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## Chapter Two. Foucault on the Body and Ethics

### A. The Late Foucault: Towards an Ethical Understanding of the Embodied Subject

It is widely argued that a stunning transformation occurred during the last years in Foucault's life from 1976-1984, in which he moved from his famous anti-humanist and poststructuralist "death of the subject," asserting the "rebirth of the subject" revealed in his lectures given at the College de France. In one of the lectures, titled *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, Foucault discusses the spirituality of the subject, the transformation of the subject, and the technique of the self. He articulates a "strong" vision of the subject and ethics. Being inspired by ancient Greek ethics, he is concerned with how different practices of the embodied self make possible an ethical subject.

Could we say that there is a "paradigm shift" in Foucault's project? Is the early "the death of subject" compatible with the late "rebirth of the subject" in Foucault's project? If the early Foucault is hostile to the humanist subject, then is there a betrayal in his later return to the notion of the subject? The "paradigm shift" in Foucault's project has aroused much discussion among Foucault scholars. Paras argues that there definitely is a paradigm shift in Foucault's project: "[h]is [Foucault's] migration away from the concept of discipline--even before the ink on American copies of *Discipline and Punish* was fully

dry--and toward an understanding of individualization that was rooted less in practices of domination than in auto-initiated practices of limiting and restraint was, to say the least, a paradigm shift.”<sup>1</sup> Paras claims that the change is mainly due to Foucault’s engagement with the *nouveaux philosophes* and the Iranian Revolution. Harrer argues, by contrast, that we should not view it as a paradigm shift; rather there is a conceptual continuity between the “early” and “late” Foucault: “...fabrication and self-constitution of subjects are but two sides of the same coin, and ... hence, there is no ontological difference between the subject in the ‘early’ and the ‘late’ Foucault.”<sup>2</sup>

In other words, while there are ‘weak’ and ‘strong’ notions of subjectivity articulated in the early and late Foucault respectively, this does not mean they are incompatible. I hope this chapter can show, through reading Foucault’s *Hermeneutics of the Subject* and *History of Sexuality II*, that Foucault does not forsake the “subject” per se. In fact, the “subject” he forsakes in his early stage is only an epistemological disembodied subject, not an ethical embodied subject. While *Hermeneutics of the Subject* rejects a rational Cartesian subject, Foucault introduces an ethical aesthetic subject, which rests on ancient

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<sup>1</sup> Eric Paras, *Foucault 2.0: Beyond Power and Knowledge* (New York: Other Press, 2006), p. 102.

<sup>2</sup> Sebastian Harrer, “The Theme of Subjectivity in Foucault’s Lecture Series *L’Hermeneutique du Sujet*,” *Foucault Studies* 2 (May 2005): 79.

Greek ethical traditions. Thus, Foucault's early claim of the death of the subject only rejects a rational form of the subject, not the "subject" itself. In fact, the later stage of a return of the subject would be impossible without his previous genealogical critique of the subject. In other words, we can read Foucault's early "destructive critique of the subject" as a theoretical preparation for his later ethical project; or his later "constructive approach to the subject" as a "redemptive response" to his earlier "destructive approach." In fact, we can read Foucault's earlier and later approach to the subject as a dialectical circulation.

This chapter will look at the late Foucault's notions of body, ethics and ethical subjectivity in order to gain a more complete understanding of what I will coin the "ethical embodied subject." For Foucault, the problem of rationalism is its dualist understanding of mind and body in which the body is an inferior object to be dominated by the mind or consciousness. For Foucault, the body is not the object of control; rather it is the very condition of subjectivity. It is not the soul or mind that controls the body, but the body that conditions the mind or soul: "the soul is the effect and instrument of a political anatomy; the soul is the prison of the body."<sup>3</sup>

In *Discipline and Punishment*, Foucault argues that power works on one's body to

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<sup>3</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, (London: Penguin, 1979), p. 30.

produce the soul, subjectivity and consciousness. The soul is not pre-given; rather it is the result of different kinds of bodily disciplines. As Margaret A. McLaren rightly says, “Having rejected metaphysical dualism, Foucault cannot posit a mind, soul, psyche, or subjectivity that is somehow prior to or apart from the body.... Power through its effect on the body produces an interiority (the soul), and in turn, it is in part through this interiority that power is exercised on the body.”<sup>4</sup> Foucault takes the question of body seriously and examines different mechanisms that discipline one’s body because he believes that one’s living mode, including one’s self-identity or one’s style of living cannot be separate from one’s body. In other words, for Foucault, subject is a contextual embodied subject, not a universal and transcendent disembodied subject, since the subject’s body conditions him or her.

Foucault’s skeptical attitude towards different cultural formations of the body has made many commentators think that his project supports an anti-essentialist approach to the body, one that denies the essence of the body and treats the body as simply culturally and linguistically constructed. For Butler, one of the anti-essentialist feminists, a body is not even a being, but only a linguistic “style.” She seems to deny the materiality and concreteness of the body. To put it bluntly, the body, for her, is no longer a lived and

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<sup>4</sup> Margaret A. McLaren, *Feminism, Foucault, and Embodied Subjectivity* (Albany: State University of New York, 2002), p. 84.

concrete body. Since Foucault's genealogical critique of the body has inspired Butler's anti-essentialist position, he is commonly identified as an anti-essentialist or constructivist. It is also argued that Foucault, who allegedly treats the subject as only a discursively and culturally constructed "product," denies any high ethical ideals for human beings. In particular, he skeptically treats all human relationships as domination. Charles Taylor, for example, charges that Foucault's neo-Nietzschean approach to the value of the human being treats human relationships as domination and reduces ethical and spiritual values to a repressive value: "... in the work of the late Michel Foucault... high ethical and spiritual ideals are often interwoven with exclusions and relations of domination."<sup>5</sup>

However, Foucault's skeptical approach to different cultural formations or disciplines of body does not mean that he totally rejects all bodily disciplines or formations. In the later stage of Foucault, we find that he approaches bodily formation in a more "constructive" and "positive" way. Inspired by a Greek notion of care of the self, Foucault positively affirms an exercise of the body that can make possible one's ethical identity. For the Greeks, philosophy, which includes both an ethical and existential value, is about a way of life and a way of being. The Greeks believe that only if one can care

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<sup>5</sup> Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 518.

and manage one's bodily life can one live out one's philosophical life or an ethical form of life. One needs to learn how to transform one's life through training one's sensibility or bodily condition in order to actualize a specific style of ethical living. Here Foucault does not simply treat the discipline of body as a violent repression; rather he treats it as a condition of cultivating an ethical way of life.

Furthermore, the late Foucault emphasizes the importance of the art of governmentality, an ethical administration of individual, which can make a contribution to the security of society. As Tina Besley and Michael A. Peters say: "For Foucault 'governmentality' means the complex of calculations, programs, policies, strategies, reflections and tactics that shape the conduct of individuals, 'the conduct of conduct' for acting upon the actions of others in order to achieve certain ends. Those ends are 'not just to control, subdue, discipline, normalize, or reform them, but also to make them more intelligent, wise, happy, virtuous, healthy, productive, docile, enterprising, fulfilled, self-esteeming, empowered, or whatever.'"<sup>6</sup> The art of governmentality, which can cultivate an ethical political life through disciplining one's bodily life, enables Foucault to view the bodily disciplines in a more "positive" way.

For Foucault, governing oneself and others properly and ethically is related to how

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<sup>6</sup> Tina (A.C.) Besley and Michael A. Peters, *Subjectivity & Truth: Foucault, Education, and the Culture of Self* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), p. 22.

one uses power in a non-coercive way. According to Greek ethics, one does not abuse the power towards the other if one can control one's anger properly. If one can control one's emotional life properly, one can also limit one's power while governing the other. Here, the late Foucault presumes that the subject is no longer a passive agent who is simply determined by power; rather the subject is an active agent who can use power freely and productively. In particular, Foucault views the use of power as a necessary means to constitute one's ethical identity. As Besley and Peters say: "His [Foucault's] later work emphasises self-determination or agency as self-regulation where individuals are continually in the process of constituting themselves as ethical subjects (ethical self-constitution). He emphasised that individuals are continually in the process of constituting themselves as ethical subjects through both technologies of the self and ethical self-constitution, and a notion of power that is not simply based upon repression, coercion, or determination."<sup>7</sup>

In other words, Foucault's genealogical critique of the violent repression of the body is only part of his ethical concern about the body, not the whole of his ethical project. Only if we recognize the importance of the care of the embodied self, as inspired by Greek ethics, can we fully recognize the value of Foucault's project. Thus, from a close

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<sup>7</sup> Tina (A.C.) Besley & Michael A. Peters, *Subjectivity & Truth*, p. 21.

reading of the later Foucault's project that affirms an embodied ethics, we may find that merely labeling Foucault as an anti-moral social constructivist is not fair. Such interpretations rest on an incomplete interpretation of Foucault's genealogical critique, not taking into account the late Foucault's works on embodied ethics. Being inspired by ancient Greek care of the self, the late Foucault neither rejects ethical values nor treats all human relationships as domination. Instead, he takes seriously an ancient Greek ethics, which views the ethical life as a daily bodily exercise. He treats those bodily practices as an inspiration for contemporary people to reconstruct an embodied ethics in response to the ethical crisis brought by modernity and Christianity. The late Foucault does not view all human relationship as a repressive domination; rather he argues that care of the self can lead to care of the other.

This chapter will argue that what the late Foucault rejects is a rational disembodied subject, not an ethical embodied subject. In the following sections, I shall first consider Foucault's notion of Greek ethics, his critique of Christian morality, and his distinguishing ethics from morality. Then I shall look at how Foucault is inspired by Stoic, Epicurean, and Aristotelian ethics to formulate the ethical subject and the practice of an aesthetics of existence. While I agree that Foucault does have a harsh attack on Christian morality and its interpretation of the body and sexuality, I want to argue that his critique

of the Christian moral norm does not destroy ethics per se, but tries to subvert a hierarchical repressive relation between ethics and the body deeply embedded in Christian culture, in which the body is treated as “the docile body” to be disciplined by the religious institution. Furthermore, being inspired by a Greek balanced teaching on ethical norms and the body, the late Foucault aims at figuring out how a Greek ethics of the care of the self, including properly managing one’s body or desire, can be worked out in a non-manipulative way, so as to avoid the Christian way of violently controlling one’s sexuality and body.

### **B. Foucault on Morality and Ethics**

One of the main concerns in the late Foucault is the crisis of morality. Because we are experiencing a crisis of morality brought by modernity, we have to find the root of the crisis. Accordingly, the late Foucault goes back to ancient Greek ethical traditions, especially the ethical traditions of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, and the Epicureans, where he wants to find an inspiration in response to the crisis of morality. Foucault discovers that one source of today’s moral crisis is Christian moral legalism, which constructs an un-free moral subject through subjecting one’s embodied life to strict moral rules.

In *History of Sexuality*, Foucault problematizes the legalist and repressive nature of

the Christian morality. Although it may seem that Foucault is concerned with the practice of ancient sexuality, his concern is morality. Foucault once remarked to Arnold Davidson: “what made sex so interesting to him [Foucault] had little to do with sex itself. His focus on the history of ancient sex, its interest for him, was part of his interest in the history of ancient ethics.”<sup>8</sup> And when Foucault was once asked in an interview about his concern in *History of Sexuality*, he confessed: “I am much more interested in problems about techniques of the self and things like that than sex...sex is boring.”<sup>9</sup> In fact, if we carefully study the three volumes of *History of Sexuality*, we may see that Foucault has characterized Western sex history as the story of our losing the subject’s freedom. He has shown how every body is subjected to a strict moral rule or code that derives from a personal God and that we are asked to decipher and then renounce ourselves and sacrifice our pleasure for the sake of salvation. But Foucault finds that this kind of legalistic morality is disappearing. Thus, we have to seek a new ethics: “[t]he idea of a morality as obedience to a code of rules is now disappearing, has already disappeared. And to this absence of morality corresponds, must correspond, the search for an aesthetics of

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<sup>8</sup> Arnold I. Davidson, “Ethics as Ascetics: Foucault, The History of Ethics, and Ancient Thought,” in Gary Gutting (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 115.

<sup>9</sup> Michel Foucault, “On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress,” in Paul Rabinow (ed.), *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984 Volume 1* (New York: The New Press, 1997), p. 253.

existence.”<sup>10</sup> The aesthetics of existence is basically a classical ethics deeply rooted in the ancient Greek ethical tradition, which differs from a strict and legalistic Christian morality.

According to Foucault, the ancient Greeks, through practicing care of the self as a way of being ethical, have made possible a flexible and non-legalistic notion of ethics distinct from the strict legalistic notion of Christian morality. In fact, Greek ethicists are not interested in designing a strict and passive rule-conforming practice for an ethical subject; rather they are concerned with a flexible and active bodily practice, through which one can build up a singular virtuous identity for oneself. More important, for the Greeks, ethics was not related to any social or legal institutional system.<sup>11</sup> Thus, Greek ethical practices, with a free style, have inspired Foucault to think of an alternative way of being ethical under the crisis of modernity, which results from the failure to establish a new ethical ground for liberation that is based on neither religion nor science.<sup>12</sup> Foucault rejects a passive making of an ethical subject that does not give the subject any freedom in responding to the moral boundary set by society.

Although it is tempting to conclude that Foucault tries to replace legalistic Christian

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<sup>10</sup> Michel Foucault, “An Aesthetics of Existence,” in Lawrence Kritzman (ed.), *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings 1977-1984* (New York: Routledge, 1988), p. 49.

<sup>11</sup> Michel Foucault, “On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress,” p. 255.

<sup>12</sup> Michel Foucault, “On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress,” p. 255.

ethics with ancient Greek ethics, that is obviously not the main intention of his late ethical project. Foucault is very careful not to present ancient Greek ethics as a solution to the contemporary moral crisis brought by the decline of legalistic Christian ethics. Foucault says we cannot find the solution to the problem in the solution to another problem raised at another moment by other people.<sup>13</sup> As O’Leary says, “He [Foucault] is very careful not to contrast a relatively free mode of sexual ethics--in Classical antiquity--with a relatively repressive and intolerant sexual ethics in Christianity: the point is not ‘they were free, we are not. So let’s regain what they had.’”<sup>14</sup> Rather, Foucault is interested in “problems” and not “solutions.”<sup>15</sup> He wants to examine the shift of emphasis from the ethical subject as an active and free ethical subject to a passive and unfree ethical subject, from that of the ancient Greek to that of the Christian age. While Foucault does not want to take ancient Greek ethics as an alternative ethics for today’s moral crisis, he does nevertheless insist that Greek ethics or an aesthetics of existence can serve as an “inspiration” for those who seek a new ethics for today’s critical situation. In other words, Foucault’s re-activation of the Greek ethics is “not a repetition, but the creation of something new.”<sup>16</sup> In the following subsection, I will discuss Foucault’s

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<sup>13</sup> Michel Foucault, “On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress,” p. 256.

<sup>14</sup> Timothy O’Leary, *Foucault: The Art of Ethics*, (London: Continuum, 2002), p. 83.

<sup>15</sup> Michel Foucault, “On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress,” p. 256.

<sup>16</sup> Timothy O’Leary, *Foucault: The Art of Ethics*, p. 84.

understanding of ethics, arguing that Foucault turns to ancient Greek ethics for inspiration in his search for an alternative to Christian legalism.

### **1. Morality as Coding**

In *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality, Volume 2*, Foucault points out that morality comprises two elements, namely, codes of behavior and forms of subjectivation. These two elements are never entirely dissociated, though they may develop in relative independence from one another.<sup>17</sup> The coding nature of morality aims at controlling one's behavior by ensuring that one's behavior would not violate a universal social norm. Foucault says that this version of morality always refers to "a set of values and rules of action that are recommended to individuals through the intermediary of various prescriptive agencies such as the family (in one of its roles), educational institutions, churches and so forth. It is sometimes the case that these rules and values are plainly set forth in a coherent doctrine and an explicit teaching... [W]ith these qualifications taken into account, we can call this prescriptive ensemble a 'moral code.'"<sup>18</sup> Human beings under the control of such moral codes have no choice but to conform to them; otherwise they have to be punished by moral authorities, such as church or government. More

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<sup>17</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality, Volume 2* (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 29.

<sup>18</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 25.

important, the coding nature of morality turns morality into a kind of obedience to rules, but not a cultivation of an ethical form of life through bodily exercises.

Foucault has identified Christian morality as such a behavior-coding morality, which he thinks has repressed the subject's body and turned the body into a "docile body." That is to say, Christian morality does not make an active and free ethical subject, but a passive and unfree ethical subject. But how does the Christian culture exert its moral power on the subject? What kind of theology is used for the manipulation of human sexuality? What kind of subject is constructed by church culture?

In *The Use of Pleasure and Abnormal*, Foucault argues that Christian morality exerts its power on the subject through interpreting the body as the sinful body. From the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, the body is the object of discipline, in which the body is manipulated through the church's mechanism of confession, penance and examination. Within this period, the body is regarded as a vehicle of sin due to the Christian dogma of sin, in which the theological discussion of sin shifts from an interrelational level to a more individual level. Originally, sin is about a brokenness of human relations or a violation of a legitimate human relationship. Adultery, for example, is sin because it violates a covenant relation in a marital relationship, which is treasured by Christianity. Later, however, sin of the flesh is emphasized, and gets associated with the human body:

“...we can say that the sins of the flesh are newly focused on the body. Sins are no longer distinguished and ordered in terms of illegitimate relationships but rather by the body itself. It is the body that determines the order of questions. In a word: we are witnessing the flesh being pinned to the body. Previously, the flesh, the sin of the flesh, was above all breaking the rule of union. Now the sin of the flesh dwells within the body itself.”<sup>19</sup>

Since sin is determined in terms of the acts of the body, especially the sexual act, the body has become the focal point for the examination and confession of conscience carried out by the church.

Since sinful violation towards human beings is extended from an interpersonal level to a more personal level, the technique of the control of the sin carried out by the church is also adjusted to a more personal and micro level. That is to say, church power tends to be a more micro power. In *Abnormal*, Foucault shows how confession became extended and generalized as a domain of control in the sixteenth century's in-depth Christianization. He says, “with the Council of Trent, the sacramental armature of penance is explicitly maintained, renewed, and then, within and around penance in the strict sense, an immense apparatus of discourse and examination, of analysis and control, spreads out... First of all, the domain of the confession is extended and confession tends to be

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<sup>19</sup> Michel Foucault, *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France 1974-1975* (New York: Picador, 2003), pp. 188-9.

generalized. All, or almost all, of an individual's life, thought, and action must pass through the filter of confession, if not, of course, as sin, at least as an element relevant for an examination or analysis now demanded by confession. Second, there is an even more pronounced intensification of the power of the confessor corresponding to this formidable extension of the domain of confession."<sup>20</sup> Confession became a dominant mode of control, through an open dialogue between priest and person.

Interestingly, the examination and confession of the relational dimension of sexual sin gradually turned into a personal confession of the penitent concerning his or her personal bodily act. This means the area of the confession tended to be more personal, and especially involved one's own bodily sensation. For example, masturbation was a sin because it aroused sexual fantasy. Thus the penitent confesses not only the "obscene content" in his or her masturbation, but also the sensual experience or sense of guilt aroused in his or her illegitimate sexual bodily act. As Foucault puts it:

"From the sixteenth century on, the fundamental change in the confession of the sin of lust is that the relational aspect of sexuality is no longer the important, primary, and fundamental element of penitential confession. It is no longer the relational aspect that is

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<sup>20</sup> Michel Foucault, *Abnormal*, p. 177.

now at the very heart of questioning concerning the Sixth Commandment, but the movements, senses, pleasures, thoughts and desires of the penitent's body itself, whose intensity and nature is experienced by the penitent himself. The old examination was essentially the inventory of permitted and forbidden relationships. The new examination is a meticulous passage through the body, a sort of anatomy of the pleasures of the flesh (*la volupté*). The body with its different parts and different sensations, and no longer, or much less, the laws of legitimate union, constitutes the organizing principle of the sins of lust. The body and its pleasures, rather than the required form for legitimate union, become, as it were, the code of the carnal.<sup>21</sup>

The confession of one's bodily sensation changes the control of the body from the control of one's own behavior to control of one's own bodily sensation and pleasure. In other words, the Christian moral control of the body is not restricted to the control of the sexual behavior, but extended to the control of one's own pleasure and sensuality. Therefore, according to Foucault, such Christian morality can only construct an un-free subject, because sensuality as a bodily expression or an expression of one's personality becomes an object of church's manipulation. It is also an implicit micro control because it exerts

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<sup>21</sup> Michel Foucault, *Abnormal*, p. 186.

its power through a theological discourse or confessional discourse that turns power control into a “soft control.” For Foucault, this coding aspect of morality is destructive, because it respects only social norms and church authority, but fails to respect the freedom of the subject. Of course, Foucault’s rejection of the Christian morality does not mean he gives up any ethical reflection on the body; rather he discovers that a more flexible form of morality, one which rests on Greek ethic, can respect one’s bodily life and cultivate one’s ethical life in a non-coercive way.

## **2. Morality as Ethics**

After criticizing the Christian legalistic interpretation of morality and its negative interpretation of body and sexuality as a sinful sexed body, Foucault argues that, in addition to a codification of one’s behavior, morality has another dimension, namely, the function of subjectivation. This aspect of morality does not concern what rule we have to obey, but what kind of ethical subject is created through interacting with different forms of moral code. In other words, it emphasizes the forms of relations with the self, the methods and techniques by which he or she makes himself or herself an object to be known, and the practice that enables him or her to transform his or her mode of being.

Due to this relational dimension of moral practice, Foucault calls it ethics, so as to

distinguish it from morality.<sup>22</sup>

Of course, one could ask, since rules, norms and moral traditions are still involved in such a subjectivation, what is the difference between morality and ethics? Foucault says, the difference between ethics and morality is that the former leaves a room and space for the subject to choose, obey or resist, and the latter fails to do so: “It is sometimes the case that these rules and values are plainly set forth in a coherent doctrine and an explicit teaching... But ‘morality’ also refers to the real behavior of individuals in relation to the rules and values that are recommended to them: the word thus designates the manner in which they comply more or less fully with a standard of conduct, the manner in which they obey or resist an interdiction or a prescription; the manner in which they respect or disregard a set of values.”<sup>23</sup> Ethics for Foucault is a more flexible form of morality that leaves room and freedom for one to decide when and how to accept the norm in an autonomous manner. Moral norms are merely points of reference for an ethical person, and being ethical is ultimately determined by what form of ethical subject one wants to be, not by any moral authorities.

In addition, the ethical form of morality presumes that one has different ways to

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<sup>22</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 30.

<sup>23</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 25.

conduct oneself morally:<sup>24</sup> “[g]iven a code of actions, and with regard to a specific type of actions (which can be defined by their degree of conformity with or divergence from the code), there are different ways to ‘conduct oneself’ morally, different ways for the acting individual to operate, not just as an agent, but as an ethical subject of this action.”<sup>25</sup> Since ethics does not require the agent to accept the norm unreflectively, it may generate different kinds of ethical agents or subjects within a moral tradition because one is asked to digest and re-interpret the norm with reference to one’s concrete bodily life. I regard such free internalization of a moral norm in one’s own bodily life as an embodied ethics.

Foucault uses the example of fidelity to examine the flexible form of embodied ethics:

“One can relate the crucial aspects of the practice of fidelity to the strict observance of interdiction and obligation in the very acts one accomplishes. But one can also make the essence of fidelity consist in the mastery of desires, in the fervent combat one directs against them, in the strength with which one is able to resist temptations: what makes up the content of fidelity in this case is that vigilance and that struggle... Alternatively, one

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<sup>24</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 26.

<sup>25</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 26.

can have it consist in the intensity, continuity, and reciprocity of feelings that are experienced vis-à-vis the partner, and in the quality of the relationship that permanently binds the two spouses.”<sup>26</sup>

Foucault does not like the enforcing nature of interdiction even though it can make one practice fidelity. Rather he suggests that we should allow one to control one’s bodily desire in an autonomous way, not in an enforcing way. For instance, fidelity may rest on an affective and voluntary relationship between two subjects. Thus, for Foucault, ethics is not a legalistic disembodied ethics, because one’s moral decision is not enforced by punishments and interdictions that ignore one’s bodily situation. Rather it is an embodied ethics because it respects one’s particular bodily situation so that one can decide what to practice and what not to practice in a voluntary way. In other words, such embodied ethics prioritizes subject over rule. This does not mean that the traditional moral teachings are totally useless in the making of the ethical subject, for those moral teachings can serve as references for the subject to create his or her aesthetic living style, as we will discuss later.

The next sub-section will explore a series of questions with regards to the Greek

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<sup>26</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, pp. 26-7.

notion of the ethical subjectivity. These questions include: What sort of ethical subject is formed by an embodied ethics? What is ethical style? How can ethics be a style? Does it have aesthetic value? Does Foucault try to use aesthetics to replace ethics?

### **C. Greek Ethics and Stylization of the Ethical Subject**

According to Foucault, Greek ethics views morality as an ethical subjectivation. Foucault privileges Greek ethic over Christian ethics, because the former is a flexible and nonlegalistic form of ethics that privileges the bodily life of the moral subject, but the latter is a rigid and legalistic form of ethics that privileges rule over subject. That is to say, the former gives us freedom by leaving a space for creating one's own ethical identity, but the latter constructs a repressive moral identity for us that represses the bodily life of the subject.

Foucault says that ancient Greek ethics refers morality to the real behavior of individuals in relation to the rules and values that are recommended to them--the manner in which they comply with a standard of conduct, the manner in which they obey or resist an interdiction and the manner in which they respect or disregard a set of values.<sup>27</sup> That is to say, Greek ethics allows the subject to actively cultivate a desirable character for himself or herself. It is the subject's decision, not the coercive rule, that ultimately

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<sup>27</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 25.

determines the subject's ethical character. Greek ethics does not encourage subjects to build up their ethical characters through obeying rules. As Foucault says, Greek ethics can make the subject conduct himself or herself as an ethical subject through referring to the prescriptive elements that make up the code. In contrast, since Christian ethics coercively imposes its moral standard on each subject without leaving "space" for the subject to make decisions, it ultimately fails to help the subject become a stylish ethical subject. In other words, for Foucault, Greek ethics can respect the singularity of the subject's embodied life, whereas Christian morality cannot affirm the singularity of each ethical subject's life.<sup>28</sup>

In *History of Sexuality*, Foucault argues that both the Greeks and Christianity have a normative understanding of sexuality, but he prefers the Greek one to the Christian one, because the Greek sense of the norm of sexuality is for making an stylish subject, through a practice of self; whereas Christianity is driven by a sense of interdictions.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, he wants to "analyze the practices by which individuals were led to focus their attention on themselves, to decipher, recognize, and acknowledge themselves as subjects of desire, bringing into play between themselves and themselves a certain relationship that allows

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<sup>28</sup> Foucault's critique of the problematic nature of Christian ethics fails to recognize that not all Christian social teachings are intrinsically repressive. For instance, liberation theology in Latin America or neo-Calvinism in the Netherlands can generate a social ethics that respects human rights and freedom.

<sup>29</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 13.

them to discover, in desire, the truth of their being, be it natural or fallen. In short, with this genealogy the idea was to investigate how individuals were led to practice, on themselves, and on others, a hermeneutics of desire, a hermeneutics of which their sexual behavior was doubtless the occasion, but certainly not the exclusive domain.”<sup>30</sup>

For Foucault, the ethical concern over sexual conduct should not be tied to the system of interdiction.<sup>31</sup> What impresses Foucault about the Greek notion of ethics is that it treats moral action as a voluntary and intentional action by which ethical subjects not only set themselves rules of conduct but also seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make their bodily life into an oeuvre that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria. That is to say, handling appropriately and skillfully one’s bodily life, i.e., sexual life, is an art for Greeks. Being an ethical subject is also being an aesthetic subject; and ethical life is also identified as aesthetic life. Simply put, the Greeks combined ethics and aesthetics, without splitting them into separated realm. Foucault adds:

“...we could say that classical antiquity’s moral reflection concerning the pleasures was not directed toward a codification of acts, nor toward a hermeneutics of the subject, but

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<sup>30</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 5.

<sup>31</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 10.

toward a stylization of attitudes and an aesthetics of existence. A stylization, because the rarefaction of sexual activity presented itself as a sort of open-ended requirement... A moral value that was also an aesthetic value and a truth value since it was by aiming at the satisfaction of real needs, by respecting the true hierarchy of the human being, and by never forgetting where one stood in regard to truth, that one would be able to give one's conduct the form that would assure one of a name meriting remembrance."<sup>32</sup>

For Foucault as for the Greeks, the stylization of oneself, including managing appropriately one's desire and pleasure (the criteria will be discussed later), is a combination of ethical and aesthetic value whose function is to give an aesthetic form to the subject. That is to say, moral reflection on pleasure and desire is not necessarily a repression of one's sensational life; rather it could be a stylization of the subject's attitude. Of course, Foucault is not the first one to use "style" to characterize ancient Greek ethics. In fact, Foucault admits that his interpretation of Greek ethics as style is mainly inspired by Peter Brown, whom he thinks is the first scholar to use the notion of style to characterize ancient Greek ethics. Foucault says, "[t]he use that I make of 'style,' I have

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<sup>32</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, pp. 92-3.

borrowed in large part from Peter Brown.”<sup>33</sup> In *The Making of Late Antiquity*, Brown suggests that there was a change of style from pagan religiosity in Late Antique Egypt to a Christian religiosity. Brown says, “The ‘style’ of religious life of the late second and third centuries... was that the frontier between the divine and the human had lain tantalizingly open.” Interestingly, for Brown, the rapid change is caused by the monks because they “fought against their own past, and they did so by creating a new style of religious life, that was the antithesis of that against which they had rebelled.”<sup>34</sup> From Brown’s interpretation, Foucault finds that creating a new ethical life or order could be a rebellious living style that actualizes one’s individuality. This inspires Foucault to perceive the Greek ethical life as a stylish aesthetic life.

But does this mean that Greek ethics is only an aesthetics that privileges the stylization of life? In fact, some Foucault scholars, like O’Leary, tend to emphasize Foucault’s notion of style as only an aesthetic style influenced by Nietzsche, or they associate Foucault’s ethics with dandyism influenced by Oscar Wilde, in which the ethical aspect of style, especially its virtuous element receives less emphasis. For instance, O’Leary highlights the aesthetic aspect of the late Foucault’s ethics, but downplays or

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<sup>33</sup> Eric Paras, *Foucault 2.0*, p. 134.

<sup>34</sup> Peter Brown, *The Making of Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), pp. 91-2. Cf. Eric Paras, *Foucault 2.0*, p. 135.

even ignores its virtuous content. O’Leary says that his approach to Foucault “will explore the extent to which Foucault’s interpretation of ancient ethics may be said to be coloured by his commitment to a new form of dandyism,”<sup>35</sup> and he thinks “the more ‘aestheticist’ interpretation--which is principally, although not exclusively, presented in interviews--arises from Foucault’s wish to produce a shock-effect which will jolt his listeners (and ultimately readers) out of their habitual acceptance of a particular form of morality. Foucault may not be exactly be a ‘rebel in the name of beauty,’ but he is a rebel who uses beauty’s name to advance the same cause which animated both Nietzsche and Wilde—the end of a particular form of modern, Western morality.”<sup>36</sup> According to O’Leary, Foucault’s appropriation of ancient Greek ethics aims at using a free form of aesthetics against a strict form of morality.

I would argue, however, that O’Leary’s interpretation is one-sided. It underestimates the virtuous element in the notion of style that Foucault stresses in his lectures at the College of France (discussed later in this chapter). O’Leary cannot fairly read Foucault’s ethics because he does not pay enough attention to lectures such as *Hermeneutics of the Subject* where Foucault shows how his later reflection on the ethical subject is deeply influenced by ancient Greek ethics.

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<sup>35</sup> Timothy O’Leary, *Foucault: The Art of Ethics*, p. 58.

<sup>36</sup> Timothy O’Leary, *Foucault: The Art of Ethics*, p. 86.

While I agree that Foucault as Nietzsche's follower does appreciate that aesthetics could serve as a radical style against morality, we should not neglect the fact that Foucault is inspired by the virtuous element embedded in Greek ethics as well. Although Foucault regards Greek ethics as an aesthetics of existence, we should not view Greek ethics as only an aesthetic form of life. In contrast, we should be aware that Foucault sees the Greeks' aesthetics of existence as a virtuous existence. That is to say, various kinds of virtuous contents fill the aesthetic form such that the aesthetic form of life could not be fully justified without a virtuous content. For the Greek ethicists, as for Foucault, what the ethical subject expresses in his or her life is not just an artistic form; rather it is a virtuous form of life.

Here, the notion of aesthetics connotes more a specific living style than a specific artistic content. According to Davidson, ancient Greek ethics always associates style with an ethical style, and this has inspired Foucault's reflection on stylization of the self: "Each philosophical school--Stoic, Epicurean, Platonist, and so on--represented a style of life that had a corresponding fundamental inner attitude... [T]o indicate what part of oneself one judges, how one relates oneself to moral obligations, what one does to transform oneself into an ethical subject, and what mode of being one aims to realize is to indicate how one lives, is to characterize one's style of life... And when Foucault says the

problem of an ethics is the problem of ‘a form [I would say ‘style’ here] to be given to one’s conduct and one’s life,’ he does in fact link the notion of ethics and style of life in a conceptually intimate way.”<sup>37</sup> In other words, perceiving Foucault’s ethics as only an aesthetic and Foucault’s style as only an aesthetic style cannot do justice to Foucault’s intention. In fact, by style, Foucault normally refers to a particular identity-formation that is against any indoctrination of social norms. It is this rebellious attitude against indoctrination of social norms that makes possible a stylish life. That is to say, style is a very personal and fundamental attitude about life.

Furthermore, Foucault’s ethics, like Greek virtue ethics, emphasizes the importance of self-transformation or bodily exercise, which is the basic teaching of Greek virtue ethics. Indeed, for Foucault, as for Greek ethicists, virtuous life is the outcome of bodily exercise. That is to say, one needs regularly to practice one’s bodily life in order to build up one’s ethical character. Thus, Foucault says:

“The Greeks, in fact, considered this freedom (liberty) as a problem and the freedom of the individual as an ethical problem. But ethical in the sense that Greeks could understand. *Ethos* was the deportment and the way to behave. It was the subject’s mode

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<sup>37</sup> Arnold I. Davidson, “Ethics as Ascetics: Foucault, The History of Ethics, and Ancient Thought”, pp. 124-5.

of being and a certain manner of acting visible to others. One's *ethos* was seen by his dress, by his bearing, by his gait, by the poise with which he reacts to events, etc. For them, that is the concrete expression of liberty. That is the way they 'problematized' their freedom. The man who has a good *ethos*, who can be admitted and held up as an example, he is a person who practices freedom in a certain manner."<sup>38</sup>

For Foucault, ethics is *ethos*. It is a mode of being and a way to behave, not a rule of life. The ethical subject is a man or woman who can live out a virtuous life in his or her public life. But, the subject cannot cultivate a virtuous life by himself or herself; rather the subject needs the guidance of the mentor to help him/her practice different kinds of ethical exercises offered by different philosophical schools, such as the Stoic or Epicurean, so as to cultivate an ethical mode of being (the relationship between mentor and student in Foucault's ethics will be discussed later). Furthermore, *ethos* is not a private ethics; rather it is a public ethics. As Pinto says, for Foucault, the *ethos*, though a personal matter, was obviously not a private one, because it was "publicly observable" and "visibly permeated by social norms and political codes."<sup>39</sup> In other words, Foucault

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<sup>38</sup> James Bernauer and David Rasmussen (eds.), *The Final Foucault* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1994), p. 6.

<sup>39</sup> Henrique Pinto, *Foucault, Christianity and Interfaith Dialogue* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 86.

never thinks of a private ethics; rather his notion of *ethos* is related to a public ethics or a civil virtue.

Being ethical is not the result of religious conversion, then, but the outcome of a labor of self or a bodily practice. For the Stoics, an ethical subject needs practice to testify that he or she has a virtue of insistence. Seneca says good men have to be submitted by God to the test in order to harden them, to make them courageous and strong and thus to prepare them.<sup>40</sup> God prepares men for himself; he prepares the men he loves for himself because they are good men; and he prepares them for himself through a series of tests that make up life.

Seneca's concept of test includes at least two ideas. First, life with its system of tests and hardships is an education. The culture of the self is essentially the substitute for an inadequate education. In particular, the culture of the self is crucial for those young people who have devoted themselves to the political career: they have to learn to take care of their bodily lives so as to properly fulfill the ethical demand of their career, such as to take care of the other. Thus, as Foucault says, the generalization of this idea of the care of self in Greek culture was not just an obligation; rather it was a life-long education: one had to take care of the self throughout one's life. The whole life must be treated as

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<sup>40</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France 1981-1982* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 439.

the individual's education, which consists in educating oneself in facing life's misfortunes.

Care of the self is a life-long education, like a spiral between education and form of life.<sup>41</sup>

Foucault stresses that for the Greeks, viewing life as test and training is connected to a fundamental but enigmatic discriminating function, which can distinguish between good and bad people. According to Seneca, life as a test is reserved for good people, so that they are distinguished from others, "while those wicked not only do not pass the test, or do not recognize a test in life, but their life is even not organized as a test."<sup>42</sup> Good people, who can show their strength and insistence in the test, are also those who can take a leadership role in the political realm. As Foucault quotes Epictetus:

"There are men who are naturally so virtuous, who have already amply demonstrated their strength, that God, rather than letting them live amongst other men, with the advantages and drawbacks of ordinary life, sends them as scouts into the greatest dangers and difficulties. It is these scouts of hardship, misfortune, and suffering who, on the one hand, will set especially tough and difficult tests for themselves but, as good scouts, will then return to their city in order to tell their fellow citizens that, after all, they should not worry themselves so much about these dangers they so greatly fear, since they themselves

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<sup>41</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 439.

<sup>42</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 440.

have experienced them...as scouts...who are able to teach others that one can triumph over these tests and evils, and that there is a path for this that they can teach them.”<sup>43</sup>

Obviously, the ethical subject is the one who can go through the test of life in which one has to experience hardship, misfortune and suffering. More important, the virtuous person not only cares for himself or herself, but also cares for the others. Indeed, when the virtuous person passes the test, he/she will go back to his or her city to comfort, strengthen and encourage his or her fellows to face the challenges brought by evil. In other words, the practice of the care of the self is not a self-centered practice for the Greeks; rather it is a preparation for the care of others. To a certain extent, care of the self is the necessary condition for care of others (the ethical relation between care of self and care of other will be discussed later).

Foucault argues that to care for the self is not to cultivate the culture of narcissism, as some critics believe. Rather it is about how to properly practice one’s behavior so that one can become an ethical subject. Foucault is fully aware of the distortion of “care of the self” in Western culture, and he tries to re-articulate its ethical nature in order to counter egoism, which is always associated with care of self. He says,

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<sup>43</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 441.

“Caring for self was, at a certain moment, gladly denounced as being a kind of self-love, a kind of egoism or individual interest in contradiction to the care one must show others or to the necessary sacrifice of the self. All that happened during the Christian era, but I would not say that it is exclusively due to Christianity. The situation is much more complex because, in Christianity, achieving salvation is also a caring for self. But in Christianity, salvation is obtained by renunciation of self. There is a paradox of care for self in Christianity, but that is another question... I think that both with the Greeks and the Romans--and especially with the Greeks--in order to behave properly, in order to practice freedom properly, it was necessary to care for self, both in order to know one’s self--and there is the familiar *gnothi seauton*--and to improve one’s self, to surpass one’s self, to master the appetites that risk engulfing you.”<sup>44</sup>

In other words, care of the self is not about self-love or narcissism; rather it is an actualization or cultivation of a virtue of self-control. It is about the making of a moderate subject. For the Greeks, as for Foucault, if we fail to practice a virtue of self-control, we may fail to become an ethical subject. In fact, self-control is important for being an

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<sup>44</sup> James Bernauer and David Rasmussen (eds.), *The Final Foucault*, pp. 4-5.

ethical subject, because to be ethical one first needs to properly manage one's power and desire. If one fails to learn to control one's own desire and power, then one would easily impose one's power and exert violence towards the other. Thus the practice of care of self, which includes learning to control one's power and desire, is important for the formation of the ethical subject because it can help to cultivate a virtue of moderation for the subject to govern the other (the ethics of governing and care of self will be discussed later). And this also supports my argument: the lived body with desire and force is a necessary condition for Foucault's ethics, without which care of the self and the other is impossible.

Of course, it is tempting to argue that the later Foucault's ethics is a virtue ethics since Foucault shares some similar natures with Greek virtue ethics.<sup>45</sup> For example, both

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<sup>45</sup> Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics* states clearly that moral virtue is the result of daily habits and practices. For Socrates, as for Aristotle, virtue cannot be treated as abstract knowledge or turned into a set of disembodied rules for one to follow. Rather, a virtuous subject is formed only through different kinds of bodily practices. Being the successor of Socrates' teaching of the practices of virtue, Aristotle says, moral virtue "is formed by habit, *ethos*, and its name, *ethike*, is therefore derived, by a slight variation, from *ethos*. This shows, too, that none of the moral virtues is implanted in us by nature, for nothing which exists by nature can be changed by habit.... Thus, the virtues are implanted in us neither by nature nor contrary to nature: we are by nature equipped with the ability to receive them, and habit brings this ability to completion and fulfillment.... (T)he virtues, on the other hand, we acquire by first having put them into action, and the same is also true of the arts. For the things which we have to learn before we can do them we learn by doing: men becomes builders by building houses, and harpists by playing the harp. Similarly, we become just by the practice of just actions, self-controlled by exercising self-control, and courageous by performing acts of courage." Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1962), pp. 33-4.

In brief, for Aristotle, we are not born with virtue, but nature can offer us the basic ability and tendency to become a virtuous subject. Thus, we need to practice virtue so as to acquire it. Stan Van Hooft gives us a good example to illustrate the relation between exercise or practice and virtue in Aristotle's understanding: "We acquire, for example, the virtue of courage by doing courageous things. We should avoid being either foolhardy or cowardly. If we act in either of these ways, we shall acquire the habit of acting in that way and we shall not acquire the virtue of courage, whereas if we face up to danger bravely on a number of occasions, we shall gradually become courageous." Stan van Hooft, *Understanding Virtue Ethics* (Chesham: Acumen, 2006), p. 57. Being a virtuous subject first needs a self-transformation

view one's ethical formation as the result of the practice; both privilege "what one is" over "what one does" in terms of being ethical. Since ethics, for Foucault, is not about law-obedience or rule-setting, but about the formation of the character of the subject, one would argue that Foucault's ethics is a virtue ethics.<sup>46</sup> Similarly Neil Lev argues that the later Foucault shares most of the basic motifs with contemporary virtue ethicists, like John McDowell. He says, both Foucault and McDowell "seek to replace what they see as a misplaced stress on codes with an ethics centred around the self. Moreover, they find this ethics of the self in the same source: the ethical thought of the ancients."<sup>47</sup>

Although both Foucault and virtue ethicists affirm the importance of exercise as a way to cultivate one's virtuous life, however, it is still hard to argue that Foucault is a virtue ethicist. The main difference between Foucault and ancient Greek virtue ethicists, especially Aristotelian virtue ethics, is that Foucault does not believe that human beings have a pre-existing nature, but the Greek virtue ethicists believe that human beings have a

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through different techniques and practices to craft our life and internalize the habit in our life; otherwise a subject is hardly a truly ethical subject. This does not mean that one needs to deny or repress one's bodily feelings or emotions so as to become a virtuous subject; rather, for Aristotle, one needs to know how to handle or manage one's feeling of fear, so as to cultivate a courageous life.

<sup>46</sup> As Stan Van Hooft says, the basic motif of virtue ethics "will consider what sort of person the agent should be and what sort of life they should lead. . . . it will not answer this question primarily by consulting principles, norms or policies that apply to such situations in general. Rather it will seek to answer it by considering the agent's own character along with other morally salient features of the situation. Virtuous agents will seek to express who they are and to develop themselves as who they are in what they do." That is to say, it is not the rules that determine what we should do, but the kind of virtuous person we want to be determines what we should do. See Stan van Hooft, *Understanding Virtue Ethics*, p. 11.

<sup>47</sup> Neil Levy, "Foucault as Virtue Ethicist," in *Foucault Studies* 1 (December 2004): 23.

pre-existing moral nature that one needs to uncover through cultivation.<sup>48</sup> As was mentioned before, Foucault does not believe in the pre-given nature of one's interiority; rather one's interior self, one's psyche, moral nature or consciousness, is conditioned by one's bodily life. In other words, because Foucault denies any pre-given human virtuous natures that one ought to realize, his ethics cannot be regarded as a virtue ethics, even though his ethics takes seriously the cultivation of one's character.

In sum, for Foucault, the merit of Greek ethics is that it can allow one to actively cultivate a desirable character for oneself so as to become a free and stylish ethical subject. More important, stylization of self, for the Greeks, does not simply celebrate an aesthetic style of life; rather it cultivates a virtuous living style. In particular, stylization of self emphasizes a virtue of self-control. The Greeks believed that if one failed to control one's bodily life, one would easily impose one's power and desire towards the other. In other words, stylization of self, for the Greeks as for Foucault, is not an unconditional stylization, but an ethical stylization. The following sub-section will further discuss Foucault's understanding of the relation between ethics and the body, so that we may find a more comprehensive picture of the embodied ethics revealed in the later Foucault's thought.

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<sup>48</sup> I thank Dr. Wouter Goris for his comments regarding the difference between Foucault's ethics and Greek virtue ethics.

## 1. Ethics of Pleasure

For Greek ethics, virtue or moral excellence is concerned with pleasure. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle says “it is pleasure that makes us do base actions.... For that reason, as Plato says, men must be brought up from childhood to feel pleasure and pain at the proper things; for this is correct education.”<sup>49</sup> Aristotle believes that pleasure is related to the noble and the beneficial action. Moreover, pleasure is an index to our character. If one revels in every pleasure and fails to control one’s pleasure, then one becomes self-indulgent, and this is not an index of a virtuous person. For Aristotle, a virtuous act or the nature of moral qualities should not be destroyed by excess: “excess as well as deficiency of physical exercise destroys our strength, and similarly, too much and too little food and drink destroys our health; the proportionate amount, however, produces, increases, and preserves it. The same applies to self-control, courage, and the other virtues...a man who revels in every pleasure and abstains from none becomes self-indulgent, while he who avoids every pleasure like a boor becomes what might be called insensitive.”<sup>50</sup> Like Aristotle, ancient Greek ethics in general is concerned with the control of one’s pleasure or desire: a virtuous person has to learn how to deal with the excess and to control one’s pleasure or desire. For Foucault, the Greek way of managing one’s desire and pleasure

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<sup>49</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 37.

<sup>50</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 36.

has formulated an important ethical tradition. He regards different practices, concerns and teachings of controlling one's desire as an ethics of pleasure and desire. Since there is an intimate association between the use of sexual desire and pleasure and the formation of the ethical subject, the management or care of one's bodily desire and sexual life is an important condition for making up an ethical subject.

If Christianity is also about care of the body or management of one's desire, however, is there any difference between the Greek way of caring and the Christian way of caring? What is the aim of care of one's bodily/sexual life for Greeks? Foucault argues there is a huge difference between the Greek way of care of the bodily/sexual life and the Christian way. They have different notions of the body and sexuality, and that makes the Greek and Christian moral traditions generate different sexual subjects. In particular, the former has a more positive view of sexual desire and pleasure than the latter.

In *Use of Pleasure*, Foucault says the problem of the Christian treatment of the body and sexuality is that it always takes the body as the sinful flesh so that we need to develop various doctrines and techniques to control and examine our body. The problem of the sinful flesh is that it is always associated with an excessive force of pleasure that has its principle in the Fall and in a weakness that reveals the sinful nature of human being.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 50.

The Christian way of care for one's bodily/sexual life occurs through a practice of suspicion toward one's own bodily life. Foucault says, "... one of the characteristic traits of the Christian experience of the 'flesh', and later of 'sexuality', [is] that the subject is expected to exercise suspicion often, to be able to recognize from afar the manifestation of a stealthy, resourceful, and dreadful power."<sup>52</sup> In other words, because Christian culture identifies the body as a kind of mystical sinful power, Christians always treat the body as the object of control.

By contrast, the Greek way of care of one's bodily/sexual life does not rest on any negative notions of body. Greek ethicists do not perceive the body as the sinful body, so that the body is turned into the docile body. The Greeks wish to manage one's sexual life because of the natural force of the body, not the sinful force of the body. As Foucault says, the classical Greek treats the sexual force as a natural force that flourishes in the natural and human world. It is not sinful in nature: "[i]n general, sexual activity was perceived as natural (natural and indispensable) since it was through this activity that living creatures were able to reproduce, the species as a whole was able to escape extinction, and cities, families, names, and religions were able to endure far longer than individuals,

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<sup>52</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 41.

who were destined to pass away.”<sup>53</sup> Plato says sexual desire is the most natural and necessary desire; and Aristotle also says sexual desire is necessary for the body and life in general.<sup>54</sup> In brief, the Greeks perceive the body as a natural sexual body that does not have a sinful nature.

Yet Aristotle does regard bodily pleasure as an object of moral concern, since pleasure-control belongs to the cultivation of virtue. In *Use of Pleasure*, Foucault points out that the ethics of pleasure for Greeks aims at “a delimitation that would enable one to determine the proper degree and extent to which it [the sexual activity] could be practiced.”<sup>55</sup> But why do the Greeks have to treat the use of pleasure as a moral issue by delimiting the practice of sexual activity if sexual desire is natural, not sinful? Foucault argues that sexuality needs to be regulated because Greeks believe that the sexual desire is potentially excessive by nature. For ancient Greeks, “nature had invested human beings with this necessary and redoubtable force, which was always on the point of overshooting the objective that was set for it.... If it was necessary, as Plato said, to bridle it with the three strongest restraints: fear, law, and true reason; if it was necessary, as Aristotle thought, for desire to obey reason the way a child obeyed his tutor...--the reason was not

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<sup>53</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 48.

<sup>54</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 48.

<sup>55</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 48.

that sexual activity was a vice, nor that it might deviate from a canonical model; it was because sexual activity was associated with a force, an *energeia*, that was itself liable to be excessive.”<sup>56</sup> In brief, since the Greeks believed that sexual desire *per se* is always an excessive force or energy that requires the subject to handle it appropriately, the care of the sexual body serves as a main ethical concern for Greeks.

For Foucault, then, Greek sexual ethics differs from Christian sexual ethics because the former emphasizes how to confront the sexual force, and how to regulate its economy in a suitable way; but the latter emphasizes how to deny the excessive force of pleasure in order to discipline the sinful nature of the human beings.<sup>57</sup> More important, the Greek way of care of one’s desire incorporates “self-discipline” into one’s life through practice and habit, not by coercion. Thus, the Greeks treat the care of one’s desire not only as ethics, but also as art because management of one’s desire needs technique and skill. It demands one to have wisdom and skill to enjoy and use one’s desire, so one has to think of the conditions under which one may have sex or when one has to control one’s desire in order not to be dominated by the excess of desire.

Thus, Foucault argues, ethics of desire is an art of existence. For the Greeks, regulating or managing one’s own sexual force or bodily force is like playing music that

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<sup>56</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 50.

<sup>57</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 50.

demands the sense of harmony and different kinds of training. Greek ethicists do not set rules to control the sexual behavior of the subjects; rather they help the subjects skillfully handle a technique to organize their bodily/sexual life, so they can learn how to balance different bodily sensations and expressions, such as pleasure, desire and sexual acts in different periods of time. Foucault says, “ what seems in fact to have formed the object of moral reflection for the Greeks in matters of sexual conduct was not exactly the act itself (considered in different modalities), or desire (viewed from the standpoint of its origin or its aim), or even pleasure (evaluated according to the different objects or practices that can cause it); it is more the dynamic that joined all three in a circular fashion (the desire that leads to the act, the act that is linked to pleasure, and the pleasure that occasions desire). The ethical question that was raised was not: which desires? which acts? which pleasures? but rather: with what force is one transported ‘by the pleasures and desires’? ”<sup>58</sup> The dynamic of the bodily force could be regarded as the Greek ontology of body that links together acts, pleasures and desires. This dynamic relationship constitutes the texture of the ethical experience of bodily pleasure.<sup>59</sup>

If one’s desire needs to be controlled in order for one to become a virtuous subject, then what should the subjects learn when they practice the ethics of desire? First,

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<sup>58</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 43.

<sup>59</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 43.

Foucault points out that Greek ethics of desire aims at setting the condition of the use of pleasure, not the rule of pleasure: “the goal of moral reflection on the *aphrodisia* was much less to establish a systematic code that would determine the canonical form of sexual acts, trace out the boundary of the prohibitions, and assign practices to one side or the other of a dividing line, than to work out the conditions and modalities of a ‘use’; that is, to define a style for what the Greeks called *chrēsis aphrodisiōn*, the use of pleasures... It was not a question of what was permitted or forbidden among the desires that one felt or the acts that one committed, but of prudence, reflection, and calculation in the way one distributed and controlled his acts.”<sup>60</sup> In other words, Greek’s ethics of desire is about creating the conditions for an appropriate way of pleasure –seeking to set up some basis of considerations for one to enjoy sexual pleasure. These conditions include the want factor, the temporal and circumstantial factor and the status factor.<sup>61</sup>

For the Greeks, as for Foucault, the practice of the ethics of desire will finally flourish in a particular style for the subject. As was mentioned before, ethics for the Greeks is about the formation of ethical subjects, but not about the construction of universal rules. The former can respect the embodiment of one’s life, or cultivate the excellence of one’s life, whereas the latter only generates a lifeless and bloodless

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<sup>60</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, pp. 53-4.

<sup>61</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 53.

legalistic moral life. Although it is the ethical content, not the aesthetic content, that makes the ethical subject possible, such an ethical subject is also an aesthetic subject because the subject is free to create a specific virtuous style for himself or herself with the aid of a mentor, not by indoctrination in any universal moral principles. According to the Greek ethical tradition, the making of the ethical self is an artistic stylization of the self, like an artist using his or her creativity to craft his or her artwork.

According to Foucault, the Greeks highlight three factors in the use of pleasure or control of pleasure. The first is the want factor, which is related to the strategy of need. The Greeks believed that we could only enjoy the pleasure of eating or drinking when we really felt hungry or thirsty. If we eat or drink excessively, we cannot enjoy the real pleasure of eating and drinking; or if an unnatural factor stimulates our desire to eat, it is difficult for us to have the pleasure of eating. Xenophon said that Socrates “ate just sufficient food to make eating a pleasure, and he was so ready for his food that he found appetite the best sauce; and any kind of drink he found pleasant, because he drank only when he was thirsty.”<sup>62</sup> Foucault says this strategy ultimately could benefit the soul. He quotes Xenophon presenting the following Socratic lesson: “people should ‘limit themselves to such indulgence as the soul would reject unless the need of the body were

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<sup>62</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 57.

pressing, and such as would do no harm when the need was there.”<sup>63</sup>

For the Greeks, if one wants to enjoy sex, one’s use of sexual pleasure should follow the above teachings. That is to say, we should have sex only if we need it naturally or we should fulfill our sexual pleasure of a natural kind. Foucault says, “But if pleasure must be sustained through desire, this does not mean that, conversely, desires must be increased by recourse to pleasures that were not of a natural kind. It is fatigue, says Prodicus, and not continuous idleness, that ought to make one feel like sleeping; and if it was proper to satisfy sexual desires when they appeared, it was not good to create desires that went beyond needs.”<sup>64</sup> In brief, the first condition of the appropriate use of pleasure is to identify sexual desire as a natural kind of desire, not as excessive sexual force; otherwise one can never enjoy a real sexual life. For the Greeks, to fulfill excessive sexual desire can never let one enjoy the pleasure of sex, for excessive desire violates the natural circulation of desire.

A second factor is the strategy of timeliness. This, too, is an appropriate way to regulate sexual desire. According to Foucault, the *kairos* “was one of the most important objectives, and one of the most delicate, in the art of making use of the pleasures.”<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 55.

<sup>64</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 56.

<sup>65</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 57.

Plato's *Laws* taught that "fortunate was the one (whether an individual or a state) who knew what needed to be done in this sphere, 'at the right time and in the right moment'; whoever, on the contrary acted 'without knowledge' [*anepistēmonōs*] and 'at the wrong time' [*ektos tōn kairōn*] would 'live a life that is just the opposite.'"<sup>66</sup> For the Greeks, handling one's practical skills, such as navigation or governing, is not only a matter of knowledge but also a matter of the "right time." Time discernment is a virtue of prudence that makes one capable of practicing the 'politics of timeliness' in the different domains. Foucault says that "morality was also an art of the 'right time'"<sup>67</sup> in the use of pleasure.

But what is the "right time" for the sexual act? For the Greeks, the "right time" is decided according to several scales. For instance, they commonly believed that it is not good to begin the practice of pleasures too young; they also believed that it could be harmful if one extends it to an old age. That is to say, sexual intercourse has its season in life. Some even correlated sexual activity with climatic variation, between cold and hot, humidity and dryness.<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, the choice of moment also depended on other activities. As Xenophon says, Cyrus was an example of moderation, not because that he denied pleasures, but because he knew how to distribute them properly, in not allowing

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<sup>66</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 57.

<sup>67</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 58.

<sup>68</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 58.

them to divert him from his occupation.<sup>69</sup>

The final consideration is status. Foucault says that the Greeks always related the art of making use of pleasure to the user's personal status.<sup>70</sup> For instance, the *Symposium* suggests that "every sensible person knows very well that love relations with a boy are not 'absolutely either honorable or shameful but for the most part vary according to the persons concerned.'"<sup>71</sup> For the Greeks, the appropriateness of sexual relation, such as a same sex relationship with a boy, is determined not by any universal rules, but by the status of the sexual subject. According to Foucault, "...in the classical ethics, with the exception of a few percepts that applied to everyone, standards of sexual morality were always tailored to one's way of life, which was itself determined by the status one had inherited and the purposes one had chosen."<sup>72</sup> Thus, whether or not a sexual relation or activity is appropriate depends on what social status you hold in the society.<sup>73</sup> For instance, the Greeks would think that if you are a leader, then it is inappropriate to have so many sex partners, as this can suggest that you do not have a virtue of endurance. As Xenophon says, "a ruler's superiority over ordinary men should be shown not by

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<sup>69</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 59.

<sup>70</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 59.

<sup>71</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 59.

<sup>72</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 60.

<sup>73</sup> Of course, the Greeks' status factor is problematic because it presumes that not everybody can enjoy sex, and that one's social status determines one's right of having sex. While Greek sexual ethics privileges the individual style over the universal rule so as to safeguard the subject's aesthetic style, it generates a sexual injustice that denies the universal sexual right.

weakness but by endurance.”<sup>74</sup> For the Greeks, as for Foucault, the more authority one has, and the more one seeks to make one’s life successful, the more necessary it was to freely and deliberately adopt a rigorous standard of sexual life.<sup>75</sup>

Since regulating appropriately one’s sexual desire needs to consider three factors in ancient Greek ethics, *enkrateia* or moderation becomes an important practice. *Enkrateia* is about self-control and about rule over pleasures and desires, in which one has to struggle to maintain control.<sup>76</sup> If one wants to become a virtuous person, one has to become moderate, which is the character of a virtuous person. In other words, *enkrateia* is not only a practice but also a virtue. Foucault says, “Xenophon speaks of moderation--which, together with piety, wisdom, courage, and justice, was among the five virtues he usually recognized.”<sup>77</sup> Plato defines moderation as *enkrateia*: “moderation is a certain orderliness and mastery over certain pleasures and appetites.”<sup>78</sup> Foucault further clarifies that *enkrateia* is characterized by an active form of self-mastery that enables one to resist, struggle and achieve domination in the area of desire and pleasure. *Enkrateia* is a form of effort and control that makes one become an ethical person.

Being moderate is an important virtue for the Greeks because it can show that one

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<sup>74</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 61.

<sup>75</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 60.

<sup>76</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 65.

<sup>77</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 64.

<sup>78</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 64.

really wants to control one's life and be the master of one's life. But it is never an easy task. Foucault says that for the Greeks, "one could behave ethically only by adopting a combative attitude towards the pleasures."<sup>79</sup> The Athenian of the *Laws* states: "if it is true that the man who is blessed with courage will attain 'only half his potential' without 'experience and training' in actual combat, it stands to reason that he will not be able to become moderate (*sōphrōn*) 'if he has not fought triumphantly against the many pleasures and desires [*pollais hēdonais kai epithumiais diamemachēmenos*] using the help of speech, deed, and art [*logos, ergon, technē*] in games and in serious pursuits."<sup>80</sup>

In other words, being an ethical subject requires hardship and discipline because it is about a battle within one's embodied life. Thus, becoming ethical has to start from one's bodily practice, without which one cannot truly manage oneself. For the Greeks, although practicing the virtue of moderation is a harsh task, it is worth doing because it is the only way for one to become a truly active and free ethical subject.

Moreover, if one fails to become moderate, one finds it hard to build up one's own aesthetic life, because the making of one's aesthetic and ethical life is about how one "individualized his action, modulated it, and perhaps even gave him a special brilliance

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<sup>79</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 66.

<sup>80</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 65-6.

by virtue of the rational and deliberate structure his action manifested.”<sup>81</sup> All these practices need a virtue of moderation to make them possible.

As was mentioned before, the later Foucault’s ethics is an embodied ethics that links body, bodily practice and ethical cultivation in an intimate relation. Such an embodied ethics has at least two implications. First, unlike the legalistic Christian sexual ethics that Foucault critiques, an embodied ethics does not treat the body as a guilty or sinful body. For the Greeks, to manage one’s desire and pleasure is ultimately for the sake of the subject and the other, not for the benefit of any establishments or authorities, such as the church’s order. In the domain of pleasures, virtue is not a state of integrity but a relationship of self-mastery, in which the subject has to learn “to rule the desires and the pleasures,” “exercise power over them,” or “govern them.” Foucault says that “to form oneself as a virtuous and moderate subject in the use he makes of pleasures, the individual has to construct a relationship with the self that is of the ‘domination-submission,’ ‘command-obedience,’ ‘mastery-docility’ type (and not, as will be the case in Christian spirituality, a relationship of the ‘elucidation-renunciation,’ ‘decipherment-purification’ type). This is what could be called the ‘heautocratic’ structure

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<sup>81</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 62.

of the subject in the ethical practice of the pleasures.”<sup>82</sup> For Foucault, the embodied virtue ethics aims at cultivating different techniques of the self so that the subject is capable of handling and governing his or her desire, pleasure and force. Otherwise the subject would fail to live out an art of existence. Unlike Christian spirituality, Greek spirituality does not deny the value of pleasure and desire. Rather what the subject needs to learn is how to use his or her pleasure and desire in a proper way.

Second, embodied ethics takes self-transformation as an essential part of ethical formation. According to Foucault, the problem of Christian morality is that it does not foster any autonomous transformation of the subject’s body. Of course, this does not mean that Christian morality does not transform the body. In fact, Christian morality has turned the body into “the docile body” through various kinds of religious discourses. But it fails to leave room for one to digest the church’s teachings, such that one cannot transform one’s own ethical subjectivity through an autonomous bodily practice and exercise. More important, in Christian morality, it is the threat of the church’s punishment, not a free deliberation initiated by the subject, that generates the subject’s bodily transformation. In contrast, Foucault’s embodied ethics privileges an autonomous bodily practice that leaves room for an autonomous self-transformation through exercising one’s

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<sup>82</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 70.

own body. To exercise one's body is an important way for one to master one's soul. As Foucault says, for Xenophon and Socrates, "if one does not exercise one's body, one cannot sustain the functions of the body (*ta tou somatos erga*); similarly, if one does not exercise the soul, one cannot sustain the functions of the soul, so that one will not be able to 'do what one ought to do nor avoid what one ought not to do.'"<sup>83</sup>

For Foucault, a disembodied Christian ethics fails to form a truly stylish and virtuous subject because it only requires the subject to unreflectively conform to the universal norm, without requiring the subject to have any autonomous bodily training or self-conversion. In particular, disembodied Christian ethics always makes use of punishment and surveillance as a way to monitor the subject's behavior. This is not an authentic self-transformation, which must be the result of an autonomous bodily practice that is not motivated by any repressive mechanisms.

By contrast, an embodied ethics, which cultivates a stylish aesthetic identity, can respect the singularity of the subject. One can adjust the degree of transformation according to one's social and political status without being restricted by any universal moral rules or norms.<sup>84</sup> Foucault's ethics is an embodied ethics: it respects the subject's

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<sup>83</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 72.

<sup>84</sup> One could argue that Foucault's embodied ethics promotes a moral emotivism because of its emphasis on the subject's desire or emotion and the subject's personal preference in one's ethical decision. But I would argue that, while Foucault's ethics emphasizes the decision of the subject, his ethics is hardly to be viewed as moral emotivism. First, although both moral emotivism and Foucault's ethics are concerned

embodied life and affirms the value of the body and pleasure. More important, this embodied ethics suggests that one's ethical character is formed by one's autonomous bodily exercise, which transmits ethical value through a voluntary self-transformation, not by an involuntary indoctrination.

Of course, for the Greeks, cultivation of the virtuous subject not only relates to practicing the ethics of desire, but also pertains to searching for truth. To a certain extent, the making of an ethical subject is not possible without knowledge. For Foucault, as for the Greeks, searching for truth cannot be separate from self-transformation. This emphasis can replace the limitation of a Cartesian notion of truth that separates truth-searching from bodily transformation. The next sub-section will discuss Foucault's notion of truth as an embodied truth.

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with the subject's own preference, the latter still requires the subject to take account of the teachings from some moral traditions and norms, while the former denies the necessity of such moral references and takes one's emotion as the only reference. Macintyre defines moral emotivism as "the doctrine that all evaluative judgments and more specifically all moral judgments are *nothing but* expressions of preference, expressions of attitude or feeling, insofar as they are moral or evaluative in character." See Alasdair Macintyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (London: Duckworth, 1992), pp. 11-12. Foucault's embodied ethics does not deny the importance of the wisdom of the ethical teachings embedded in one's own tradition. Although such moral teachings are not viewed as universal principles, and although one has to choose the desirable ethical role that one wants to stylize according to one's particular situation and the teaching of the mentor, Foucault does not say that the subject itself is the only criterion for a moral judgment. In particular, for ancient Greek ethics, the opinion of the ethical subject's mentor is also significant in terms of making an ethical subject.

Moreover, Foucault's ethics is not simply a personal ethics, as I have mentioned before; rather it is also a civic ethics. He says that moderation, "understood as an aspect of dominion over the self, was on an equal footing with justice, courage, or prudence; that is, it was a virtue that qualified a man to exercise his mastery over others. The most kingly man was king of himself." See Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 81. Thus, Foucault's embodied ethics has a sense of public responsibility. It can hardly be identified as moral emotivism.

## 2. Ethics of Truth

Some contemporary scholars of ancient Greek thought, such as Pierre Hadot, charge that Foucault's interpretation of Greek ethics reduces Greek ethics into a dandy ethics that negates the importance of discovering the logos or wisdom of the world. Hadot says:

“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. This, however, deserves a more attentive study than I am able to devote to it here. Personally, I believe firmly--albeit perhaps naively--that it is possible for modern man to live, not as a sage (*sophos*)--most of the ancients did not hold this to be possible--but as a practitioner of the ever-fragile *exercise* of wisdom. This can be attempted, starting out from the lived experience of the concrete, living, and perceiving subject, under the triple form defined, as we saw above, by Marcus Aurelius: 1. as an effort to practice objectivity of judgment; 2. as an effort to live according to justice, in the service of the human community; and 3. as an effort to become aware of our situation as a part of the universe. Such an exercise of wisdom will thus be an attempt to render oneself open to the universal.”<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, ed. Arnold I. Davidson (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1995), pp. 211-12.

According to Hadot's criticism, Foucault's interpretation of Greek thought fails to appreciate the rational tradition of Greek thought that includes learning to make right judgment, practicing justice and viewing ourselves as part of the universe. In other words, the later Foucault's ethics does not have a truth dimension or epistemological dimension. But Hadot's critique of Foucault does not do justice to the later Foucault's research on Greek virtue ethics. In fact, Hadot shares the mistake of so many of Foucault's critics such as O'Leary or McNay by reading his ethics as merely an aesthetics (O'Leary) or a "pan-aesthetic dandyism"(McNay).<sup>86</sup> He fails to take into account Foucault's lectures at Collège de France, such as *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, where Foucault affirms the Greek way of nurturing a virtuous truth-speaking subject through self-transformation, not through rational deliberation or speculation, so as to make possible an embodied truth.

In *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, Foucault argues that Greek ethics concerns not only how we can manage our desire in the making of an ethical subject but also how we think and speak as an ethical subject. For Foucault, Descartes' rational approach to truth destroys the truth because of its split understanding of self and truth. He argues that the rational approach to truth is problematic because it views truth as a static propositional knowledge, and simply reduces the subject to an epistemological subject. In particular,

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<sup>86</sup> Lois McNay, *Foucault & Feminism* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1992), p. 157.

the Cartesian way of truth-searching privileges logical calculation over self-transformation. Whereas the disembodiment of the Cartesian approach to truth does not require one to transform one's body while searching for truth, the Greek way of truth-searching involves self-transformation that requires the subject to gain access to the truth with his or her bodily life.

Different notions of philosophy make the Greeks and Descartes have different approaches to truth. In *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, Foucault regards the Cartesian approach to truth as philosophy and the Greeks' approach to truth as spirituality. For Foucault, philosophy "asks, not of course what is true and what is false, but what determines that there is and can be truth and falsehood and whether or not we can separate the true and false. We will call 'philosophy' the form of thought that asks what it is that enables the subject to have access to the truth and which attempts to determine the conditions and limits of the subject's access to the truth."<sup>87</sup> Philosophy is about a methodology that enables the subject to figure out the condition of attaining truth. In contrast, the Greeks' spirituality is "the search, practice, and experience through which the subject carries out the necessary transformation on himself in order to have access to

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<sup>87</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 15.

the truth.”<sup>88</sup> In other words, spirituality is about the set of researches, practices, and experiences that include purifications, ascetic exercises, renunciation, conversing or looking, and modification of existence. These practices are not mainly designed to acquire knowledge, but for the subject’s very being, the price to be paid for access to the truth.

Foucault privileges spirituality over philosophy: the former can generate an embodied truth that can deeply get in touch with life, whereas the latter simply generates a disembodied truth and life. This does not mean that Foucault is against philosophy. He simply believes that the Greeks’ spirituality is a more comprehensive philosophy that can affirm the value of praxis and speculation in philosophizing. What he regrets is that philosophy, after ancient Greek philosophy, fails to see the connection between self-transformation and truth-seeking. In particular, for Foucault, the Cartesian approach to truth cannot benefit the subject. In fact, it even forgets the subject because it takes the subject as only an instrument or means of finding truth: “the modern age of the history of truth begins when knowledge itself and knowledge alone gives access to the truth. That is to say, it is when the philosopher (or scientist, or simply someone who seeks the truth) can recognize the truth and have access to it in himself and solely through his activity of

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<sup>88</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 15.

knowing, without anything else being demanded of him and without him having to change or alter his being as subject.”<sup>89</sup>

Spirituality, for ancient Greeks, has three characteristics.<sup>90</sup> First, it postulates that the approach to truth cannot simply rest on the static logical structure of the subject. Spirituality postulates that the subject as such does not have right of access to the truth. That is to say, truth is not given to the subject by a simple act of knowledge that could be simply found and justified by the fact that he or she is the subject and because he or she possesses this or that structure of subjectivity. Rather, the approach to truth demands that the one must be changed, transformed, shifted, and become, to some extent and up to a certain point, other than oneself. Foucault says this is the simplest but most fundamental formula by which spirituality can be defined.

Second, for Foucault, as for the Greeks, approaches to truth need a conversion or a transformation of the subject that is related to a movement of eros (love) or a kind of work (askesis/ascesis).<sup>91</sup> Foucault says eros and askesis are two major forms in Western spirituality for conceptualizing the modalities by which the subject must be transformed in order finally to become capable of truth.<sup>92</sup> Foucault also shows that truth-searching

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<sup>89</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 17.

<sup>90</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 15.

<sup>91</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 16.

<sup>92</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 16.

involves a correlation between ethics and practice. Since truth is generated from a practice of the ethics of love, i.e., loving our neighbors, the truth privileged by the later Foucault is no longer a theoretical truth, but an embodied truth, a truth of life. In fact, such an embodied truth is a popular concept in ancient Greek philosophy, which views philosophical thinking as an art of living, not an abstract speculation about life. As Hadot says, for ancient Greek ethicists, such as the Stoics, “philosophy did not consist in teaching an abstract theory--much less in the exegesis of texts--but rather in the art of living. It is a concrete attitude and determinate life-style, which engages the whole of existence. The philosophical act is not situated merely on the cognitive level, but on that of the self and of being. It is a progress that causes us to *be* more fully, and makes us better. It is a conversion which turns our entire life upside down, changing the life of the person who goes through it.”<sup>93</sup>

Finally, for spirituality, the truth is not just what is given to the subject, as reward for the act of knowledge; rather, as Foucault says, “the truth enlightens the subject; the truth gives beatitude to the subject, the truth gives the subject tranquility of the soul. In short, in the truth and in access to the truth, there is something that fulfills the subject himself, which fulfills or transfigures his very being... An act of knowledge could never give

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<sup>93</sup> Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, p. 83.

access to the truth unless it was prepared, accomplished, doubled, and completed by a certain transformation of the subject; not of the individual, but of the subject himself in his being as subject.”<sup>94</sup> Here, truth is an ethical knowledge that can serve as beatitude to the subject to the extent that its ethical content can form a specific style for the subject through transfiguring the being of the subject.

Thus, the distinction between spirituality and philosophy is that the former can help one search for an embodied knowledge, so that it can ultimately transform the being of the subject, whereas the latter is only a disembodied knowledge that cannot transform the life of the subject, due to its rejection of the body in any truth-searching activities.

Interestingly, for Foucault, truth cannot simply be identified as knowledge. Truth is more or less about the wisdom and virtue of life, which is prepared, accomplished, doubled, and completed by a certain transformation of the subject. As Pierre Hadot says, “...above all every school practices exercises designed to ensure spiritual progress toward the ideal state of wisdom, exercises of reason that will be, for the soul, analogous to the athlete’s training or to the application of a medical cure.”<sup>95</sup> Truth-searching is identified as a “progress toward the ideal state of wisdom” that has to be achieved through bodily

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<sup>94</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 16.

<sup>95</sup> Pierre Hadot, “Forms of Life and Forms of Discourse in Ancient Philosophy,” in Arnold I. Davidson (ed.), *Foucault and His Interlocutors* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 213.

exercise in which one can internalize a wisdom of truth or a virtuous life. Thus, practicing, not speculating on, the teaching about life is important because the former can help one transform a disembodied knowledge into an embodied truth. Moreover, what one acquires in the transformation is no longer a theoretical knowledge, but an ethical knowledge of life.

If truth, for the later Foucault, can cultivate virtue for the subject or give beatitude to the subject through bodily transformation, then we may further ask what kind of virtue or beatitude is given to the subject through the transformation? In fact, Greek ethical practices do not bring a self-renunciation at the end of *askēsis*. Rather they involve arriving at the formation of a full, perfect, complete, and self-sufficient relationship with oneself, namely, the happiness one takes in oneself.<sup>96</sup> Such was the objective of *askēsis*. In other words, the objective of the practice of the self is not the individual's submission to the law; rather its principle is to bind the individual to the truth.<sup>97</sup> More important, as Foucault says, Greek practices not only bind the subject to the truth but also allow the subject to become the subject of enunciation of true discourse: becoming an ethical subject who can speak truthfully.

Yet not all practices can make a person become an ethical subject who dares to

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<sup>96</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 320.

<sup>97</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 332.

speaking truth. Foucault says that Christian practices such as confession, which serve the function of self-renunciation, only make the subject the objectification of the self. In contrast, Greek practices can rejoin oneself as the end and object in the art of living, which “is not the objectification of the self in a true discourse, but the subjectivation of a true discourse in a practice and exercise of oneself on oneself.”<sup>98</sup> For instance, the practices suggested by Seneca are a method of the subjectivation of true discourse with regard to “learning, the language of philosophers, reading, writing, and the notes you make, etcetera, that what is involved is making the things you know your own (*facere suum*’), making the discourse you hear, the discourse you recognize as being true or which the philosophical tradition has passed on to you as true, your own.”<sup>99</sup> That is to say, the subject has to practice what I coin “the ethics of truth” through which the subject has to learn to judge and speak truly. Foucault says, “making the truth your own, becoming the subject of enunciation of true discourse: this I think, is the very core of this philosophical ascesis.”<sup>100</sup>

Foucault calls the ethics of speaking truth *parrhēsia*. *Parrhēsia* is a moral quality or a virtue that is about the act of telling all (frankness, open-heartedness, plain speaking,

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<sup>98</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 333.

<sup>99</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 333.

<sup>100</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 333.

speaking openly, speaking freely).<sup>101</sup> It is related to the honesty of the speaking subject.

It is about what makes us speak, what makes us say what has to be said, what we want to say, what we think ought to be said because it is necessary, useful and true: “What is basically at stake in *parrhēsia* is what could be called, somewhat impressionistically, the frankness, freedom, and openness that leads one to say what one has to say, as one wishes to say it, when one wishes to say it, and in the form one thinks is necessary for saying it.... The telling all of *parrhēsia* was rendered by *libertas*: the freedom of the person speaking.”<sup>102</sup> In other words, it is not about what one thinks is true, but what one knows is true.<sup>103</sup>

*Parrhēsia* is a kind of truth that stems from a bodily knowledge, not from a theoretical knowledge, and through which one speaks what one feels and experiences in one’s life. Murray says that *parrhēsia* “is an immediacy to the truth that is expressed and felt through a bodily knowledge, by putting her body on the line, risking life and limb, risking her reputation.... Hence there can be said to be a ‘proof’ for the authenticity of the *parrhesiastes*. Foucault tells us it was his courage --not just a matter of the heart—*le coeur*--but the heart as a metonym for the life-force of the whole body.”<sup>104</sup> *Parrhēsia* is

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<sup>101</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 336.

<sup>102</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 372.

<sup>103</sup> Michel Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, Joseph Pearson (ed.) (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2001), p. 14.

<sup>104</sup> Stuart J. Murray, “Post-Textual Ethics: Foucault’s Rhetorical Will,” in Anna Fähræus and AnnKatrin Jonsson (ed.) *Textual Ethos Studies: Or, Locating Ethics*, Vol. 26, *Critical Studies: Critical Theory*,

about an ethics of discourse that requires one's integrity and commitment to one's life-experience, because one cannot speak truly without honestly reflecting on one's life.

If *parrhēsia* is an ethics of speaking truth or an ethics of discourse, then it must be related to the use of language. Foucault says that for ancient Greek ethics, true discourse is essential in a dialogue between master and disciple, especially to the master. The master is the one who teaches the disciple to become a virtuous subject and to practice a virtue of speaking. In contrast, the disciple normally has a listener's role so as to practice an ethics of listening. Foucault says, "The question of what the disciple has to say, of what he must and can say, basically did not arise, at any rate not as a primordial, essential, and fundamental question. What was imposed on the disciple as duty and conduct--as moral duty and as technical conduct--was silence, a particular organized silence obeying a number of rules of posture, and the requirement of giving a number of signs of attention."<sup>105</sup> In other words, the virtue of *parrhēsia* is the speaker's virtue that guides the speaker what to say and how to say it, according to some specific rules, technical procedures and ethical principles.<sup>106</sup> It is a discourse for the sake of the other (the listening subject), not for the speaker (the speaking subject). Harrer rightly says, "The

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*Literature & Culture* (Rodopi Press, 2005), pp. 111-2.

<sup>105</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 372.

<sup>106</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 372.

exercise of *parrhēsia* involves practicing to give well-formed and comprehensive lectures that focus on the subject matter and not on rhetorical adornment. Also, the lecturer is to set aside any personal intention of gaining advantage through what he might say, but to focus on the needs of his students and to instruct them to their advantage.”<sup>107</sup>

The master’s *parrhēsia* has two moral adversaries, which are flattery and rhetoric.<sup>108</sup>

Foucault says that for the Greeks, if we want to speak freely, we have to be aware of the immoral nature of flattery and rhetoric. Flattery and rhetoric are profoundly connected to each other: the moral basis of rhetoric is always flattery, and the instrument of flattery is the technique of rhetoric. Thus the one who practices the ethics of *parrhēsia* ought to be aware of the moral problems brought by these techniques of rhetoric.

Furthermore, the problem of flattery is related to the problem of anger. For the Greeks, anger is the uncontrolled and violent rage of the superior, such as the king or the father, towards the inferior other: “[a]nger is, of course, the uncontrolled, violent rage of someone towards someone else over whom the former, the angry person, is entitled to exercise his power, is in a position to do so, and who is therefore in a position to abuse his power.”<sup>109</sup> Anger is unethical to the Greeks because it more or less shows that the one

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<sup>107</sup> Sebastian Harrer, “The Theme of Subjectivity in Foucault’s Lecture Series *L’Hermeneutique du Sujet*,” p. 94.

<sup>108</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 373.

<sup>109</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 374.

who governs is incapable of governing others; anger is the sign of losing control towards oneself or the inferior other. Foucault says, "... the question of anger, of being carried away by anger or of the impossibility of controlling oneself--let's say more precisely: the impossibility of exercising one's power and sovereignty over oneself insofar as and when one exercises one's sovereignty or power over others--is situated precisely at the point of connection of self-control and command over others, of government of oneself and government of others."<sup>110</sup> In other words, anger makes the ruler abuse one's power and fail to govern the others righteously. Anger is considered an illegitimate power of rule through which the ruler can temporarily handle the uncontrollable situation.

Flattery in turn is a technique for the inferior other to deal with the superior's anger. It is a way for the inferior to win over the greater power he or she comes up against in the superior, a way for him or her to gain the superior's favor and benevolence.<sup>111</sup> And the only appropriate technique for the inferior is *logos*.<sup>112</sup> Foucault says, "He speaks, and it is by speaking that the inferior, boosting the superior's extra power as it were, can get what he wants from him. But in making use of the superior's superiority in this way, he reinforces it. He reinforces it since the flatterer is the person who gets what he wants

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<sup>110</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 374.

<sup>111</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 375.

<sup>112</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 375.

from the superior by making him think that he is the most handsome, the wealthiest, the most powerful, etcetera, or at any rate, wealthier, more handsome, and more powerful than he is.”<sup>113</sup> In brief, the flatterer is a liar who does not let the superior know his or her true self and “prevents the superior from taking care of himself properly.”<sup>114</sup> Finally, the flatterer can control the ruler or superior through projecting an unrealistic picture of him or her or a distorted picture of reality.

For the Greeks, it is easier for the ruler to be deceived by the flatterer if he or she does not practice the care of self regularly and properly. Foucault uses Seneca’s teaching to illustrate the relation between failure of care of self and flattery. Seneca in the preface of his fourth book, *Natural Questions*, told Lucilius, a procurator in Sicily, that he conducted himself well as a procurator, because on the one hand he exercised his functions properly, and on the other hand he cared for himself through giving himself a free time to study. For Seneca, a studious free time is a “complement, accompaniment, and regulative principle”<sup>115</sup> that serves an art of the self, allowing the ruler to establish an appropriate and sufficient relationship to himself or herself.

More important, Foucault says, care of the self ensures that “the individual does not

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<sup>113</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, pp. 375-6.

<sup>114</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 376.

<sup>115</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 377.

invest his own self, his own subjectivity, in the presumptuous delirium of a power that exceeds its real functions.”<sup>116</sup> If the ruler can regularly practice the care of self, then he or she can have a true self-understanding, including an appropriate understanding between the superior and the inferior. This means the ruler no longer needs the flatterer to tell him or her who he or she is. It leaves no room for the flatterer to manipulate the ruler through an inauthentic discourse: “...through the insufficiency of his relationship to himself, the flattered person finds himself dependent on the flatterer, on someone who is an other and who may therefore disappear or transform his flattery into wickedness, into a trap, etcetera. He is therefore dependent on this other, and what’s more he is dependent on the duplicity of the flatterer’s discourse.”<sup>117</sup> A flattered person is always the one who lacks proper self-understanding and care of the self.

The virtue of *parrhēsia*, for Foucault, is precisely anti-flattery, because discourse guided by the virtue of *parrhēsia* can help one establish a true and autonomous relationship to oneself: “in *parrhēsia*, there is indeed someone who speaks and speaks to the other but, unlike what happens in flattery, he speaks to the other in such a way that this other will be able to form an autonomous, independent, full and satisfying relationship to himself. The objective of *parrhēsia* is to act so that at a given moment the

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<sup>116</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 377.

<sup>117</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 378.

person to whom one is speaking finds himself in a situation in which he no longer needs the other's discourse."<sup>118</sup> Both flattery and *parrhēsia* are related to discursive formation.

Whereas the former can destroy the autonomy of the subject through masking the truth, the latter can empower the subject through telling the truth: "The truth, passing from one to the other in *parrhēsia*, seals, ensures, and guarantees the other's autonomy, the autonomy of the person who received the speech from the person who uttered it. This is what I think can be said about the flattery/*parrhēsia* (speaking freely) opposition."<sup>119</sup>

Although Foucault criticizes the manipulative and deceptive nature of flatterer's discourse, he does not give up the "redemptive function" of social discourse. Instead, he discovers an ethics of discourse: the virtue of *parrhēsia* can make possible an ethics of speaking truthfully.

Rhetoric is another problematic technique of discourse that fails to help an ethical subject speak and search for truth. According to Foucault, the ancient Greeks believed that rhetoric cannot establish truth. It is only "an art of persuading those to whom one is speaking whether one wishes to convince them of a truth or a lie, a nontruth."<sup>120</sup> For Aristotle, rhetoric is a technique of persuading that ignores the question of content and

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<sup>118</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 379.

<sup>119</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 379.

<sup>120</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 381.

the truth of discourse. Foucault summarizes the teaching of Quintillian: “a good general must be able to persuade his troops that the enemy they are about to confront is neither serious nor formidable when in actual fact he is. The good general must therefore persuade them with a lie. How will he do this? He will do this if, on the one hand, he knows the truth of the situation and if, on the other hand, he truly knows the means by which one can persuade someone by a lie as well as by a truth. Consequently, Quintillian knows how rhetoric as *tekhnē* is directly linked to a truth--the truth known, possessed, and controlled by the person speaking--but not to the truth of what is said and so not from the point of view of the person being spoken to.”<sup>121</sup> In other words, the superior uses rhetoric to manipulate the inferior through persuading the inferior with lies or distorted facts. Such power functions through masking the truth. Thus, Foucault says, rhetoric is the art of lying because it denies truth.

Therefore, rhetoric is against the virtue of *parrhēsia*, which privileges a discourse of speaking free, containing no rhetorical adornment. Foucault says, “[t]here can only be truth in *parrhēsia*. Where there is no truth, there can be no speaking freely... *Parrhēsia* ensures in the most direct way this *paradosis*, this transfer of true discourse from the person who already possesses it to the person who must receive it, must be impregnated

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<sup>121</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 382.

by it, and who must be able to use it and subjectivize it. It is the instrument of this transfer that does nothing other than put to work the truth of true discourse in all its naked force, without adornment.”<sup>122</sup> *Parrhēsia* is truth because the speaking subject does care whether or not the other can understand the original message of the discourse, so that the speaking subject can get rid of any rhetorical techniques in order to transmit the message with its naked force.

Another problem of rhetoric emerges when it is not governed by individual relationships, by a face-to-face relationship, but by the subject matter. Cicero and Quintillian say that rhetoric is defined by the subject matter one is dealing with.<sup>123</sup> Rhetoric is a game of the subject matter that privileges “how the discourse must be organized, how the preamble must be constructed, how the *narratio* (the account of events) must be presented, and how arguments for and against must be discussed.”<sup>124</sup> In other words, rhetoric is a disembodied way of speaking, because it only cares how the subject matter can fit the rhetorical rules of discourses, but ignores the embodied life of the communicative subject. It views communication as an instrumental communication that denies the life of the communicative subject.

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<sup>122</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 382.

<sup>123</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 383.

<sup>124</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 385.

Perhaps one could argue that it is not fair to say rhetoric ignores the interest of the communicative subject, since it still concerns the interest of the speaking subject. Yet, as was mentioned before, rhetoric uses lies to protect the interest of the speaker, not the interest of the listener. Thus it is a self-centered egoist discourse that fails to cultivate a life-enriching and authentic intersubjective communication. Since rhetoric enables one to influence deliberation in assembly, lead people and direct an army, it always makes one believe that it acts on behalf of others. But this neglects the fact that rhetoric is always to the greater advantage of the person speaking.<sup>125</sup> In contrast, Foucault says, *parrhēsia* has a different purpose, where “the speaker attempts not to direct the other, but it involves acting on them so that they come to build up a relationship of sovereignty to themselves, with regards to themselves, typical of the wise and virtuous subject, of the subject who has attained all the happiness it is possible to attain in this world.”<sup>126</sup> That is to say, the virtue of *parrhēsia* is a virtue that benefits both the other’s and the subject’s life. In particular, the subject who practices the ethics of *parrhēsia* has no personal interest in its exercise; rather he or she is driven by a virtue of generosity: “Generosity towards the other is at the very heart of the moral obligation of *parrhēsia*.”<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 385.

<sup>126</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 385.

<sup>127</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 385.

Furthermore, *parrhēsia* is also an ethics of mentorship, in which the mentors have to practice how to encourage, intensify, and enliven their students' benevolence towards each other.<sup>128</sup> Foucault says "the practice of free speech on the part of master must be such that it serves as encouragement, support, and opportunity for the students who will themselves also have the possibility, right, and obligation to speak freely."<sup>129</sup> In other words, *parrhēsia* does not cultivate the skill of speaking, but the ethics of speaking. It concerns how we can speak responsibly to the other so as to cultivate a culture of honesty and authenticity. In sum, *parrhēsia* makes possible an ideal communicative act between master and student in which truth-searching and virtue-cultivation can form a harmonic whole.

Simply put, *parrhēsia* is free speech, released from the manipulation of rhetorical rules and procedures. It takes into account the situation, the occasion, and the particularities of the other/listener over the speaking subject. Thus, it is speech that "is equivalent to commitment, to a bond, and which establishes a certain pact between the subject of enunciation and the subject of conduct. The subject who speaks commits himself ... to do what he says and to be the subject of conduct who conforms in every

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<sup>128</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 389.

<sup>129</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 389.

respect to the truth he expresses.”<sup>130</sup> So an authentic human relationship is necessary for the cultivation of the virtue of *parrhēsia*. Foucault says it is a “relationships of shared lives, a long chain of living examples, as if passed on from hand to hand... I tell the truth, I tell you the truth. What authenticates the fact that I tell you the truth is that as subject of my conduct I really am, absolutely, integrally, and totally identical to the subject of enunciation I am when I tell you what I tell you.”<sup>131</sup> In *parrhēsia*, what the subject speaks does not separate from how the subject acts. We can judge what the subject says from how the subject acts. Speech and act are united in the subject of enunciation. Since the virtuous life of the speaking subject is a testimony of the subject’s discourse, an authentic discourse can only be justified by a virtuous life of the speaking subject.

The late Foucault’s search for an ethics of truth from *parrhēsia* is compatible with his genealogical critique of truth, because both look for an ethical way of speaking and constructing truth. Thus, there is no split between the earlier and later stage of Foucault’s works. Although Foucault’s genealogical critique is a skeptical critique of different discourses of the scientific truth, his assertion of *parrhēsia* shows that he is not against truth; rather he looks for an ethics of truth that can help us speak truthfully. Bernauer says that what concerns the later Foucault are: “(1) What was it necessary to think today in

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<sup>130</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 406.

<sup>131</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 407.

contrast to the traditional domain of the thought-worthy? What should the substance for thought be? (2) In examining this domain, what sort of understanding should be sought? What mode of subjection should the thinker take up? (3) How should the search for such understanding find its methodological way? What ascetical practices must it perform on itself in order to be enabled to think differently? (4) What goal is pursued through the definition of substance, mode of subjection, and practice of asceticism? Foucault's exploration of these questions throughout his works succeeded in creating a broad ethical inquiry on the activity of thought itself... [I]t provides not an obligatory conduct but a possible escape from an intellectual milieu unnourished by ethical interrogation."<sup>132</sup>

### **3. Ethics of the Other**

Some critics charge that Foucault's assertion of the stylization of the self and care of the self is a celebration of individualism, love of self or dandyism. In particular, they claim that he totally ignores or rejects any ethics of the other promoted by contemporary postmodern ethics. After comparing Foucault and Levinas, Smart worries that Foucault's care of self might diminish and undermine a responsibility for others, which Levinas tries to assert in his ethics of the other: "[t]he impression which emerges from Foucault's work is of self-constitution or self-stylization as a relatively solitary or isolated process.

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<sup>132</sup> James Bernauer and David Rasmussen (ed.), *The Final Foucault*, p. 73.

Where, we might ask, is the interactional context? Where is the interest in social interaction between oneself and others made manifest? And does an approach to the question of self-formation or self-stylization, which appears to neglect social interaction, provide a sound basis for the cultivation of a modern ethics of existence?”<sup>133</sup>

McNay even charges that Foucault filters out a more communal and interactional notion of the self held by Greeks.<sup>134</sup> That is to say, Foucault’s self is simply a disengaged self, without an inter-subjective dimension that contemporary feminists try to assert: “a more central problem with Foucault’s notion of an aesthetics of existence is that it privileges an undialectical and disengaged theory of self.... [T]his privileging of the isolated self in the idea of aesthetics of existence conflicts with recent feminist attempts to understand more fully the intersubjective dimension of social relations.”<sup>135</sup> In other words, Foucault’s care of the self is simply an actualization of individualism or narcissism that eliminates an ethics of the other. To put it bluntly, Foucault’s ethics is a philosophy of narcissism.

In fact, Foucault is fully aware of this misinterpretation, which simply identifies the Greeks’ care of self as individualism or dandyism. He says that today the care of self

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<sup>133</sup> Barry Smart, “Foucault, Levinas and the Subject of Responsibility,” in Moss Jeremy (ed.), *The Later Foucault* (London: Sage, 1998), p. 80.

<sup>134</sup> Lois McNay, *Foucault & Feminism*, p. 165

<sup>135</sup> Lois McNay, *Foucault & Feminism*, p. 157

seems like “a sort of challenge and defiance, a desire for radical ethical change, a sort of moral dandyism, the assertion-challenge of a fixed aesthetic and individual stage. Or else they sound to us like a somewhat melancholy and sad expression of the withdrawal of the individual who is unable to hold on to and keep firmly before his eyes, in his grasp and for himself, a collective morality (that of the city-state, for example), and who, faced with the disintegration of this collective morality, has naught else to do but attend to himself.”<sup>136</sup> For Foucault, however, the original meaning of care of self is not a conservative apolitical ethics that discourages the subject from getting involved in any public affairs. In contrast, the Greek notion of care of self is about governing the other through different embodied virtuous practices: “[t]he care of the self is ethical in itself; but it implies complex relationships with others insofar as this *ēthos* of freedom is also a way of caring for others. This is why it is important for a free man who conducts himself as he should to be able to govern his wife, his children, his household; it is also the art of governing.”<sup>137</sup> In other words, care of the self is finally about the governing of the other. It is basically about the making of civil ethics. Pinto rightly claims that for Foucault the mastery of the self as a technique of care of self “though embedded in the cult of a deeply

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<sup>136</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>137</sup> Michel Foucault, “The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom,” in Paul Rabinow (ed.), *Michel Foucault: Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984 Volume 1* (New York: The New Press, 1997), p. 287.

asymmetrical aristocratic virility, had no other scope than the right government of others.”<sup>138</sup> This includes letting one have one’s rightful position in the city, the community or interpersonal relationships, whether as a magistrate or a friend.

Thus, it is not fair to identify Foucault’s care of the self as an individualism or narcissism that allegedly fails to see how care of the self can prepare one to serve or love the other. Although the Greeks emphasize care of the self, they do not negate the other, and neither does Foucault. Like the Greeks, Foucault never separates care of the self from care of the other. Accordingly, if one cannot take care of oneself properly and kindly, one never treats the others in the same manner. Thus, care of the self is a necessary condition of care of the other. As Foucault says, Greek ethics does not put care of the other before the care of the self in the sense that the care of the self is ontologically prior.<sup>139</sup>

### **3.1 Ethics of the Other in Governing**

Some critics also charge that the later Foucault’s aesthetic and ethical turn to care of self is an apolitical turn that fails to take account the power relation between self and other.

Martha Nussbaum charges that Foucault has retreated from his earlier views about “the inseparability of ideas and institutions.”<sup>140</sup> Jon Simons claims that Foucault has

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<sup>138</sup> Henrique Pinto, *Foucault, Christianity and Interfaith Dialogue*, (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 86.

<sup>139</sup> Michel Foucault, “The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom,” p. 287.

<sup>140</sup> Martha Nussbaum’s review of *The Use of Pleasure*, “Affections of the Greeks,” *New York Times Review*, 10 November 1985, pp. 13-14.

separated “ethics as much as possible from the axis of political power in his analysis of Greek and Hellenist [sic] arts of the self.”<sup>141</sup> Again, their interpretations of the later Foucault as an “apolitical Foucault” are not fair since they do not take into account Foucault’s *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, where he discusses the ethics of the other in governing.

In *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, Foucault attempts to show how Greek ethics emphasizes care of the self, without ignoring the importance of the ethics of the other in a political context. Foucault argues that care of the self, for Plato, occurs as an ethical practice of care of the other, which was commonly regarded as a virtue of governing. For Plato, care of the self clearly opens out onto the question of the city-state, of others, of the political. In *Alcibiades*, after Socrates’ lesson, Alcibiades learns that his concern for the soul and care of the soul are about a governing of the soul; and if he can govern his soul properly and regularly, he will be capable of watching over the city, safeguarding its laws and constitution, and maintaining the right balance between citizens. In other words, care of the self is related to governing others righteously.<sup>142</sup>

According to Foucault, Plato has established the link between care of self and care

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<sup>141</sup> Jon Simons, *Foucault and the Political* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 104.

<sup>142</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 175.

of others in three ways.<sup>143</sup> First, there is a functional relation between care of the self and care of the others because one makes oneself capable of taking care of the others by taking care of oneself. Foucault says, “I practice on myself what the Neo-Platonists call *katharsis*, and I practice this art of cathartic precisely so that I can become a political subject in the sense of someone who knows what politics is and as a result can govern.”<sup>144</sup> In other words, the ethical identity of the political subject is determined by whether he or she can regularly practice catharsis. That is to say, if one can take care of oneself, one can have a proper knowledge of the political technique that makes one take care of the others. Here we see that Plato does not separate the cathartic and the political. That is to say, governing is not only a technique of governing, but also a virtue of governing, which demands a total transformation of the ruler’s inner spiritual life.

Second, there is a link of reciprocity between care of self and care of other. If the ruler can bring prosperity for the citizens as the result of his or her care of the self, then the ruler can benefit from the prosperity of all and from the salvation and victory of the city that he or she has ensured. In other words, as Foucault says, “the care of the self therefore finds its reward and guarantee in the city’s salvation. One saves oneself inasmuch as the city-state is saved, and inasmuch as one has enabled it to be saved by

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<sup>143</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 175.

<sup>144</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 175.

taking care of oneself.”<sup>145</sup> Care of the self and care of the other relate reciprocally. The subject, who takes care of the other, is likely to be rewarded by the other. That is to say, the subject and other have a symmetrical relationship.

Third, for Plato, the subject can finally discover its being and knowledge through practicing the care of the self. Foucault says, “...by taking care of itself, by practicing the ‘cathartic of the self’ (not a Platonic but a Neo-Platonic term), the soul discovers both what it is and what it knows, or rather, what it has always known. It discovers both its being and its knowledge at the same time. It discovers what it is, and in the form of memory it discovers what it has contemplated. In this way, in this act of memory, it can get back to the contemplation of the truths that enable the city’s order to be founded anew in full justice.”<sup>146</sup> In other words, care of the self finally generates a knowledge that can keep the city’s order in full justice. Thus, we cannot say that care of the self is apolitical because care of the self can make possible a righteous civic order.

Even if care of the self can lead to the care of the other, however, can we be so certain that the subject will also treat the other with care? How do we guarantee that the subject will treat the other ethically in governing? Foucault argues that we treat the other badly only because we cannot properly care ourselves: “... the risk of dominating others

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<sup>145</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 176.

<sup>146</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 176.

and exercising a tyrannical power over them arises precisely only when one has not taken care of the self and has become the slave of one's desires. But if you take proper care of yourself, that is, if you know what it means for you to be a citizen of a city, to be the master of a household in an *oikos*, if you know what things you should and should not fear, if you know what you can reasonably hope for and, on the other hand, what things should not matter to you, if you know, finally, that you should not be afraid of death--if you know all this, you cannot abuse power over others."<sup>147</sup> That is to say, if one can practice the care of the self wholeheartedly, and knows what it means to be a master, then one will not abuse the power when one governs the other. It seems to me that Foucault has great confidence in Greek practices and teachings on governing. He thinks that the subject can govern the other righteously and non-violently only if the subject can first love his or her life.

### **3.2 Ethics of the Other in Mentoring**

Greek ethics of the other is also actualized in Greek mentorship, which privileges the student's interest over the mentor's interests. In Greek ethics, mentorship is important in helping the subject search his or her life.<sup>148</sup> Foucault says that three types of relationship are indispensable for the young man's training. First, mentorship occurs through example,

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<sup>147</sup> Michel Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom," p. 288.

<sup>148</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 128.

in which the master offers a model of behavior to the younger person. Second is the mastery of competence, in which the master passes on knowledge, principle and abilities to the students. Third is the Socratic mastery of dilemma and discovery practiced through dialogue.

Interestingly, each of these three mastery rests on a particular interplay of ignorance and memory; and the aim of mentorship is to free the young people from ignorance. That is to say, Greek mentorship aims at turning the subject into an independent and mature subject who has the wisdom of life. Thus, the young person needs to learn from the mentor the technique and knowledge that will enable him or her to live properly. These practices of mastery function on the basis of ignorance and memory, because memory enables one to pass from ignorance to non-ignorance and from ignorance to knowledge, as Socrates believed.<sup>149</sup>

The master trains the subject. Seneca refers to *stultitia*, which is the mental restlessness of someone who is never satisfied by anything or settled by anything. Seneca believes that anyone who is in the status of *stultitia* does not care for himself or herself.<sup>150</sup> The *stultus* is someone who lets all the representations from the outside world into his or her mind. He or she accepts these representations without examining them, without

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<sup>149</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 129.

<sup>150</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 131.

knowing how to analyze what they represent; he or she does not make judgment, and lets life pass by.<sup>151</sup> The *stultus* is essentially someone who does not will oneself and does not want the self. In *stultitia*, there is a disconnection between the will and the self.<sup>152</sup>

The intervention of the master is important by helping the student not to be a *stultus*.<sup>153</sup> The one who helps the *stultus* is the one who has achieved a relationship of self-control, self-possession, and pleasure in the self. This is the objective of *sapientia*. That is to say, the teacher is the one who can exercise his or her sovereignty over himself or herself and can find his or her entire happiness in this relationship. The philosopher is this effective agent.<sup>154</sup> This idea is found among the Epicureans: Epicurus says only the philosopher is capable of guiding others. Philosophy is the set of principles and practices available for such guidance.<sup>155</sup>

Furthermore, the philosopher is also a private counselor.<sup>156</sup> He or she is a counselor of existence, who gives his or her view on specific occasion. This philosopher/counselor initiates the student into a particular form of life. In other words, the counselor is also a cultural agent for a circle into which he/she introduces both theoretical and practical schemas of life as well as political choice. The philosopher/counselor integrates

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<sup>151</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 131.

<sup>152</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 133.

<sup>153</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 133.

<sup>154</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 135.

<sup>155</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 136.

<sup>156</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 142.

philosophy into the daily mode of being.

As was mentioned before, it is inaccurate to identify Foucault's care of the self as mere individualism, egoism or narcissism. In discussing the role of the mentor, for example, Foucault tries to distinguish care of the self from three other types of self-centered activity: the activities of the doctor, the head of the household and the lover. Foucault argues that, when a doctor applies the art of medicine to himself or herself when he or she is ill, this is not a kind of care of the self because the doctor does not view himself or herself as a soul-subject but cares only for the body, not the doctor's subjectivity. The main distinction is that the *tekhnē* of the doctor cannot transform himself or herself as subject, whereas the *tekhnē* of care of the self enables the individual who takes care of himself or herself to become a subject. In other words, Foucault is concerned with whether or not the technique of the self can truly make us be a subject.<sup>157</sup>

Second, we cannot say a good father takes care of himself when he takes care of his wealth, because he takes care of the wealth that belongs to him, but not of himself. Third, we also cannot say Alcibiades' suitors take care of Alcibiades himself, because they only love Alcibiades' body and beauty, not Alcibiades himself. To take care of Alcibiades means attending to his soul and making good use of his body and its capacities and

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<sup>157</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 58.

aptitudes. Socrates takes care of Alcibiades, including his soul, because he can wait until Alcibiades has grown old and lost his beauty. Thus, unlike other of Alcibiades' lovers and suitors, Socrates cares about the way in which Alcibiades will be concerned about himself. And, Foucault says, this is the true meaning of care for self and other.

Foucault argues that care of the self always goes through the relationship to someone else who is the master. One cannot care for the self without the presence of the master. However, the master's position is defined by what he or she cares about. Unlike the doctor, the master is not concerned with the body. Unlike the teacher, the master is not concerned with teaching attitudes to the person he or she guides. According to Foucault, "the master is the person who cares about the subject's care for himself, and who finds in his love for his disciple the possibility of caring for the disciple's care for himself."<sup>158</sup>

Thus, Foucault does not reject mentorship even though he criticizes the Christian way of mentorship, the confession. From his rejection of Christian confession and affirmation of Greek mentorship, we may see that what Foucault rejects is not mentorship per se, but a manipulative form of mentorship that fails to take the other/student's life as the core of concern. The confession is problematic because it aims at controlling the believer's behavior for the sake of maintaining the status quo of the church without

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<sup>158</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 59.

taking care of the believer's interest. More important, the confession does not leave "room" for the other to cultivate his or her free subjectivity with the help of the priest, the master. In contrast, Greek mentorship emphasizes the master's responsibility in helping the other to build up his or her subjectivity, in which the autonomy of the subject is fully respected.

#### **D. Conclusion**

Although Foucault is commonly regarded as an anti-moral social constructivist or anti-essentialist who treats all moral discourses as repressive discourse, this chapter has argued that the later Foucault fully affirms one's ethical formation, given that one's ethical life is cultivated in a free and non-coercive manner. While Foucault is commonly regarded as a hedonist, who simply affirms self-gratification, the later Foucault shows us that he is not unaware of the problem of the excess use of desire or pleasure.

In addition, while Foucault is commonly regarded as a genealogist who criticizes different discourses of truth that repress the body, the later Foucault fully affirms an embodied truth that mingles bodily transformation and truth-searching. That is to say, Foucault does not reject all kinds of "truth." Instead, he accepts a kind of truth that arises from one's bodily transformation. In other words, for Foucault, the lived body, which includes desire and bodily sensation, is a necessary condition for building up an

embodied virtue ethics and an embodied epistemology in response to the crisis brought by Christianity and rationalism.

Furthermore, while the later Foucault's care of the self has been labeled as individualism or dandyism, this chapter has argued that the later Foucault's care of the self also affirms the necessity of care of the other. For him, care of the self must lead to care of the other. That is to say, care of the self is the necessary condition for care of the other. Moreover, while Foucault rejects Christian confession, he accepts Greek mentorship because the latter can truly respect the interest of the student (the other). Thus, Foucault does not reject all kinds of mentorship or pedagogy; rather his concern is whether the mentorship occurs within the boundary of respect and love so that masters can teach their students to care for their bodily life.

In sum, Foucault does not treat stylization of self as simply a symbolic subversion or aesthetic transgression towards the dominant culture, as some social constructivists believe. Rather, he believes that one's bodily stylization not only transgresses some repressive boundaries but also forms an ethical embodied life that respects one's freedom.

In contemporary French philosophical circles, Foucault is not the only one who emphasizes the bodily dimension of ethics and the ethical dimension of the body. In the next chapter, I shall explore the thought of another French philosopher, namely,

Emmanuel Levinas. From his phenomenological approach to the ethical dimension of bodily sensation, we may see how the body and the other's body make possible an embodied ethics and an embodied subjectivity. In particular, we may see how the subject's sensation makes possible an ethics of the other.

If we can regard Foucault's ethics as an ethics of care of the self, then we can regard Levinas' ethics as an ethics of care of the other. For Foucault, care of the self is a necessary condition of care of the other because the self is ethical in itself; but for Levinas, the self can never be ethical in itself, and the ethical subjectivity of the self is only made possible through taking care of the other first. That is to say, for Foucault, ethical subjectivity can be attained without the intervention of the other, whereas for Levinas, the intervention of the other is the necessary condition in terms of making an ethical subjectivity. Yet, although their ethical approaches take different directions, they treat the lived body as the necessary condition of ethics. For them, this is the only way to respond to the moral crisis brought by modernity.