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FACULTY OF HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY  
SPECIALIZATION ANCIENT AND MEDIEVAL PHILOSOPHY**

**DOCTORAL THESIS**  
**The Care of the Self in Stoic Philosophy**  
**(Summary)**

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**2010**

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**Key words:** the Care of the Self, conversion, the self, oikeiosis-ul, spiritual exercises, the discipline of the assent, friendship, love, the discipline of the action, "the heavens 'scrutiny", the acceptance of destiny, time, death, the discipline of the desire, human nature, the universal Nature.

## **Argument:**

The purpose for which we chose this thesis are: 1) the main aim consists in the fact that the care of the self is the most complex and most complete dealt with in Stoic Philosophy, which is the very attitude intensely and carefully promoted by the majority of the stoics, especially by those living between the centuries 1-2 B.C.

To preoccupation of your own self became a general principle in the Stoic philosophy and a permanent impulse which was meant to every individual regardless their social status. Moreover, with the Stoics, the care of the self did not represent a specific activity, such as ruling a city, as it is with Plato's Dialogues.

The care of the self in stoicism even though takes only the form of self-knowledge; the imperative "Know yourself!" does not disappear, it is subject to a modification or an inclusion in an assembly of self practices or spiritual exercises.

As far as the Stoics are concerned, the care of the self does not mean acquiring technical knowledge which is necessary for professional learning, in order to do a certain type of activity, but making protective "shield" towards the happenings or the accidents that could occur, which was called by the Greeks *παρασκευή*, an approximate equivalent in Latin by the term *instructio*. *Παρασκευή* does not need to be taken as a theoretical frame which, when needed, the individual could use in their actions, but as an assembly by means of which both mentioning of the truth of the Knowledge and the reasons of behaviour are done.

2) Secondly, another argument is given by the fact that on contrast with other philosophical schools, the care of the self is planned in Stoicism as an assembly of very carefully issued procedures, with a complex development which involves 3 stages: I) the first stage involves the adoption of an attitude to impose their kind by individuals. II) the second stage, which concerns inter-human relationships, prepares the individual to act for the interest and for the well-being of humankind in the spirit of justice. III) the third stage refers to the attitude that concerns the events that result from the course of Universal Nature, from the action of an "external cause" and from the cosmic order. Following this stage, which concerns

the relationship of man with the Universe, the individual accepts joyfully and piously everything that depends on the Universal Nature and wants only that concerns himself, which is for the Stoics the righteous moral action to do.

3) The third argument for which we chose to explore this theme is given by the fact that the Stoics are the philosophers that went the furthest from all the ancient philosophers, who tried to elucidate the issue of the self, and if this one consists in a determined reality, it is identified with the reasonable soul that takes different names in their writings.

4) Furthermore, the Stoics, on contrast with the philosophers prior to their time, explained the care of the self with the help of οἰκείωσις, one of the humblest impulses that humans share with every other being and also which pushes him to improving his own nature.

5) Finally, Stoic Philosophy, being an organised in a system, in which every field (be it Physics, Logic and Ethics) presents theses which form a coherent doctrine, offers us the possibility to analyse every aspect linked with the care of the self and thus examining every aspect connected with the care of the self and also analysing the relationships between the fields of Physics, Logic and Ethics.

## **Summary - chapters:**

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

In Antiquity, philosophy meant not only adopting a "way of life", radically opposed to the non-philosophers, but also acquiring of a scholar, technical discourse, whose role was to justify, motivate and influence this option of life style. Those who wanted to attain wisdom were initiated in philosophy as though they initiated themselves in religion, by a conversion (*conversio*) which drew as consequences a total change of one's own existence. The Philosopher, regarded most often as a spiritual master rather than a teacher, urged people to conversion, then led the newly converted - be them young or grown-ups - to the ways of wisdom. Even though sometimes in his courses, which could have a somehow technical side, the philosopher considered issues of Logic or Physics, all these were nothing but some intellectual exercises conceived as a learning method which explored the soul largely.

The care of the self (ἐπιμέλεια ἑαυτοῦ), or the cult of the self (*cura sui*) represents both a way to be, a general attitude characterised by a reflection on the self, and also a series of practices by means of which we try to take care of our selves, by changing our life-styles

and one's view over the world, reaching the appreciation of our relationships with our kind, reaching the awareness of our place in the universe, and reaching the knowledge that we are subjects of blind destiny.

## **II. THE CARE OF THE SELF UNTIL THE STOICS**

Michel Foucault, referring to the Pythagorean tradition, analyses two of the most important elements of the technology of the self from the practices of its schools: the purifying preparation to dreaming and the review of the events from the day that passed. Regarding the preparations for purifying before sleeping to Pythagoreans, to dream while one is sleeping means to be in contact with a heavenly world, which is immortal, with a very existence beyond death, which is also the way of truth. Therefore, to dream one needs preparation before sleeping, which consists in a series of ritual practices which purify the soul, making it able to come into contact with the divine world and to understand the meanings, the messages and the truths, shown in a more or less ambiguous form? There are a lot of such purifying techniques, among which we mention: listening to music, inhaling different aromas and last but not least, practising the examining one's conscience.

Plato's philosophy can be considered "the main impetus of a diverse spiritual movements", since knowledge and the access to truth cannot be conceived other than starting with a self knowledge, which involved implicitly acknowledging the truth in our inner selves. Consequently, for Platonicians, knowledge and the access to truth couldn't be made other than a spiritual movement of the soul regarding itself and regarding the divine too. This condition of rapporting to the self and to the divine as own self, constituted for Plato one of the conditions of accessing the truth.

Plato also tried to prove that the wholly preoccupation that we should have towards ourselves, if ever we want to, access to the truth, consists in this recognition, that is knowledge of the truth.

Being indifferent to pleasures and pain, the Cynics adopt asceticism as spiritual exercising and also making effort. For the pleasures of civilization laze the body and soul, the cynics' way of life consists in almost athletic training, but well programmed nevertheless, to bear hunger and thirst, to bear weather conditions in order to gain freedom, independence, inner force, lack of worries, the serenity of a soul able to adapt to any circumstance.

In summary, we can say that for Epicureans the refinement of the theoretical discourse played a little role, because these ascetics - philosophers meant to converse people of any class to the soteriologic message heralded by Epicurus.

### **III. THE CARE OF THE SELF IN STOIC PHILOSOPHY**

After a brief review of the issues connected with the care of the self in the philosophical schools of pre-Stoics (pre-Socrates, Socrates-Plato, Cynics, Epicureans ) we aimed at mentioning the main difference that the stoic doctrine brings forward regarding the care of the self.

Michel Foucault notices that a major difference between the care of the self, as promoted by the philosophical schools before the Stoics and the teachings of the Portico, consists of the inclusion of the practice of the self in the everyday life of each individual, in other words, for the Stoic philosophers the care of the self, not being the preliminary condition, the absolutely necessary to adopt a life style, should combine organically with the general formula of the art of living (τέχνη τοῦ βίου). Preoccupation of the self became an unconditional view with the stoic philosophy, a permanent imperative imposing no condition of restriction considering the social status.

The care of the self does not represent a process that should be initiated at the end of the educational cycle, when a youth joins adulthood, but becomes a task meant to run along with the whole existence of any individual, centering itself, on adulthood. This is why, preoccupation of the self gains a rather critical than formative function, as it is with Plato, preparing the individual for old age, regarded as a privileged stage of one's existence and on ideal climax of self completion.

Secondly, with the Stoics, the care of the self does not mean a specific activity, that is ruling a city, which young Alcibiade. The Stoics concern of the self for themselves, not for the city and its inhabitants. If in Plato's Dialogues, the object of preoccupation was the soul, and the purpose of any activity, with the Stoics, as far as the one who rules is part of the city, he is in the same time the object and purpose of his preoccupation.

From the Stoics writings we find out that the care of the self is not regarded anymore as an absolutely necessary practice in individual formation in order to become a good leader, for instance "The Alcibiade" Dialogue, but to cope with, no matter the profession or social

activity that one has, all the unfortunate events, all the unforeseen troubles, all misfortunes, hardships and failures life care offer.

This is why, from the Portico Philosophers' point of view, the care of the self does not consist in acquiring of some technical or professionally needed knowledge, needed in a certain professional, but in making of a "protective shield" in front of misfortunes and hardships that care appear, that the Greeks called *παρασκευή*, an approximate equivalent that the Latin's translated *instructio*. *Παρασκευή* does not need to be understood as a simple theoretical case which, if needed, the individual will be able to appeal to in his actions, but as an assembly by means of which both the truth of knowledge and the righteousness of behaviour is stated.

The third characteristic specific to the care of the self at the Stoics is given to the fact that the imperative, "Know yourself!" which is equivalent to, "Take care of your self" with Plato, grows to be subordinate to the practice of the self that is no more only knowledge of the self. The Delphic concept suffers an attenuation or integration in an assembly of practices of the self or spiritual exercises.

If, in Alcibiade's case, the practice of the self imposes itself only on a background of ignorance that denies one's self, with the Stoics it comes to correct some mistakes, bad habits, deformities and addictions fully stamped and deepened in one's soul, which have to be eliminated. For the Stoics, the care of the self represents a correction-freedom like rather than knowledge-formation one, an important perspective for the evolution which the practice of the self was going to have in Hellenistic times.

The fourth characteristic of the care of the self is given by the fact that the formula "take care of your self" appears in Stoic philosophers' writings as an universal principle which addresses to every individual, regardless their lifestyle. Nevertheless, the imperative "take care of your-self" stated as a general massive, proves to be an elitist principle, since a statement of the kind can be followed but by a restricted number of individuals.

Finally, in the Stoics' view, the asceticism that founds the care of the self should not be understood as a form of tough and severe practice by means of which the individual gives himself up, but as a way of accomplishing a certain rapport between the individual and his own self, like then one is completely overcome, produces a certain transmutation, a change of the individuals themselves as subjects, subjects of true knowledge, of moral action and a metaphysical perspective on life as a whole.

We also mentioned in this thesis that the Stoic philosophers are the ones that moved forward from all the ancient philosophers, trying to decipher the issue of subjectivity, and also

if the self is a determined reality, they identified it with the reasonable soul that will take different names in their writings.

Consequently, the Stoic philosophers, on contract with all philosophers prior to them, but also with those that followed them, considered that οἰκείωσις, one of the humblest impulses that more share with every being on earth and which determines its desire to perfection, is the basis of the care of the self.

#### **IV. STAGES OF THE CARE OF THE SELF WITH THE STOICS**

The subsequent part of the thesis presents the complex development that the principle of the care of the self meets in stoic philosophy, this process being conceived as an assembly of exercises, carefully thought of, which supposes three stages:

##### **1) The Care of the Self Regarding One's Self**

The first stage supposes the individual's adoption of such an attitude by which he seeks to impose order in his own thinking. This order can't be obtained other than by sorting and subjecting to a critical examination the representations that come from the outer world (φαντασίαι), for the objective or comprehensive (καταληπτικαὶ φαντασίαι) to get the approval from the individual. This first stage determines the rapport of a person with himself, for the essential part of man is thinking and judgment.

The stoic Philosophers such as Seneca, Epictet, Marcus Aurelius initiated a varied type of exercises, in their works, exercises that the subject has to performer in order to discover his Owen identity, the true self. They consider that in order to identify, circumscribe and fluid the true self, the individual must understand that the true self is not the body, but his soul, to be specific the hegemonies, the one who can choose. The subject also needs to regard the happenings surrounding him as alien, since they are produced by external causes, even though the representations of things and events are received by the body in his liveliness. Therefore the self becomes well aware that, because of his freedom of judgment which implies also some freedom of will and desire, it is not into the flow of events and that it can rise above whatever destiny chooses.

This delimitation of the self – as Pierre Hadot stated – represents the major exercise in Stoicism, for it involves a full transformation of the individual's conscience about himself,



about the relationship with his body, with external goods, about his attitude regarding the future and the past, represents some concentration on the present an absence of detachment, the recognition of universal causality and of destiny, the discovery things the value that anybody wants to give whenever they want.

## 2) The care of the Self in Relationship with the Other

The second stage concerns antihuman relationships and prepares the individual to act in the best interest and for the well-being of the humankind for justice. Under the close supervision of a „master of conscience”, who can be διδάσκαλος ἀγαθός or an *amicus bonus*, a dear friend or a lover, the one who seeks to become a wise man, learns how to be more careful with himself, to stay away from errors and away from danger. The individual must aim not to the knowledge that care replaces his ignorance, but to sensible willingness which characterizes the righteous action morally. This actions after this stage of self preoccupation must be in accordance with the inters and for the wellbeing of mankind for justice.

For the stoic Philosophers, human relationships have a natural feature, people being forced, by nature, to live together, as groups or communities, on contrast with other beings. This living in common is based on a biological necessity: reproduction and survival of the species. Though, man being endowed with reason by the very nature, develops the human relationships beyond biological necessities.

While, at the beginning, the mere presence of reason makes people associate and collaborate in a closer way, taking a from of very community, the mutual help' friendship and care for the others constitutes the obligation that every being in tune with Nature.

Requesting mastery of the practice of the self, which will be a requirement in the Roman world of the 1st and 2 nd century A. D., is a social practice that is no more related to schooling, and thus the care for the other changes into a type of relationship among individuals, in a fort of control of the individual by the others, in a formation, type of development of constituting a relationship with himself. The practice of the self is connected to the social practice or, differently, the constituting of a relationship between one's own self and the self is based home, as clearly as possible, on the relationships between one's self and the other.

Friendship offers the individual the certainty of the fact that no one is alone and each and every of as takes part from a whole that represents the total of reasonable beings. It can be

stated that the foregoing principle of stoicism is love for the whole, for the self care because the coherence with one's self are possible only by full adherence to the whole all of us are part of.

### **3) THE CARE OF THE SELF IN RELATIONSHIP WITH THE UNIVERSE**

The third stage refuses to the attitude that concerns the events that result from the course of the Universal Nature, if from the cause of „external input” and the order of the Cosmos. After this stage, that concerns the relationship of the individual with the Universe, the person in question accepts happily and piously everything but what depends on him, which for the stoics is the righteous moral action. The care of the self in relationship with the universe takes into account the adopting by the individual of a metaphysical perspective on the things and events of this world.

To reach his self conscience the individual needs expansion in the universe and also a movement by means of which the self re-enters a whole he is part of, but which, without making him personal, allows him to go in on infinite time and space. As far as the stoic philosophers are concerned, the cosmic perspective allows the individual to acknowledge all aspects and loves of the Universe, reaching closeness with Nature. To be close with Nature constitutes a fundamental attitude of the one who practises a discipline of will, the subject of this spiritual exercise finding it familiar as things and events, but also understanding that they belong to the same world and derive from the same source as himself.

For the Portico's Philosophers, the "scrutiny from above" offers the possibility to explore the mysteries of nature, allows us to see the world we are part of and thus we can see ourselves in this world.

The acceptance of destiny – as Michel Foucault considers – allows the subject in question not to disregard what he is, but, on the contrary, to acquire perspective: he, him-self inside the world, he, him-self as a being situated inside a series of particular causes and effects, also necessary and reasonable ones, which he must accept of he truly wants setting himself free from this series of consequences in the only possible form, that is the recognition of this entanglement.

As long as the self is not yet self aware of his freedom of choice, as long as there doesn't exist such a delimitation of this force of freedom, the self considers as autonomous and independent in the universe. When the self becomes aware that it doesn't identify either with the body or vital force, or involuntary emotions, it discovers that it is unconsciously

determined by destiny, regardless his will, and also it discover that it is nothing but a grain of sand in the immensity of the Universe, despite his will, a little spat in the endlessness of time.

Another subject of meditation, regarding this care of the self in relationship with the universe, is constituted by death. Practising to die (μελέτη θανάτου) does not consist in a simple reminding, be it insistent enough, of the fact that man is subject to death, but it represents a way to live one's death in one's life time. The individual involved in this spiritual exercise lives every day out as if it were the lives his last day on earth. Among all the Stoic philosophers it is Seneca who practised this exercise the most.

During the process of meditating on one's death, the worst is not that this are anticipation of what public opinion considers the worst hardship of them all; it is not simply the fact that allows us to see that death is not bad; it offers the possibility to regard, anticipatively, that is, over own life. Regarding ourselves as meeting the final point, we are offered the possibility to judge every activity we are being involved into then correctly. Meditation on being makes us, in a certain degree, our own judges, being able to measure the moral progress we will have made until that very day.

## **V. THE CARE OF SELF AFTER THE STOIC PERIOD**

Briefly, we reviewed in this summary, the care of the self in the philosophy schools that followed the stoic period and we reached the conclusion that the care of the self and the spiritual exercises continue to represent a frequently met them not only in Neo-Platonism, which proves to be a development of the metaphysical and religions doctrine of Plato, but also in primitive Christianity. While, for Plato's follower, the philosophical discourse has many connections with the concrete practices of ascesis and with a moral and mystical way of life, Christianity took on many of the heathen philosophical practices. The Christian thinkers and the monks constitute also some spiritual attitude, a life style, completely different from that of common people. In any case, the attention one has towards one's self (προσοχή), the care of the self, the seek of peacefulness at heart; abandonment of pleasures became major goals for spiritual Christian life. From that spirituality, powerfully influenced by the way of the Christian life style of middle Ages and of Modern Times as well we inherited the Christian way of life of Middle Ages and also of Modern times.

## VI. CONCLUSIONS

The practice of the self in stoic philosophy, regarded by all philosophers as a long and hard process, at whose end the individual finds a changed view on him-self, his life and the universe, the individual reaches a self-awareness of his place in the universe and an awareness of the system of necessities he is into. The practice of the self has as aim to change the self, which gets to be identified with some nature that has never got the chance to truly manifest in it.

### The three models of the care of the self:

<i>Type of the model</i>	<i>The place of the care of the self in the model</i>	<i>The way of regarding the self in the model</i>	<i>The finality of the care of the self</i>
The Platonic model	The knowledge of the self reduces the care of the self	Always remembering the Truth and coming back to one's true nature allows recognition of the self	Knowledge of the self
The Hellenistic model	Knowledge of the self is autonomous and privileged	The art of the self and not knowledge of the subject and its inner self	Constituting of the self-Self finalizing of the rapport with the self
The Christian model	The preoccupation of the self involves in the same time both knowledge of the self and knowledge of the Truth	The exegesis of the self	Giving up one's self

The three forms of conversion:

The Platonic conversion	Transcendence	Liberty is achieved in rapport with the body	Knowledge of the truth
Hellenistic conversion	Immanence	Liberty is achieved compared with the events (those which don't depend on us)	Ascesis and returning to the self-self subjectivity
Christian conversion	Transcendence	Liberty is achieved compared with the prior sage of the individual	Giving up one's self by trans-subjectivity

To conclude, ending this study we can't help asking ourselves: Was the care of the self the lesson that ancient philosophy offered? As far as the Ancient philosophers are concerned, philosophy meant conversion, meant seeking for wisdom and changing the style of life and of the manner to see the world.

Can one find the truth and happiness without any transformation, without any sacrifice, without any absciss, without any purification which to concern the very self of the individual? The answers are not yet decisive. Nonetheless, one thing is sure, the Stoics anticipated what Heidegger will tell over centuries: all beings can be grouped in two categories: on the one hand there is that existence that can rapport to itself, and on the other hand, that one that cannot do it. O rock exists but it doesn't have the possibility to make a rapport to itself, the same analogy is applied to a chair, a tree and all the things which are not human. Human being does not mean only to be, but also they rapport to themselves, to their kind and to inanimate beings. Consequently, important consequences derive from here. The human beings don't just exist, but they must exist, their existence is not a gift, but a duty to fulfill.

## **The Care of the Self in Stoic Philosophy (Summary)**

The care of the self in the philosophy of the Portico is the most complex and most completely developed, and this is the attitude that was promoted and thoroughly analysed by the Stoic philosophers, especially by those living between 1-2 B.C. The purpose of the care of the self consists in offering to anybody the chance that by knowledge of the self, of one's kind and lastly of the entire universe to act according to some righteous principles, the object of the care of the self in stoic philosophy fulfilling in particular the correctness of the act better than the perfection of knowledge. Moreover, the Stoics, unlike the philosophers prior to them explained the care of the self with the help of οἰκείωσις, one of the humblest impulses that man shares with all other beings and also which pushes them to correct and improve their nature. In the same time, the stoic philosophy, as one organised in a system in which every field of knowledge (Physics, Logic and Ethics) represent subjects which make a perfectly coherent doctrine offered the possibility to check and analyse every aspect linked with the care of the self and thus to explore the tight connections among the fields of Physics, Logic, Ethics.