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Implications and Consequences of Post-Modern Philosophy for Contemporary Perspectives on Transpersonal and Spiritual Experience

I. The Later Foucault and Pierre Hadot on a Post-Socratic This-Worldly Mysticism

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While Michel Foucault is chiefly known for his historical relativism and his critique of modern institutional power over the individual, his late writings, as further extended by Pierre Hadot, centered on the post-Socratic spiritual practices of the experience of here and now presence or Being in the Stoics, Epicureans, and Cynics. For Foucault the positive, expansive self-actualization common to these traditions, and contrasting with Christian self-renunciation, offers a guidance for a contemporary spiritual crisis in valuation of the person. For Hadot each of the post-Socratic traditions was based on the imitation and further development of key characteristics of Socrates, much as the charismatic figure of Jesus inspired the multiple forms of earliest Christianity. These post-Socratic practices of the Hellenistic-Roman era are examples of what Max Weber termed a this- or inner-worldly mysticism, in contrast to both the more other-worldly mysticisms of the East and the Judeo-Christian prophetic traditions, and saw as the most likely line of spiritual renewal in the modern secularized West. Examples of this form of spirituality are reflected in the Sufi influenced Gurdjieff-Ouspensky movement, Jung's Self, Maslow's self-actualization, and the Diamond-Heart approach of Almas. Foucault and Hadot locate its specifically Western historical genealogy, which, given Jung's controversial concerns over adopting spiritualities outside one's own cultural tradition, may offer some context and direction amidst presently contending New Age and transpersonal spiritual understandings.

Keywords: *Stoicism, Epicureanism, Socrates, inner-worldly mysticism, numinous experience, constructivism, presence, personal essence, Gurdjieff-Ouspensky, self-remembering, Nietzsche, early Christianity*

Michel Foucault (1926-1984) is best known for his detailed analyses of the unprecedented power of modern institutionalized knowledge over an increasingly "objectified," endlessly "accountable," and "normalized" individual, as best reflected in his interpretive histories of prisons and madness (*Discipline and Punish, Madness and Civilization*). His approach here is broadly comparable to Heidegger (1949/2012) on the "enframing" of a technological attitude in which everything—including persons as well as natural environment—becomes potential "commodity" for a "calculative," purely utilitarian attitude. It is also

reminiscent of the sociologist Max Weber (1922/1963; Radkau, 2011) on the unique "rationalization" and "disenchantment" of modern materially driven life (see also Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983).

Within a more formal philosophical context Foucault is also known for his rejection of any universal phenomenology of consciousness, understood in the sense of Husserl, as primary or "constitutive" of meaning and society—and which in transpersonal psychology is sometimes seen as the underlying source for a mystical core for all religions. For the early Foucault consciousness and experience of self varies across historical eras and is

itself largely constituted by the unconscious structures of language, society, and economy (*The Order of Things, The Archeology of Knowledge*). At this stage, consciousness for Foucault was entirely epi-phenomenal—an after-the-fact “fictive” construction (Jay, 2005). Foucault’s (1972) rejection of what he termed the “transcendental narcissism” of a primary phenomenology of consciousness was later still echoed in his distrust of what he encountered personally in the 1980s as what he termed the “California cult” of a “true self,” in the sense of a universal structure to be simply uncovered by the techniques of meditation and psychedelic drugs with which he experimented at the time (Foucault, 1983a).

So it is interesting to find the later Foucault, especially in his final lectures between 1981 and 1984 (*The Hermeneutics of the Subject, The Government of Self and Others, and The Courage of Truth*) even more than in his final books being edited at that time (*The Use of Pleasure, The Care of the Self*), returning to the importance of the subject as part of his concentration on the Post-Socratic, Hellenistic and Roman, spiritual practices of the Stoics, Epicureans, and Cynics. He saw this tradition of cultivating a “care of the self” or “aesthetics of existence” as offering an alternative guidance for the ethical crises of modernity, in contrast to what he regarded as the secularization of a Christian “self-renunciation” that would falsely subordinate the more positive or cohesive sense of self now needed.¹ In an interview from 1984 he stated:

From Antiquity [i.e., these post-Socratics] to Christianity, we pass from a morality that was essentially the search for a personal ethics to a morality as obedience to a system of rules. And if I was interested in Antiquity it was because... the idea of a morality as obedience to a code of rules is now disappearing...And to this absence... must correspond the search for an “aesthetics of experience.” (Foucault, 1984/1988a, p. 49)

And in a 1983 essay:

We have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality that has been imposed on us for several centuries. (Foucault, 1983b, p. 216)

Foucault’s late concentration on what he understood as the spiritual practices of the Stoics, Epicureans, and Cynics, as offering a potentially liberating

spiritual guidance for the modern individual, was later extended by another French philosopher, Pierre Hadot (1922 - 2010), whom Foucault cited for support in his own analyses. Hadot is best known for his re-valuation of these post-Socratic philosophies as spiritual practices most similar to key aspects of Eastern meditative traditions, rather than primarily as conceptual systems. Hadot’s phenomenologically based views concentrate on post-Socratic techniques of cultivating a sense of numinous presence or Being (*What is Ancient Philosophy, The Inner Citadel, The Present Alone is our Happiness*). As will be shown below, Foucault’s and Hadot’s “geneology” of post-Socratic spiritual practices places them within Weber’s (1922/1963) typology of religions as forms of the “inner” or “this worldly” mysticism which both Weber and his colleague Ernst Troeltsch (1931/1992) saw as the direction of potential spiritual revival in the modern secularized West, and of which much of current transpersonal psychology is both example and its own analysis.²

Return to the Subject in Later Foucault

Much of Foucault’s early critique of the centrality of the subject and consciousness was based on his intense skepticism concerning the inclusive meta-theories of an essential human nature appearing in the new disciplines of late 19th and early 20th century psychology, sociology, and anthropology (*The Order of Things, The Archeology of Knowledge*). He saw these as immanent naturalistic substitutes for the transcendent overview of the boundaries and essence of the human condition associated with the already secularizing Judeo-Christian tradition—implicitly replacing the God whose “death” had been proclaimed by Nietzsche. These attempts at “social scientific” paraphrase must ultimately fail for Foucault since they leave us entirely “inside” our own being, with no quasi-external stance from which to conceptually encompass our historical contingency, particularity, and myriad variation. Foucault’s prediction of the inevitable demise of these original macro-theories in the human sciences seems confirmed by their subsequent splintering, by the mid 1990s, into the current hyper-specializations of myriad subdisciplines, based almost entirely on the more “objectified” statistical methods equally appropriate to the physical sciences. This seemingly inexorable shift from the interpretive systems of early psychology and sociology to a primacy of methodologies of measurement and statistical probability can be taken as illustrating Foucault on a contemporary “episteme” of objectification

and accountability—extended from technologies of economic production to the utilities of persons.

Along with this historical attenuation of interpretive and phenomenological approaches, one can see the present marginalization into a specialized subdiscipline of the dimension of consciousness, including its spiritual or transpersonal expression, which had been foundational for the early more qualitative meta-theories of the human sciences. Indeed it is striking to see the centrality of explicit theories of religion and spirituality, whether understood reductively or more constructively, in the work of James, Fechner, Freud, Jung, and Baldwin in psychology, and Durkheim, Weber, Tylor, Frazer, and Levy-Bruehl in sociology and anthropology. Foucault's intuition of these traditions as already endangered "place holders" for a secularizing religiosity is also confirmed by the widespread appeal of early psychology and social science to many of its pioneers as a way to seek some resolution for their own personal crises of religious belief—as the ideal place to attempt a reconciliation, one way or the other, of the collisions of science and religion. It is also striking how many of these early pioneering figures either had fathers who were pastors or had themselves left an initial ministerial training (Hunt, 2003; Taylor, 1999).

So it seems significant that Foucault's return to the subject is associated with his own attempt at a genealogy of Western spirituality in the context of what he saw as contemporary ethical dilemmas of personhood and personal cohesion. In his 1981-1982 lectures, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, he suggested that the subject or self is at least partly defined, in contrast to his earlier cultural relativism, by an intrinsic "ontological freedom." This is always implied by our potential for "resistance to power"—that the individual is never entirely determined by the largely unconscious "structures" of institutionalized knowledge and power. In a 1983 essay he stated:

Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free,...faced with a field of possibilities in which several ways of behaving may be realized....Slavery is not a power relationship...it is a question of a physical relationship of constraint.... The relationship between power and freedom's refusal to submit cannot therefore be separated. (Foucault, 1983b, p. 221)

Foucault's renewed interest in an intrinsic dimension of the subject and subjectivity is associated

with a more complex understanding, replacing his earlier extreme cultural constructivism, in which the singularities of experience arise from the continuous interplay of three more or less universal dimensions, endlessly intersecting and tumbling over each other, and with no one considered primary or foundational. In his 1982-1983 lectures, *The Government of Self and Others*, he defined these three co-dependent and co-defined axes of experience as follows:

- 1) A dimension of "power", with which his earlier work was chiefly pre-occupied, now defined in terms of practices or "technologies" of "governance" and normativity
- 2) A dimension of "knowledge," defined in terms of cultural technologies of truth "veridication"
- 3) The dimension of the subject, defined in terms of "technologies of self transformation" that elicit different "modes of being," and which are most developed in any society in its spiritual practices and traditions.

With respect to these latter he stated, in a late interview:

I do indeed believe that there is no sovereign, founding subject, a universal form of subject to be found everywhere...I believe, on the contrary, that the subject is constituted through practices of subjection, or in a more autonomous way, through practices of liberation...as in Antiquity, on the basis of course, of a number of rules, styles, inventions to be found in the cultural environment. (Foucault, 1984/1988a, p. 50)

While the techniques of an ultimately spiritual self transformation are culturally provided, their degree of pursuit or resistance always involves for Foucault a component of personal choice and ability. In terms of recent research we might speak of an individual difference dimension of "imaginative absorption" or "openness to experience" as leading into a spontaneous fascination with the spiritual and transpersonal (Hunt, 2000, 2003).

Foucault on Spiritual Practices, Spiritual Knowledge, and Bataille on Ecstasy

Foucault stressed that while different spiritual traditions can reflect very different cultural values, their techniques overlap strikingly:

There is in all societies...another type of techniques; of operations on their own bodies, on their own souls...so as to transform themselves...to attain a

certain state of perfection, of happiness, of purity, of supernatural power, and so on. Let's call this kind of techniques a technology of the self. (Foucault, 1980/1999, p. 162)

These techniques included purification and purgation, the use of oracle and dream interpretation, isolation, breath control, the contemplation of death, and meditative concentration. In the Western tradition he located some of these practices in Socrates, the earlier Pythagoreans, and expresses interest in views that they would extend back into shamanism.

Spiritual practices are defined as producing a "spiritual knowledge" that changes one's "mode of being" or "subjective being":

Spirituality...postulates that for the subject to have right access to the truth he must be changed, transformed...and become to some extent, and up to a certain point, other than himself...[by] something that...fulfills or transfigures his very being. (Foucault, 1981-1982, pp. 15-16)

Accordingly, Foucault distinguished the "spiritual knowledge" that transforms one's "mode of being" from the now broader intellectual and scientific knowledge whose full understanding does not involve or require such inner transformation. He separated earlier Western spiritual traditions, where all forms of truth had spiritual implications, from what he terms the "Cartesian moment" of the modern scientific era, where science and religion become increasingly independent. Here Foucault is reminiscent of both Max Weber (1922/63) and Jung (1938/1958a) on their differentiation of religious or sacred eras, where spiritual knowledge is central to the larger culture, as in medieval Christianity, the early Renaissance, and the post-Socratics, from more secularized eras. In the "disenchantment" of modernity spiritual knowledge becomes its own separate enclave, and the individual no longer feels "at home" in a universe in which a larger macrocosmic and "objective" knowledge bears no relation to the "merely" subjective human microcosm (see also Hunt, 2011; Tarnas, 2006).

In this regard it is worth considering contemporary transpersonal psychology itself as another version of this modern separation that Foucault is addressing. It begins with William James' *Varieties of Religious Experience* and his suggestion of a mystical or numinous core to the world religions, which James,

and later Jung, understood as a "natural" function that confers a sense of higher or superordinate meaning and purpose in human existence. Yet James and Jung both realized that while such "higher states of consciousness" can be studied in terms of their phenomenology and empirical effects on peoples' lives, they can in themselves offer no "proof" of their conceptual content, which remains persistently outside what Foucault would term the larger "episteme" of contemporary science. While this is especially obvious in the recently popular "scientific" refutations of contemporary evangelical religiosity, it is also true of some more "new age" mystical spiritualities, which do attempt some degree of integration with quantum and cosmological physics (Hunt, 2001, 2006). While significant for an innovative heterodoxy in both psychology and physics, these attempts remain either unknown or anathema to most mainstream academics in university departments of physics, chemistry, and biology.

Foucault's discussion of this modern separation of spiritual knowledge from the larger secular culture helps in retrospect to understand both his own earlier appreciation and ambivalence concerning the writings of the French philosopher Georges Bataille (1954/1988; 1967/1989) on ecstasy, as expressed in Foucault's 1963 essay, "A preface to transgression." Bataille anticipated important aspects of contemporary transpersonal psychology. In his expressionist, at times surreal, book *Inner Experience* he understood ecstasy, or what Otto (1917/1958) termed numinous experience, in post-Nietzschean terms as a natural and human capacity that becomes automatically "transgressive" in both a cultural and personal sense in a secular age.³ Bataille's definition of ecstasy includes the great religious mystics, although he argued that any interpretation in terms of a supernatural God distorts its more human nature. Accordingly, his definition is broadened to include erotic bliss, intense laughter, dance, ritual violence, and all manner of intoxications. Ecstasy for Bataille is the experience of Being within the unfolding moment, as a state of inner sovereignty, freedom, and potential for pure intimacy. For Foucault, Bataille's ecstasies are very real "limit experiences" of the discursively "impossible." Foucault's own ambivalence here appears in his statement that while such felt sovereignties "...must be recognized some day and we must try to assimilate them" (Foucault, 1963/1977, p. 38-39), yet such intense ecstasy is like a brilliant flash of lightning on a dark night—in that

the darkness of the night is actually intensified in its wake. The brief illuminations and felt significances of spontaneous and psychedelic drug induced ecstasy in the modern setting, for Foucault, actually intensify a subsequent “night of nothingness,” as a black despair and sensed futility. In hindsight they can seem like “mere” subjectivities lost within an era of pervasive “objectification.”

Not only can one see something of this negative aftermath in the reactive despair of what has been popularly termed “suicide Tuesday” in the wake of weekend long, rave overuse of the drug Ecstasy, but also in a late interview where Foucault discussed his feelings of the importance, yet personal ambivalence, of his own drug explorations:

I think that the kind of pleasure I would consider as *the* real pleasure would be so deep, so intense, so overwhelming that I couldn't survive it. I would die....There is also the fact that some drugs are really important for me because they are the mediation to these incredibly intense joys...that I am not able to experience, to afford by myself...the complete total pleasure and, for me, it's related to death. (Foucault, 1983/1988b, p. 12)

While this is not to judge Foucault himself or any serious explorer of psychedelic substances, perhaps nothing better underlines the negative side of Foucault's separation of ecstatic experience from the contemporary larger culture than much of contemporary recreational drug use or over-use. If, as Rudolf Otto maintained, numinous states of awe, fascination, and bliss are always schematized or interpreted as part of the very fabric of their experience, as most obviously seen within the cultural variations across the world mysticisms (Katz, 1978; Hunt, 2012), then the contemporary societal segregation and rejection of drug experiences will risk their actual schematization by, and reinforcement of, the larger context of personal alienation, social disengagement, and sensed futility that their usage actually seeks to overcome, or at least compensate. It may be this dilemma that Foucault was locating in the experiences of Bataille, and partly describing in his own life.

If, with Martin Jay (2005), we apply Foucault's later understanding of experience as an emergent constellation of only partially separable dimensions of knowledge, normativity, and subjectification to

Bataille's ecstatic “limit-experiences,” it seems clear that “experience” is no longer something entirely derivative and epi-phenomenal. While it arises out of a multitude of dimensions, these now include the “forms of subjectivity” central to Bataille. Experience for the later Foucault is both a resultant and a potentially separable component of that resultant. Following Jay (2005), “experience” in Foucault's sense of the immediately undergone limit situations of death, sexuality, crime, madness, and mysticism is best approximated by the German word *erlebnis*. This refers to an immediately undergone, pre-reflective “state of consciousness.” Meanwhile, “experience” in the sense of an emergent, derivative constellation of dimensions, which will include and transform *erlebnis*, is best represented by the word *erfahrung*—as experience in the sense of a more temporally extended, relationally unfolding “event.”

Where experience predominates as resultant constellation it includes Foucault's subjectification processes of self-identity. This is the sense of self specifically disrupted and suspended by the ecstatic experiences of maximum intensity central to Bataille. For Bataille and Foucault these experiences are also open to both intimate sharing and varying degrees of cultural appropriation. In his own life Foucault sought out such limit-experiences in the homoerotic sexual adventuring that led to his death from AIDS, and in the drug experiences to which he alludes.

Foucault and Hadot on the Contemporary Relevance of Post-Socratic Spiritualities

Given the later Foucault's concern with a contemporary cultural segregation of new forms of spiritual experience, it is of particular interest that he came to see the post-Socratic practices of self transformation, while no longer open to simple imitation or revival, as nonetheless offering a potential spiritual guidance for the present. Specifically, these traditions would point toward a larger ethical renewal for the more positive and cohesive sense of self needed to deal with the complexities of institutionalized power within contemporary society. Here it is illuminating to compare Foucault on these “care of the self” or “aesthetics of existence” traditions to Pierre Hadot's later development of the same material, since they both refer to each other—with Foucault citing the earlier essays of Hadot for initial support and justification. Both came to see these philosophical movements as spiritual practices and disciplines in their

own right, rather than more traditionally as primarily conceptual systems. Where Hadot will concentrate on the Hellenistic Stoic, Epicurean, and neo-Platonist cultivations of an experience of inner presence or Being, Foucault focuses more on the Roman era of Stoic, Epicurean, and Cynic experience of inner autonomy, freedom, and social responsibility.

The Later Foucault

In his 1981-1982 lectures, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, Foucault contrasted the positive sense of spiritual self development in the post-Socratics with what he saw as the later Christian emphasis on self renunciation, sinfulness, and the personal confession of intensely private matters to an external authority. Both in these lectures and in his final posthumous books, *The Use of Pleasure* (1985), and *The Care of the Self* (1986), he also contrasted the Stoic teacher as spiritual guide and guru, with the medieval Christian confessor as examiner and moral judge. Where the post-Socratics viewed sexuality as primarily a matter of personal hygiene and mental balance, about which one can make “mistakes” that can be corrected or “mastered” through meditative discipline, the traditional Christian view was of sex as “original sin,” revelatory of hidden moral limitations that require unlimited interrogation and decipherment. It is the later secularization of this distrust and renunciation of self that Foucault finds so dangerous in the modern setting.

Indeed it does seem that systematic distrust of the individual, and a self-justifying obsession with one’s “accountability,” has become an underlying implication of modern institutional life. Foucault questioned this normative acceptance of continuous scrutiny and accountability, whether self-administered, institutional, or scientifically based. He also saw this reflected in the very Western contemporary preoccupation, indeed obsession, with the new “science” of sexuality. Foucault (1978a) questioned whether such preoccupation could ever be part of any genuine sexual liberation. For the Greeks and Romans sexuality and gender could never be the inner essence of one’s essential soul or personhood, and in this Foucault seems to have found support for neither hiding nor making a personal politics of his own homosexuality (Carrette, 1999).

It is of interest that Foucault’s turn from a secularized Christian self renunciation to the positive spiritual self of the Stoics comes in the same decades that saw an analogous shift in psychoanalytically oriented

psychotherapies from the decipherment of hidden and unconscious motivations to a more predominant concern with the cohesion of sense of self (Kohut) and an inner sense of presence, being, and feeling real (Winnicott and Bion), both highly congruent with Maslow’s (1962) self actualization and its inner sense of realized identity as Being (see also Hunt, 2003).

Both Foucault and Hadot begin their interpretation of this alternative Western spirituality with Socrates, but to somewhat different effect. Foucault’s Socrates is fundamentally concerned with the “governance” or “care” of self, which must be developed first before it can be naturally and spontaneously extended to help others. Foucault agreed that the proper care of oneself is ontologically and ethically prior. Here he is on Socrates in a late interview:

He would greet people in the street...with the question: Are you caring for yourself? For he has been entrusted with this mission by a god and he will not abandon it even when threatened with death. He is the man who cares about the care of others. (Foucault, 1984/1997, p. 287)

Foucault (1981-1982) emphasized that the methods of self transformation one finds in common to Socrates himself and the later Stoics, Epicureans, and Cynics, including meditative concentration, periodic social withdrawal, and the contemplation of death, should be considered primarily as spiritual techniques. He cited in this regard the terms they used for these techniques of inner transformation, such as “inward conversion,” “reversion to the self,” “inner awakening,” and *askesis*, the latter in the sense of Weber on the “ascetic practices” that Foucault speculated can be traced back into shamanism.

While regarding the post-Socratic spiritualities as potential guidance for the present, at the same time Foucault is not uncritical of these traditions. He separated their more spiritual level, cultivating the inner *daimon* or “Zeus within,” from a more popular “art of living” level of the later Roman era, associated with the more inward attitude needed as civic involvements became more dangerous, and which in Weber’s terms would constitute a later secularization of the post-Socratic spiritualities. From a present perspective, Foucault (1984/1988c, 1986) saw these latter as risking a narrow “elitism,” while the more popular forms could fall into a kind of “dandyism” and narcissism. He

especially admired the later Cynics for their capacity of “truth telling” in the face of power.

Yet all forms and levels of these traditions show a this-worldly valuation of personhood, individuality, and equality of soul that has traditionally been associated only with a Judeo-Christian heritage, and regarded as crucial to Western values. In *The Care of the Self* Foucault quoted from the Roman philosopher Seneca on the Stoic understanding of the soul:

What else should you call such a soul than a god dwelling as a guest in a human body? A soul like this may descend into a Roman knight just as well as into a freedman's son or a slave....They are mere titles.... One may leap to heaven from a slum. (Foucault, 1986, p. 86)

What is striking here from the perspective of Foucault's concern with the modern segregation of “spiritual knowledge” is that the positive, emergent sense of self and techniques of self transformation common to these Hellenistic-Roman traditions are entirely congruent with the larger secular culture of today, and this perhaps in contrast to some “New Age” interests in Eastern and/or Gnostic mysticisms. Thus their potential for a contemporary guidance toward a this-worldly “re-enchantment.”

With respect to the cosmologies of the Stoics and Epicureans, it is worth noting that their very different understandings of physical cosmos also resonate with some aspects, albeit often heterodox, of modern physical theory (Hunt, 1995, 2001). There is some consistency between Stoic physics, where the world is held together by a living force “moving of itself” and causing things to “spring up” (Diogenes Laertius, vol. 2, p. 253), and current interests in dynamic self organizing systems in physical nature. Similarly, recent linkages between quantum micro-physics and consciousness, actually put forward by Neils Bohr (1934), are already present in the Democritean connection between the chance combinations of atomic particles and the inner spontaneity of experience, which was central to the materialism of Epicurus. Conceptually at least, much of the super-structure of Western physical theory can trace its genealogy back into Greek and Hellenistic science, which was fully coordinated with post-Socratic spiritual practices. What potential this may offer for the re-integration of a separated spiritual knowledge within Western mainstream culture remains to be seen. It is not

yet clear whether the sociological hyper-differentiation foreseen by Weber will leave self-organizing complexity theories and quantum consciousness as their own segregated heterodox enclaves, along with any respective integrations with New Age spiritualities, or whether the larger renaissance Foucault found lacking could still prove possible.

Finally, on the more strictly philosophic side of Foucault's later thought, his concentration on spiritual self-transformation of an inner “mode of being” does seem to have at least tacitly re-introduced a phenomenological orientation to consciousness, certainly not in the sense of Husserl's universal foundation of meaning, but perhaps more in the sense of Heidegger's (1927/1962) analysis of an implicit structure of *Dasein*. If experience is finally understood by Foucault as the continuous intersection and cross-determination of the three dimensions of power, knowledge, and the subject, and the first two have their own complex determining structures, then by implication, Heidegger, who Foucault (1984/1988c) cited, after Nietzsche, as the major influence on his development, is describing “states of Being” that have their own implicit structure. For Heidegger this appears as the sense of care or concern as we face toward the continuous “carry forward” of time into a permanent “horizontal openness.” The early and later Heidegger understood this “being experience” as implicit in an everyday life “temporalizing” as specific life situations, but it is the felt sense of Being *as such* that would be exteriorized in the “intensifying concentration” (Heidegger, 1919/2013) of mystical experience—as the full “reflectance” of our “self-aware existence” (Heidegger, 1919/2008).

In Foucaultian terms one could speculate that such spiritual states represent experience where the dimension of subject relatively predominates in its determinations over the dimensions of power and knowledge. These latter will more commonly constrain and direct that “flow of experience” in the way that water, which also has its own patterns, can take the shape of what contains it. Certainly it is the latter that Foucault saw as predominating in contemporary cultural structures of “normativity” and accountability. It is of interest then that Foucault's (1954/1993) first published paper was a loosely phenomenological analysis of Binswanger's Heideggerian understanding of the inner freedom of dreaming. There dreaming, as spontaneous response to cultural and personal history,

is also never entirely reducible to it. Foucault's final centering on the dimension of subject and "states of Being" seems a partial return to a modified existential-phenomenology that also becomes central for Hadot (2006, 2011).

Hadot on a Post-Socratic This-Worldly Mysticism

Hadot also begins with Socrates, but less with the self-governance of Foucault, than the guidance of an inner *daimon*, and the courage and detachment it allows in the face of social pressure, legal prosecution, and imminent death (Hadot, 2002). For Hadot each post-Socratic school seeks the imitation and formulation of key characteristics of the person of Socrates, very much in the way early directions of Christianity were inspired by differing aspects within the charismatic impact of Jesus. Thus the Skeptics imitated Socrates' *aporetic* capacity for acknowledging the "not knowing" of what cannot be truly or finally known—what Keats later termed "negative capability." The Cynics, Foucault's main focus in his last lecture series during 1983-1984 and recently published as *The Courage of Truth* (2011), emulated the public guidance offered by Socrates, his concern for the ethical welfare of others. The Epicureans concentrated on the Socratic *eudaimon*, or inner peace and tranquility. For them the pleasure of Being itself is the most subtle bliss possible for human beings, on the same level as the detached, contemplative gods. So all cruder pleasures of body and emotion must be minimized and mastered, much as with the Stoics, so that this experience of Being can arise and predominate. Finally, the Stoics sought principally the Socratic *ataraxia*—that capacity for inner autonomy and detachment they termed the "Zeus within." Its development would allow the discrimination of what was within one's control and what was not, with the acceptance of the latter as a manifestation of the Divine Will to which one must align and daily surrender. This continuous meditative openness to events as spontaneous manifestation of the divine was the core of Stoic practice (Epictetus, 2nd century).

All these traditions emphasized the same detachment in the face of persecution and death, and Diogenes Laertius in his *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* (3rd century) recounted individual tales of courageous martyrdom reminiscent of the early Christians. Hadot (1998, 2002) is struck by the way in which differing conceptual systems among these post-Socratic traditions were associated with the same spiritual practices, suggesting that they reflect essentially the

same movement, one inspired by the lived example and inspiration of Socrates—in contrast to the more purely metaphysical systems of the later Plato and Aristotle. Instead, these were primarily spiritual practices, centering on a meditative concentration on the experience of Being or presence in the moment, more reminiscent in terms of technique with the meditative traditions of Taoism and Sufism (Izutsu, 1984), rather than what is traditionally termed "philosophy."

For Hadot there is a common capacity for a "cosmic consciousness" that is shared across the later Stoics, Epicureans, and more obviously mystical neo-Platonists such as Plotinus (Hadot, 1993), conferring a sense of being "at home" in the universe as then understood by Hellenistic science. Here is Hadot on this experience of Being or presence:

The Stoics and Epicureans invite us...to live in the only moment in which we live, that is the present... as though we only had this day, only this moment, to live....as though we were seeing the world for the first and for the last time...The recognition of this... sacred character of life and of existence will lead us to understand our responsibility toward others and toward ourselves. (Hadot, 2011, p. 166, 189)

For Heidegger (1938/1994), and it would appear for Hadot as well, this experience of Being is at the core of Otto's sense of the numinous awe, wonder, and bliss of the mystical states more or less common to the world religions.

This would be the place then to locate these post-Socratic spiritualities both in terms of Max Weber's (1922/1963) extensive typology of world religions *and* the approximate coordination of the latter with variations within characteristic forms of transpersonal or numinous experience (Hunt, 2003). Weber distinguished between more mystical-experiential and prophetic-ethical orientations, and within each of these between more this- or inner-worldly and other-worldly attitudes. In inner-worldly spirituality one's realization/salvation is based on practice within everyday social living, rather than the retreat into more isolated communities or monasteries. The post-Socratic spiritual traditions, with their emphasis on an aesthetics of existence and cultivation of presence within the everyday social order would be examples of Weber's this-worldly mystical orientation, in contrast to the "world rejecting" mysticisms of neo-Platonism, Medieval Christian monasticism, and Eastern Buddhism and Vedanta, and further contrasted with the

this-worldly ethical propheticism of traditional Judaism, Pauline Christianity, and the Protestant Reformation and its Puritan sects.

To stay with the contrastive forms of more mystical-ecstatic states, Laski (1961) distinguished two directions of development in the felt transformations of personal identity or sense of self. On the one hand, there is the dissolution of self into an all-one Absolute, as in Plotinus and much of the other-worldly Eastern mysticisms. On the other, there is the felt enhancement/transformation of self that one finds in the Stoics and Epicureans. The psychology of this dimension of identity transformation is reflected in Jung's (1959) concept of the Self, which he considered most fully realized in the *persons* of Jesus and Buddha. It is also central to Maslow's (1962) description of the peak or numinous experiences of self actualization, where one's sense of identity becomes Being itself – "I am" experiences that evoke felt autonomy, love for others, and joy.

Almaas (1988) has subsequently distinguished two overlapping forms within this sensed expansion of self. First there is what he has termed "personal essence," as the spontaneous synthesis of an authentic autonomy with empathic sensitivity and care for others, which one finds in Socrates himself, Stoic teachings, and Cynic practices. Second, there is what Almaas termed experiences of one's "essential identity" as Being, which is most explicitly developed in the Epicureans. While inner-worldly mysticism, with its positive transformation in self identity, is found especially developed in aspects of Taoism and Sufism (see Izutsu, 1984), its most traditional Western form is actually to be found in the post-Socratics. Its more contemporary New Age expression appeared in the Gurdjieff-Ouspensky movement, not in its more other-worldly neo-gnostic metaphysics, but in the Sufi influenced technique of "self remembering." This is a kind of extraverted meditative practice, in the midst of everyday social life, cultivating and sustaining an immediate sense of presence or existence. Its successful practice, while especially difficult in the midst of social involvements in which we normally "lose" ourselves, sounds very much like the sense of clarity, freeing detachment, and expansive joy of Maslow's "peak experiences" of Being (Ouspensky, 1959; DeVilaine-Cambessedes, 1997). Gurdjieff groups practice this cultivation of ongoing presence with each other in much the way practiced within the Epicurean "gardens," the retreat areas to be found in every major city during

Foucault and Hadot on This-Worldly Mysticism

the Hellenistic era—a dispersion which Gurdjieff, and contemporary Almaas Diamond-Heart groups, hoped to emulate in the modern West (Hunt, 2003).⁴

Both Weber (1922/1963) and his associate Ernst Troeltsch (1931/1992) can be seen as anticipating for the later 20th century an inner- or this-worldly mystical direction of spiritual renewal among the educated middle classes, one more than borne out by the psychedelic and New Age mystical movements of the 1960s, as the predominant response to a contemporary secularization, disenchantment, and loss of Judeo-Christian religious belief. It follows from Weber and Troeltsch that any genuine re-newal, apart from the reactive fundamentalisms of more traditional groups, would need to be mystical, in order to compensate for the exhaustion of an earlier and predominant prophetic-ethical religious tradition. Meanwhile, the form of such a re-newal would need to be predominantly "this-worldly" to be consistent with and appeal to our historically unprecedented materialism and individualism— itself for Weber the secularized embodiment of the this-worldly Christian values of "on earth as it is in heaven." Developing their analyses largely independent of the sociologies of Weber and Troeltsch, and outside transpersonal and New Age circles, it seems strikingly prescient that Foucault and Hadot would arrive at the post-Socratic Stoics, Epicureans, and Cynics, the major Western traditions of a this-worldly mysticism, as offering the major guidance for any contemporary spiritual renewal that might re-balance an ethics of the modern subject in a society that they see, with Weber, as over-rationalizing, technologizing, and objectifying both individual and natural world.

Similarities of Post-Socratic Spirituality to Earliest Christianity

Despite Foucault's emphasis on a post-Socratic "aesthetics of existence" as an alternative to Christian self-renunciation, and what he considered the dangers today in our largely unconscious secularization of the latter, there are partial parallels between these two "this worldly" movements, and especially so when one considers the very earliest form of Christianity still linked to the historical Jesus. These parallels emerge from the analyses of both Foucault and Hadot, explicitly for Foucault in his treatment of the Roman Cynics, and more implicitly in the strong implication of Hadot's phenomenology of post-Socratic presence or Being experiences in early gospel accounts.

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The Christianity Foucault rejected in terms of its contemporary secularization is based on the post-5th century emergence of the confessional and what he saw as its subsequent emphasis on inquisitional interrogation and self-distrust of all privacy and inwardness. Other than his analysis of the Cynics in his final lectures, one does not know what else he might have made of the very earliest Christian era, since the draft of his book on Christianity, which he hoped to modify based on his final lectures, was held back from publication (Carrette, 1999; Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983).

Foucault and the Cynics

Foucault, in his final lectures on *The Courage of Truth* (2011), along with the historian of Jesus, John Crossan (1994), was struck by the parallels between the Roman era Cynics, in particular, and the early Christian Apostles, as well as with later Christian mendicant orders, such as the early Franciscans and more heretical Waldensians. Both the Cynics and Christian Apostles were committed to the ethical and spiritual guidance of others. Both followed a path of homeless wondering, foregoing family, marriage, and children, and returning a persistent care and love for others in response to any resulting abuse. In Crossan's terms, "Both are life-style preachers, advocating their position not only by word but by deed, not only in theory but in practice" (Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*, 1994, p. 137). Crossan concluded that the early followers of Jesus would have been initially understood at the time as populist Cynics. As inner/this worldly spiritual practices, one more mystical, the other prophetic, both seek the social transformation of everyday life.

Foucault was also struck by significant differences, with implications for a present guidance, centered ultimately around the "free spokenness" (*parrhēsia*) of the Cynics in "speaking truth to power." The Cynic goes forth alone, emphasizing a fierce self sufficiency and autonomy, the Apostles in small communal groups. He begs for food, while they exchange a communal reciprocity of hands-on healing for shelter and meals. The key difference for Foucault is in the positive sense of self in the Cynic: The Cynic is a

universal missionary of mankind, who watches over men whatever they may be doing...which people quarrel among themselves, which household enjoys peace....All this is the Cynic's mission, which is

nothing other than the reverse, positive side of his detachment. (Foucault, 1983-1984, p. 301)

This emphasis on autonomy and aggressive ethical challenge sounds very different than Christian Agape.

Accordingly the Cynic turns the other cheek in response to inevitable abuse from freely confronting the ethics of others, not out of humility and self-renunciation but out of a kind of inner pride, presence, and freedom. Following here Foucault's own reliance on Epictetus (2nd century), Cynics, who are understood as civically committed Stoics, aim to evoke their own sense of presence, detachment, and inner sovereignty (the Zeus within) in others. They reflect a kind of extraverted Stoicism, in contrast to what Epictetus (vol. 2) regarded as the "madness" of the Galileans (p. 363). Indeed, one would never confuse Diogenes telling Alexander the Great to stand out of his sunlight with the early Apostles evocation of universal forgiveness and love. The overt provocations of the Cynics are actually more reminiscent of the Sufi "way of blame," later adopted in the behavior of Gurdjieff, where unconventional and even outrageous behavior is used as a form of teaching that tests and challenges (Bennett, 1973; Toussulis, 2010).

One can infer that it would be such challenges to "normativity" and institutional empowerments that Foucault himself would find more suited to the present than a humility of self surrender and renunciation—whether that negation of self is Christian or takes the very different form of meditative Buddhism, which he also questioned in this regard (Foucault, 1978b).

Presence/Being Experience in Early Gospel Accounts

The experience of immediate here and now presence, with its felt qualities of freedom, joy, and timeless eternity, which Hadot saw as the explicit focus of post-Socratic spiritual practices, is also strongly implied within the earliest gospel accounts of the pre-crucifixion teaching of Jesus, while largely occluded under the later future oriented narrative schematizations of Resurrection and Apocalypse. This would be the implicit "mystical element" at the core of prophetic as well as mystical religion for Troeltsch (1931/1992). It is interesting that Gurdjieff, who on occasion referred to his "fourth way" movement as an "esoteric Christianity," said that it is impossible to sustain the Christian ideal of love and forgiveness, other than through an effortful and often failing struggle, without the lost capacity for

the spontaneously empowering experience of Being still inferrable in earliest Christianity.

Such as we are we cannot be Christians...Christ says “love your enemies,” but we cannot even love our friends...In order to be a good Christian one must first be...(as quoted in Ouspensky, 1949, p. 102)

First one must be able [to be], only then can one love. Unfortunately, with time, modern Christians have adopted the second half, to love, and lost view of the first, the religion which should have preceded it. (Gurdjieff, 1973, p. 153).

If one then asks what would stop or inhibit this experience of ongoing presence, both Hadot’s account of the Stoics Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, along with the Gurdjieff/Almaas tradition, will answer 1) preoccupation with the past and its sensed guilt, shame, and regret, 2) anxieties, fantasizing, and fearful preoccupations about the future. Both take the practitioner equally and powerfully away from any capacity to stay in the unfolding moment of Being. Yet what does Jesus, as pre-crucifixion charismatic teacher, moving and inspiring large crowds of followers, teach? 1) All past sins are forgiven – as a universal dispensation depending only on its acceptance and extension to a corresponding forgiveness for others 2) The eternal kingdom of heaven is already here. The future and death as personal annihilation is no longer to be feared:

Anyone who...puts his trust in Him who sent me has hold of eternal life, and does not come up for judgement, but has already passed from death to life....He shall never know what it is to die....No one who is alive and has faith shall ever die. (John 5: -24, 8:-51, 11:-26)

To fully feel these teachings from the speech and example of Jesus would be to experience a numinous sense of timeless and eternal Being, joy, and gratitude (see also Hunt, 2012).

Probably the first person to fully articulate this “mystical element” embedded within gospel narratives was Nietzsche, himself steeped in accounts of the Stoics, Epicureans, and Cynics from his studies of Diogenes Laertius, and a major intellectual influence on Foucault: Here is Nietzsche in *The Anti-Christ*:

In the whole psychology of the “evangel” the concept of guilt and punishment is lacking....”Sin”—any

distance separating God and man—is abolished: *precisely this is* the “glad tidings.” Blessedness is not promised...it is the only reality...[It is] how one must *live*, in order to feel oneself “in heaven,” to feel “eternal”...a new way of life, *not* a new faith.... The “kingdom of heaven” is a state of the heart—not something that is to come “above the earth” or “after death”....Not a faith...[but] another state of *being*...It is plain *what* was finished with the death on the cross: a new, an entirely original basis for a Buddhistic peace movement, for an actual, not merely promised, *happiness on earth*. (Nietzsche, 1888/1954b, pp. 606, 7, 8, 13, 16)

For Nietzsche, as more recently for Crossan (1994), the later schematization and “raising” of the death by ignominious crucifixion into the future oriented doctrines of Resurrection, Ascension, and Return in Judgement will have occluded this more spontaneous experience of numinous presence and its felt eternity. Bataille (1954, 1967) had originated his own phenomenology of numinous experience as a natural human capacity based on Nietzsche’s accounts of his own personal experiences of ecstasy (see also Hunt, 2003). This is what Nietzsche was also locating, with Hadot, in the Stoic-Epicurean experience of presence, as well as here in the earliest gospel accounts. It could not be more different than the later self-renunciation, life-long inner sinfulness, and eternally postponed salvation that Foucault finds so questionable in the context of its modern secularization.

Conclusions

Foucaultian

The later Foucault and Hadot find in these post-Socratic spiritualities less an occasion for any would-be direct imitation or revival, than a guidance for a needed renewal and re-balancing of an “ethics” of the modern subject in a society whose institutions and forms of knowledge systematically over-rationalize and dominate the life of the individual:

one of the great problems of Western culture has been to find the possibility of founding the hermeneutics of the self, not as was the case in Christianity, on the sacrifice of the self, but, on the contrary, on a positive, on the theoretical and practical, emergence of the self. (Foucault, 1980/1999, p. 180)

If, as Foucault suggested, the sense of self is largely determined by cultural “technologies of self transformation” that are most developed in spiritual traditions and practices, then “...maybe the problem is to change these technologies” as part of a needed “politics of ourselves” (Foucault, 1980/1999, p. 180). If so, the “positive self” of the post-Socrates—with its inner freedom, sovereignty, and presence—may be the better guide to a “new ethics” more fully congruent with the emerging culture at large than our powerfully secularized version of self-distrust and an institutional dominance over the sense of personhood and personal presence on which our version of modern civilization has been based.

Non Foucaultian

If Weber and Troeltsch are right that any genuine spiritual renewal, in the midst of a modern secularization/disenchantment of the Judeo-Christian ethical-prophetic tradition, must come from a more mystical-experiential direction;

And if it also follows that our unprecedented development of a cultural materialism, utilitarianism, and egocentric individualism can only be fully addressed and reconciled by a mysticism that is, in Weber’s terms, this- or inner-worldly;

And finally, if Jung (1943/1958b) has at least some point, however contentious within current transpersonal and New Age circles so often drawn to Buddhism and Vedanta, on the problematic basis for many in the modern West in seeking the full adoption of spiritual traditions entirely outside one’s own culture and upbringing;

Then, in looking for a genealogy of a this-worldly mysticism within our own cultural traditions of the West, one will arrive, courtesy of the later Foucault and the subsequent work of Hadot, at the post-Socratic spiritual practices of “care of the soul” and its social responsibilities of the Hellenistic-Roman era.

These traditions both by-pass the more other-worldly New Age appeals of the East and Gnostic neo-Platonism, often seen as sanctioning a withdrawal from the dilemmas of contemporary society, and avoid the reactive prophetic fundamentalisms—Christian, Jewish, or Islamic—that from a Foucaultian perspective play back into our present society of totalizing accountability and subordination of the person. Instead, it would be guidance from the post-Socratic, especially Stoic and Epicurean, spiritualities of an emergent self

of felt presence, that might help address the *cul de sac* of a world view, so forcefully critiqued by Foucault, of a pervasive institutionally driven normativity and accountability.

Foucault on Experience and its Implications for the Transpersonal

Foucault’s later understanding of experience as neither entirely derivative nor entirely constitutive, but always a culturally and historically varying interactive constellation, fits well with Scheler’s (1923/1960) and Buber’s (1957) further amending of Otto’s univocity of the numinous in terms of its necessary interaction with discursive structures of culture and sectarian “schematizations.” Mystical states, while showing the cross cultural component also implied by Foucault’s “technologies” of spiritual practices, will always entail shifting degrees of that interaction (Hunt, 2006, 2012). With Ferrer (2002), the resulting performative and ethical implications of transpersonal states avoid the sometimes overstated extremes of both “perennial philosophy” and a pure cultural constructivism.

From a later Foucaultian perspective one could suggest that mystical experience, like all human experience, is the resultant of multiple interacting dimensions. It is an expressive constellation, within which there are the core features of numinous states that do tend to predominate within the overlapping mysticisms of the major world religions. At the same time, mystical states are open to a continuous and variable shaping by societal, cultural-historical, cognitive, and personal patterns. The later Foucault’s location of specific valuative orientations, with a selective relevance and guidance for the contemporary West, in the shaping of more or less cross cultural “technologies of self transformation” in the this-worldly spiritual schools of the post-Socratics offers its own support for such an interactive approach within transpersonal studies.

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Notes

1. We can be reasonably certain that Foucault's last three lecture series on post-Socratic practices of self transformation would point the direction of any subsequent book length studies had he lived longer, given that his lectures generally anticipated his later books by several years and the majority of *The Use of Pleasure* (1985) and the posthumous *The Care of the Self* (1986) were based on lectures immediately preceding these final series.
2. Hadot's concentration on the Stoics and Epicureans, as part of a this-worldly spirituality inspired by the person of Socrates, came only after his first published work on the more other-worldly mysticism of Plotinus (Hadot, 1993, first French edition 1963), which he gradually concluded was irrelevant to what is most significant in ordinary living (Hadot, 2011). It was the beginnings of this shift, and the similar work of Hadot's wife, Ilsetraut Hadot, that Foucault cited as supporting his own approach in the *Hermeneutics of the Self* lectures.
3. Both Foucault and Bataille were strongly influenced by Nietzsche, but Foucault's Nietzsche is centered on the genealogical unmasking of cultural forms, as in *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886/1954a), whereas Bataille's Nietzsche is the exemplar of Dionysian ecstasy in *The Anti-Christ* (1888/1954b). This latter aspect is approached more indirectly by Foucault in his last lectures addressing "technologies" of spiritual transformation in the post-Socratics.
4. There is no suggestion here that Foucault, or for that matter Hadot, would have been personally interested in the more elaborated spiritual schools of Gurdjieff or Almas. What does seem well supported are the similarities of these more recent forms of this-

worldly spirituality, in both their core practices and understandings of self-identity as presence, to the earlier schools of the Stoics and Epicureans so central for both philosophers.

About the Author

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