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Towards a History of Philosophical Practices in Michel Foucault and Pierre Hadot

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This paper approaches the idea of philosophy that could be extracted from the reception of Hellenistic philosophical schools in Michel Foucault and Pierre Hadot. Stressing the idea of 'way of life', as well as the importance of 'spiritual exercises' and 'ascetic practices' to philosophical activity, I outline similarities between the two French philosophers, in order to explore the possibility of a history of philosophy written form the concrete perspective of the technologies of the self and of spiritual practices. I present Foucault and Hadot's analyses of concrete practices and modes of engagement with life as a perspective that redefines philosophy, as well as a hermeneutical tool in the study of ancient philosophy. In order to highlight the collective aspects of the history of philosophy as a history of practices, I discuss Hadot and Foucault's perspectives on the phenomenon of the ancient philosophical schools.

Introduction

In this paper I analyse the notion of philosophy as a way of life in the works of Pierre Hadot and Michel Foucault. Adopting different perspectives and methodologies, both authors are critical of a certain 'modern' notion of philosophy characterised by a systematic, abstract, and discursive form. Through historical research, Foucault and Hadot show the origins and the contingency of this notion of philosophy, pointing to alternatives, to traditions that were marginalised in the history of Western thought, which, nevertheless, continued to operate and re-emerge in this history.

What is the idea of philosophy delineated by Foucault and Hadot in their studies of antiquity? If it is the case that they share a conception

of philosophical activity, it is important to explicitly articulate this convergence. In addition to the specific philosophical tasks that the two authors set in their reading of ancient philosophy, is there a possible outcome in what concerns the consideration of the history and historiography of ancient philosophy? Is there a certain methodological attitude or a conceptual framework that could be relevant to the way we write the history of philosophy more generally? Considering their critical aims, does their image of philosophy presuppose an actual or possible alternative history of philosophy?

As Orazio Irrera[1] points out, the notion of 'practice' is very important to Hadot and Foucault. However, they interpret this notion differently, placing it in different historical-philosophical frameworks. By analysing Hadot's criticism to Foucault, Irrera shows the different notions of 'practice' entailed by the two scholars' philosophical and historiographical approaches.[2] My attempt is to emphasise a certain convergence concerning their conception of the practice of philosophy.[3] The

1 O. Irrera. 'Pleasure and Transcendence of the Self: Notes on a 'Dialogue too soon Interrupted' between Michel Foucault and Pierre Hadot', *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, v.36(9) (2010), 995-1017.

2 Irrera analyses in detail one of Hadot's criticisms to Foucault: Foucault's allegedly misunderstanding of the difference between 'joy' (*gaudium*) and 'pleasure' (*voluptas*) in the ancient schools, especially in the Stoics. Irrera ('Pleasure and Transcendence of the Self…', p.996-997) shows that the distinction is acknowledged by Foucault (when he differentiates two forms of pleasure, relating them to the ancient concepts of *gaudium* and *voluptas*). Irrera, then, shows the insufficient differentiation of these two concepts in different texts by Hadot ('Pleasure and Transcendence of the Self…', p.1008). He also explains that, even if Foucault notes the 'historical-doctrinal' difference between 'joy' and 'pleasure', this distinction is not relevant to the purpose of his genealogy. Irrera shows that there is also a fundamental difference in the conception of spiritual practice in Hadot and Foucault, making explicit some of Hadot's philosophical presuppositions in the analysis of ancient philosophy, namely, in Hadot, the 'performativity of a practice (or spiritual exercise)' as 'intimately tied to a universal which transcends the individual self' (Ibid., p.995). According to Irrera, Hadot's taxonomic activity as historian can be performed only starting from the 'choice of a determined theoretical paradigm', namely 'a theory of transcendence', which is absent in Foucault (Ibid., p.1008).

3 This was done by Moreno Montanari, who argues that Foucault and Hadot developed their research in the 1980s in 'complete autonomy', reaching surprisingly similar conclusions. M. Montanari. 'La filosofia antica come esercizio spirituale e cura di sé nelle interpretazioni di Pierre Hadot e Michel Foucault'. *Studi Urbinati, B – Scienze umane e sociali.* v. 80 (2010), p.343. I am not working with this hypothesis, but rather with the one that asserts or emphasises the

working hypothesis here is that Hadot and Foucault share a concrete, pragmatic, and performative conception of philosophy.

By analysing the notion of philosophy as a way of life, spiritual practice or technique of the self, as endorsed by the two philosophers, my attempt is to investigate the possibility of a history of philosophy as a history of concrete practices in their works. In order to do this, I examine the technologies of the self that articulate the relationship between 'subjectivity' and 'truth' in Foucault's concept of spirituality, as well as Hadot's conception of philosophy as spiritual exercises and its crystallisation in the ancient schools, as tools to read and understand the historical practices of philosophy.

My scope here is limited to an inquiry on the work of Foucault and Hadot, and this paper is situated within the reconstruction of this 'dialogue too soon interrupted'[4] between the two authors. However, where the dialogue did not occur,[5] there is still a series of convergences and divergences to be analysed. The two French philosophers began this

communication between the two authors, presupposing some degree of mutual influence, clearly noting Foucault's statements regarding his reading of Hadot as influential to his research. See F. Testa. 'A filosofia como modo de vida: Michel Foucault e Pierre Hadot'. *Cultura e Fé*, v. 136 (2012), 63-79. I frame this encounter as a dialogue 'too soon interrupted'. See Irrera,'Pleasure and Transcendence of the Self…' and Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*. (Malden: Blackwell, 1995); also, *Exercices Spirituels et Philosophie Antique*. (Paris: Albin Michel, 2002).

4   As Hadot says: '*Malheureusement sa mort prématurée, qui a bouleversé tous ses amis, a interrompu un dialogue que ne faisait que commencer, et dans lequel nous aurions pu sans doute profiter mutuellement de nos accords, mais aussi et surtout de nos désaccords'*. P. Hadot. *Execices Spirituels et Philosophie Antique*. (Paris: Albin Michel, 2002), p.305. Irrera uses Hadot's expression as the title of his paper. See O. Irrera, 'Pleasure and Transcendence of the Self: Notes on a 'Dialogue too soon Interrupted' between Michel Foucault and Pierre Hadot'.

5   According to Flynn, they 'never met until Foucault invited Hadot to accept candidacy for election to the Collège' (T. Flynn. 'Philosophy as a Way of Life: Foucault and Hadot'. *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, v.31(5-6) (2005), 609-622, p.614). As Hadot says, that happened in the autumm of 1980. Hadot says he did not know Foucault's work in depth at the time (P. Hadot. *Execices Spirituels et Philosophie Antique*, p.305), whereas Foucault told him that he was an 'attentive reader' of Hadot's texts. Foucault attended Hadot's inaugural lecture. Hadot states they did not have much contact and exchange ('unfortunately rare conversations'), because Foucault died soon after that. P. Hadot. *La Philosophie comme manière de vivre. Entretiens avec Jeannie Carlier et Arnold I. Davidson* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2001), p.215, English translation P. Hadot. *The Present Alone is our Happiness* (California: Stanford, 2011).

work of comparison and this inventory of differences. For instance, Foucault mentions Hadot's work several times in the *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, analysing his positions, stressing the importance of Hadot's texts to his own work, but also pointing to their different philosophical choices.[6] He also quotes Hadot in the introduction to *The Use of Pleasure*,[7] as well as in *The Care of the Self*.[8] Hadot also worked on this comparison, starting with the text 'Reflections on the Notion of 'Cultivation of the Self''',[9] in which he severely criticised Foucault, acknowledging, nevertheless, a certain philosophical proximity despite the methodological distance between them.[10]

It is difficult to engage in the reconstruction of this dialogue without considering Foucault's and Hadot's critical and philosophical aims, as well as the notion of philosophy that can be derived from the parallel reading of their works. If this reading can operate a critique or a

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6 We could take the discussion about the notion of 'conversion' as an example. Foucault says: 'I have done all this preparation and taken all these precautions with regard to the analysis of this notion of conversion, between *epistrophē* and *metanoia*, with reference, of course, to a basic text written by Pierre Hadot twenty years ago now'. M. Foucault. *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p.216.

7 'I have benefited greatly from the works of Peter Brown and those of Pierre Hadot, and I have been helped more than once by the conversations we have had and the views they have expressed'. M. Foucault. *The History of Sexuality, Volume Two: The Use of Pleasure.* (New York, Vintage Books, 1990), p.8.

8 See Foucault's definition of 'the cultivation of the self' ['*culture de soi*'] as art of existence, in which Hadot appears as a reference. See M. Foucault. *The History of Sexuality, Volume Three: The Care of the Self.* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), p.43.

9 This text was first publicised in the conference 'Foucault philosophe'. See P. Hadot. *Philosophy as a Way of Life.* (Malden: Blackwell, 1995), p.206. See also P. Hadot. *Exercices Spirituels et Philosophie Antique.* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2002), p.323.

10 In this text, Hadot criticism is articulated in three main axes: 1) Foucault focused too much on the 'self', articulating an kind of individualistic ethics, without considering the idea of a 'transcendent self'; 2) He fails to clearly distinguish 'joy' (*gaudium; eupatheia*) and 'pleasure' (*voluptas; hedone*) in ancient philosophy, especially in Stoicism; 3) Foucault does not recognise or emphasise the transcendent non-individual aspects of the practices of the self, namely: 'human community' and the 'cosmic whole' or 'universal nature'. Hadot also criticises Foucault's idea of the 'writing of the self'. Hadot claims that the Foucauldian idea of a 'culture of the self' is 'tacit attempt to offer contemporary mankind a model of life' and an 'aesthetics of existence', which is 'too aesthetic' and 'may be a new form of Dandysm'. See P. Hadot. *Philosophy as a Way of Life.* (Malden: Blackwell, 1995), pp.207-211.

transformation of our understanding of philosophical activity, it is possible to ask if it could also contribute to a reflection on the way we understand and practice the history of philosophy. What could be the relevance of such investigation to the history of philosophy as such?

In order to illustrate very briefly the relevance of this question – and of Foucault and Hadot – to the historiography of philosophy,[11] it is possible situate their positions according to Ian Hunter's account of the historiographical debate in intellectual history in the Anglophone scholarship. Hunter explains:

> Since the 1980s we have been told that the history of philosophy and intellectual history more broadly are characterised by a fundamental impasse, between the genre *of historical contextualisation* that views philosophies as empirical activities and the genre of *rational reconstruction* that assesses their contribution to philosophical truth.[12]

He explains that one of the solutions to this impasse was provided by what he calls a 'dialectical method', which synthesises the two genres.[13] Hunter argues that the dialectical method is insufficient,[14] because it risks subsuming the historical, empirical aspects of philosophies in a philosophical narrative. He proposes, then, to replace the philosophical commitments of the dialectical method 'with concepts capable of approaching philosophies as empirical activities taking place under

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11 This justification is not the scope of this paper. What I intend to do here is merely to point to an ongoing historical debate in which categories close to those of Hadot or Foucault are analysed from the point of view of historiography.

12 I. Hunter. 'The History of Philosophy and the Persona of the Philosopher'. *Modern Intellectual History,* v.4(3)*,* (2007), 571-600, p.572.

13 Hunter analyses Rorty, Schneewind and Skinner's book *Philosophy in History.* This book articulates the two genres mentioned above in dialectical opposition and complementarity. An example of this approach is Charles Taylor. He conceives philosophy as a social practice, presupposing, however, a *telos* and an idea of good that would allow this philosophy to be judged in terms of philosophical truth and falsity. Following Hunter's exposition, this rational truth does not seem to be historical or historicised and, at the same time, seems to function as a kind of transcendent or external criterion to assess a certain philosophy. I. Hunter. 'The History of Philosophy and the Persona of the Philosopher', p.578.

14 'This dialectical presentation of the two genres makes it impossible to approach the key problem - regarding the divergence between philosophy as object and as method of intellectual history'. (Ibid., p.574).

specifiable historical circumstances'.[15] Hunter views the Cambridge school of history of political thought as an alternative to the dialectical method.[16] His position, however, differs from this historiographical line.[17] Hunter's alternative is that of a history of philosophy considering the constitution of the philosophers' self or 'persona', emphasising the contingent, 'performative character of ethico-cognitive ensembles'.[18] The concept of persona 'extends the reach of the history of philosophy' because of the 'account it offers of the relation between the acquisition of philosophical knowledge and the *cultivation of a special self*'.[19]

This idea of 'persona' constitutes a perspective, close to that of Foucault and Hadot,[20] which is as a positive alternative in the historiographical debate. From this perspective, the starting point of philosophical activity emerge within the

> …regimen of philosophical self-problematisation designed to motivate cultivation of the particular philosophical persona that it makes desirable. Such regimens transmit what Foucault char-

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15 Ibid, p.574.

16 'The Cambridge School writers have indeed provided an approach to intellectual history in which past forms of thought, philosophies included, can be constituted as objects of empirical historical interpretation and explanation. By viewing philosophies as speech acts, Skinner in particular has sought to suspend their truth-claims and to interpret them in terms of their mode of acting on and within particular cultural, religious and political contexts'. Hunter emphasises Skinner's non-dialectical, 'conflictual conception of intellectual history' (Ibid, p.575).

17 Hunter is sympathetic to the Cambridge school's empirical history of philosophy, against a dialectical mode of history of thought and philosophical reconstruction of truth. However, he sees a residual 'structuralism' in the Cambridge school (Ibid., p.583).

18 Ibid., p.583.

19 'The philosopher's self is usually viewed as a purely formal point of reflexive self-awareness, for example the 'cogito' of Descartes's sceptical reduction […] Through the concept of philosophical persona, though, we learn to see this self as something that the apprentice philosopher cultivates (…) thereby imbuing a particular ensemble of intellectual arts with the unity and dynamism of a culturally valorised and intensely desired 'higher self'' (Ibid, p.587).

20 Hadot is appears in one of the notes in this passage as an example of the group of writers that emphasised the regimes 'associated with the cultivation of a particular persona' (I. Hunter.'The History of Philosophy and the Persona of the Philosopher', p.587). Hunter quotes Hadot's book *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, supporting his claim according to which 'the history of philosophical pedagogy and psychagogy should form an integral part of the history of philosophy' (Ibid., p.587).

acterises as 'models proposed for setting up and developing relationships with the self, for self-reflection, self-knowledge, self-examination, for the decipherment of the self by oneself, for the transformations that one seeks to accomplish with oneself as object'.[21]

Even if Foucault and Hadot seem to occupy an important place in Hunter's proposition of the history of philosophy as a history of ensembles of intellectual arts – 'speech acts, but also doctrines, modes of proof, logico-rhetorical techniques, ethico-cognitive exercises, and exper- imental apparatus' – that are tied to 'a specific sense and kind of self',[22] it is important to consider certain particularities, especially in Foucault's case.

Between History of Sexuality, Genealogy of Subjectivity and History of Philosophy

When analysing Foucault's reading of ancient philosophies, it is important to stress that he is not explicitly writing a history of philosophy. According to Ortega, Foucault's project is that of the 'elaboration of a history of subjectivity starting from different technologies of the self'.[23] If we analyse diachronically his studies on antiquity, we note that it begins as part of the project of a history of sexuality. His research starts as an investigation of sexual practices, the problematisation of behaviours, and the sexual ethics of the ancients – a chapter of a broader genealogy of the subject. This research, however, is gradually re-centred on the 'techniques of the self' – on the relation to oneself as an ethical work of ascesis.

It is also important to remember that Foucault's research on ethics is an inquiry on the forms of resistance to power and subjection. Foucault's goal is the 'study of different practices that allow the indi- vidual to establish a relationship with itself, constituting different points of resistance to subjectivising power'.[24] Foucault investigates the possib- ility of a subject that is not informed by exterior governmentalities, a subject able to constitute, by means of regular exercises, a relationship to the self. As he states in *The Hermeneutics*, this relation to the self seems

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21 Ibid., p.587.
22 Ibid., p.583.
23 F. Ortega. *Amizade e Estética da Existência em Foucault.* (São Paulo: Graal, 1999), p.60.
24 F. Ortega. *Amizade e Estética da Existência em Foucault*, p.60.

to be the only possible ground of resistance to power.[25] From the perspective of ethics and resistance, then, philosophy seems to play an important role as a positive set of critical practices mobilised by the subject.

As Timothy O'Leary suggests, philosophy is a practice in Foucault's ethics, and not only an object of historical investigation.[26] If, in 1978, Foucault said that he was not doing philosophy, nor 'suggesting to others not to do it',[27] in his 1980s research, philosophy appears as a useful tool for the transformation of the self. Analysing the introduction of *The Use of Pleasure*, O'Leary claims that, for Foucault, philosophy could participate in a project of self-transformation: 'Philosophy could again be a critical reflective practice whose aim is to transform and de-subjectivise the individual'.[28] In this sense, Foucault's historical research 're-encounters a philosophical tradition with which he could identify his ethics of self-transformation – the ancient tradition of philosophy as a 'way of life' or 'spiritual exercise''.[29]

When recovering the trajectory of Foucault's research on ethics and subjectivation, it is important to ask: (a) is it possible to find the elements for a redefinition of philosophy, a positive concept of philosophical activity, as O'Leary, Ortega and others seem to suggest? (b) Is it possible to find the elements of an alternative history of philosophy in Foucault's history of subjectivity?

I believe it is pertinent to ask whether Foucault provides the tools to constitute a different historiographical perspective. Indeed, he seems to acknowledge that philosophy gradually acquires centrality in his historical project. As he says, in 1984, in the *Courage of the Truth*, 'Maybe I will try to pursue this history of the arts of living, of philosophy as a form of life, of asceticism in its relation to truth, after ancient philosophy, in Christianity'.[30] This statement suggests a shift concerning the possibility of a history of philosophy in his work.

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25 'There is no first or final point of resistance to political power other than the relationship one has to oneself' (M. Foucault. *The Hermeneutics of the Subject,* p.251).
26 T. O'Leary. *Foucault and the Art of Ethics.* (London and New York: Continuum, 2002), p.140.
27 Ibid., p.141.
28 Ibid., p.142.
29 Ibid., pp.143-144.

I intend to show how this Foucauldian perspective converges, to a certain extent, with the one Hadot presents. I believe the consideration, by these two authors, of the ancient schools – as the intertwining of a collective art of existence with intellectual or spiritual exercises that one operates on oneself – is a way to establish concrete individual and social practices as a point of reference to understand the history of ancient philosophy.

History of philosophical ways of life and Hadot's critical aim

Differently from Foucault, Hadot articulates his conception of philosophy in relation to his explicit project of history of philosophy. Hadot thinks that, by recovering the 'ancient' spiritual conception of philosophy we can uncover a history of fundamental philosophical attitudes and existential choices. According to Hadot, historiography of philosophy should also include the 'study of philosophical modes of life'.[31] His project focuses on the task of writing a history that could integrate this lived, existential dimension to the study of the doctrines, to a reconstruction of philosophical discourse. This historical enterprise is connected to his critical aim, that of offering another possible concept of philosophy in our days, by recovering this idea of philosophy as a lived activity, 'more formative than informative',[32] which touches the core of our life and *ethos*. Hadot seeks to revive the tradition in which philosophy is defined by spiritual exercises and forms of life.

In *What is Ancient Philosophy?* the idea of 'school' plays a key role in the definition of ancient philosophy. Hadot employs this notion to explain the relation between a fundamental choice of a way of life and discourse, including a dimension of alterity and inter-human relations in the core of ancient philosophical practices. The ancient school seems to be a privileged locus of intersection of (a) philosophical doctrines (or theoretical discourse as a practice), (b) modes of being, ways of living (which presupposes the relationship with others), and (c) pedagogy (the practices and concrete circumstances through which certain groups learn

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30 M. Foucault. *The Courage of the Truth (The Government of Self and Others II).* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p.316.

31 P. Hadot. *What is Ancient Philosophy?* (Cambridge and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), p.1.

32 T. Flynn. 'Philosophy as a Way of Life: Foucault and Hadot'. *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, v.31(5-6), 2005, 609-622, p.610.

how to reflect on themselves, problematise certain aspects of themselves, and undertake various exercises on the self).[33]

Let us analyse the perspectives of the two authors and discuss their complementarity. We begin with Foucault's analysis of the care of the self as an event in the history of thought and its implications to philosophical activity.

The care of the self as an event in the history of thought

The Hermeneutics of the Subject could be characterised as a 'history of the care of the self'.[34] This history is a particular case of a broader inquiry on the technologies of the self.[35] in which different practices on the self configure different forms of subjectivation.

The history of the care of the self is structured in three axes: (1) the emergence of this principle as a cultural experience and as a philosophical concept; (2) the articulation of a specific subject-truth relation based on the care of the self, which Foucault calls 'spirituality'; (3) the discrediting of the care of the self,[36] a re-qualification of the knowledge of the self – and, consequently, the exclusion of the requirements of spirituality for the subject-truth relation.

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33 This definition of pedagogy in the context of a philosophical school was suggested by Ian Hunter.

34 S. Muchail. *Foucault, Mestre do Cuidado:* Textos sobre a *Hermêutica do Sujeito.* (São Paulo: Loyola, 2011), p.44.

35 Foucault will integrate the investigations on medical and philosophical practices of the self within the category of 'pragmatics of the self'. He also mentions other practices, ritual and magical practices that he includes in the field of a 'historical ethnology of ascetics' (M. Foucault. *The Hermeneutics of the Subject,* p.417). According to the editors of *The Hermeneutics*, 'The history of the techniques of the self in Ancient Greece was broadly investigated before Foucault's studies of the eighties', they provide a list of authors and studies (Ibid., p.61).

36 'Why did Western thought and philosophy neglect the notion of *epimeleia heautou* (…) in its reconstruction of its own history?'. How did it come about, asks Foucault, 'that we accorded so much privilege, value, and intensity to the 'know yourself' and omitted, or, at least, left in the shadow, this notion of care of the self that (…) seems to have framed the principle of 'know yourself' from the start and to have supported an extremely rich and dense set of notions, practices, ways of being, forms of existence? Why does the *gnothi seauton* have this privileged status for us, to the detriment of the care of oneself?' (M. Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p.12).

According to Foucault, the care of the self was a traditional principle in Greek culture. It is with the figure of Socrates that both the imperative of 'knowing oneself' and that of 'taking care of oneself' emerge as philosophical precepts. Foucault claims that the imperative of 'knowing oneself' emerges within that of 'taking care of oneself', understanding the latter as an underlying structure to ancient philosophy.[37] According to Arnold Davidson, Foucault 'aims to unsettle a dominant way of understanding the history of ancient philosophy. Foucault insists that (…) the rule 'know yourself' should be understood (…) in a kind of subordination to the precept of the care of the self'.[38]

By individuating the history of the practices and techniques that defined the care of the self, Foucault's genealogy makes it possible to establish different conditions of intelligibility of knowledge of the self related to it. The constitution of the subject and the possibility of knowing oneself can be understood through the history of the concrete practices of the care of the self.[39]

According to Ortega, one of the theoretical outcomes of Foucault's historical-genealogical enterprise regarding antiquity (beyond the particular historical practices he analyses) is a 'processual notion of subjectivity', which differs from a philosophy of the subject or a 'return of the subject'. Subjectivity is historicised and depends on the different

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37 Differently from Hadot, who generalises the model of philosophy as a way of life to the whole of ancient philosophy, Foucault makes clear that there is the exceptional figure of Aristotle for whom philosophy is a purely theoretical activity.

38 Davidson. 'Introduction', in M. Foucault. *The Hermeneutics of the Subject,* p.xx.

39 Hunter's concept of 'the persona of the philosopher' is 'introduced in opposition to the philosophical concept of subject of knowledge' ('The History of Philosophy and the Persona of the Philosopher', p.584). This is also one of the consequences of Foucault's genealogy. Starting from the care of the self means to avoid the assumption of a theory of the subject, and to emphasise the way a particular kind of self is constituted. The cultivation of a persona expresses a case of composition or constitution of the self. From a Foucauldian perspective, the persona of the philosopher – engendered by a certain set of practices of cultivation and formation – is an example of alternative modes of subjectivation in history. It is possible to say that, like in Foucault's analyses of the constitution of the self, Hunter's historiographical reflection on the concept of persona does not presuppose a universal structure of subjectivity, or a fixed subject of knowledge. Hunter suggests us to treat the 'philosopher as a self cultivated to bear specialised ensembles of such [intellectual] arts, in institutions dedicated to the transmission of particular philosophical traditions'. His concept is the application of a consistent method to the study of different periods in history of philosophy, not only to antiquity.

technologies that constitute it: 'there is no subject *as such* (a universal, a-historical subject), but rather a history of subjectivity […] and of the different technologies of the self'.[40] As Davidson explains, by refusing a universal theory of the subject, Foucault understands '*the subject* himself as constituted by the form of reflexivity specific to this or that form of care of the self'.[41]

Foucault shows the different ways in which the constitution of the subject took place in history according to different practices and techniques of the self. As Davidson explains, by identifying the priority of the care of the self in ancient philosophy, Foucault's genealogy dismantles a possible theory of the subject implied in assuming the knowledge of the self as a starting point.[42]

If we take the care of the self as a key notion in the history of philosophy, it is possible to say that Foucault's approach includes within the sphere of this history, a series of concrete practices, activities and exercises (tests, memorisation, writing, meditation, etc.). This emphasis leads Foucault to a differentiation between ancient philosophy, and a modern – theoretical, abstract and systematic conception of philosophy.[43] Foucault characterises the processes, requirements and the subject-truth relation active in ancient, and, especially, Hellenistic, philosophy, as spir-

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40 F. Ortega. *Amizade e Estética da Existência em Foucault,* p.60.

41 M. Foucault. *The Hermeneutics of the Subject,* p.xxii.

42 Foucault's history cannot take the 'subject' as something universal, eternal, fixed or essential. It has to consider it as a variable (and empty) form that has different historical constitutions. As Davidson puts it, to depart from the 'knowledge of the self', 'installing a factious history that would display a sort of continuous development of the knowledge of the self' would be to allow 'an explicit or implicit, but anyway underdeveloped theory of the subject to infiltrate the analysis' (Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject,* p.xxi). Foucault shows that the *gnothi seauton* does not have the same form or function within the history of the *care of the self*, and, in addition, that the 'self' is constituted.

43 This qualitative difference between 'ancient' and 'modern' philosophy is also fundamental in Hadot's approach. Nevertheless, I believe it is important to question this distinction. If we consider Hunter's approach, modern philosophy is still related to the constitution of a philosophical persona (that is to say it is still connected to empirical historical practices of self cultivation, connected to institutions and ethico-cognitive exercise. In Foucault's work, however, the distinction between 'ancient' and 'modern' is more fluid. Foucault situates a series of philosophical examples of the articulation of philosophy as a way of life in modernity, from Spinoza to Nietzsche, Marx, Stirner, anarchist thought, etc.

ituality.[44]

From the perspective of the historiography of philosophy, this distinction corresponds to a re-evaluation of the decisive moments in the history of thought. Once we highlight the care of the self, there would be a history of the singular event of 'spirituality', seen through the lens of *long durée*, as long-standing body of cultural practices, pedagogical institutions, modes of cultivating the self. There would also be a history of the relative effacing of spirituality, marked by the event that Foucault calls, with a certain ambiguity, 'Cartesian moment'.[45] Nevertheless, Foucault believes that spirituality is never completely excluded from philosophy. Integrating this structure of spirituality, beyond antiquity, the 'alternative' history of philosophy would have to investigate these examples.[46]

Philosophy, Spirituality and Techniques of the Self

According to Foucault, the care of the self structures a subject-truth relation called 'spirituality', which has three main aspects. First, spirituality is a mode of relation between subject and truth in which these terms are not connected by means of a transparent, direct relation. The subject is conceived as deprived of truth. As Foucault explains: 'Spirituality postulates that the truth is never given to the subject by right'.[47] The conditions of possibility of knowledge and access to truth are neither

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44 'A distinction without which' – according to Davidson – 'the modern relation between the subject and the truth, taken as if universal, would cover over the singularity of the Hellenistic event of meditation and its constitution of the subject of truth' (Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject,* p.xxiii).

45 A series of processes in the history of thought, especially in the history of the subject-truth relation, that separate philosophy from the exigencies of spirituality and disqualifies the care of the self. I discuss the 'Cartesian moment' in papers published previously (See F. Testa. 'Michel Foucault e o helenismo: subjetivação e cuidado de si'. *Intuitio,* v. 4 (2011), 3-14. See also F. Testa. 'A filosofia como modo de vida: Michel Foucault e Pierre Hadot'. *Cultura e Fé* (2012), v. 136, 63-79). The 'Cartesian moment' is an ambiguous historical concept, because it does not mark a definitive dissociation or rupture between spirituality and philosophy.

46 As he explains, 'I think Montaigne should be reread in this perspective […]. We could also take up the history of 19th century thought a bit in this perspective […]. If you take, for example, Stirner, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Dandysm, Baudelaire, anarchy, anarchist thought, etc'. He also mentions Spinoza, Goethe, Marx, Lacan and other examples from the early-modern and modern period. M. Foucault. *The Hermeneutics of the Subject,* p.251.

47 M. Foucault. *The Hermeneutics of the Subject,* p.15.

immanent to the subject's cognitive structures, nor assured by an object-
ive method.[48]

Second, spirituality does not disqualify the truth or the possibility
of truth. The subject has to operate a self-transformation in order to have
access to the truth, through a conversion to and a work on the self, which
Foucault calls *askesis*. The second attribute of spirituality is the need of a
conversion,[49] a movement of opening up of the access to truth. As
Foucault says, 'There can be no truth without a conversion or a trans-
formation of the subject', which is conditioned by 'a work of the self on
the self […] a progressive transformation of the self […] in a long labour
of ascesis (*askesis*)'.[50] This work is the key to understand the concrete
forms acquired by the care of the self in ancient philosophy.[51]

In modern philosophy, the subject can access truth without self-
transformation. According to Foucault, in the modern moment of the
history of truth and subjectivity, truth and subject are autonomous in rela-
tion to each other, but the relations between them are assured *a priori,* by
the subject's very structure, and by the structure of truth. The mediation
between these two instances is a certain objective method and not spir-
itual requirements. In spirituality knowledge is connected to the ethical or
affective status of the subject. The caesura between subject and truth,
before conversion and *askesis,* is reflected in his condition of suffering
and bondage to the passions. This means that the relation to the truth has
important ethical implications, and the access to truth is also capable of
saving[52] the subject. This is why, in spirituality, access to the truth has
also therapeutic aspect. We might recall, as an example, the Epicurean
idea according to which the discourse of a philosopher that does not act
upon the passions of the soul, as a physician would act upon the body, is
in vain.[53]

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48 Ibid., p.15.

49 Ibid., Lecture eleven.

50 Ibid., p.16.

51 'In short […] in and of itself an act of knowledge could never give access to the
   truth unless it was prepared, accompanied, doubled, and completed by a certain
   transformation of the subject; not of the individual, but of the subject himself in his
   being as subject' (Ibid., p.16).

52 For an analysis of the notion of salvation, see M. Foucault *The Hermeneutics of the
   Subject,* p.23, pp.120-21, p.127, pp.180-85.

53 See Foucault (*The Hermeneutics of the Subject,* p.21), note 29: 'The centre of
   gravity of this theme is Epicurus' phrase: 'The discourse of the philosopher who
   does not treat any human affection is empty. Just as a doctor who does not get rid

This is the third key feature of the access to truth in spirituality: its effects of rebound on the subject.[54] The subject does not merely come to know the truth in a cumulative process, but this truth is a 'quasi-subject' that installs itself within the subject's being, reacting upon his way of being and affective condition.[55] We can suppose that, starting from Foucault's subjectivity-truth framework, there would be a concrete history of the different effects of truth on the subject operated by different philosophies. There would be a history of the experimentations that different forms of *askesis* propose, as well as a history of practical effects of philosophy in the structure of the subject and the formation of the self.

What is the image of the history of philosophy that could emerge from this perspective? (1) History of philosophy should consider the different relations subject-truth oriented by the care of the self, understood concrete arts and intellectual work on the self. Consequently, the history of philosophy would be a history of the concrete practices and technologies of the self.[56] Different philosophies propose different tech-

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of bodily illness is useless, so also is a philosophy if it does not get rid of the affection of the soul''. Foucault's quotation is from A.-J. Voelke (*La philosophie comme therapie de l'âme*) . Epicurus is very important for the discussion of a therapeutic model in *The Hermeneutics*. See the analysis of the uses of the word *therapeuein* in Epicurus' *Letter to Menoeceus* (*The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p.9)

54 As Foucault explains: '…once access to the truth has really been opened up, it produces effects that are, of course, the consequence of the spiritual approach taken in order to achieve this, but which at the same time are something quite different and much more: effects which I call 'rebound' ('*de retour*'), effects of the truth on the subject' (Ibid., p.16).

55 'For spirituality, the truth is not just what is given to the subject, as reward for the act of knowledge as it were, and to fulfil the act of knowledge. The truth enlightens the subject; the truth gives beatitude to the subject; the truth gives the subject tranquillity of the soul' (Ibid., p.16).

56 This history would suspend truth claims of past philosophies (similarly to Hunter's description Skinner's method, and of his own history of 'persona'), replacing it by an empirical approach to the practices that each philosophy considered necessary to reach the truth. The truth in the Foucauldian perspective of 'spirituality' and 'ascesis' seems to be this historical formal structure – and not a substantive reality or attribute of philosophies. Practices of asserting the truth, knowing the truth, thinking the truth, pragmatic and performative effects of the truth occupy a central role, but there is not an evaluation of past philosophies and practices in terms of truth or falsity (as we could find in what Hunter calls 'dialectical method' or 'rational reconstruction').

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niques and exercises, as well as different models of the self. (2) This history of philosophy should consider the history of the effects of the truth on the subject, and the different effects of truth aimed by each philosophy – which could be also called a history of different 'therapies of the truth'. (3) History of philosophy would analyse the different ways of life that configure the progress and the aims of the *askesis* of each school, as well as the *ethos* in which truth can emerge or be accessed by the subject.

Considering these conclusions, there is still an important question to be discussed, regarding the collective aspects and conditions of the consideration of the care of the self in the history of philosophy. Is it possible to take care of oneself in isolation? Is the care of the self and the conception of philosophical activity derived from it deprived of a collective character, of an axis of otherness and sociality? We will discuss this question through Hadot's perspective on philosophy as a way of life and the philosophical schools.

Hadot and the ancient philosophical schools

For Hadot, philosophy is fundamentally a radical choice of a way of life. Hadot thinks that philosophy is not the same as 'theoretical discourses and philosopher's systems'.[57] In what concerns the possibility of an alternative history of philosophy, he claims that, 'in addition to this histories of ideas, theories and systems, there would be room for the study of a history of philosophical practices, attitudes and ways of life'.[58]

The choice of a way of life is never made in solitude. As Hadot argues, 'there can never be philosophy or philosopher outside a group, a community – in a word, a philosophical 'school''.[59] Despite his emphasis on the 'self', Foucault also analyses the 'question of the other' in the care of the self.[60] stating that 'the other is indispensable for the practice of the self'.[61] He explains:

In Greek, Hellenistic, and Roman culture, care of the self

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57 P. Hadot. *What is Ancient Philosophy?* (Cambridge and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), p.1.
58 Ibid., p.1.
59 Ibid., p.3.
60 'The care of the self consequently requires, as you can see, the other's presence, insertion, and intervention' (M. Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject,* p.134).
61 M. Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject,* p.127.

always took shape within quite distinct practices, institutions,
and groups, which were often closed to each other […]. Care of
the self is linked to practices or organisations of fraternity,
brotherhood, school, and sect'.[62]

According to Hadot, this inter-human relation is a condition to conceive
history of 'philosophy as way of life'. In order to understand the theories
and doctrines of ancient philosophers, it is not enough to consider them
from an exegetical perspective. One has to consider them according to a
'concrete perspective'.[63] To situate the doctrines presented in the texts and
understand them properly one must consider: (1) the spiritual exercises,
the concrete practices and activities in which these doctrines were actual-
ised and experienced; (2) the schools, the collective dimensions and a
complex set of social relations that organised philosophical life. Hadot
thinks that 'understanding a work of antiquity requires placing it in the
group from which it emanates'.[64] The relation to others, the belonging to
a certain group, and a collective experience were also the conditions of
philosophy as self-transformation.

The historian of philosophy should consider the 'existential atti-
tudes underlying the dogmatic edifices' being analysed, because 'they are
products of a *school*, in the most concrete sense of the term, in which a
master forms his disciples, trying to guide them to self-transformation'.[65]
This concrete perspective of the school adds to our investigation on the
possibility of an alternative history of philosophy a necessary collective
dimension without which, according to Hadot, we cannot understand
philosophical practice.

It is by understanding the school as concrete and collective instan-
tiation of philosophical life that we can understand the texts and the
particular contents of the different philosophical doctrines. Hadot's
concept of 'school' could guide us in a history of concrete philosophical
practices. That said, I would like individuate some of its key meanings.

Hadot links the concept of 'school' to, on the one hand, *schole,*
designating an 'institution or a doctrinal tendency'[66] and, on the other

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62 Ibid., p. 113.
63 P. Hadot. *Philosophy as a Way of Life,* p.104.
64 Ibid., p.64.
65 Ibid., p.104.
66 P. Hadot. *What is Ancient Philosophy?,* p.295.

hand, to *hairesis*, designating 'attitudes of thought and life'.[67] The school as an institution and a doctrinal tendency can been seen as the collective organisation of a certain *hairesis*.

In *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, Hadot explains[68] that a school is the connection between (1) a fundamental inner attitude, (2) a manner of speaking (discourses or doctrines); (3) a set of specific exercises to ensure spiritual progress, (4) the 'application of a medical cure', and (5) a conception of wisdom, a 'norm of wisdom',[69] and thus a conception of the sage or the wise man (as a regulatory image or ideal, as an 'exemplar', or an ideal of a 'higher' self). The articulation of these elements configures 'cultural' institutions that organise, guide, and cultivate different ways of life. The different ways of articulating these items create different global attitudes, instantiated in agonistic, or competing, social-political structures.

A different characterisation is presented in *What is Ancient Philosophy?,* where Hadot stresses the intersection between three elements: a 'fundamental experience', a 'radical choice' and an 'existential attitude'. For example, he presents the Epicurean fundamental experience as that of the 'flesh'[70] – 'the voice of the flesh: not to be hungry, not to be thirsty, not to be cold', and its choice is to 'deliver the flesh from its suffering and thus allow it to experience pleasure'.[71] It is by considering this experience and this choice that Epicurean doctrine and way of life will be grounded, justified, practiced.

Hadot argues that the different schools proposed different remedies to human suffering, or different therapies.[72] Each school conceives

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67 P. Hadot. *What is Ancient Philosophy?,* p.101.

68 P. Hadot. *Philosophy as a Way of Life,* p.59.

69 Ibid., p.57.

70 Jean-Marie Guyau, in his *La Morale d'Épicure*, also defines the fundamental experience of Epicureanism as that of the 'flesh' (*chair*). I quote from my translation: 'Pure thought, thought without flesh [*chair*] is, for the Epicureans, just a distant and uncoloured image, an effaced picture in which we can only glimpse vague and irresolute lines'. See J.-M. Guyau. *La morale d'Épicure et ses Rapports avec les Doctrines Contemporaines*. (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1927).

71 P. Hadot. *What is Ancient Philosophy?,* pp.114-115.

72 When I presented this paper in Prato, I emphasised the importance of a medical model of philosophy, as described by Foucault in *The Care of the Self* and *The Hermeneutics*, by quoting his analysis of Plutarch's idea according to which philosophy and medicine share a same field, *mia khora*, that is to say that of

human experience, individuating 'mankind's principal causes of suffering'. Each school proposes a specific choice in order to deliver the subject from his suffering, offering distinct therapeutics of the passions, and a 'particular therapeutic method'.[73] For example, in what he calls 'dogmatic schools',[74] 'therapeutics consisted in transforming value judgements'.[75]

In this sense, ancient schools are, more than just a pedagogical institution, a kind of philosophical 'clinic'. This is also important for Foucault, when analysing the care of the self within the collective structure of the school:

> There is the appearance of the idea of a group of people joining together to practice the care of the self, or of a school of philosophy established in reality as a clinic for the soul [...].You come [...] to be treated for the evils and passions from which you suffer. This is exactly what Epictetus says about his school. He conceives of it as a hospital or clinic of the soul. [76]

Foucault explains:

> You should remember that you are basically here to be cured. Before you throw yourself into learning syllogisms, "cure your

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passions and affects.

73 P. Hadot. *Philosophy as a Way of Life,* p.82.

74 Hadot differentiates two types of schools. He calls 'dogmatic' schools those like Stoicism and Epicureanism, which sustained the possibility of knowledge, theoretical truth, and the formulation doctrines in a coherent nucleus. They are 'dogmatic' because they conceive the practice of a way of life as presupposing the 'adhesion to numerous dogmas mutually coherent' (P. Hadot. *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, p.101), reduced to fundamental maxims that must be kept 'at hand' in order to operate in the dynamics of life and passions. There are also schools that are non-dogmatic, but still propose a way of life oriented by a rational principle (even if not committed to dogmas, or robust metaphysical claims, as Cynicism and Scepticism).

75 P. Hadot. *What is Ancient Philosophy?,* p.103. See Epictetus, *Enchiridon*, Ch.5 (p.223). Hadot explains that 'evil is not to be found in things', but in the way we interact with them – as he says, In the value judgements which people bring upon things. People can therefore be cured of their ills only if they are persuaded to change their value judgements […]. In order to change our value judgements, however, we must make a radical choice to change our entire way of thinking and way of being' (*What is Ancient Philosophy?,* p.102).

76 M. Foucault. *The Hermeneutics of the Subject,* p.99.

wounds, stop the flow of your humours, and calm your mind. Again, in discourse 23 in book III, he [Epictetus] says even more clearly: What is a philosophy school? A philosophy school is an *iatreion* (a clinic) . You should not walk out of the philosophy school in pleasure, but in pain. [77]

The concept of school, for Hadot, however, is not only connected to the historical phenomenon of organisation of philosophy as a way of life in the ancient world. If the school is such an important concept for Hadot's conception of philosophy, it is because it has also a more robust, speculative and general sense – perhaps referring to a philosophical anthropology or an idea of the structure of the human experience or human reason.

The schools are, he says, 'models of life', 'fundamental forms in accordance with which *reason* may be applied to human existence, and [are] *archetypes* for wisdom'.[78] In this sense, schools could correspond to fundamental coordinates of the human spirit, in such a way that we could suppose that philosophical experience as a whole is developed within a cartography that the attitudes of the ancient schools succeeded to synthesise, conceptualise, and organise. As Davidson explains:

> The permanence of the existential aspects of ancient philosophy has been highlighted by Hadot […] as 'fundamental and universal attitudes of the human being when he searches for wisdom'. [79]

Davidson says that Hadot uncovered, for each singular school, the correspondence to 'a permanent possibility of the human spirit'.[80] This is not only a proposition on the historical aspects of ancient philosophy, but might be seen as a constitutive aspect of philosophy itself. Hadot says that each school, each fundamental philosophical choice 'must correspond to an innate human tendency'.[81] In this sense, to study ancient schools is to understand how certain attributes and tendencies of the human mind, certain archetypical attitudes towards life which were form-

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77 Ibid, p.99.
78 P. Hadot. *Philosophy as a Way of Life,* p.273.
79 Davidson. 'Introduction: Pierre Hadot and the Spiritual Phenomenon of Ancient Philosophy', In P. Hadot. *Philosophy as a Way of Life,* p.34.
80 Ibid., p.34.
81 P. Hadot. *What is Ancient Philosophy?,* p.103.

alised by ancient philosophy.

With this strong claim – the schools as universal 'archetypes of human wisdom', and as synthesis of 'innate human tendencies' – Hadot grounds the historical phenomenon of the schools on a deeper philosophical structure, implying that this phenomenon is not only socially and culturally constitutive of philosophy. There seems to be an implicit philosophy of the schools that extrapolates historical description in Hadot's work, according to which the historical experience of the schools is based in the structure of the human reason. In this sense, the value and the exemplarity of ancient schools transcend the temporality in which they were conceived.

Hadot's thesis of the analogy existing between social, cultural-political practices that characterised the schools, and the structure of fundamental – universal – attitudes of the human spirit, can be problematised, for operating what Hunter calls a 'philosophical history of philosophy'. Through this thesis, Hadot sets his own philosophical categories as both a metaphysical structure and a historical practice. Historical practices are not just the object of an empirical or pragmatic analysis, but express philosophical or metaphysical truth-claims, risking to 'draw its account directly from the nature of human reason itself'.[82]

In *What is Ancient Philosophy?,* it seems to be left unclear how the individual existential decision is made without supposing the existence of actual schools to which the individual can adhere, or the previous contact with philosophical discourse that converts him to a school. In Hadot's 'philosophy of the schools' we could find a way to justify the possibility of beginning philosophical activity with an 'existential decision', in itself extra-philosophical or pre-philosophical. There would be a connection between the individual decision and the actual historical schools, because this decision reproduces or corresponds to 'archetypes of human wisdom' and 'innate human tendencies'. Then, our existential attitude structurally connects us to one existing school (that expresses these 'archetypes' and 'tendencies' historically), and is not necessarily produced within the existing group. In this sense, Hadot replaces the empirical history of philosophy by a philosophical structure, in a way analogous to what Hunter characterises as the Kantian procedure in the history of philosophy.

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82 I. Hunter. 'The History of Philosophy and the Persona of the Philosopher', p.592.

According to Hunter,[83] Kant's approach is a 'philosophical history of philosophy' that, although establishing 'facts of reason, it (…) does not borrow these from the narration of history but draws them from the nature of human reason in the form of a philosophical archaeology'. Is Hadot mobilising a similar practice himself? If the 'schools' are not just a historical phenomenon, but also describe and correspond somehow to human nature, do they function as a kind of transcendental for the history of philosophy?

If that is the case, Hadot's philosophical framework presupposes strong metaphysical claims underlying his history of philosophical practices. This kind of move seems to be absent in Foucault's analysis of the ancient schools, and of the historical framework that he employs to analyse philosophical practices. The kind of history that could be derived from Foucault's account does not focus on the truth claims of each philosophical doctrine *per se,* or on the historico-doctrinal reconstruction of each philosophical system. It is as a history of the philosophical self and its cultural, social and political implications. Foucault's historical method could be characterised as suspending claims about human nature and its underlying structures, and as a way to challenge these concepts. Differently from Hadot's discrete reconstruction of universals regarding human mind and existential attitudes, Foucault's method is characterised as a historical nominalism.

Conclusions

We can already draw a more complete picture of what a history of philosophy written considering the conceptions of Foucault and Hadot could look like. On the one hand, this possibility was affirmed by the consideration of the 'care of the self' as an event in the history of philosophy that allowed to describe philosophical practices from the perspective of a pragmatics of the self. The care of the self brings to light a tradition that emphasises the fundamental implication between philosophy and form of life. The concept of spirituality showed us the performative aspect philosophy, offering the possibility of writing a history of philosophy which is a history of practices, techniques and experiences. The focus on the idea of way of life pointed to the transformations that the ascetic relation to truth provoked on the subject.

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83 Ibid., p.592.

The concrete perspective highlighted by Hadot leads us to emphasise the ancient philosophical schools as way to introduce an axis of collectivity and sociality in this history of philosophical practices. If it is possible to note a complementarity between Foucault's notion of technologies of the self, in the individual level, and Hadot's collective emphasis on the 'schools' as a concrete condition to spiritual exercises and philosophy in antiquity, we must not suppose that the dimension of sociality and is absent in Foucault's thought.

Although, there are similar possible ways to think of the history of philosophy in Foucault and Hadot, we must remember that this theoretical encounter is a 'dialogue too soon interrupted'. Besides this discontinuation of the dialogue, Foucault and Hadot approach ancient philosophies with very different perspectives and objectives, but both authors seek to re-actualise a powerful alternative model for philosophical activity.