, and what, if any, criticisms might be raised against Hadot's own stress on dissolution of the self in his accounts of ancient philosophy.

The first section will briefly introduce Foucault's later work and comment on its debt to Hadot. The second section will examine Hadot's criticisms of Foucault's account of ancient practices of self-transformation and outline the contrast between their accounts. The third section will examine Hadot's criticisms and suggest ways in which Foucault's account might be defended, while the conclusion will argue that their accounts might be seen as complementary rather than opposed.

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<sup>1</sup> For previous discussions of the relationship between Foucault and Hadot see Flynn 2005, Wimberly 2009, Irrera 2010, Baudart 2013, 101-25, Lorenzini 2015, 213-18, and Agamben 2016, 95-108.

<sup>2</sup> Foucault referred to Hadot in Foucault 1984a, 14, 264 (trans. 1986, 8, 271), and in Foucault 1984b, 57 (trans. 1988, 243), as well as throughout his 1981-82 lecture course, *L'herméneutique du sujet*, in Foucault 2001 (trans. 2005). Hadot recounts his personal encounters with Foucault in Hadot 2001, 215-17 (trans. 2009, 135-6).

## Foucault's Late Work and its Debt to Hadot

Foucault's later work can be difficult to grasp due to the ways in which his interests shifted and his project developed over a relatively short period of time.<sup>3</sup> By the end of his life he was effectively working on three inter-related projects that were never fully disentangled from one another. His untimely death in 1984 meant that the second and third volumes of the *History of Sexuality* published that year combine elements of these different projects layered over one another. These three projects were i) a history of sexuality, with a particular focus on shifts in sexual attitudes between pagan antiquity and early Christianity; ii) a genealogy of the modern subject; and iii) an examination of ancient "technologies of the self" associated with the ideas of self-cultivation and "care of the self".<sup>4</sup>

The original plan for the *History of Sexuality* was for a total of six volumes, of which just three were published in Foucault's lifetime (Elden 2016, 62-3); a fourth volume completed before Foucault's death (and at one point intended to be the second volume) has also now been published (Foucault 2018). While that original plan was inevitably cut short by Foucault's illness and death, his focus had already begun to shift away from a narrow focus on sexual attitudes. In the published version of the third volume of his history, *The Care of the Self*, this shift is manifest in the section entitled "The Cultivation of the Self" (Foucault 1984b, 51-85; 1988, 37-68). There he records his interest in what he called an "attitude of severity" towards the self that became prominent in the first two centuries AD and, in particular, a mistrust of pleasures that Foucault took to prefigure and inform early Christian attitudes towards the body. While this was clearly highly relevant to his attempt to map shifts in sexual attitudes, Foucault's concerns quickly broadened into a much wider interest in the ancient idea that one ought to pay attention to oneself.

It was this wider interest in the ancient idea of paying attention to oneself that led Foucault to start to develop a distinct, if related, project focused on the genealogy of the modern subject (see Foucault 2016, 22). Foucault intended that these reflections on the self should become a publication distinct from his *History of Sexuality* (see Foucault 1997, 255), but alas he never had the time to disentangle

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<sup>3</sup> For a thorough account see Elden 2016; for a condensed summary see Sellars 2018, 15-16.

<sup>4</sup> It is worth noting that the ideas of self-cultivation and care of the self are potentially quite different. The former implies self-transformation and, on one reading, self-creation. The latter might be taken to imply a pre-existing, true self that must be looked after. On this see Foucault 1997, 261-2, with further discussion below.

the two projects before publishing the second and third volumes just before his death. This separate project, focused on the genealogy of the subject, would have examined the origins of the idea that there is some kind of truth about the self that is hidden within and can be uncovered through a hermeneutic process. Foucault had traced this idea, central to the modern notion of the subject, back to the early Church Fathers and in particular to the idea of confession (*aveu*). However, when he went further back to pagan Graeco-Roman authors he found something quite different. There he encountered a series of practices concerning the self that, although superficially similar to early Christian confession, had, he thought, a different set of aims. These pagan practices of the self were not intended to uncover a hidden truth about the subject; instead they were processes aimed at the transformation of the self (Foucault 2016, 29-37; also 1997, 276). A key text that Foucault referred to more than once was a passage from Seneca's *De ira*, in which the Roman Stoic describes his own process of self-examination at the end of each day, a practice that had its origins in the Pythagorean tradition:

The mind must be called to account every day. This was Sextius's practice: when the day was spent and he had retired to his night's rest, he asked his mind, "Which of your ills did you heal today? Which vice did you resist? In what aspect are you better?" Your anger will cease and become more controllable if it knows that every day it must come before a judge. Is there anything finer, then, than this habit of scrutinizing the entire day?<sup>5</sup>

What Foucault found significant about this pagan practice of self-examination was the way in which it was concerned, not with confessing guilt or uncovering hidden truths about oneself, but rather with identifying faults so that one could address them.

This led Foucault to a third, yet inevitably related, project focused primarily on such ancient practices of self-transformation, practices that he often referred to as "technologies of the self" (Foucault 2016, 25; also 1997, 225). It was in this context that Foucault encountered the work of Pierre Hadot. Hadot had begun his career intending to become a priest in the Catholic Church, but after a crisis

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<sup>5</sup> Seneca, *De ira* 3.36.1-2, in Kaster and Nussbaum 2010. This passage was mentioned by Foucault in his 1979-80 Collège de France lecture course, *On the Government of the Living* (Foucault 2014a, 239-41), his 1980 lectures in Dartmouth and Berkeley (2016, 29-30), and his 1981 lectures in Louvain (2014b, 97).

of faith became a respected scholar of Neoplatonism, working on Marius Victorinus and then Plotinus (Hadot 1963; 1993), as well as the interaction between pagan and Christian thought in late antiquity (Hadot 2001, 38-62; 2009, 15-31). Later, he also worked on Roman Stoicism, especially Marcus Aurelius (Hadot 1992; 1998). In the mid 1970s, Hadot wrote an article devoted to the topic of spiritual exercises in ancient philosophy (Hadot 1975-76).<sup>6</sup> Hadot borrowed his title from the Jesuit Ignatius of Loyola, using it to describe a series of ancient practices (such as Seneca's routine of daily self-examination) designed to effect some form of self-transformation. While some commentators have criticized Hadot for anachronistically using an early modern Christian category to describe ancient pagan practices (e.g. Cooper 2012, 402), the notion of an "exercise of the soul" (*askêsis tês psuchês*) was already well established in antiquity (Sellars 2003, 110-15). Hadot's account of these ancient practices would prove to be an important influence on Foucault, who referred to Hadot's work a number of times in his later writings,<sup>7</sup> and Foucault's own notion of "technologies of the self" shares much in common with Hadot's "spiritual exercises".

Foucault's interest in these inter-related projects, and especially the third, was announced to the wider world in an interview he gave in English in 1983 (Foucault 1997, 253-80), a year before the publication of the second and third volumes of the *History of Sexuality*. In it he made a number of important, but potentially controversial, claims. Most notably he suggested that ancient ethics was not normative; instead it had an aesthetic aim and was primarily a matter of personal choice (Foucault 1997, 254). While the first part of this claim is not so controversial (cf. Anscombe 1958), the second is certainly more so. He went on to claim that there was also a significant shift in ancient ethics: in the classical Greek period ethics was primarily a *technê*, an art or craft, about how to live well within the context of the *polis*, but later, in the Graeco-Roman culture of the first two centuries AD, it became a *technê* of the self, disengaged from society. What had been an aesthetics of life became an aesthetics of the self (1997, 260). This led Foucault to some wider reflections (1997, 261-2): if the self is not something given, if it is something that must instead be created, then why can it not be a work of art? Further:

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<sup>6</sup> This article was reprinted in Hadot 1981 (the edition cited by Foucault), which was revised and expanded in 1987; a third edition was issued in 1993 (which I have not seen). I cite from the most recent edition, revised and expanded again, Hadot 2002a, 19-74. It is translated into English in Hadot 1995b, 81-125.

<sup>7</sup> See note 2 above.

What strikes me is the fact that, in our society, art has become something that is related only to objects and not to individuals or to life. That art is something which is specialized or done by experts who are artists. 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? (Foucault 1997, 261)

Foucault has been criticised for many of these claims. In the present context one might note a tension between this last idea of self-creation as a work of art and the account he gave in the third volume of the *History of Sexuality* in which "care of the self" is presented as a therapeutics of the soul analogous to medicine for the body (1984b, 69-71; 1988, 54-5). In that account there is, albeit implicitly, the idea that care of the self involves returning a diseased soul back to its proper functioning. There are tensions like this one throughout Foucault's late works, reflecting the ways in which three distinct and incomplete projects were never fully disentangled before becoming intertwined in publications that were issued somewhat hastily in the final year of Foucault's life.

#### Hadot's Criticisms of Foucault

In discussion with Jeannie Carlier and Arnold Davidson, Hadot remarked that he met Foucault only a few times. Presumably impressed by his work, Foucault encouraged Hadot to submit his candidature to the Collège de France, towards the end of 1980 (Hadot 2001, 215; 2009, 135; also 2002a, 305). They spoke a few times thereafter but never had an extended discussion about their shared interests in ancient philosophy (ibid.). In the same discussion Hadot summarized what he took to be the principal points of disagreement between their accounts of ancient practices of the self:

In his descriptions of what he calls the practices of the self, Foucault does not sufficiently valorize the process of becoming aware of belonging to the cosmic Whole, a process that also corresponds to an overcoming of oneself. Finally, I do not think that the ethical model adapted to a modern man can be an aesthetics of existence. I am worried that this may ultimately be no more than a new form of dandyism. (Hadot 2001, 216-17; 2009, 136)

According to Hadot, "Seneca finds joy not in Seneca but in Seneca identified with universal reason. One elevates oneself from the level of the self to another, transcendent level" (ibid.). The problem with Foucault's account of ancient

philosophy, Hadot claims, is its excessive attention to the self. It is indeed a great shame that Foucault and Hadot never had an opportunity to sit down and talk through these issues in detail. As Hadot commented elsewhere, “These differences could have provided the substance for a dialogue between us, which, unfortunately, was interrupted all too soon by Foucault’s premature death” (Hadot 2002a, 323; 1995b, 206).

Hadot elaborated on these concerns in two short pieces both published after Foucault’s death: “Un dialogue interrompu avec Michel Foucault. Convergences et divergences” (first published in Hadot 1987), and “Réflexions sur la notion de « culture de soi »” (Hadot 1989).<sup>8</sup> In the first of these, in which Hadot praises Foucault’s “l’extraordinaire présence personnelle et la merveilleuse acuité d’esprit” (Hadot 2002a, 306), points of agreement and divergence are noted. Hadot acknowledges much common ground between Foucault’s account of the cultivation of the self (*la culture de soi*) in the third volume of the *History of Sexuality* (Foucault 1984b, 51-85; 1988, 37-68) and his own work on spiritual exercises in ancient philosophy (Hadot 2002a, 306). However, he has reservations about Foucault’s notion of an “aesthetics of existence”, either as a description of ancient thought or as a model for ethical practice today (2002a, 308). Hadot notes that modern notions of aesthetic beauty are quite different from the ancient idea of *kalon*, which encompassed not merely aesthetic but also moral qualities (ibid.). The idea that one might non-morally add style to one’s life in order to turn it into a work of art is, according to Hadot, quite alien to ancient thought. This is one of the reasons why Hadot is suspicious of Foucault’s focus on the self. Instead of cultivating the self, Hadot suggests that it would be more appropriate to think in terms of “overcoming the self” (ibid.). He continues:

It is not a matter of the construction of a self as a work of art, but on the contrary, of an overcoming of the self, or at least of an exercise by means of which the self is situated in the totality and has an experience of the self as part of this totality. (Hadot 2002a, 310)<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Both texts can be found in Hadot 2002a, 305-11 and 323-32. The second is translated in Hadot 1995b, 206-13. The first is due to appear in translation in a volume of Hadot’s selected writings currently being prepared by Federico Testa and Matthew Sharpe. It is discussed and quoted at length in Agamben 2016, 95-108; note also the commentary in Baudart 2013, 101-25.

<sup>9</sup> This passage is translated into English in Agamben 2016, 96, which I follow here with some emendations. Note that the translation there omits the key phrase “as a work of art” and the pagination given for the original text is incorrect.

While Hadot notes other divergences,<sup>10</sup> these two interconnected points concerning aesthetics and the self appear to be the most significant, and they are developed further in his second essay on Foucault.

Hadot's second essay, "Réflexions sur la notion de «culture de soi»", was first published in 1989, in the proceedings of a conference from 1988 marking the fourth anniversary of Foucault's death. Here he develops his concerns about Foucault's excessive focus on the self. The difference between their positions, Hadot implies, is already evident in Foucault's choices of titles and phrases – "care of the self" (*souci de soi*), "practices of the self" (*pratiques de soi*), "technologies of the self" (*techniques de soi*), in contrast to Hadot's own "spiritual exercises" (*exercices spirituels*). Hadot's charge against Foucault is that his work is "focused far too much on the 'self', or at least on a specific conception of the self" (Hadot 2002a, 324; Hadot 1995b, 207). In particular, Hadot challenges Foucault's interpretation of Seneca (who became one of Foucault's favourite authors). Seneca is not primarily concerned with perfecting and taking joy in himself, Hadot argues, but with "transcending 'Seneca'" (Hadot 2002a, 325; 1995b, 207). Cultivation of the self, for the Stoics, involves transcending the self, cultivating one's inner reason that is a fragment of divine reason: "the goal of Stoic exercises is to go beyond the self, and think and act in unison with universal reason" (*ibid.*). Hadot goes on to suggest that this was not a failure of comprehension on Foucault's part but rather a deliberate decision to bracket an aspect of ancient thought out of step with modern sensibilities, which was necessary as part of Foucault's attempt to outline an "aesthetics of existence" that could "offer contemporary mankind a model of life" (Hadot 2002a, 325; 1995b, 208). He further suggests that if Foucault had paid more attention to the Epicureans he might have avoided this problem, but even the Epicureans, Hadot argues, were not as focused on the self as Foucault's wider account would have it. A similar problem can be found in Foucault's discussion of "writing the self" (*écriture de soi*) from 1983 (Foucault 1997, 207-22), Hadot claims. In that essay Foucault described a range of ancient forms of writing, all of which he presented as "arts of oneself", as examples of "training of the self by oneself" (*ibid.* 207-8). In response Hadot writes:

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<sup>10</sup> In Hadot 2001, 216 (trans. 2009, 136), he criticizes Foucault's focus on pleasure, especially when discussing the Stoics, and argues that Foucault failed to comprehend the Stoic distinction between joy and pleasure. See also Hadot 2002a, 324-5 (trans. 1995b, 207). For further discussion of this dispute see Irrera 2010. In Hadot 2002a, 310-11 (and cf. Hadot 1995a, 395-9; trans. 2002b, 263-5), he criticizes Foucault for claiming that Descartes marked a break from these ancient practices, inaugurating a new model of philosophy; Hadot suggests that the break occurred in the early Middle Ages and, in fact, Descartes may be seen as resurrecting ancient practices of the self in his *Meditations*.

The point is not to forge oneself a spiritual identity by writing, but rather to liberate oneself from one's individuality, in order to raise oneself up to universality. It is thus incorrect to speak of "writing the self": not only is it not the case that one "writes oneself," but what is more, it is not the case that writing constitutes the self. Writing, like the other spiritual exercises, *changes the level of the self*, and universalizes it. (Hadot 2002a, 329; 1995b, 210-11)

It is worth noting here that Foucault's account drew on a range of Stoic, Platonist, and early Christian sources, and Hadot refers to a similar range of ancient sources as well. For these schools of thought Hadot argues that there is, in effect, a double renunciation of the self. First there is an ascetic moment in which "one frees oneself from exteriority, from personal attachment to exterior objects, and from the pleasures they may provide" (Hadot 2002a, 330; 1995b, 211). This turn inwards is directed towards self-mastery, and on this Hadot and Foucault are in agreement. However, Hadot insists that this move inwards is "inseparably linked" to another move that reconnects the self with the exterior world in a completely new way:

This is a new way of being-in-the-world, which consists in becoming aware of oneself as a part of nature, and a portion of universal reason. At this point, one no longer lives in the usual, conventional human world, but in the world of nature. (ibid.)

Hadot's principal charge against Foucault, then, is that he "did not sufficiently insist" on this "universalist, cosmic dimension" of ancient thought (ibid.; also Hadot 2002a, 308, 310). But Hadot's concern was not limited merely to historical accuracy. As we have already seen, Hadot could see that, in part at least, Foucault wanted to draw something from his historical work in order to create an ethical framework for the present day. Hadot's further concern was that an ethics focused on the self would on its own terms be unattractive as an ethical model:

What I am afraid of is that, by focusing his interpretation too exclusively on the culture of the self, the care of the self, and conversion toward the self – more generally, by defining his ethical model as an aesthetics of existence – M. Foucault is propounding a culture of the self which is *too* aesthetic. In other words, this may be a new form of Dandyism, late twentieth-century style. (Hadot 2002a, 331; 1995b, 211)



The contrast is clear: while Hadot is happy to acknowledge a good deal of common ground with Foucault, on this one point there is, in his view, a significant difference between them, both with regard to correctly grasping ancient thought and to what one might take from it and revitalize today. Foucault's work is excessively focused on the self, while Hadot emphasizes the impersonal, universalist, cosmic dimension of ancient practices of self-transformation.

#### Analysis of Hadot's Criticisms

Are these criticisms of Foucault justified? Let us begin with the charge of dandyism. Is Foucault right to talk about an ancient "aesthetics of existence" (*esthétique de l'existence*)? In antiquity philosophers, and in particular Stoics, did refer to philosophy as an art of living, a *technê peri ton bion*.<sup>11</sup> In this context *technê* simply means art in the sense of a craft, or a skill. Ancient examples of *technai* would be rhetoric, medicine, navigation, or shoemaking – all examples well known from the early Platonic dialogues. The ancient phrase "the art of living" has no aesthetic overtones. Instead it refers to a practical skill, based on knowledge, as opposed to a mere knack that cannot guarantee consistent results. In this it shares something with skilled craftsmen, but it has little to do with artists in the modern sense of the term. When Foucault wonders whether our lives might become works of art, in the same way that aesthetically attractive objects are works of art (1997, 261), it looks as if he has gone well beyond his ancient sources. Taken in these terms, it looks as if Hadot has good grounds to call into question Foucault's notion of an "aesthetics of existence".

It would, however, be unfair to judge Foucault's wider view on the basis of a single passing remark in an interview. In a recent discussion Giorgio Agamben has defended Foucault against Hadot's charge by drawing attention to a number of other texts, including Foucault's 1981-82 lecture course, *L'herméneutique du sujet* (Foucault 2001; 2005). One of Hadot's concerns, as we have seen, is the apparent dislocation between the aesthetic and the ethical in Foucault's late work, and the thought that one might follow purely optional rules in order to give style to one's life, seemingly without regard for any moral concerns. But, Agamben notes (2016, 97-8), in the lecture course Foucault explicitly warns against reading ancient references to care of the self as a "sort of moral dandyism", insisting that they were

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<sup>11</sup> Foucault used the Greek phrase *technê tou biou* (1984b, 57; trans. 1988, 43), but this appears nowhere in the surviving ancient texts; see further Sellars 2003, 5.

the basis of one of “the most austere, strict, and restrictive moralities known in the West” (Foucault 2001, 14; 2005, 12-13). It seems that Foucault was both fully conscious of the danger and explicitly resisted it.

That lecture course was of course not published until 2001, well after Hadot had written his two short essays on Foucault’s late work. Perhaps Hadot’s judgement was quite reasonable given the texts that were available to him at the time he was writing. However, Agamben insists that the issue was already clear in the second volume of the *History of Sexuality*, published back in 1984 (Agamben 2016, 98-9). There, Foucault outlined his notion of an “aesthetics of existence” by describing it as combining both “rules of conduct” and a certain aesthetic value (Foucault 1984a, 16-17; 1986, 10-11), with a goal that might best be defined as “etho-poetic” (Foucault 1984a, 19; 1986, 13; see also 1997, 209). It is also worth noting that while Foucault does use the phrase “aesthetics of existence”, he is primarily concerned with discussing what he calls the “arts of existence” (*arts de l’existence*), which he identifies with “technologies of the self” (Foucault 1984a, 16-17; 1986, 10-11). Taking into account all of these remarks, it seems clear that what Foucault has in mind are arts and techniques precisely in the sense of a *technê*, a craft or skill. Indeed, he goes on to state that his primary concern in volumes two, three, and four of the *History of Sexuality* is with prescriptive texts “whose main object, whatever their form ... is to suggest rules of conduct ... texts written for the purpose of offering rules, opinions, and advice on how to behave as one should” (Foucault 1984a, 18; 1986, 12). From this it seems clear that Foucault did not neglect the ethical dimension of ancient thought.

Agamben’s defence of Foucault helps to give us a fuller picture of Foucault’s account of ancient ethical practices. However, it is worth noting that when Hadot directed the charge of dandyism at Foucault, he did not say that Foucault had misunderstood the ancient texts; he was more concerned with the attempt to extract something new for today (Hadot 2001, 217; 2009, 136). In that context, Foucault does ask whether we might turn our lives into works of art akin to aesthetic objects (Foucault 1997, 261). For Hadot, then, on this issue the difference is over the foundation for ethics today, not the interpretation of ancient texts. Yet, in the end, Foucault said very little about the idea of a modern aesthetics of the self – just a few passing, and often seemingly contradictory, comments in interviews right at the end of his life.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Compare, for instance, Foucault 1997, 256 with 294-5. For a very brief discussion see Sellars 2018, 25-7.

Closely connected to the charge of dandyism is Foucault's focus on the self. According to Foucault there was a pronounced concern with the self in ancient thought, especially in the Graeco-Roman period of the first two centuries AD.<sup>13</sup> For Hadot, by contrast, any such turn inwards was only ever preparatory for a reconnection with something beyond the self. For the ancient Stoics, Hadot stresses the goal of living in harmony with Nature and what he calls the "cosmic dimension" of ancient thought (Hadot 2002a, 330; 1995b, 211). Before pursuing the dispute further, it is perhaps worth pausing for a moment to say a bit more about Hadot's own intellectual background. His early work focused on the interaction between early Christian thought and Neoplatonism, and Neoplatonism remained an important area of work throughout his career. That career began, he told Carlier and Davidson in conversation, with an oceanic experience of oneness with "the Whole" that developed into a fascination with mysticism (Hadot 2001, 23-4, 27-9; 2009, 6, 8-9). Hadot's subsequent book on Plotinus highlights the Neoplatonic claim that one's true self is "not of this world" but nevertheless could be reached by "returning within oneself" (Hadot 1963, 25-6; 1993, 25). For Plotinus,

The human self is *not* irrevocably separated from its eternal model, as the latter exists within divine Thought. This true self – this self in God – is within ourselves. During certain privileged experiences, which raise the level of our inner tension, we can identify ourselves with it. We then become this eternal self; we are moved by its unutterable beauty, and when we identify ourselves with this self, we identify ourselves with divine Thought itself, within which it is contained. (Hadot 1963, 28; 1993, 27)

The aim in Plotinus's Neoplatonism, then, is not to take care of the self, but to transcend the self, or, to be more precise, to transcend one's everyday sense of self and identify with the divine self. Hadot's spiritual exercises are not concerned with cultivating or taking care of one's everyday self; they are aimed at escaping it.<sup>14</sup>

Neoplatonism and Stoicism are of course quite different philosophies, but Hadot's account of Stoicism also emphasizes this theme of escaping the everyday

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<sup>13</sup> Foucault's discussions of the self in ancient thought have generated a huge commentary and a wide range of criticisms, some of which are critically examined in Lorenzini 2015, 203-12.

<sup>14</sup> In this context we might also note Hadot's admiration for the philosophy of Henri Bergson (Hadot 1995b, 278), as well as the influence of Bergson on Émile Bréhier, who wrote important works on both Stoicism and Neoplatonism that were regular points of reference for Hadot.

self. As we have already seen in his criticisms of Foucault, Hadot insists that Seneca takes joy not in being Seneca but in “transcending ‘Seneca’” (Hadot 2002a, 325; 1995b, 207), in identifying himself with “universal reason” (Hadot 2001, 216-17; 2009, 136). This idea is also prominent in Hadot’s extended study of the Stoic philosopher and Emperor Marcus Aurelius:

The realization of one’s self as identical with universal Reason, then, as long as it is accompanied by consent to this will, does not isolate the self like some minuscule island in the universe. On the contrary, it can open the self to all cosmic becoming, insofar as the self raises itself from its limited situation and partial, restricted, and individualistic point of view to a universal and cosmic perspective. (Hadot 1992, 196-7; 1998, 180-81)

While Hadot is quite right to point to this theme within ancient Stoicism, which is especially prominent in Marcus’s *Meditations*, there are other themes that are equally important. In the Stoicism of Epictetus, for instance, great stress is placed on actions appropriate to the social roles in which one finds oneself.<sup>15</sup> Closely connected to this, as Foucault himself points out (2001, 188-91; 2005, 195-8), is taking care of others as well as oneself. Thus, someone who is a parent should embrace the responsibilities that such a role entails, which of course means taking care of their children. Moreover, given that all humans are by nature social beings, taking care of oneself – cultivating the virtues appropriate to a social being – will necessarily involve paying attention to the needs of one’s fellow humans. Epictetus is quite explicit that there is nothing antisocial about self-concern; on the contrary, it is essential if we are to develop the virtues necessary to become good ethical agents. He writes:

This is not mere self-love; such is the nature of the animal man; everything that he does is for himself. Why, even the sun does everything for its own sake, and, for that matter, so does Zeus himself. But when Zeus wishes to be “Rain-bringer,” and “Fruit-giver,” and “Father of men and of gods,” you can see for yourself that he cannot achieve these works, or win these appellations, unless he proves himself useful to the common interest; and in general he has so constituted the nature of the rational animal man, that he can attain nothing of his own proper goods unless he contributes something to the common interest. Hence it follows that it can no

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<sup>15</sup> See e.g. *Enchiridion* 30, in Oldfather 1925-28.

longer be regarded as unsocial for a man to do everything for his own sake.<sup>16</sup>

This highlights two key points. The first is that care of the self as understood by Epictetus cannot be disassociated from ethical behaviour. Foucault himself explicitly underlined this point:

The person who takes care of himself properly ... when he has taken care of himself so that when something appears in his representations he knows what he should and should not do, he will at the same time know how to fulfil his duties as part of the human community. (Foucault 2001, 189; 2005, 197)

The second is that while the Stoics stressed our place within the wider context of Nature, they also stressed the need for individual ethical development, aimed at cultivating virtues that shape our inter-personal relationships. Indeed, they identified living in harmony with Nature with a virtuous life.<sup>17</sup> A substantial part of Roman Stoic discourse is concerned with precisely this sort of personal self-cultivation. We can see this in Marcus's *Meditations* alongside his reflections on his place in the cosmos, such as when he reminds himself that he should embrace the work appropriate to a human being, with all the social responsibilities that involves:

Can't you see the plants, the birds, the ants, the spiders, the bees each doing his own work, helping for their part to adjust a world? And then you refuse to do a man's office and don't make haste to do what is according to your own nature.<sup>18</sup>

Foucault's account of ancient concern with the self is thus well grounded in the Graeco-Roman texts with which he became so fascinated. Not only does Hadot's criticism seem potentially unfair, his own focus on impersonal union with cosmic Nature runs the risk of obscuring this equally important aspect of Stoic ethics.

Foucault also addressed the issue of the relationship between the individual and cosmic self in his *L'herméneutique du sujet* lectures, published as has already been

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<sup>16</sup> Epictetus, *Dissertationes* 1.19.11-15, in Oldfather 1925-28. Note also *Dissertationes* 2.14.8.

<sup>17</sup> See Diogenes Laertius 7.87, in Hicks 1925.

<sup>18</sup> Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 5.1, in Farquharson 1944.

noted after the composition of Hadot's two pieces. In a discussion of a passage from Seneca's *Quaestiones naturales* Foucault writes:

This flight from ourselves ... leads us to God, but not in the form of losing oneself in God or of a movement which plunges deep into God, but in the form that allows us to find ourselves again, "*in consortium Dei*": in a sort of co-naturalness or co-functionality with God. That is to say, human reason is of the same nature as divine reason. It has the same properties and the same role and function. (Foucault 2001, 264; 2005 275)

Here, it seems, Foucault fully acknowledges the aspect of Stoicism that Hadot claimed he had neglected. This is akin to Hadot's insistence that Seneca finds joy in "transcending 'Seneca'", escaping his everyday self in order to reconnect with cosmic, divine Nature. However, Foucault continues with some important qualifications:

What is involved is not an uprooting from this world into another world. It is not a matter of freeing oneself from one reality in order to arrive at a different reality. It is not a matter of leaving a world of appearances so as finally to reach a sphere of the truth. (Foucault 2001, 264; 2005 276)

In other words, the Stoic connection with Nature is quite different from a Platonic "turning away from this world" (Foucault 2001, 265; 2005, 276). In this particular passage from Seneca's *Quaestiones naturales* (the Preface to Book 1) – but the same applies to many similar passages in the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius – one of the main aims is to relocate oneself within a wider cosmic perspective in order to devalue everyday human concerns.<sup>19</sup> As Foucault summarizes:

Reaching this point enables us to dismiss and exclude all the false values and all the false dealings in which we are caught up, to gauge what we really are on the earth, and to take the measure of our existence – of this existence that is just a point in space and time – and of our smallness. (Foucault 2001, 266; 2005, 277)

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<sup>19</sup> For further discussion of this theme, with examples from a variety of ancient texts, see Hadot 1995b, 238-50.

Developing such a perspective contributes to the Stoic ethical project insofar as it encourages one not to place value on external possessions and circumstances, which the Stoics deemed to be mere indifferents (*adiaphora*) when compared to virtue (*areté*).<sup>20</sup> Foucault goes on to stress that, for Seneca, locating oneself within the much wider context of Nature in this way is an essential part of Senecan care of the self: “knowledge of the self and knowledge of nature are not alternatives, therefore; they are absolutely linked to each other” (2001, 267; 2005, 278). On Foucault’s own account, then, there is no dichotomy between a self-centred care of the self and an impersonal union with cosmic reason; in Stoicism the two go hand in hand. As he put it, “the soul’s virtue consists in penetrating the world and not tearing free from it, in exploring the world’s secrets rather than turning away towards inner secrets” (2001, 269; 2005, 280). This remark alone shows that Foucault’s account of ancient practices neither neglected their ethical aspect nor focused narrowly on the self. It seems quite clear, then, that Foucault’s account of Stoic ethics avoids many of the charges that have been laid against it. But, to reiterate, all this is to be found in a lecture course published well after Hadot had produced his essays on Foucault’s work.

## Conclusion

As we have seen, it is possible to push back against both of Hadot’s principal concerns about Foucault’s late work. Foucault’s account of ancient ethics does not fall into an aestheticized dandyism and its focus on the self is well grounded in the ancient texts. Hadot’s doubts about Foucault’s focus on the self may simply reflect his own philosophical instincts alongside his scholarly background in Neoplatonism. Yet it would be a mistake to overstate the differences between their positions. As Hadot stressed in both of his short pieces on Foucault’s work, there is much common ground between them, with just a few divergences of opinion. But those divergences are not the product of one person getting it right and the other person going wrong; instead they merely reflect differences of emphasis. Foucault’s focus on practices of the self, for instance, was entirely appropriate given that one of the central themes in his late work was an attempt to write a history of the subject. Hadot was also quite right to point out that the impersonal dimension within Stoic thought received less emphasis from Foucault, at least in the works he managed to publish before he died. Hadot’s remarks, I suggest, ought to be taken as a supplement to, rather than a rejection of, Foucault’s account. Foucault’s and Hadot’s accounts of ancient practices of self-cultivation and self-transformation ought to be seen as complementary

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<sup>20</sup> See e.g. Diogenes Laertius 7.102-5, in Hicks 1925.

rather than contradictory, each augmenting the other. It is such a shame that, despite knowing each other and being aware of their shared interests, they never found an opportunity to pursue these issues themselves.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> An earlier version of this chapter was read at a workshop in Prato, Italy – *Reinventing Philosophy as a Way of Life* – in July 2018, organized by Michael Ure. I should like to thank all the participants for their comments and discussion, especially Federico Testa, Matthew Sharpe, Matthew Dennis, and Keith Ansell-Pearson.



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