Foucault, care of the self and the privileged status of old age

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Abstract

This paper draws attention to Foucault's 1981/1982 lecture series on *The Hermeneutics of the Self*. These contain one of the very few direct references Foucault ever made to the topic of old age. In them, he observes how, in the first and second centuries of the Common Era, Greco-Roman philosophers shifted their emphasis from "knowing thyself" to "becoming one's self." Whilst these writers saw the practice of the arts of living as desirable at every stage of life, they considered them effectively cultivated in later life, when the individual is least constrained by the weight of the world. Foucault argued that this classic focus upon the "arts of living" was later replaced by a "rules of living" approach, evident in the early Christian church teachings, and later embedded by the institutions of the state. Foucault's endorsement for pursuing an art of living in later life can be contrasted with other modern thinkers who have perpetuated a "rules of living" approach. Set against Foucault's support for an aesthetics of lifestyle, writers working largely within an ageing studies/gerontology framework have either advocated what might be called a public health agenda to age actively or successfully or have prescribed morally desirable pathways for older people to develop integrity, self-realisation and/ or bodily transcendence. Foucault's advocacy of an art of living in later

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life has been neglected by those using his work to emphasise the governance, rather than the freedoms of old age. Drawing attention to these overlooked lectures is intended to help re-balance this view.

Keywords: art of living, care of self, Foucault, rules of living, subjectivity.

Introduction

This paper is concerned with the French philosopher Michel Foucault and his view of old age as expressed in his 1982 lectures on the hermeneutics of the self. In these lectures, he drew upon writings from antiquity that saw old age as a potentially privileged place, privileged because it was seen to offer an ideal opportunity to practice those technologies of the self that enable the self to exercise a degree of sovereignty over its self. These lectures constitute one of the few times that Foucault paid any attention to the place of old age. Most students of ageing have almost entirely ignored them and have instead focused upon Foucault's writings on governmentality, knowledge/power and surveillance and their application to the administrative institutions and practices of welfare for older people (Biggs & Powell 2001; Katz & Green 2002; Pickard 2009). Such themes are largely drawn from Foucault's earlier writings on the institutions governing ordering and organising individual subjects although none of these works refers directly to the topic of old age.

Nevertheless, it is these "genealogical" topics dominate the bulk of gerontological writing referencing Foucault. This is especially true in the case of "critical gerontology" and its focus on the role of the "relations of power and power relationships between professionals, institutions, and subjects of study" in controlling the organisation of "old age" (Powell 2011: 359). Within this tradition, Foucault's work is employed to frame "the history of gerontology as a system of knowledge/power that produces a discipline of the elderly body" (Dumas & Turner 2006: 145). Preoccupied with such welfarist perspectives, these "Foucauldian" gerontologists seek to demonstrate how "the discourse of community care acquires a coherence of power/knowledge" constructing older people's experiences and their identities as "a power/knowledge to be deployed against older people's voices rather than for their emancipation" (Powell 2012: 7). The point of this paper is to note that there is another, later

Foucault, which has been largely ignored in the gerontological literature; a Foucault that though less often referred to offers a very direct route to Foucault's thinking about old age and which provides a challenge to much current gerontological theorising.[1]

Old Age and the Hermeneutics of the Self

Despite claims that "Foucault did not write about old age" (Pickard 2009: 69), in a series of lectures, given in 1981/1982 under the general heading of *The Hermeneutics Of The Self,* Foucault describes how, in classical Greco-Roman writing, the care of the self ceased being focused on the adolescent's entry into adult life and became, instead, "an obligation that should last for the whole of one's life" (Foucault 2005: 87). In his account of this classic writing on the care (or concern) for the self, he noted how they attributed to old age a "privileged status" in carrying out such practices (Foucault 2005: 107). He began his account by quoting the Greek philosopher Epicurus (BCE 341–270), who stated that one should practice philosophy both when we are young and when we are old, the former to acquire the steadfastness of an old man and the latter to grow young again (Foucault 2005: 88). Turning to a later text, Foucault sees a similar theme being repeated in Philo of Alexandria's "*De Vita Contemplativa,*" advocating the kind of philosophical training that Foucault calls the "technology of self-care" as a practice to be performed through adulthood and on to old age.

In Philo's writing, Foucault sees a clear shift from practices of youth to practices best conducted in late middle age. This shift is advocated as a means of ensuring a satisfactory transition from active civic life to a less active old age, enabling old age to become "the centre of gravity, the sensitive point of the practice" for the care of the self (Foucault 2005: 92). Having established this historical record of making care of the self a life-long practice, Foucault pursues its realisation in old age as his main topic for the second hour of his lectures. There he seeks to establish the value given to old age during this classical period in Graeco-Roman literature,

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[1] The division into an earlier and a "late" Foucault is no doubt problematic, but for practical purposes, I am distinguishing here between Foucault's writing in the 1960s and 1970s and that from the early 1980s till the end of his life in 1984 (see Elden 2017, for a more extended discussion on this "late" Foucault).

during the first two centuries of the common era Antedating the work of George Minois and his account of the history of old age during the classical period (Minois 1989), Foucault observes a duality in how old age was regarded by the writers of this period. On the one hand, he argues that those in old age were judged as possessing wisdom, yet they were also marked by weakness; drawing upon much experience, they nonetheless possessed little energy to put that experience to use. Old age, Foucault concluded, contained – or expressed – an inherent ambiguity in the literature of this period, regarded "no doubt" as honourable but at the same time, "certainly" not desirable (Foucault 2005: 108).

Set against this ambiguity over the status of old age, Foucault suggests that the practices representing the care of the self, constitute, in old age, "the positive moment, the moment of fulfilment, the peak of this lengthy practice that the individual has pursued … throughout his life" (Foucault 2005: 109). Quoting from Seneca, he advances the argument that old age arrives at the point when, without wanting or expecting to derive pleasure or joy from the world, the old man (*sic*) finally arrives at himself, can delight in himself and can at last achieve "a perfect and complete relationship" with his self.[2] In this account that Foucault derives from the classical Graeco-Roman literature, he evinces an implicit understanding that we must fulfil our life before the moment of death arrives and hence must organise our life as if we are already old. This is not just a matter of living long enough to reach chronological old age; it is about living in such a way that we should reach an ideal old age, "an old age we produce as it were which we practice" (Foucault 2005: 110).

Of course, it could be argued that Foucault is simply giving an historical account of the narratives concerning the care of the self, whereby writers in the classical period sought turn from governing others to fully governing themselves. His interest, it might be said, is more in organising the historical development of ideas about subjectivity and the self. Hence, his aim might seem merely to document the transition from the Hellenistic command to "know thyself" and its prioritisation in the search for the truth of the self to a later classical period, evinced by a "new" concern for styling one's self. In short, that his goal is merely to mark this shift, from

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[2] See Seneca's *On Tranquillity of Mind* (Seneca 2008). In all his accounts of these "classical" texts, Foucault implicitly genders old age as a male stage of life.

a moralised path towards self-knowledge to a much more aesthetically informed notion of realising an autonomous life style in old age.

Arguably there exists another, more personal sub-text in this and other related themes in Foucault's later work, reflecting his growing concern with the question of self, subjectivity and the practices of freedom. According to Geoffrey de Lagasnerie, Foucault said at the time that his writing was a way of "transforming yourself, unbinding or freeing yourself from yourself," in short, a part of the technology of the self to which he was applying himself (De Lagasnerie 2015: 131). In an interview conducted shortly before his death, Foucault elaborated further on these practices, arguing that the virtue once assigned to the care of the self during this classical period was overturned as the Church and other "coercive" institutions took them over (Foucault 2020a). In doing so, he felt that their interpretation was shifted from the self-chosen practices of freedom and self-formation of the classic period to an avoidance or regulation of such practices, which were now deemed "suspect" and "denounced as a form of self-love, a form of selfishness or self-interest" (Foucault 2020a: 284).

Foucault pursued these concerns with the self when he went onto address a further transformation in the technologies of the self, as realised within early Christian teachings, notably in the form of the confessional and the prescription of the "regula vitae" (the rule of life). Rather than focusing upon the opportunity afforded by later life for strengthening the sovereignty of the self, these early Church teachings concentrated instead upon the subjection of the self, subjection to the disciplinary demands of Church doctrine to control the flesh. Youth, rather than old age, became the focus of disciplinary concern. With the subsequent decline in the authority of the Church, these would, in due course, be taken over by the state and its regulatory institutions, topics that had been the main focus for Foucault's earlier writings on disciplinarity and governance. The classical Graeco-Roman practices that had once privileged individual choice and the personal development of a style or form of life became, Foucault concluded, the rules of life under natural law, as evinced by the laws of the early Church (Foucault 2005: 424). The tone of Foucault's writing makes it clear that this transformation was not one to his taste, replacing "subjectivation" (making oneself a subject) with "subjectification" (being made subject to institutional pressures). As he would put it, in an interview conducted in early 1984, the year of his death, one should "be concerned

with yourself … i.e. ground yourself in liberty, through the mastery of the self" (Foucault 1988: 20).

Foucault was in his late fifties when he died, and nearly 56 when he gave the lecture series on the hermeneutics of the self. Though far from conscious of his closeness to his death, the lectures he gave constitute one of the very few occasions when he touched upon the topic of old age.[3] In the remaining years of his (writing) life, he focused upon technologies of the self, *tout court*, and did not follow through his 1982 lectures when he framed age, old age, as the focus and indeed centre of gravity for the practices of the care of the self, the "positive focal point towards which we should strive" (Foucault 2005: 110). Placed not as the peak of a career or as the peak of power in heading the household, old age was represented rather as the peak of self-realisation and self-sovereignty. Old age, Foucault argued, was framed less as an end point, a point of finitude but more a potential peak experience in realising the individualised journey of self-becoming; not a coming to terms with death and finitude but the ideal opportunity to practice and perfect the technologies of the self.

Of course we can never know whether Foucault would have practiced such an aesthetics himself, had he lived into later life or whether he might have developed these ideas further or abandoned them entirely. It seems evident that his mid-life awakening – which Foucault himself attributed to the triggering event of his trip to Death Valley, in California in 1975, where he was treated to the "mind-expanding" effects of taking the hallucinogenic drug, LSD - represented a shift in his thinking about subjectivity and self-hood (Wade 2019). This redirection in Foucault's thinking that followed his return from California to Paris has been described as "a tectonic shift" (Davidson 2005: xx). In place of the earlier concern over the "structures of subjectification" that had so preoccupied his thinking throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, from the late 1970s onwards, he continued to develop his own reading and thinking about the "practices of subjectivation" and the self-fashioning of the subject. Whilst

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[3] In a lecture delivered later that year at Toronto's Victoria University in June 1982, Foucault again notes that the idea of age as a privileged, *the* privileged moment of life to devote to "*askesis*" – "the diverse forms of cultivating oneself" (Foucault 2023: 69) – a point of view that he himself identifies with, stating that this is 'the point of view which is mine' (Foucault 2023: 75).

in two of the lectures he gave in 1982, he had pointed towards old age as an ideal time to fully engage with the art of living and the aesthetics of lifestyle his subsequent lectures (and writings) turned towards the more general topic of the government of self and others (Foucault 2011, 2012).

Technologies of the Self, Individualisation and Foucault's Neo-Liberalism

Though his general advocacy of the care of the self and the cultivation of a self-styled life-style (a sovereign concern with one's self) has been widely reported and debated, little has been said of his support for the idea that later life (old age) provides the best opportunity fully to engage with making oneself a sovereign subject. After a lifetime of being made a subject by the world (subjectification), the idea that later life (old age) affords the best opportunity for what he called "subjectivation" – making oneself the subject of one's self – (Foucault 2000: 351, 2005: 333) echoes some present day writing on the topic of "the third age." Thus, Peter Laslett considered later life – framed as the "third age" – to be a period in life when, freed from the responsibilities of work and family, older people could focus upon their "self-realisation." How far can such self-realisation be reconciled with Foucault's care (concern) for the self? Perhaps the critical point of departure is that pursuing a third age was for Laslett imbued with moral purpose, and not intended to be used to practice what might be deemed a purely selfish form of "self-love," or what he rather sternly called engaging in a life of "indolence" (Laslett 1991a: 140).

In contrast to the practices of freedom that Foucault advocated, Laslett saw the care of the self and the associated expectations of "self-realisation" to be defined by their social value and moral worth. For Laslett, there were rules for living a successful third age, manifested above all by "a duty to represent the future as a trust" (Laslett 1991b: 389). The rules governing the self-fulfilment of the third age, in short, were imbued with a "moralism/paternalism," which "paradoxically contradict the fundamental underlying principles of the self-realization discourse itself" (Laceulle 2018b: 269). For Laslett, the rules of living a third age were distinct for a particular phase of life – an opportunity, true – but one to be squeezed in between the business of a second age and the collapse into a fourth age.

His focus was on the opportunity to acquire a distinct status, albeit one defined not by work or childcare but by civic worth.

Other writers – such as Gilleard and Higgs– have argued that the third age is not a status – and certainly not a subjectivity – but constitutes a cultural space that is realised through the general "enriching" of later life and the opportunities this affords older people to participate as citizen consumers (Gilleard & Higgs 2011). Whilst employing the concept of "technologies of the self" to describe the consumption of the goods and services directed towards enhanced well-being in later life, such technologies of the self are embedded within the market and actively promoted in the media and by the modern welfare state with its emphasis upon individualisation and responsibilisation – a far cry, one might well argue, from the Stoic advocacy that Foucault was describing in his *Collège de France* lectures. Although a number of writers have accused Foucault of turning away from critique and an emphasis upon how the institutions of modernity render people subject to social control, towards a more individualistic position, exactly how far this constitutes a "defection" to a neo-liberal politics is debatable (Dean 2015; Dilts 2011; Tanke 2023).

Foucault's engagement with neoliberalism has been seen as falling "squarely within his genealogical period" (Sherman 2019: 501), when he was concerned with the issue of "governmentality," which he described as an ensemble of "institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, calculations, and tactics that allow the exercise of … power that has the population as its target, political economy as its major form of knowledge, and apparatuses of security as its essential technical instruments" (Foucault 2007: 208)[4]. Certainly, it is possible, as Dilts suggests, that "the neo-liberal account of human capital opens the grounds of subjectivity … and allows him [Foucault] to think about the role that subjects play in their own formation" (Dilts 2011: 13). The bridge between a focus upon subjectification and subjectivation that his engagement with human capital theory enabled does not however mean that Foucault considered care for the self simply as a form of investment in one's own human capital. It remains,

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[4] Some commentators and critics of Foucault's work have periodised it into a threefold division, distinguishing his early "archaeological" approach from his "genealogical" approach and finally his later "problematizations"; this latter phase being his turn to the hermeneutics of the self, the government of the self and the more general problem of "subjectivity" (Foucault 2020b).

as it was for the Stoics and other classic writers, a self-consciously per-formed enactment of one's sovereignty over one's self: a self-styling that creates a degree of freedom from the institutional subjectifications that otherwise characterise much of family and working life. The potential leverage that creates for the market, the media and the state to fashion that self-fashioning, of course, cannot be ignored.

Care of the Self, Self-Actualisation and Self-Realisation: Alternative Framings in Gerontology

If Foucault's advocacy of the practices of care of the self in later life can be linked both with ideals (idealisations?) of the third age and the marketisa-tion of self-care, it is also possible to compare and contrast it with the more general advocacy of "self-actualisation" and "self-realisation" as practices of the self in later life. In this section, I shall explore how some key writ-ers in the twentieth century have sought to characterise old age as a time for "self-actualisation" "self-integrity" and/or "self-realisation" and how far such views connect – and contrast with – those espoused by Foucault. Whilst the cultural trope of ordering the stages of life is centuries old, it is only really in the twentieth century that old age became a sufficiently democratic possibility, which could be framed within an implicitly secu-larised social order. Within this "institutionalised life course," old age was assigned a distinct place, a social position, through the introduction of re-tirement and the granting of a universal, pensioned citizenship (Kohli 2007; Kohli et al. 1983). This status was largely achieved without any obvious moral order or indeed expectations of those designated as aged or old. Old age was famously described by Burgess as a "roleless role" (Burgess 1960). One of the first writers to re-consider the signification of old age, its pur-pose or meaning, as opposed to its graphic or symbolic representation in the various "stages-of-life" iconographies of pre and early modernity, was Erik Erikson, in his book, *Childhood and Society* when he proposed the realisation of "integrity" as a distinct virtue of old age (Erikson 1950). In this section, then, I will consider how some of the key writers who have addressed the "matters of meaning and morality concerning later life" (Laceulle 2018b: 14) that have otherwise been neglected in ageing studies stand in comparison to the above "Foucauldian" position on care of the self.

As noted, Erikson was certainly one of the first such writers to address these issues. He outlined a schema describing the stages and tasks of psychosocial development from birth to the grave, a schema that he worked upon for a further 35 years, effectively to the end of his professional career (Erikson 1950, 1963, 1982; Friedman 2000). Erikson framed his stage theory of lifelong human development in terms of a systematic passage through a series of psychosocial crises, the resolution of which leads to the development of a series of "basic strengths" (Weiland 1993). These resolutions were aided by the use of socially embedded "ritualisations" whose nature is formed by and within society and social relations but which embody an underlying universality in so far as they are deployed as a means of successfully negotiating each stage of development and the crises they bring (Erikson 1982: 43–52). At the developmental stage characterising old age, Erikson sees the crisis being one of either achieving "integrity" – a sense of the wholeness of one's life – or failing and falling into "despair" and a disdain for both one's own life and more generally of the world. The ritualisation Erikson sees as supporting this transition is the philosophical (Erikson 1982: 33). By this, Erikson means the development of a philosophical outlook that enables the older person to contemplate the wholeness of his or her life, its integrality both with the world and with humanity collectively. In short, the art of making a success of later life is in shaping a coherent narrative about one's life, and in shaping "a shared proclivity for understanding … those who do understand the integrative ways of human life… [and] … a comradeship with the ordering ways of distant times" (Erikson 1982: 65).

To some extent then both Foucault and Erikson share a view – an advocacy – of later life being a time for philosophical practice, but whilst Erikson emphasises the passive contemplation involved in realising such "integrality," Foucault framed old age as a site of practice (he used the Greek term "askesis") less concerned with contemplation than with aligning the self with the self, of refining a way of life that asserts authority, an authority of the self, the authoring of one's life through shaping a lifestyle rather than developing a narrative. At the end of his book on *The Care of the Self*, he writes that this involves "the importance of developing all the practices and all the exercises by which one can maintain self-control and eventually arrive at a pure enjoyment of oneself … the development of an art of existence that revolves around the question of the self" (Foucault

1990: 238). Whilst it can be argued that for Foucault, the art of living could not easily be separated from the act of writing, his focus was upon active subject-making, the pursuit of what the Cynics called "the royal life par excellence," the life that is sovereign over itself (Foucault 2005: 307).

Whilst Erikson emphasised narrative coherence as a means of transcending the individual life and its singularity, Foucault wanted to celebrate that singularity and pursued the development of an autonomous "art of living" in later life. These practices, these "technologies of the self" (Foucault 2020c: 223–226), were forms of "active leisure" (Foucault 2020c: 252), designed to train the body and the mind, not so much with an end in sight but as practices of existence. In contemporary terms, one can see that such notions of active leisure are part of the cultures of later life. But their focus is different, emphasising above all a resistance to age, a forever maintaining of "youthfulness," and the practices realised through counting steps, completing brain puzzles, undergoing exercise, good sleep habits, healthy eating and the regular use of "anti-ageing" cosmaceuticals and nutraceuticals. Foucault's framing of the Greco-Roman technologies of the self, however, was mostly confined to those practices illustrated in the writings of Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius, Philo of Alexandria, Plutarch and especially, Seneca (Foucault 2020c). These focused upon both the body and the soul, not to preserve or prolong life but to reach "a happy and autonomous life." Ideally practiced most effectively in later life, these technologies of the self were not unlike Laslett's idea of the third age, or Erikson's goal of achieving integrit, but they represented a way of living beside death but on the bank of life (Foucault 2023: 76). Rather than resisting death or seeking to ensure a passage beyond death, in Foucault's eyes, these "pagan" technologies of the self were concerned with the sovereignty of the self, a sovereignty of living beside death.

The notion of "transcending" the finitude of a life has been developed in the work of Lars Tornstam. Tornstam introduced the concept of gero-transcendence as "a meta-theoretical reformulation" of the disengagement theory developed by Elaine Cumming (Tornstam 1989). Whilst Cumming and her colleagues had framed their ideas about disengagement as a desired and desirable integration of the needs of older people to leave their social world with the needs of society to be freed from those without any further role, she conceived this as the mutual coordination of intra- and inter-subjective processes (Cumming & Henry 1961). What

Tornstam focused upon, however, was the intra-psychic process by which older people shifted their perspective "from a materialistic and pragmatic view of the world to a more cosmic and transcendent one" (Tornstam 1997: 143). Ironically for a sociologist, Tornstam was concerned less with a change in social relations and role performances than in a change or development in and of an essentialised self (Tornstam 2011: 168).

A central element of that changing self was a rising degree of "cosmic transcendence," a term that is connected with Erikson's formulation of old age as a time of integrity – or integrality – a sense of the wholeness of one's life and its connection with all of humanity – mankind [sic] as "my kind" (Erikson 1982: 32). In contrast to this emphasis upon personal development and narrative integrity, Tornstam implies that gero-transcendence occurs as a result of "a natural progression toward maturation," a kind of endogenous developmental process of the self, which transcends the limits of one's body, one's environment and, in a sense, one's world (Tornstam 1997: 143). Rather than turning of the self more fully towards the art of fashioning one's self, the position that Foucault tends to endorse, gero-transcendence involves a "natural" decline in self-centredness, a turn from egoism to altruism, and thereby helping realise previously hidden aspects of the self (Tornstam 2005).

In fleshing out these shifts in the self-arising in old age, Tornstam has eschewed both personal and cultural histories in favour of empirical surveys of older people, designed to demonstrate the multi-dimensionality of gero-transcendence, and the variability by which it is achieved. But with this focus upon demonstrating the phenomenon of gero-transcendence via interviews and self-reported questionnaires, he has neglected to explain how this progression takes place, treating it as neither practice nor discourse but instead as a process of naturally occurring "self-development." Others however have taken it upon themselves to suggest a variety of "exercises" to help people discover "new possibilities for personal development" and thereby achieve higher levels of such transcendence (Tornstam 2011: 177). But whether treated as the outcome of such therapeutic tasks or as a reflection of the natural development of age, it is apparent that Tornstam considers gero-transcendence a reflection of a moral order, a moral imperative for becoming old. Whilst "essentialised" as part of the "natural progression" of human ageing, Tornstam also argues that gero-transcendence can also be fostered by various regulated practices

as well as by encouraging significant others to recognise encourage and accept such "signs of gerotranscendence as possibly natural signs of the ageing process" (Tornstam 2011: 177).

Like Erikson and Tornstam, Jan Baars and his colleague, Hanna Laceulle, share a similar concern with the moral ordering of old age (Baars 2012, 2017: Laceulle 2018a, 2018b). But rather than assuming any "natural" pattern to this moral ordering, as both Erikson and Tornstam seem to do, Baars and Laceulle's focus is upon the desirability of active "self-realisation" in old age. Rather than any endogenous process of later life adult development, they perceive self-realisation as a socially necessary labour that is required, in part, to counteract the negative views held about – and dominating the discourses concerning – representations of old age in late modernity (Laceulle & Baars 2014). For Baars and Laceulle, "self-realisation" is a moral goal, set apart from the more indulgent forms of "self-realisation" that are associated with consumer society and its current "third age" advocates (Laceulle & Baars 2014: 39). That goal constitutes a search for autonomy, authenticity and virtue. In stressing the latter, they too mirror aspects of what Peter Laslett advocated in his version of the third age: the moral responsibility for those in later life who have the time and resources to undertake such morally responsible "self-realisations" to do so, virtuously, for others – in short to exercise civic virtue. They argue that such "moral philosophy … offers a deeper and richer notion of self-realization ….[whose] roots reach back to the Socratic ideal of "knowing yourself"" (Laceulle & Baars 2014: 40).

Laceulle suggests that such a preferred form of self-realisation is necessary to counteract both the consumerist and the pessimistic narratives for living well in later life. She summarises her position as advocating "a process of moral self-development in which people strive to become who they are by realizing their deepest aspirations and highest capacities" (Laceulle 2018b: 30). Such development she argues is realised within three inter-related themes of autonomy, authenticity and virtue (Laceulle 2018a). Although framing ageing as "a socio-culturally constituted process of living in time" (Laceulle 2018b: 22), she unavoidably has to confront a key aspect such social constructionist definitions omit – namely the increasing probability of morbidity and mortality arising from a chronology expressed through and within structures that lie outside society and culture.

13

Whilst all these authors – Baars, Erikson, Laceulle and Tornstam – express a common theme – the desirability of moral development continuing into later life – they see its manifestation in different ways and through different mechanisms. In the case of Erikson and Tornstam, such development represents an endogenous process in the development of the self; or, in the case of Baars and Laceulle, as a culturally mandated direction of travel to overcome both the pervasiveness of negative representations of old age in "late" modern societies and the inevitable finitude that ageing universally incurs (Baars, Laceulle). Whilst Laceulle is aware of the various objections that can be made to her concept of self-realisation in later life – its implicit elitism, Eurocentrism, moralism, paternalism, self-centredness, etc., she insists that, faced with human finitude and the pervasive social devaluation of age, "becoming who I am" remains an important practice to pursue into later life (Laceulle 2018a: 265–270). Unlike Foucault, however, who is less inclined to advocate the idea of there being any authentic or essential self waiting to be realised or revealed, these latter authors seem to subscribe to such a belief. In doing so, they imply that such a self can – and should – be realised in old age – when an authentic, transcendent and fully realisable older "I" can be actualised. Foucault's concern, on the other hand, remains with realising a style of living in later life, a practice of becoming to be engaged in each day, without end and without any final fashioning.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper has been to delineate a strand of thinking about later life that takes its point of departure from a theme that Foucault had begun to develop in the course of his 1982 lectures on the hermeneutics of the self, namely, the care of the self. In framing old age as a position of privilege in practising these technologies of the self, Foucault contrasts the Greco-Roman emphasis upon developing an art of living (what might be termed a self-styled later lifestyle) with the subsequent shift towards a "rules of living" approach, that emphasised ways of realising a later life in keeping with the tenets of the church, the state or nowadays with the "rules" of any number of spiritual and non-spiritual coaches, trainers and public health officials. This turn from an aesthetics of later life style to an ethics of living a "good" old

14

age is arguably re-invented in the works of Jan Baars, Erik Erikson, Hannah Laceulle and Lars Tornstam with their focus upon gero-transcendence, personal integrity, self-actualisation and self-realisation. Although these models share a common focus upon the self in old age, they contrast sharply with Foucault's valorisation of the care of the self as a life-style practice exemplified in writings from the "classic period" in Greco-Roman history.

A significant element in contemporary gerontology embodies not so much an art of living as a rules of living approach, evidenced in both the work of writers such as Baars, Erikson, Laceulle and Tornstam and in the various public health initiatives concerned with promoting active, healthy or successful ageing. Whilst aspects of Foucault's "art of living" might seem to have echoes in Laslett's advocacy of the third age, the key difference, it is suggested, lies in the moral strictures that Laslett insists upon in living a morally significant third age. Whilst it might be argued that a more purely Foucauldian third age risks making people in later life simply another subject of the market, the practices the "later" Foucault sees making up the care of the self are constituted by the possibility of practising personal sovereignty – without assuming any fixed self-hood or subjectivity. Set against the lifelong forms of subjectification dogging both the early and the adult years of growing up, he raises the possibility of a self-styling, self-styled, "becoming" in later life. Not a goal or an end, he seems to be advocating rather a practice – an art of living – that can more fully be engaged with in later life, whatever the precise circumstances that later life is lived in and without any denial of the self's finitude.

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