Foucault's Hermeneutics of the Subject:

Care of the Self, Truth and the Art of Existence

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Abstract

This paper examines Michel Foucault's interpretation of the subject, with a particular focus on the complex relationship between the subject and truth. Foucault's approach analyses how individuals historically conduct themselves as subjects in relation to truth through specific techniques and within frameworks of power and knowledge. It identifies three primary historical modes of self-formation: the gnomic self, the gnostic self, and the epistemological self. Foucault argues that across these modes, subjects are shaped by the interplay between the techniques of domination and the techniques of the self. The paper traces Foucault's intellectual trajectory, showing how his earlier work on power/knowledge dynamics and discursive formations laid the groundwork for his later turn to the subject. His ultimate concern is the "care of the self" (epimeleia heautou), an ancient Greco-Roman concept he revitalises against Platonic recollection and Christian renunciation models. Care of the self involves spiritual practices (askēsis), such as studying nature, self-knowledge, and truth-telling (parrhesia), aimed at achieving self-mastery, freedom, and an aesthetic of existence. For Foucault, this art of living, where the subject actively shapes itself as a work of art oriented towards truth and virtue, represents the path to restoring the subject's fundamental relationship with itself.

Keywords: hermeneutics, care of the self, technique of the self, subject, parrhesia

Michel Foucault's later work centers on the hermeneutics of the subject, a project interrogating how individuals conduct themselves as subjects of truth through historically situated practices. Moving beyond his earlier archaeological and genealogical studies of power-knowledge regimes, Foucault's final lectures (1980–1984) reframe his lifelong inquiry into subjectivity by asking: How does the subject attain truth through transformative relations with itself, others, and the world? This question anchors his critique of Western philosophy's

privileging of gnōthi seauton (know thyself) and champions instead the ancient ethic of epimeleia heautou (care of the self) as the foundation for ethical self-formation.

Foucault's hermeneutics unfolds through two interdependent stages. The first is the subject's understanding of truth: revealing unrecognized truths obscured by dominant epistemes. The second is the subject's practice of truth: internalizing truth through disciplined application until it becomes internalized.

Rejecting Cartesian and Kantian models of a priori rationality, Foucault traces subjectivity's historical emergence across three frameworks: gnomic self (ancient Greece), gnostic self (Hellenistic era) and epistemological self (Christianity). In each, subjectivity is shaped by techniques of domination (e.g., confessional rites) and techniques of the self (e.g., meditation, self-examination). Foucault argues that modernity's reduction of ethics to legal-scientific accountability has erased the spiritual dimension of self-formation—a loss he remedies by recovering pre-Socratic askēsis (ascetic practices). For Foucault, the care of the self is neither narcissistic withdrawal nor Platonic recollection but an aesthetic-ethical project where subjects actively fashion existence as a work of art through conversion to the self (epistrophē), self-equipment (paraskeuê) and truth-telling speech (parrhesia).

Ultimately, Foucault's hermeneutics seeks to restore the subject's capacity for active freedom within power-saturated worlds. By excavating historical modes of self-relation, he envisions an ontology where care of the self—grounded in spirituality, practice, and critique—enables subjects to reclaim agency and transform their relationship to truth. This volume explores Foucault's journey from the dissolved subject of his early works to the ethically resilient subject of his final ethos, offering a roadmap for contemporary resistance against normalizing power.

1. Foucault's hermeneutics of the subject

Foucault's hermeneutics of the subject (l'herméneutique du sujet) aims to elucidate the path through which the subject attains truth. This requires traversing two stages: the subject's understanding of truth and the subject's practice of truth.

Foucault's hermeneutics of the subject is thus an analytical interpretation of the subject's self-explication, achieved by "look for the forms and modalities of the relation to self by which the individual constitutes and recognizes himself qua subject" (Michel Foucault, 1990, p. 6).

In a preparatory manuscript for his 1981 New York lectures, Foucault states: "For Heidegger, it was on the basis of Western tekhnê that knowledge of the object sealed the forgetting of Being. Let's turn the question around and ask ourselves on the basis of what tekhnai was the Western subject formed and were the games of truth and error, freedom and constraint, which characterize this subject, opened up (Michel Foucault, 2005, p. 523)".

Foucault's interpretation of the subject is thus an unveiling of the subject's formation, seeking the opening of truth to the self. It proceeds through three key inquiries:

a. Historical Conditions of Subjectivity: Foucault investigates the historical forms in which the relationship between the "subject "and "truth" is maintained – addressing his earlier concerns with epistemes and power.

b. The Determinants of Human Existence: He explores what defines the human environment and social behaviour in different historical periods – the question of truth in each era, manifest in the boundaries marking subjects like the mad or the abnormal.

c. The Art of Existence: Ultimately, Foucault returns to the question of how the subject should live to attain its own truth – the aesthetic of existence centred on the care of the self (le souci de soi).

Foucault's interpretation of the subject thus traverses the domains of epistemes and apparatuses of power, culminating in a focus on the relationship of the subject to itself. The

ultimate goal of his hermeneutics is to resolve how to restore the subject's care for itself, thereby forming an aesthetics of existence oriented towards truth and virtue.

Foucault's hermeneutics of the subject (l'herméneutique du sujet) begins with the relationship between the subject and the world, aiming to achieve an understanding of this relationship. Foucault views the world as a text and humans as connectors between discourse and the world. The process through which the subject cognizes the world is simultaneously the process of interpreting it: it entails discovering a passage "from the visible mark to that which is being said by it and which, without that mark, would lie like unspoken speech, dormant within things" (Michel Foucault, 1989, p. 36), which is fundamentally a process of interpreting signs.

Foucault's hermeneutics of the subject relies on two key aspects: 1. Hermeneutics (l'herméneutique): The ensemble of knowledge and techniques enabling one to make signs speak and reveal their meaning. 2. Semiology (sémiologie): The ensemble of knowledge and techniques enabling one to distinguish the location of signs, define everything that constitutes them as signs, and understand how and according to what laws signs are linked together. For Foucault, interpreting signs is the process of seeking meaning: it involves elucidating resemblances (ressemblances) and exploring the laws governing signs to perform an exegesis (exégèse) on similar beings. Consequently, understanding the world means understanding a marked world composed of similarities (le similaire), understanding "a speaking man" (Michel Foucault, 1989, p. 29).

The problem of the subject, central to Foucault's concern, is a crucial aspect of hermeneutics and the human sciences. Foucault's conception of the human sciences takes 'man' as an empirical object, specifically studying man who creates and recreates his own positivity. In his view, the triad formed by deductive sciences (like mathematics and physics), empirical sciences (like linguistics, biology, and economics) and philosophy, and the combined fields of

psychoanalysis and ethnology, which dissolves man (elles dissolvent l'homme). The core lies in constructing scientific knowledge about man, thereby challenging traditional philosophers of consciousness.

Foucault argues that while the human sciences have gained theoretical and practical importance in our time, they have never succeeded in defining what man himself fundamentally is. Everything about man – "the unconscious, sexuality, everyday life, dreams, desires and drives, temperament, political activities and attitudes" – "is articulated and inscribed in a language" (Michel Foucault, 1994, p. 662). Therefore, understanding this language equates to understanding the subject.

Foucault observes interpretation through genealogical research, tracing its evolution: from Nietzschean exegesis (exegesis) of Greek words, through Freudian exegesis of discourse, phantasies, dreams, and the hidden body, to Biblical interpretation (interpretation) in the 16th century, to the interpretation of words formed in the 19th century, and finally, interpretation in modern thought as a major form of analysis coexisting with formalization.

In this process, man has never existed (l'homme n'a jamais existé). Within classical thought, man merely viewed himself as a natural being, lacking a localized, finite, and specific nature, and possessing no epistemological consciousness of man himself" (Michel Foucault, 1989, pp. 312-314).

This very nature and consciousness constitute the specific attributes and awareness of the subject that Foucault focuses on—characterized by activity and spirituality. Within the German idealist tradition, Kant emphasized the realization of autonomy through self-legislation in a moral context, Fichte proposed practical human freedom starting from the foundational problem of self-consciousness, and Hegel discussed human freedom within the structure of negative self-relation—all predominantly stressing the passivity of the human

being. Marx, in contrast, explained humanity through concrete life practices such as production processes and economic relations, viewing it through historical factors.

Like Marx, Foucault analyzes the formation of the 'subject' or 'self' within a post-Nietzschean, post-Heideggerian, quasi-Marxist framework, offering a unique interpretation aimed at dismantling Cartesian subject philosophy. Whereas Sartre declared in The Transcendence of the Ego that the self is an object of consciousness, Foucault places this claim within a "historical context" (Richard Kearney, 2016, p. 429). He seeks to find the possibility of active freedom after acknowledging humanity's inevitable and inalienable passivity, thereby forming "a historical ontology of ourselves (Michel Foucault, 1997, XXXIII)" (une ontologie historique de nous-même), with which Foucault summarized his work during an April 1983 discussion with H. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow at the University of California, Berkeley.

2. Forms of the Subject in Foucault's Early Works

Foucault's hermeneutics of the subject examines historical representations of the subject across archival texts to reveal relationships between the world and the subject, ultimately addressing the subject's relationship with truth. His early analyses of knowledge-power dynamics laid the groundwork for his later turn to the subject. In 1982, he explicitly stated: "It is not power, but the subject, which is the general theme of my research" (Gary Gutting, 2020, p. 6). Foucault investigated the modern subject by genealogically tracing past subjects through distinct power theories, constructing alternative historical frameworks. Centering on hermeneutic questions—relationships between writing and speech, and between speech and events with their meanings — he dissected the interplay of subject and truth in historical contexts using archaeological and genealogical methods.

In The Origin of Hermeneutics of the Self, Foucault studied historical forms of self-formation under truth, aiming to genealogically trace the modern subject's emergence and explore the historicity of self-constitution. As humans inevitably exist within specific cultural

and temporal conditions, their knowledge remains contingent (Michel Foucault, 2018, p. xxviii). In The Use of Pleasure, he clarified that his intent was "not to analyze ideas but to move beyond familiar facts by examining their embeddedness in theoretical and practical frameworks" (Michel Foucault, 2016, p. 3), thereby scrutinizing the conditions enabling subject-object relations. As Ricoeur noted in Freud and Philosophy, such interpretation continuously engages "the world it confronts, itself, and its traditions" (Jeff Malpas & Hans-Helmuth Gander, 2015, p. 153). Here, Foucault aligned with Ricoeur: both opposed Kantian regulatory Enlightenment, seeking to transform knowing oneself (gnōthi seauton) into caring for oneself (epimeleia heautou)—reconceiving self-care as self-knowledge and self-interpretation.

According to Foucault, interpreting oneself is fundamentally a matter of the relationship between the subject and truth. Historically, this interpretation manifests in three modes of self-formation.

First, the gnomic self (soi gnomique) of ancient Greece. Here, the self was interpreted as a unity of truth-force and will. The essence of the self-truth relationship was the relationship between self and other. As disciples, individuals actively sought advice externally. The "other"—the mentor—represented external truth, guiding disciples through discourse to internalize this truth, thereby perfecting the self.

Second, the gnostic self's binary schema (soi gnostique). In this mode, the self was interpreted as an inner spark of light discoverable within oneself—a relationship between the subject and self-discovery. "We discover within ourselves the divine fire of light; through the revelation of truth conveyed by texts, we recognize the truly divine essence of our soul" (Michel Foucault, 2005, p. 156).

Third, the epistemological self (soi gnoséologique) of the Christian era. Here, the self was regulated by external rules of truth. Individuals renounced the sins deep within their souls

through self-confession and self-examination. Essentially, the self was interpreted as divisible according to good and evil.

Foucault termed these three interpretive modes the "hermeneutics of the self" (Michel Foucault, 2018, pp. 12, 92). Their commonality lies in the subject's reflection upon and understanding of itself based on contemporary truth. Regardless of what truth prevailed historically or whether humans possessed free will, individuals were shaped into subjects of their time through the interplay of techniques of domination and techniques of the self.

In ancient Greece, truth resided in maxims. Thus, subjects used life maxims as truth criteria to understand their existence—here, truth acted as a technique of domination. Simultaneously, people employed self-examination techniques at day's end to review whether their actions aligned with these maxims, thereby achieving autonomy of will.

In the Christian era, confession required admitting sins and evils. While confessing transgressions, individuals faced judgment and public scrutiny. Subjects examined themselves against Christian doctrine as truth criteria, confessing every thought to their spiritual director using techniques of self-confession—a point further clarified in The Confession of the Flesh and The History of Sexuality.

Regardless of the mode, self-formation involves accepting, rejecting, or transforming ourselves, thereby entering the realm of power. This is the power relation Foucault sought to elucidate in Discipline and Punish and Madness and Civilization. The implementation of power upon subjects and bodies relies on techniques of governance and techniques of the self. In The Government of Self and Others and Technologies of the Self, Foucault examines how power permeates subjects and bodies at the micro-level.

In *Subjectivity and Truth*, Foucault clarifies that his research focuses on "truth as a relational bond, truth as obligation, truth as politics" (Michel Foucault, 1997, p. 18)—that is, the rules of truth that shape the self across historical periods and the interpretive frameworks

through which the subject understands itself. Beginning with language, Foucault examines the truth of language within historical fields in *The Order of Things* and *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, since language constitutes the primary regulation and foundational truth. His archaeological investigation of discourse aims to let traces speak silently. At this stage, Foucault explores what kinds of discourse may have produced truth, or what forms of truth may have given rise to these discourses. Through this, he identifies the boundaries of truth-discourse and the marginalized subjects within discourse.

In *Lectures on the Will to Know and Abnormal*, Foucault further anchors the relationship between power and the subject hidden behind language. Madness, criminality, and sexuality represent the boundaries within discursive power mechanisms. Foucault traces how power expands its domain precisely at the liminal spaces between madness and civilization, crime and innocence, normalcy and abnormality. Truth-discourses about the mad, the criminal, and the abnormal have historically functioned as measuring instruments of power. In *Society Must Be Defended*, he analyzes power-discourses (war, history, politics) and power mechanisms. In *Security, Territory, Population and The Birth of Biopolitics*, he examines the economic and political contexts linked to raison d'État, explaining how the body's boundaries open to power and revealing the history and processes of power's operation upon the bodily field. In *The Government of the Living*, Foucault demonstrates truth-procedures for governing subjects through Sophocles' Oedipus Rex and Christian practices. In *The Birth of the Clinic*, he visualizes the bodily field, revealing how medical authority's truth-discourses operated upon the body in different eras—a concrete example of the objectification of the subject.

Across these works, Foucault outlines diverse interpretive structures: the subject of truth, the confessing subject, the disciplined subject, the mad subject, the subject of power, the governed subject, etc. This marks a process of the subject's continual dissolution. Thus, he seeks a return to the subject's own concern. In his later work *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*,

Foucault returns to ancient Greece to trace the shifting relationship between "the care of the self" (epimeleia heautou) and "know thyself" (gnôthi seauton), aiming to explain the formation of the modern subject. He investigates why "the care of the self"—once the ultimate purpose of the subject, a virtuous measure representing an active way of life—transformed into "know thyself". This measure encompasses the subject's relationship with itself, with others, and with the world. Whether the confessing, disciplined, mad, powerful, or governed subject, all are derivatives of "know thyself," whereas Foucault seeks to return to the subject of "the care of the self". This is fundamentally a question of the standard of truth: regardless of the dominant truth, its ultimate aim should enable the subject's care for itself, others, and the world.

Returning to Socrates, Foucault challenges the traditional association of "know thyself" with Socrates, arguing that "the care of the self" was more crucial for him. He further proposes that this concept was a fundamental principle defining the philosophical attitude throughout Greek, Hellenistic, and Roman culture. This is the truth-criterion Foucault envisions for the subject to attain itself, for "the care of the self" is the true pillar of "know thyself" (Michel Foucault, 2005, pp. 10, 480). In *The Government of Self and Others*, by studying the tragic truth-schema in Euripides, Foucault introduces the self-technology of parrhesia (truth-telling speech), a technique for the subject to realize self-care. For Foucault, parrhesia is virtue, obligation, and technique. He attempts to reject Christian self-confession, advocating parrhesia as the path to genuine care of the self, while also presenting it as a means to restore intersubjective truth. After analyzing the history of parrhesia in ancient Greece, Foucault shifts to political and philosophical parrhesia, expressing his hope: that philosophy should pursue the "common man" and "strive to fashion his soul" (Michel Foucault, 2010, p. 450). Thus, soul and spirituality emerge as the destination of Foucault's care of the self. In *The Courage of Truth*, he emphasizes the importance of restoring the subject's spirituality and explores the methods and conditions for speaking truthfully to attain truth. Parrhesia—speaking the existence of the

soul and giving style to life—constitutes, for Foucault, the truth of life: life existing as a beautiful work of art (Michel Foucault, 2011, p. 201).

Foucault's interpretation of the subject originates in the relationship between subject and truth. Traversing paths of subject-knowledge, subject-power, and subject-self, it ultimately returns to the care of the self. He envisions every ordinary person freely shaping their existence as a work of art. He calls this art—the possibility of deciding and transforming one's own life—the art of living (tekhnê peri bion). Through this artistic technique, he argues, individuals can both relate to others and act upon themselves to attain ontological status and modes of experience (Michel Foucault, 1997, p. 46).

3. Forms of the Subject in Foucault's Later Works

Foucault situated his historical research within the history of the present, as his reflections consistently stemmed from mechanisms and practices discerned in the contemporary moment (genealogy). His historical archaeology aimed to "use insights from the past to comprehend the present (Gary Gutting, 2020, p. 12)".

Addressing Gadamer's assertion in *Truth and Method* that what is expressed is primarily not what ought to be expressed but what is co-expressed in the present discourse and perspective—something almost exposed by expression (Hans-Georg Gadamer, 2004, pp. 338-343), scholar Hong Handing (2018a, p. 7) interpreted this as:

> Understanding does not refer to the meaning originally intended by the author or the literal sense of the words, but to the hidden meaning within the proposition that we, as contemporary interpreters, must unveil. Such understanding encompasses our present existential relationship with the proposition.

Foucault's practice of subject reflection embodies his present-centered understanding of the subject. In *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, Foucault contrasts Descartes' 17th-century skepticism and Spinoza's concept of intellectual improvement with 19th-century philosophy,

arguing that the latter—especially in Hegel—returned to the question of spirituality (the care of the self). For Foucault, this constitutes the oldest and most fundamental issue, serving as the condition for the subject's access to truth. Rejecting Descartes' methodological path of knowing oneself, Foucault examines practices of the care of the self through ancient Greek techniques like meditation, memorization, and conscience-testing. This marks a shift from practices oriented toward the external, others, and the world to those focused on the self (Michel Foucault, 2005, p. 13). It represents a transition from methodology (how to attain truth) to ontology (the subject's relationship with truth), aligning with philosophical hermeneutics' evolution "from methodological and epistemological inquiry to ontological research" (Hong Handing, 2018b, p. iii).

a. Platonic and Christian Models Rejected by Foucault

Foucault terms the Platonic model the recollection model. First, Platonic care of the self (epimeleia heautou) is premised on human ignorance—humans are not only ignorant but unaware of their ignorance, discovering this condition only through questioning. Caring for oneself serves to end this ignorance. Second, in this model, care of the self is equated with knowing oneself (gnōthi seauton), achieved through the soul's rational self-apprehension. Finally, recollection bridges caring for and knowing oneself: the soul returns to itself through remembrance.

Foucault labels the Christian model the self-interpretation and self-denial model. The care of the self requires accepting divine truth from scripture to purify the mind and know oneself. Second, it involves self-annotation by analysing hidden inner processes to recognise desires and resist illusion. Ultimately, the final stage and purpose of self-knowledge is self-renunciation.

b. Foucault's Conception of the Care of the Self

Foucault opposes the Platonic model, advocating instead for structuring knowledge of the world as the subject's spiritual experience. He rejects the Christian model, proposing that truth practices (askēsis) shape the subject as its own ultimate end. This shifts the subject from being dominated by "knowing and obeying the law through oneself" to being defined by "spirituality and truth practices" (Michel Foucault, 2005, p. 334). For "the care of the self" (epimeleia heautou), Foucault endorses the "Hellenistic model", which delineates the schema between caring for and knowing oneself. He interprets Hellenistic epimeleia heautou—as practiced by Epicureans, Cynics, and Stoics—through the concept of "conversion to oneself" (epistrophē eis heauton): turning attention from the world to the self. Foucault calls this the complete subject (Michel Foucault, 2005, p. 263).

Firstly, the orientation of care shifts from cognitive to spiritual knowledge. Foucault identifies a shift from spiritual to cognitive knowledge beginning with 17th-century thinkers like Descartes, Pascal, and Spinoza. Through evolving portrayals of Faust (Marlowe, Lessing, Goethe), he observes the post-Enlightenment disappearance of spirituality—a "melancholy" turn (Michel Foucault, 2005, p. 325). Scientific discourse relegated ethics to law, politics, and administration, reducing human behavior to questions of legality, political correctness, or accountability. This responsibility ethics, however, lacks a dimension of self-cultivation (askēsis) and fails to interrogate conscience. Legalizing or scientizing responsibility allows evasion of moral accountability, displacing fault onto legal or scientific frameworks while neglecting moral conscience. Thus, Foucault urges a return to a truth-order over a legal-order.

This truth-order relies on askēsis (truth practices), comprising three aspects (Michel Foucault, 2005, pp. 277–300):

Knowing nature to liberate oneself: Citing Seneca's Natural Questions, Foucault argues that liberation from worldly pursuits and political power enables self-mastery. By elevating the soul above threats and temptations, one achieves spiritual care. Studying nature leads to

transcendence, freeing oneself from false values and enslavement to discover purpose, happiness, and the highest good within the soul.

Knowing oneself to cultivate virtue: Positioning oneself within the world, engaging with its events, and recognizing one's natural necessities foster dialogue with the cosmos. This is neither introspection into "inner secrets" (à la Christianity) nor world-renunciation, but a measured existence in time and space—achieving self-control in action and thought.

Knowing one's relation to nature to ensure freedom: By scrutinizing the body's hold over the soul and discerning the world's structure, one accepts earthly conditions—both beautiful and painful—to become a sage capable of prudent, free choices.

Secondly, the meaning of "self" and "care" is further clarified. From dialogues among Plato, Socrates, and Alcibiades, Foucault concludes that the ancient Greek "self" (heauton) is the soul (psūkhē), which employs language, tools, and the body. He emphasizes the Greek verb khrēsthai ("to use"), noting its dual significance: instrumental utilization and attitudinal transformation. Thus, the care of the self signifies the subject's transcendent stance toward its surroundings, dominated objects, related others, its body, and itself (Michel Foucualt, 2005, pp. 57–60). In Utopian Body, Foucault defines the body as an unfeeling site and the soul as splendid, pure, and immaculate (Michel Foucualt, 2005, pp. 187–189). The soul-subject exhibits four traits: subject of instrumental acts; subject in relation to others; subject of general conduct and attitudes; subject in relation to itself.

Drawing on the Phaedo and Symposium, Foucault defines care as "practices that focus thought on itself, revolve the soul around its own axis, turn inward, and cultivate patience" (Michel Foucualt, 2005, p. 72). In Platonism, caring for oneself means knowing one's soul and its divinity. This entails choosing a lifestyle and engaging in self-cultivation (askēsis) to discover oneself through oneself. Such practices evolved from elite self-perfection to universal corrective rules (Michel Foucualt, 2005, pp. 136–137). Askēsis mediates one's relationship

with oneself and others, enabling the subject to attain a status never previously recognized and become a subject constituted through the intervention of others (Michel Foucualt, 2005, p. 140).

In essence, the care of the self is an art of living that transforms existence to access truth. Foucault deems this art vital, opposing Descartes and Kant's demand to "purge the spiritual conditions for attaining truth" (Michel Foucualt, 2005, p. 205). For him, theology and scholasticism wrongly posit a rational subject divorced from spiritual conditions, abandoning the spirituality inherent in ancient and Christian thought. Spirituality is the subject's foundation; caring for oneself is fundamentally about cultivating the soul.

Thirdly, the method is to shift one's attention to oneself. Turning the gaze inward is neither the Platonic practice of fashioning oneself into an object of cognition to discover seeds of truth within, nor the Christian injunction to excavate hidden secrets. Rather, it redirects attention from external distractions to one's immediate concerns, pleasures, and goals—chief among them, self-perfection. The gap between imperfection and perfection constitutes the distance Foucault describes as "the self within the distance between oneself and oneself: this, I believe, is the aim of the gaze turned away from others. One must attend not to the self as an object of knowledge, but to this distance, for the subject is an agent possessing the means to reach itself—an imperative task. What must be reached is the self" (Michel Foucualt, 2005, p. 236). Redirecting attention is thus the first step toward self-return via the path to self-realization.

Also, Foucault employs paraskeuê (equipment/preparation) as the tool for askēsis (self-cultivation) in returning to oneself (Michel Foucualt, 2005, pp. 255, 335, 337, 340, 346, 432, 491). The soul must be aptly equipped to confront life's unpredictabilities and resist external stimuli to achieve its aims. Unlike Christian self-renunciation, this practice grants "the self" resources for protection and fulfilment. Logos (reason), as an element of equipment, orders the subject, trains conduct, and acts as a remedy (pharmakon) in crises. Equipment structures the permanent transformation of inherent truths into morally actionable principles—logos

transmuted into ethics. Through paraskeuê, askēsis ultimately fosters a rich, autonomous self-relationship (Michel Foucualt, 2005, p. 341).

The third way to shift attention to oneself is the subjectivation of Truth. Through parrhesia (fearless speech), the individual bonds with truth (Askēsis) anchors philosophy in daily ethics through parrhesia—a moral quality (êthos) that enables candid expression (Michel Foucault, 2005, pp. 170, 346, 388, 396). In relationships (e.g., doctor-patient, teacher-student), it utilises knowledge to transform the subject. Truth acquired through teaching, reading, or counsel is internalised as an eternal, active principle. Askēsis makes truth-telling a way of existence; parrhesia in daily practice becomes conscience-guided ethics.

The fourth way is through the ethical dimension of care. Care of the self permeates the existence of others: the mentor, the correspondent, the comparative other, the supportive friend, the benevolent parent. (Michel Foucault, 2005, p. 557). It shapes us into authentic agents who establish a rightful identity in the world. Those who care for themselves become ethically distinct from the masses (hoi polloi) dissolved in daily life, implying an ethical differentiation (Michel Foucault, 2005, p. 80). This care must be an exercise of subjective freedom, enabling one to "wield techniques guided by the aim, desire, and will to create a fine work" (Michel Foucault, 2005, p. 440)—a perfected existence. For Foucault, the care of the self aims not at living well, reasoning rightly, or governing others properly, but at forging an optimal relationship with oneself. In this self-relation, the soul contemplates itself to grasp the divine elements constituting its virtue.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, Foucault's hermeneutics of the subject offers a profound rethinking of how individuals constitute themselves in relation to truth. Rejecting both Platonic recollection and Christian self-renunciation, Foucault revives the ancient Greco-Roman concept of "the care of the self" (epimeleia heautou) as an active, ongoing practice of self-formation. Through

askēsis—encompassing the study of nature, self-knowledge, and parrhesia (fearless truth-telling)—the subject engages in a transformative process aimed at self-mastery, ethical agency, and an aesthetics of existence. Foucault's historical and philosophical journey reveals that subjectivity is not pre-given but constructed through techniques of domination and self-techniques within specific power-knowledge frameworks. Ultimately, his work advocates for a return to spirituality and self-care as the foundation for freedom, enabling individuals to shape their lives as a work of art and restore a meaningful relationship with themselves, others, and truth.

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