

"You are will to power and nothing besides": Nietzsche, Foucault, Yoga, and Feminist s/Self-Actualisation

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“You are will to power and nothing besides”:
Nietzsche, Foucault, Yoga, and Feminist
s/Self-Actualisation

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy by

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This thesis argues that Friedrich Nietzsche's notion of world and self as 'will to power and nothing besides' offers a highly productive interpretive lens or 'grid of intelligibility' for understanding the ethical implications of Michel Foucault's middle and late works on power and subjectivity. For if the late modern era is marked by a sustained and pervasive incredulity toward metanarrative, it is also the historical site for the reappearance and widespread acceptance of a very ancient metanarrative – the Heraclitean view of material reality as continual flux. Inasmuch as Nietzsche's will to power philosophy is grounded in this Pre-Socratic worldview, his works and those of his devotee Foucault may serve as a productive foundation for a late modern ethics.

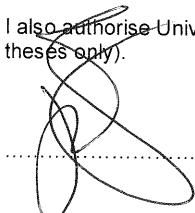
The scholarly implications of reading Foucault's middle and late works through the interpretive lens of Nietzschean will to power in its two key manifestations, domination and dynamism, are multiple. In addition to providing new insights into the value of Nietzschean-Foucauldian philosophy for advancing a late modern ethics, such an analysis also illuminates important continuities in Foucault's theory of power and how his works simultaneously extend and critique Nietzschean views on the role of asceticism in culture.

The thesis then turns to a more futuristic exploration of how Foucault's final texts, feminist critiques and extensions of these texts, and works from the separate discipline of feminist moral theory may advance a feminist form of will to power ethics. Feminist reflection upon the dualistic philosophical basis of modern androcentric power invites further speculation upon the utility of the nondual philosophies of yoga, including those found in Vedāntic texts like the *Bhagavad Gītā*, for such an endeavour. Because yoga utilises asceticism-based practices of the self as its primary means for moulding moral subjects, it is comparable to the Greco-Roman will to power ethics described in Foucault's final works. On the other hand, yoga's nondual *telos* may present certain ethical possibilities that dualistic constructs like the Greco-Roman model cannot. Indeed, by practicing nonduality through yoga, contemporary women and others may be engaging in a practice of freedom in the most essential sense.

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Abstract

This thesis argues that Friedrich Nietzsche's notion of world and self as 'will to power and nothing besides' offers a highly productive interpretive lens or 'grid of intelligibility' for understanding the ethical implications of Michel Foucault's middle and late works on power and subjectivity. For if the late modern era is marked by a sustained and pervasive incredulity toward metanarrative, it is also the historical site for the reappearance and widespread acceptance of a very ancient metanarrative – the Heraclitean view of material reality as continual flux. Inasmuch as Nietzsche's will to power philosophy is grounded in this Pre-Socratic worldview, his works and those of his devotee Foucault may serve as a productive foundation for a late modern ethics.

The scholarly implications of reading Foucault's middle and late works through the interpretive lens of Nietzschean will to power in its two key manifestations, domination and dynamism, are multiple. In addition to providing new insights into the value of Nietzschean-Foucauldian philosophy for advancing a late modern ethics, such an analysis also illuminates important continuities in Foucault's theory of power and how his works simultaneously extend and critique Nietzschean views on the role of asceticism in culture.

The thesis then turns to a more futuristic exploration of how Foucault's final texts, feminist critiques and extensions of these texts, and works from the separate discipline of feminist moral theory may advance a feminist form of will to power ethics. Feminist reflection upon the dualistic philosophical basis of modern androcentric power invites further speculation upon the utility of the nondual philosophies of yoga, including those found in Vedāntic texts like the *Bhagavad Gītā*, for such an endeavour. Because yoga utilises asceticism-based practices of the self as its primary means for moulding moral subjects, it is comparable to the Greco-Roman will to power ethics described in Foucault's final works. On the other hand, yoga's nondual *telos* may present certain ethical possibilities that dualistic constructs like the Greco-Roman model cannot. Indeed, by practicing nonduality through yoga, contemporary women and others may be engaging in a practice of freedom in the most essential sense.

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*vande gurūnām caranāravinde
samdarsita-svātma-sukhāvabodhe.
Tat tvam asi.*

I worship the lotus feet of all the gurus
who awaken and manifest joy in oneself.
Thou art that.

Table of Contents

Prologue	1
Chapter One: The Will to Power Ethics of Nietzsche and Foucault	15
Chapter Two: Asceticism and Feminist Praxis	75
Chapter Three: Toward a Feminist Will to Power Ethics	126
Chapter Four: Yoga as a Practice of Feminist s/Self-Actualisation	174
Epilogue	251
Chronology of Selected Works	261
Bibliography	262

Prologue

The time has come to philosophize.
— Jean-François Lyotard¹

Thirty years ago Jean-François Lyotard declared late modernity the era of sustained and pervasive ‘incredulity toward metanarratives’; an economical perception that has resonated with many contemporary scholars and assumed a sort of iconic status (*Postmodern* xxiv).² As Terry Eagleton observes, this incredulity toward metanarratives has produced some ‘genuinely radical effects’ as academics and others turned a sceptical eye toward discourses asserting any absolute, monological claim to truth (*Ideology* 378). The late modern turn away from metanarrative is particularly apparent in the discipline of ethics where less certain and more relativistic approaches including perspectivism, pragmatics, and weak thought (*il pensiero debole*)³ have assumed the authority once afforded to only God and reason. This movement away from the universal and toward the local and relative has given rise to a new intellectual terrain which is marked chiefly by what Lyotard calls as ‘islands of determinism’ (*Condition* 59). These tentative, highly circumscribed territories are now the key sites for grounding ethical thought and action in a world where traditional sources and structures of ethical guidance have lost their authority.

Notwithstanding the utility of Lyotard’s analysis of the period or the brilliance of his epistemic catchphrase, it nonetheless seems inaccurate to assert late modernity

¹ *The Differend* (xiii).

² Like many other scholars, Lyotard uses the term ‘postmodernity’ to describe the contemporary ethos. The current study will utilise the alternative ‘late modernity’ to emphasise the salient continuities that exist between the prior epoch and the present one. For a more detailed discussion of this issue, see C. Barry Chabot’s “The Problem of the Postmodern”. Graham Ward’s *The Postmodern God* and David Ray Griffin’s Introduction to *Spirituality and Society* are also useful for illuminating the spiritual issues of the late modern era.

³ *Il pensiero debole*, which utilises certain components of Nietzschean thought, is one of the central concepts of Gianni Vattimo’s philosophy. See David Rose’s “The Ethical Claims of *Il Pensiero Debole*” for an overview.

has completely renounced the urge toward metanarrative. The contemporary resurgence of fundamentalist religions in many regions of the world offers a particularly vivid example of the enduring nature of metanarratives. Perhaps paradoxically, the contemporary Western academy – one of the most productive sites for the ongoing interrogation of the grand narratives of reason, science, and progress – represents another. For if the academy is one of the chief cultural sites for the continuing contestation of metanarrative, it is also home to a revival of a very ancient story of the world as flux, a recurrence perhaps fostered by what Donna Haraway describes as our increasing inability to deny the ‘ferocity of the transformations lived in daily life throughout the world’ (*Modest_Witness* 4). If, as Haraway asserts, the current era signals the end of the ‘Greatest Story Ever Told’ – the silencing of an ‘ethnospecific Western philosophical narrative’ of stable actors and actants – then it also bears witness to the return of a subjugated metanarrative of continual change and endless transformation. This metanarrative of flux manifests in numerous ways including in the late modern propensity for ignoring tradition; resisting certainty and resolution; rejecting fixed notions of reality, knowledge, and method; accepting complexity, multiplicity, contradiction, and playfulness; and disrupting binaristic, bounded, or hierarchical ways organising reality.⁴

Although the metanarrative of flux has many possible origins, some might trace it to Heraclitus of Ephesus, an obscure Pre-Socratic philosopher who lived five hundred years before the Common Era. Heraclitus, whose philosophy is known to contemporary audiences only from fragments and second-hand references, asserted that ‘men should try to comprehend the underlying coherence of things’ and then proposed a river metaphor to illustrate his fundamental belief in the ‘absolute

⁴ This list is indebted to Elizabeth Atkinson’s analysis of the characteristics of ‘postmodernity’ in “The Responsible Anarchist” (74).

continuity of change in every single thing.⁵ Perhaps contemporary Western scholarship shuns tradition, universal reason, and the other grand narratives of the past because it more so than preceding eras is beginning to come to terms with Heraclitean speculation about the underlying nature of things as transitory, elusive, and capricious rather than enduring, completely knowable, and predictable.⁶

Inasmuch as contemporary thought represents a revival of the subjugated metanarrative of flux and the minoritarian literatures that support and advance it, Friedrich Nietzsche can be understood as its precocious modern champion.⁷ Simply stated, Nietzsche's notion of the world as 'will to power and nothing besides' (*Will* 1067/549-550) is a modern reiteration of the Heraclitean dictum that 'all things are in motion all the time'.⁸ Nietzsche's Heraclitean sensibility is perhaps best demonstrated in a 1885 fragment from his notebooks where he describes his view of world as a 'monster of energy, without beginning, without end [...] a sea of forces flowing and rushing together, eternally changing' (*Will* 1067/550). A number of commentators, including Gilles Deleuze, have observed the Heraclitean tenor of Nietzschean philosophy. In commenting upon Nietzsche's pivotal if not course-altering influence upon Western philosophy, for example, Deleuze argues Nietzsche's unique contribution is a function of his 'untimeliness' or the fact that he saw the long-forgotten Pre-Socratics and later iconoclasts like Spinoza to be his only predecessors (*Nietzsche* ix-xi).⁹ Walter Kaufmann, whose translations and commentaries introduced Nietzsche to legions of English-speaking scholars, makes an equivalent

⁵ See *The Presocratic Philosophers* by G.S. Kirk and J.E. Raven (197). All direct quotations from Heraclitus are taken from this translation and commentary. One of Nietzsche's most extended direct commentaries on Heraclitus is found in *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers* (53-74).

⁶ Notably, Lyotard also cites Heraclitus in his discussion of islands of determinism (*Postmodern* 59).

⁷ A chronology of Nietzsche and Foucault's key texts precedes the bibliography of this work.

⁸ Citations from Nietzsche's works are presented in 'section/page' format whenever appropriate.

⁹ Deleuze may be projecting his own interest here because although Nietzsche admired Spinoza in many ways, he also advanced numerous critiques of his thought. See *The Gay Science* (349/291-292) and various fragments in *The Will to Power*. Foucault's comments in "Truth and Juridical Forms" are also useful here (*Essential III* 12).

observation, noting Nietzsche's identification of atypical thinkers such as Heraclitus, Empedocles, Spinoza, and Goethe as his 'ancestors' (*Nietzsche* 306). This sort of iconoclasm may also be why commentators like Kaufmann further assert: 'Nietzsche, more than any other philosopher of the past hundred years, represents a major historical event' (*Nietzsche* xiii).

The repercussions of this 'historical event' become especially clear in the work of French poststructuralist philosophers such as Deleuze, Michel Foucault, and others who were inspired by Nietzsche to rethink the basic 'truths' of existence – truths which have typically relied upon metanarratives of stability, predictability, and reason. In the last sentence of one of his final texts, *The Anti-Christ*, Nietzsche sets the agenda for this philosophical work of the future by calling for the 'revaluation of all values' (62/187) – a task that thinkers like Deleuze and Foucault would assume with great enthusiasm. Foucault, for one, places Nietzsche's agenda at the centre of not only his own philosophy but the entirety of contemporary philosophical and critical thought when he asserts its primary objective is to negotiate the 'revolving door of rationality that refers us to its necessity, to its indispensability, and at the same time, to its intrinsic dangers' (*Reader* 249). To the extent Foucault and his corpus can be understood as 'simply Nietzschean' (as Foucault himself once characterised it),¹⁰ it represents an extension of Nietzschean thought and thus stands as a late modern testament to the necessity of continually evaluating our beliefs and actions to meet the challenges of a world marked by constant change. In addition, Foucault's novel definition of ethics, which takes into account both the discursive and practical aspects

¹⁰ This is a reference to a comment Foucault makes in a late interview (*Politics* 251).

of becoming a moral being,¹¹ is particularly well-suited to the task of formulating a late modern ethics.

Devising an ethics in such a milieu is intrinsically challenging because as Nietzsche observes moralities are borne from an urge for stability, from the desire to establish enduring and universal values and rules that will allay human fears about the unpredictability and dangers of existence. Because this urge is always pursued within a mutable reality, however, all ethical models are essentially provisional and to a certain extent untimely given their descent from customs and best practices rather than something as immutable as ‘natural’ or ‘divine’ law as many are wont to believe.¹² Moreover, despite the human propensity to exteriorise ethical authority, as Nietzsche declares in *The Gay Science* : ‘We know it well, the world in which we live is ungodly, immoral, “inhuman”; we have interpreted it far too long in a false and mendacious way, in accordance with [...] our reverence, [...] our needs’ (346/286). For Nietzsche, therefore, severing morality from these false origins and resituating it within its humanity-forged socio-cultural cradle is an essential act of liberation for the enlightened being. Nonetheless, as Eagleton suggests, the ethical import of Nietzschean philosophy is paradoxical because it actually demands a life styled in accordance with nature, in tune with the changeful, experimental, and self-improvisatory reality of ‘will to power and nothing besides’ (*Ideology* 250). Formulating a morality in accordance with a worldview defined by flux is thus the central ethical task for those who, like Foucault and Deleuze, adhere to Nietzsche’s philosophical views.

¹¹ This definition is found in *The Use of Pleasure* or the second volume of Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality* (25-32). Hereafter, the three-volume text will be referred to as ‘*History*’. The individual volumes will be referenced by number or subtitle: *The Will to Knowledge* (volume one or *Will*), *The Use of Pleasure* (volume two or *Pleasure*), and *The Care of the Self* (volume three or *Care*).

¹² Nietzsche offers a brilliant discussion of this matter in *Daybreak* (9/10-12).

In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche asserts that actual philosophers are ‘commanders and law-givers’, creating values through their knowing, through their will to truth, their will to power (211/142-143). If what we presently know is the world and all its inhabitants are ‘will to power and nothing besides’ then the task of the late modern philosopher is to create values, discourses, and practices that uphold this dynamic view of existence rather than perpetuating the fictive, stability-based models of bygone eras. Late modern acceptance of the Heraclitean metanarrative of the world as endless flux therefore demands a will to power ethics.

The centrality of the Heraclitean metanarrative of flux in Nietzschean thought marks his philosophy and the works of devotees like Foucault as sources of great insight into the fundamentals of a late modern will to power ethics.¹³ Even so, devising a *feminist*¹⁴ form of such an ethics presents certain special challenges because, as existing commentaries will attest, there are aspects of the Nietzschean-Foucauldian worldview that do not serve the feminist emancipatory project. The gender bias of Nietzsche’s works and gender blindness of Foucault’s are examples of the profound challenges these philosophers represent to feminist thought. Nevertheless, Nietzsche, Foucault, and feminism also stand united in many important ways, perhaps most keenly in their mutual interest in liberation, empowerment, and transcending the myriad oppressions of the current ethos. Other philosophies, including the feminist ethics of care and the ancient Indian discourses of yoga, also share these concerns. These shared interests, along with other philosophical

¹³ The current work will not endeavour to analyse the late modern ethical implications of eternal Nietzsche’s other famous theory, his idea of eternal recurrence. Kaufmann, Deleuze, and Arthur Danto all provide useful (if not somewhat contradictory) overviews of this theory. Nietzsche’s vision of the *Übermensch*, another key component of his philosophy, will be discussed when appropriate.

¹⁴ Although the author is reticent to perpetuate the longstanding and obviously counterproductive practice of ‘gendering’ philosophies, the current work will nonetheless employ ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ appellations to philosophies when appropriate. Ultimately, however, the ethics advanced here is neither ‘feminist’ nor ‘masculinist’ but instead endeavours to be an ethics for anyone who wishes to transcend the myriad oppressions of disciplinary late modern society.

commonalities, present a fertile ground for devising a feminist will to power ethics in the Nietzschean-Foucauldian mode. It is upon these loosely enchained islands of determinism – amidst a chaotic and diverse landscape of Western, Eastern, ancient, and contemporary discourses and practices of power, subjectivity, and morality – this thesis rests.

Chapter Outline

This thesis is arranged in the Nietzschean style, as a numbered series of interconnected analyses or, if you will, extended meditations on topics salient to the formulation of a feminist will to power ethics. It is a style that endeavours to replicate the primary characteristics of the open-ended creative process used to generate the words on the page – a process that intentionally traversed multiple and somewhat disparate worldviews and disciplines. Chapter overviews and summaries of extended discussions have been provided when needed to anchor and direct the discussion in a more emphatic way.

In certain important ways, therefore, the text exhibits an investigatory quality intended to reflect the author's mindset during its production. A quotation from the Introduction to the second volume of Foucault's *History* is helpful here. In this passage Foucault attempts to explain the benefits of adopting a flexible, if not groping attitude as a means to truly 'alter one's way of looking at things, to change the boundaries of what one knows and to venture out a ways from there' (*Pleasure* 11). Following Foucault's lead, this thesis is a record of my efforts to rethink my own existence, to free myself from the painful confines of a reality which, like the lives so many other contemporary women and men currently inhabit, was largely constructed for me without my consent. To use another Foucauldian mode of expression,

completing this thesis was an essential act in my own practice of freedom. Researching and writing it has utterly transformed me and my life, helping me to live more deliberately, more compassionately, more joyously. In short, to paraphrase Nietzsche's Zarathustra, completing this project has helped me discover how *my* wills and *my* values can (and have) set me afloat upon a river of becoming and self-surmounting.¹⁵ As Foucault suggests, the journey does indeed rejuvenate things and age the relationship with oneself. And now, sure of having travelled far, I find myself looking down upon myself from above, writing these words in an effort to describe what I have learned so that it might somehow contribute to humanity's understanding of itself and perhaps serve those who struggle to live ethically in this late modern world.

Chapter One elucidates some of the most important conceptual and methodological similarities and interconnections between Nietzschean philosophy and the perspectives of his follower Foucault. Key points of comparison include Nietzsche and Foucault's shared use of the genealogical method for advancing their respective critiques of the present and their similar conceptualisations of freedom, subjectivity, power, and ethics. The chapter also features a more comprehensive analysis of the Nietzschean concept of will to power which, following Heraclitus, is one of the central principles of the Nietzschean worldview. Ofelia Schutte's analysis, which identifies two key manifestations of will to power in Nietzsche's works, offers a particularly useful analytic schema here (*Beyond* 76). As Schutte's work suggests, although both forms of will to power are productive and mutable; one form (domination) relies more heavily upon a strife-based, mastery-centred, and dualistic interpretation of material reality whereas the other form (dynamism) is situated upon a

¹⁵ Part II, "Of Self-Surmounting" (104).

more playful, aesthetic-creative, and nondualistic¹⁶ view of existence. Analysing Nietzsche and Foucault's works on subjectivity, power, and ethics through this two-fold analytic framework or 'grid of intelligibility' exposes instances where each manifestation of will to power is more prominent. The ongoing struggle between the Apollonian impulse toward knowledge, stability, and individuation and the Dionysian urge toward forgetting, flux, and unity provides another lens for revealing the variable manifestations of will to power in Nietzsche and Foucault's philosophical corpuses.

Identifying the variable manifestations of will to power in these works is fruitful for a variety of reasons that have generally gone unnoticed by previous commentators. First, this grid of intelligibility offers a particularly productive lens for assessing the salvage value of the Greco-Roman ethical model Foucault describes in his last works. As an archetypal example of will to power ethics, this moral framework represents the apex of Nietzschean-Foucauldian ethical thought; a fact that also marks it as an object of particular interest for the current study. Because the ethical model contains nuances of both forms of will to power, however, assessing its salvage value for a contemporary audience is a highly complex matter. Second, re-reading Foucault's middle and late works through the interpretive lens of the two manifestations of will to power illuminates important continuities in Foucault's interlinked theories of power and subjectivity. The resulting analysis, which proposes these works are simply a multifaceted analysis of the will to power as domination, runs counter to existing commentaries that typically argue Foucault's late interest in

¹⁶ As David Loy notes, the term 'nonduality' is ambiguous and can assume at least five different meanings: (1) the negation of dualistic thinking, (2) the nonplurality of the world, (3) the nondifference between subject and object, (4) the nonduality of duality and nonduality, and (5) the possibility of a mystical unity between God and man (*Nonduality* 17). The current study is mostly focused upon the practical implications of Loy's first definition which, as he notes, is a precursor to realising other forms of nonduality (21).

ethics signifies a shift away from his prior theoretical concerns or even marks a new chapter in his theory of power.

The chapter then closes with a more detailed discussion of the contemporary use value of the Greco-Roman ethical model explicated in Foucault's final works in light of its heavy reliance upon a domination-based definition of will to power, arguing the relative benefits of its counterpart, a creative-dynamic will to power ethics.

Chapter Two extends the comparative analysis found in Chapter One beginning with a discussion of the ethical ramifications of Foucault's observations in *The Use of Pleasure* about the importance of asceticism-based discipline to all ethical systems. Once again a closer analysis of Nietzsche's writings on asceticism, which are extensive and largely (but not exclusively) negative, is useful for elucidating the import of Foucault's more covert but remarkably similar commentary. Reading these works in tandem also illuminates how Foucault's middle and late works simultaneously extend and critique Nietzschean thought on the role of asceticism in modern culture. This unique analysis, which demonstrates the sheer ambivalence of ascetic discipline a technology of power, sets the stage for yet another reconsideration of the salvage value of Foucault's Greco-Roman ethical model. For Foucault, the salvage value of the Greco-Roman ethical model rests chiefly in its most notable difference to contemporary praxis – namely, its creative-dynamic approach to ascetic discipline that inherently critiques a more traditional Being-centred ethics of stability and sovereignty. Inasmuch as this moral framework privileges open-ended self-cultivation as its primary means for moulding ethical subjects, it may offer a real alternative to contemporary mores.

Feminist critiques of Foucault's final works nonetheless identify the highly problematical nature of the Greco-Roman ethical model – an ethics originally developed for an elite cadre of men – for contemporary women. Superimposing the two definitions of Nietzschean will to power as a lens to reinterpret these critiques provides new insights into the components of the Greco-Roman model that may or may not lend support to the feminist emancipatory project. Most notably, this analysis demonstrates that if a feminist ethics is to be salvaged from Nietzsche and Foucault, it must devise discourses and practices supportive of a view of self and world as dynamic-creative will to power rather than will to power as domination.

Building upon Chapter Two's discussion of the centrality of ascetic discipline to ethics, Chapter Three presents a more detailed argument of the importance of formulating alternative, less dualistic approaches to bodily discipline if Nietzschean-Foucauldian philosophy is to serve as a basis for a feminist will to power ethics.¹⁷ The need for a more nondual approach is supported by a review of selected feminist discourses of embodiment that illustrate how dualistic discourses and 'practices of the self'¹⁸ tend to produce existential suffering rather than serving as strategies for its alleviation. Indeed, feminist philosophical speculation on the role dualism plays in women's oppression problematises the Foucault's late thesis regarding the emancipatory potential of the highly dualistic, mastery-centred Greco-Roman ethical model.

¹⁷ Rosalyn Diprose's *Corporeal Generosity* also investigates the use value of Nietzschean philosophy for a contemporary feminist ethics. Diprose's analysis is specifically concerned with the ramifications of Nietzsche's thoughts on generosity-based social economies; an analysis supported by Alan Schrift's work (11).

¹⁸ According to Foucault, Greco-Roman practices of the self comprised a 'whole set of occupations' including physical exercise, meditation, education, retreats, self-examination, journaling, and abstinence (*Care* 39-68). Although contemporary Western women also engage in these and other practices of the self, the current study is chiefly concerned with the first two – physical exercise and meditation.

A survey of recent studies of women's fitness practices written from a Foucauldian feminist perspective offers a range of more specific insights into the utility of asceticism-based bodily discipline to cultivate freedom by minimising the negative effects of contemporary discourses and practices of feminine embodiment. As the ensuing analysis demonstrates, women's fitness practices are situated in a complex, multi-disciplinary realm which makes it extremely difficult to gauge their resistive or transgressive potential as Foucauldian 'practices of freedom'. Despite this ambivalence, studies like these nevertheless lend themselves to another important observation – namely, that discourses and practices of the body which valorise and sustain dualistic perceptions of the self and world are antithetical to feminist praxis because of their tendency to uphold a 'masculine' worldview of separation, domination, and oppression. Conversely, discourses and practices that uphold a more relational, dynamic-creative, and ultimately nondual understanding of the body and material reality are more amenable to feminism's emancipatory agenda. Practicing feminism is, therefore, intimately bound up in practicing nonduality.

The chapter then turns to a discussion of how the modern penetration of religious-based ascetic disciplines into secular society problematises asceticism's capacity to mould subjects in a ways that might contravene cultural norms and conventions. An analysis of the various ways ascetic activity may be situated within culture thus becomes essential for understanding how something as commonplace as an ascetic act can acquire critical or transformative value or assume a wider political significance. As the discussion shows, the critical-transformative-political value of asceticism is not simply a function of detachment, renunciation, or refusal but also a function of the binding or unifying effects of ascetic acts as performances of socio-political engagement and interconnection. This quality is perhaps clearest in ethical

systems that valorise reciprocal forms of care as their central intra- and interpersonal relational dynamic. Foucault's late works and feminist extensions of these works, as well as those from the separate domain of feminist moral theory, all represent possible discursive platform for a late modern ethics centred on care. To the extent these discursive domains also advance a more dynamic and perhaps less dualistic understanding of the body, selfhood, and material reality, they may also gesture toward a dynamism-based will to power ethics in the Nietzschean-Foucauldian mode.

Chapter Four expands upon aforementioned feminist speculation on the utility of nondual philosophies, including the yogic philosophies found in Vedāntic texts like the *Bhagavad Gītā*, to interrogate or perhaps even destabilise the dualistic philosophical foundations of modern androcentric power. Yoga is an appropriate choice for this endeavour for two key reasons. First, although yoga has become something of a naturalised feature of contemporary Western culture, its non-Western origins imbue it with certain philosophical differences that still allow it to serve as a potent source of cultural critique. Second, and perhaps more importantly, yoga is chiefly a women's practice in the West despite its androcentric origins. As an existing practice of personal empowerment for Western women, yoga may offer a ready-made platform for developing a contemporary feminist ethics focused chiefly upon practices of the self.

The 'metaethical' framework Foucault introduces in *The Use of Pleasure* provides a useful structure for analysing the yogic ethics advanced by the *Gītā*. On a schematic level, this unprecedented analysis demonstrates how yogic practices of the self mould ethical beings by inducing a shift in consciousness whereby individuals begin to understand themselves in more expansive terms. This expanded sense of self is inherently critical of the sovereign ideal and supportive of a more interconnected,

nondual worldview. Tantric yoga, which is known for its veneration of the feminine principle of *prakriti* and view of the body as a divine vehicle for transcendence, provides a secondary conceptual and practical basis for a feminist incarnation of yogic ethics. Because *prakriti* represents a feminine iteration of Nietzsche's notion of will to power as creative dynamism, tantrism-inspired yoga may also offer a conceptual foundation for a feminist will to power ethics in its creative-dynamic guise.

Chapter One: The Will to Power Ethics of Nietzsche and Foucault

Creation – this is the great salvation from suffering,
this is life's alleviation.
— Nietzsche¹

1

Previous scholarship has elucidated a number of connections between the work of Friedrich Nietzsche and one of his most renowned contemporary devotees, Michel Foucault. Reading Foucault's middle and late works through a Nietzschean lens can illuminate the depth and breadth of his precursor's influence and highlight certain significant continuities in the Nietzschean-Foucauldian philosophical lineage. For example, not only does Foucault adopt Nietzsche's genealogical method and advance his critique of the present, he also extends Nietzsche's theories on subjectivity, power, and ethics in certain important ways. One particularly useful analytic framework or 'grid of intelligibility' for reading Foucault's middle and late works is the Nietzschean concept of self and world as will to power. As Schutte observes, there are two manifestations of will to power in Nietzsche's works: will to power as domination and will to power as dynamism.² Although both types of will to power are productive and mutable, the former relies upon a more conflict-ridden or strife-based interpretation of reality in keeping with the Heraclitean philosophy that serves as the intellectual backdrop for Nietzsche's worldview.

A detailed analysis of Foucault's middle and late works exposes important instances where his thought aligns more closely with Nietzsche's concept of will to power as domination and conversely, instances where the alternative, dynamism-

¹ *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Part II, "In the Happy Isles (77)."

² See Schutte's *Beyond Nihilism* (76).

based definition seems more prominent. The analytic lens of an ongoing struggle between the Apollonian impulse toward knowledge, stability, and individuation and the Dionysian urge toward forgetting, flux, and unity is also useful for exposing the variable manifestations of will to power in Nietzsche and Foucault. While identifying the alternative manifestations of will to power in Foucault's works is productive for a variety of reasons including its utility in illuminating certain significant theoretical continuities between Foucault's middle and late works, it is particularly useful for assessing the practical value of the Greco-Roman ethical model described and analysed in the final two texts of his corpus. As the ensuing analysis will demonstrate, this ethical model can be understood as an archetypal form of will to power ethics. Reconceptualising Foucault's explication of the Greco-Roman ethical model as a case study in a form of morality centred upon will to power as domination not only demonstrates how Foucault's final works extend Nietzsche's critique of modern mores; it also illuminates the stability of Foucault's interlinked theories of power and subjectivity throughout his middle and late works. Contrary to the popular notion that Foucault's late works signal a salient change in his theories of power and subjectivity, therefore, this analysis suggests these works should be understood as a series of interlinked case studies of the will to power as domination. This finding has important ramifications for individuals interested in utilising Foucault's ethical thought as a basis for contemporary moral praxis.

Building on this insight, the analysis then shifts to a discussion of the use value of a Nietzschean-Foucauldian will to power ethics for contemporary audiences. These sections suggest that the primary utility of this ethical model resides in its ability to serve as a flux-based or Becoming-centred moral framework or, in other words, as an ethical alternative to the dualistic, domination-based moralities so

common to Western experience. In such an ethics, activities or what Foucault calls ‘practices of the self’ become a bridge between unfreedom and freedom, the way to overcome the nihilism and confinement that pervades contemporary moralities and attends modern life. The careful design of these practices is essential because, following Nietzsche’s thesis that our ‘Being’ is a function of our ‘doing’, ‘virile’ deeds focused on self-mastery and domination will tend to produce an oppressive, masculinised form of selfhood. Inasmuch as an ethics can be designed around practices that valorise and support a vision of the self and world as dynamism-based will to power, however, problems such as these may be avoided. Indeed, in a dynamism-based will to power ethics, flux can become an important strategic weapon in the ongoing war of subjugation, a way for individuals to affirm life and cultivate freedom within a nihilistic modern ethos of containment, discipline, and punishment.

2

In the last interview Michel Foucault gave before his death in 1984, he asserts, ‘I am simply Nietzschean’ (*Politics* 251). Foucault elaborates on Nietzsche’s influence in an interview conducted two years’ prior, declaring ‘Nietzsche was a revelation to me’ and crediting him with causing a break in his life that would lead him to leave his job at the asylum and ultimately his native France (*Technologies* 13). ‘Through Nietzsche’, Foucault explains, ‘I had become a stranger to all that’.

Although many contemporary thinkers have been influenced by Nietzsche – including Jean-François Lyotard, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, and Sarah Kofman³ – it is perhaps Foucault who best exemplifies what it means to be ‘simply Nietzschean’. According to Alan Schrift, ‘Foucault rivals Gilles Deleuze as the most Nietzschean of contemporary French philosophers’ (*French* 35). Will Dudley further

³ See Peter Sedgwick’s comments in the Introduction to *Nietzsche: A Critical Reader* (2).

observes that Nietzsche's 'practice of philosophical genealogy, understood as the potentially liberating exposition of prevailing conceptual and institutional prejudices' is 'alive and well' in the work of Foucault and his followers (*Hegel* 220). Despite never overtly citing him, Nietzsche's influence is especially clear in Foucault's middle and late works which, as products of the archaeological-genealogical method Nietzsche inspired, use detailed historical inquiry as a way to critique the present. Foucault explicitly announces this objective for his two final works (volumes two and three of *The History of Sexuality*) by characterising them as 'philosophical exercises' aimed at learning 'to what extent the effort to think one's own history can free thought from what it silently thinks, and so enable it to think differently' (*Pleasure* 9). As studies of ethics or, more specifically, as analyses of the self-care practices of the ancient Greco-Roman and early Christian worlds; these texts also advance an implied critique of contemporary ethical praxis. Consequently, when Foucault describes the intricacies of Seneca's 'evening examinations' or the components of various ancient dietary regimens (*Care* 60-62, *Pleasure* 95-139), he is inviting us to compare these practices with our own, sparking the sort of 'revaluation of all values' Nietzsche calls for in *The Anti-Christ* (62/187). This is the Nietzschean project *par excellence*: using genealogy as a tool of estrangement, as a way to draw attention to the inessential nature of practices and belief systems and thereby ignite the desire for change.

In addition to owing Nietzsche for his methodology, Foucault's middle and final texts also append his precursor's research by continuing Nietzsche's inquiry into the foundations of Western moral theory and practice. At a schematic level, for example, the critique of contemporary mores implied by Foucault's *History* and his study of modern disciplinary society in *Discipline and Punish* are comparable to Nietzsche's more explicit critiques in *On the Genealogy of Morals* and *The Anti-*

Christ. Foucault's investigation of pagan ethics in volumes two and three of his *History* also displays another Nietzschean tendency; namely, utilising the non-Christian discourses and practices of the ancient world as comparative or exemplary paradigms. This predilection is apparent from Nietzsche's earliest works and demonstrates his enduring interest in cultures and philosophies that were 'uncontaminated' by Christianity. In fact, as Greg Whitlock notes in his commentary on Nietzsche's lectures on Pre-Platonic philosophy, it was in ancient Greek discourse that Nietzsche 'discovered' two of his most fundamental doctrines – the will to power and eternal recurrence (*Pre-Platonic* 157). As antiquities scholar Pierre Hadot suggests, therefore, Nietzsche's knowledge of ancient philosophy continually informs his call to 'radically transform our way of life' by offering a pagan counterpoint to the Christianity-based institutions and philosophies he so vehemently rejects (*Philosophy* 272).

Although Foucault was neither a Hellenist nor a Latinist, he also endeavoured to familiarise himself with ancient Greco-Roman texts as he wrote his final works, consulting experts like Hadot and Paul Veyne to ensure the defensibility of his interpretations (*Pleasure* 7-8). Consequently, just as Nietzsche looked to the ancient world in crafting his philosophy, so would Foucault as he searched for a morality untouched by Christianity. Indeed, when viewed from this perspective, Foucault's final works represent nothing less than a counter-ethics to the modern Christian-based mores Nietzsche so vehemently criticises throughout his writings. More specifically, Nietzsche characterises Christianity as the 'one great curse' and 'immortal blemish of mankind' (*Anti-Christ* 62/186-187). As a religious philosophy and cultural foundation, it embodies what Nietzsche considered to be some of the worst human traits: resentment (slave morality), mediocrity (herd instinct), and nihilism (will to

nothingness).⁴ Foucault's inquiry into the pagan 'prequel' to Christian ethics is, therefore, his endeavour to identify alternatives to contemporary mores – to discover an ethics that exemplifies a specific set of opposing values: mastery, excellence, and *will to power*.

3

In the West the discipline of philosophy is sometimes divided into three sub-disciplines or areas of inquiry: physics, logic, and ethics.⁵ As Hadot observes, physics and logic are sometimes paired to form the 'theoretical-discursive' side of philosophy; whereas, ethics tends to stand alone, comprising the 'practical' side (*Philosophy* 191-192). Nonetheless, as Hadot further notes, in some philosophical traditions including Stoicism, philosophy is perceived as the 'exercise of wisdom [...] a unique act, renewed at each instant' (192). This viewpoint tends to problematise the existence of any sort of neat boundary between theory and praxis. Following this general line of thought, the current study will define ethics as the discursive and nondiscursive practices individuals adopt to uphold a specific relation of truth between themselves and the world. This definition is informed by Foucault's idea of 'morality' in volume two of his *History* which posits all moralities are comprised of not only discursive or theoretical elements but also contain nondiscursive or practical elements (*Pleasure* 25-32).⁶

⁴ Each of these ideas is discussed in *On the Genealogy of Morals* but also occur throughout Nietzsche's *oeuvre*.

⁵ Stoic philosophy is a good example. See Brad Inwood's Introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics* (3-4).

⁶ As Foucault notes in his *History*, the term 'morality' is ambiguous; referring at once to theory and practice (*Pleasure* 25-30). Foucault's definition differs from the definition found in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which focuses more upon the theoretical and discursive facets of morality ('science of morals', 'moral principles' and 'rules of conduct') to the detriment of its practical aspects. See <http://dictionary.oed.com>. The reasoning behind Foucault's definition becomes clear to readers of his *History*, of course, for these texts are chiefly studies of the activities individuals use to form themselves as moral subjects or what Foucault calls 'ethics' or 'practices of the self'.

Although Foucault's definition of morality delineates between the discursive and nondiscursive elements of an ethics, like Hadot's characterisation of Stoicism as a continuous exercise in wisdom, Foucault blurs this boundary through his wider thoughts on discourse, which he tends to view as an activity. As he writes in *The Discourse on Language*, discourse is a 'violence that we do to things, or, at all events, [...] a practice we impose on them' (*Archaeology* 229). Elsewhere in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* Foucault elaborates on this idea, adding the task of discourse is 'to *make* differences: to constitute them [things] as objects, to analyse them, and to define their concept' (205). A similar observation is made in Foucault's essay on Nietzsche where he declares 'knowledge is not made for understanding, it is made for cutting' (*Language* 154). Moreover, according to Foucault, discourse is where power and knowledge are joined (*Will* 100). Thus, when a discourse like a moral code comes into contact with an object or body, it applies force(s) to it. These forces objectify it, discipline it, and subordinate it to power and knowledge. When an individual engages in bodily practices such as meditation, dietary restrictions, or other forms of physical or mental asceticism, additional forces come to bear upon that individual, engendering further transformations of body and mind and forging an ethical subject.

According to Foucault, the subject who engages in practices of the self enjoys certain 'truth benefits' that non-practitioners do not (*Pleasure* 20). Foucault further notes the idea that adhering to a moral code and performing ascetic acts in concert with that code will give a person privileged access to truth is far from new. Linkages between praxis and truth are a commonplace feature of spiritualities across cultures and time. In ancient Greece and Rome, for example, abstention from certain sexual pleasures was 'linked directly to a form of wisdom that brought them [the

practitioners] into direct contact with some superior element in human nature and gave them access to the very essence of truth'. As Foucault further observes in volume one of his *History*, since the Middle Ages many Western societies have used the practice of confession as 'one of the main rituals we rely on for the production of truth' (*Will* 58) – a practice that has spread well beyond its spiritual uses into the justice system and various clinical environments.

The ethical subject who has access to the truth is produced, therefore, through exposing one's body and mind to certain discursive and nondiscursive practices. Foucault further conceptualises these 'practices of the self' – that is, a whole range of occupations including physical exercise, meditation, education, retreats, self-examination, journaling, and abstinence (*Care* 39-68) – as broadly ascetic in nature (*Pleasure* 29, *Final* 2). In other words, human beings who wish to become ethical, enlightened subjects must engage in ascetic practices or, as Foucault might have it: the ethical, enlightened subject is the product of a specific technology of power called ascetic discipline.⁷

4

Another vital aspect of an ethics is the vision of freedom it upholds and conversely, the notion of unfreedom it attempts to minimize or eliminate. Dudley considers the concept of freedom 'one of the most important points of intersection between the traditional branches of theoretical and practical philosophy' (*Hegel* 2). In the Nietzschean-Foucauldian paradigm freedom is repeatedly associated with work and, in particular, the work of self-creation. As Kaufmann notes, Nietzsche did not believe humans were naturally free but instead considered freedom a state produced only

⁷ This statement echoes a more general pronouncement Foucault makes in *Discipline and Punish* regarding the production of subjects (194).

within the relatively safe confines of culture (*Nietzsche* 170). Indeed, as Nietzsche remarks in *Daybreak*, ‘Be grateful! – The greatest accomplishment of past mankind is that we no longer have to live in continual fear of wild animals, of barbarians, of gods and of our own dreams’ (5/9). In a 1984 interview, Foucault echoes Nietzsche’s stance on the cultural basis of freedom, observing how it and relations of power co-constitute the social field (*Final* 12). In rejecting the sovereign ideal of selfhood, Nietzsche and Foucault further deny the subject any pre-existing pre-cultural essence, including any autochthonic freedom.⁸

If, as Nietzsche and Foucault suggest, freedom does not precede culture but is instead actively produced by and within it, ensuring its presence requires ongoing effort or work. Both men further believe the main work of freedom is conducted through ethics and self-styling activities, not only for aesthetic reasons but also to avoid the nihilism and *ressentiment* Nietzsche associates with the ‘slave’ morality of Christianity and the oppression Foucault links to contemporary disciplinary society.⁹ Foucault specifically sees ethics and self-styling activities as indispensable as the rule of law in ensuring ‘games of power [...] [are] played with a minimum of domination’ (*Final* 18). Nietzsche makes a similar assertion in *The Gay Science*, identifying self-styling as humanity’s most important task:

To “give style” to one’s character – a great and rare art! [...] For one thing is needful: that a human being should *attain* satisfaction with himself, whether it be by means of this or that poetry and art; only then is a human being at all tolerable to behold. Whoever is dissatisfied with himself is continually ready for revenge, and we others will be his victims, if only by having to endure his ugly sight (290/232).

This comment is particularly significant because it also evidences Nietzsche’s belief in self-styling as a way to avoid *ressentiment*. Foucault makes a related statement in a

⁸ This matter is discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

⁹ Nietzsche and Foucault’s respective discussions of these matters are found in *On the Genealogy of Morals* and *Discipline and Punish*.

1983 interview, where he observes how ‘we have hardly any remnant of the idea in our society that the principle work of art which one has to take care of, the main area to which one must apply aesthetic values is oneself, one’s life, one’s existence’ (*Beyond* 245). For both Nietzsche and Foucault self-creation further necessitates an evaluation and refusal of ‘what we are’ – that is, traditional forms of subjectivity that are imposed by the state and other socio-cultural institutions. In Nietzsche’s view, this is the true work of the philosopher – to ‘revaluate all values’ and then create new ones, reaching for ‘the future with [a] creative hand’ (*Anti-Christ* 62/187, *Beyond* 211/142). According to Foucault, the work of self-refusal or liberating ourselves from the state or the forms of individualisation linked to the state is the key political, ethical, social, and philosophical problem of our days (*Beyond* 216).

‘Unfreedom’ is a term deployed here from Wendy Brown who uses it to signify the state of being fostered by ‘contemporary orders of regulation, discipline, exploitation and domination’ (*States* x-xi). These ‘orders’ or ‘regimes of unfreedom’ impose limitations on human activity and potentiality and can be understood as equivalent to the ‘general formulas of domination’ that Foucault argues now pervade modern society (*Discipline* 137). Like freedom, therefore, unfreedom is also a cultural artefact produced by the network of institutions and power relations present within society. This idea is also present in Nietzsche’s work. In *Twilight of the Idols*, for example, Nietzsche suggests unfreedom is a product of ‘liberal’ institutions; arguing their tendency to undermine will to power and reduce individuals to herd animals (38/92). This statement foreshadows Foucault’s more detailed comments in *Discipline and Punish* where he demonstrates how modern institutionalised discipline fabricates ‘docile’ and ‘useful’ bodies (138).

For Nietzsche, therefore, freedom is borne from struggle and has nothing to do with the ‘contemptible sort of well-being dreamed of by shopkeepers, Christians, cows, women, Englishmen and other democrats’ (*Twilight* 38/92). To the contrary, there is nothing peaceful or harmonious about free individuals: they are *warriors* (38/92). As demonstrated later in this chapter, Foucault’s middle and late works suggest almost identical figurations; ideals established through Foucault’s repeated use of battle allusions when discussing the ‘nature’ of society and selfhood. In addition, both Nietzsche and Foucault believe that ethics or, more specifically, ‘practices of the self’ are the key determinant of whether an individual is free or unfree. Although the rule of law, tradition, and other power relations present within a culture also influence freedom, ethics is the realm where individuals can affect immediate and very personal changes to their lives. These changes may, as Foucault suggests, subsequently show us we are much freer than we feel and allow us to better enjoy the space of freedom which already exists (*Technologies* 10-11).

5

The practice of ethics is predicated upon certain philosophical, psychological, and sociological assumptions about what it means to be human. Collectively, these underlying assumptions comprise a theory of subjectivity which, as Nick Mansfield notes, establishes

...an abstract or general principle that defies our separation into distinct selves and that encourages us to imagine that, or simply helps us to understand why, our interior lives inevitably seem to involve other people, either as objects of need, desire and interest or as necessary sharers of common experience (*Subjectivity* 3).

Mansfield further suggests a dual framework for cataloguing contemporary thought on subjectivity into: (1) theories such as those based upon Freudian psychoanalytic

theory that tend to understand the ‘subject as a *thing*’ and therefore ‘quantifiable and knowable’ and (2) theories that deny the subject’s essence or ‘thatness’ but instead propose its construction by ‘dominant systems of social organisation in order to control and manage us’ (8-10). Mansfield characterises this latter grouping as ‘anti-subjective’ and identifies Nietzsche and Foucault as two of the key protagonists of this theoretical position (9-10). As Mansfield further observes, both schools of thought depart from the Enlightenment model of subjectivity by insisting the subject is not free and autonomous but is instead constructed through cultural relations (11).

As Kim Atkins further observes, Nietzsche’s subject is emblematic of the counter-Enlightenment and German Romantic thought prevalent during the late eighteenth to mid-nineteenth century (*Self* 71). Nietzsche, like many of his contemporaries, was greatly influenced by an idea popularised by Romanticism – the notion that reality is underpinned by nonrational forces which are the source of all life and creativity (71). Nietzsche calls these omnipresent but variable forces ‘will to power’ as noted in the following fragment: ‘*This world is the will to power – and nothing besides!* And you yourselves are also this will to power – and nothing besides!’ (*Will* 1067/550). In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche further asserts all forms of will are really just expressions of will to power, stating: ‘The world seen from within, the world described and defined according to its “intelligible character” – it would be “will to power” and nothing else’ (36/67). As Arthur Danto notes, therefore, will to power is not secondary to selfhood for Nietzsche – that is, it is not something we *have* or exhibit as humans – rather, it is what we *are* (*Nietzsche* 215). Because will to power is our nature, all expressions of it are inherently just or ‘beyond good and evil’, differing only in terms of their intensity. Nietzsche’s collapse of all

forms of ‘willing’ into one category further incites a revaluation of the moral judgments attached to various instincts and desires, creating a levelling effect.

Many commentators including Atkins attribute this aspect of Nietzsche’s thought to the influence of Schopenhauer’s idea of the ‘world as will’ but fail to acknowledge the influence of the Pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus who, as Whitlock points out, also theorised the world as something akin to will (Logos) (*Pre-Platonic* 207-209).¹⁰ Indeed, Whitlock argues Nietzsche ‘felt closer to Heraclitus than anyone else in the history of philosophy – Schopenhauer, Wagner, or Boscovich included’ (222). Favourable references to Heraclitus can be found throughout Nietzsche’s work, including one of particular significance (noted by Kaufmann) where Nietzsche identifies the philosopher as one of his ‘ancestors’ (*Nietzsche* 306). In addition, Heraclitus’s vision of the world aligns with Nietzsche’s in other important ways, including his rejection of a world of Being for one where ‘all things flow’, his related beliefs in war as the ‘common condition’ of humanity and strife as ‘justice’, and his purely aesthetic interpretation of the ‘meaning’ of life (*Pre-Platonic* 60-70).

Whatever its origin, the Nietzschean dictum that we, like the world we inhabit, are ‘will to power and nothing besides’ forms the basis for his concept of the subject. Nietzsche’s subject is perhaps best encapsulated by a short passage from *On the Genealogy of Morals* and two fragments from *The Will to Power*. In the first selection, Nietzsche declares ‘there is no “being” behind doing, effecting, becoming; “the doer” is merely a fiction added to the deed – the deed is everything’ (*Genealogy* I.13/45). The second is even more direct; asserting ‘the “subject” is only a fiction: the ego of which one speaks when one censures egoism does not exist at all’ (*Will* 370/199). In the ensuing fragment from *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche solidifies his

¹⁰ Kirk and Raven, quoting Diogenes Laertius, state Heraclitus was at his acme during the 69th Olympiad (504-501 B.C.E.) (*Presocratic* 182).

‘anti-subjective’ stance by stating: “The “ego” – which is *not* one with the central government of our nature! – is, indeed, only a conceptual synthesis – thus there *are* no actions prompted by “egoism”” (371/200).¹¹ The ‘central government of our nature’ is, as noted above, will to power. Thus for Nietzsche the sovereign subject is merely an illusion perpetuated by philosophy, psychology, and linguistics – a placeholder for our real ‘essence’, which is not a *thing* but the *activity* of willing. Consequently, just as there is ‘no lightning apart from its flash’ (*Genealogy* I.13/45), there is no subject apart from will to power.

Nietzsche not only posits the sovereign subject as ‘fictional’ or a ‘created entity, a “thing” like all others’ (*Will* 556/302), he also argues the harm caused by this illusion. As he writes in *The Will to Power*: “We set up a word at the point at which our ignorance begins, at which we can see no further, e.g., the word “I,” the word “do,” the word “suffer”:—these are perhaps the horizon of our knowledge, but not “truths”” (482/267). Later in this text, Nietzsche remarks upon the ‘will to power’ implicit in naming things including the subject, observing how it is the ‘powerful who made the names of things into law’ (513/277). For Nietzsche, therefore, the sovereign subject is not a metaphysical certainty but an expression of will to power, a manifestation of our urge to ‘order, simplify, falsify, artificially distinguish [...] to be master over the multiplicity of sensations’ (517/280). As he further suggests in *Daybreak*, the impulse behind concepts like the sovereign subject or the ego is possession:

The ego wants everything. – It seems that the sole purpose of human action is possession: this idea is, at least, contained in the various languages, which regard all past action as having put us in possession of something (‘I *have* spoken, struggled, conquered’: that is to say, I am now in possession of my

¹¹ A similar argument is made in “‘Reason’ in Philosophy” in *The Twilight of the Idols* (5/37-38). Here Nietzsche remarks how grammar perpetuates the error of a ‘doer’ behind ‘doing’ and lends itself to a belief in God – a ‘blunder’ committed in India as in Greece (5/38).

speech, struggle, victory). How greedy man appears here! He does not want to extricate himself even from the past, but wants to continue to *have* it! (281/286).

In other words, as Deleuze suggests, all human actions are an expression of forces or a will to power which seeks to appropriate whatever it, through the senses, encounters (*Nietzsche* 3). Although Nietzsche is by no means advising his reader against expressing these forces, his main objective here is to denaturalise and problematise concepts like the sovereign subject so we can understand them for what they really are: manifestations of will to power. In his essay on the ramifications of Nietzschean genealogy, Foucault reiterates Nietzsche's point by calling for the 'sacrifice of the subject of knowledge' which, contrary to appearances, is not 'neutral' nor 'devoid of passion' nor 'committed solely to the truth' but instead a manifestation of the 'will to knowledge: instinct, passion, the inquisitor's devotion, cruel subtlety, and malice' (*Language* 162). According to Foucault, therefore, it is only by accepting the sovereign subject as a construct of power and knowledge that we can begin to understand how little the concept has to do with freedom or autonomy and how much it has to do with subjugation.

In summary, the Nietzschean subject represents a radical departure from the Enlightenment ideal – not a thing but an *activity* he calls will to power. Thus, for Nietzsche the freedom associated with the subject is not situated in some autonomous, pre-cultural 'thatness' but instead is implicit in its *lack* of solidity, in the constant flux of the true essence of reality and selfhood – will to power.

6

Nearly a century later, like many of his French contemporaries including Deleuze, Foucault would adopt Nietzsche's anti-foundational subject, continuing the tradition of counter-Enlightenment thought implied by this theoretical stance. Foucault

provides a more precise elaboration of the Nietzschean influence on his idea of the subject in a 1983 interview where he observes how ‘everything which took place in the sixties arose from a dissatisfaction with the phenomenological theory of the subject’ and points to Nietzsche’s work as representing ‘a determining experience for the abolition of the founding act of the subject’ (*Politics* 24). In a later interview, Foucault reiterates his agreement with this view of the subject by declaring: ‘I do indeed believe there is no sovereign, founding subject, a universal form of subject to be found everywhere. I am very sceptical of this view of the subject and very hostile to it’ (50). Like Nietzsche, Foucault’s hostility to the sovereign ideal is fuelled by the harm he associates with it. As Jerrold Seigel notes, Foucault believes that all efforts to lend coherence and stability to the self inevitably result not in its liberation but in its confinement (*Idea* 616).¹² For Foucault, therefore, the cause of individual freedom is not advanced by concepts like the sovereign ideal – quite the opposite. As a result, Foucault believes the purpose of our inquiries into subjectivity should not be to discover and pin down our identity but to commit the self to dissipation¹³ – not endeavouring to discover what we are but to *refuse* what we are (*Beyond* 216).

Having dispensed with the sovereign ideal, Foucault echoes his precursor’s stance once again by conceptualising the subject as a construction of the power relations present within a specific culture. As he writes in *Discipline and Punish*, the individual, which is constituted as a ‘correlative element of power and knowledge’, is both a ‘fictitious atom of an “ideological” representation of society’ and a ‘reality fabricated by this specific technology of power [...] called “discipline”’ (194).

¹² Seigel further suggests that four of Foucault’s books (*Madness and Civilisation*, *The Order of Things*, *Discipline and Punish*, and the first volume of his *History*) revolve around this central premise (*Idea* 616). Foucault speaks at length about society’s attempts to define and use our individuality as a tool of oppression in “The Subject and Power” (*Beyond* 208-226).

¹³ This statement echoes a comment Foucault makes on the purpose of history as guided by genealogy (*Reader* 95).

According to Foucault, these constitutive power relations are two-fold, occurring both around and within the individual to create a subject that is: (1) subject to another ‘by control and dependence’ and (2) tied to an identity ‘by a conscience or self-knowledge’ (*Beyond* 212). Both meanings, Foucault continues, ‘suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to’ (212).

Nonetheless, Foucault’s subject is not without agency as some critics have suggested. As Amy Allen notes, while much of his work focuses upon the production of subjectivity by power regimes that are largely beyond our control, Foucault never says individuals have no influence whatsoever upon their subjectivity (“Anti-Subjective” 120). In short, as Allen adds, it is erroneous to suggest Foucault’s subject is *merely* or *nothing more than* an effect of power (120). Instead, as Foucault explains in a 1976 lecture:

The individual is not to be conceived as a sort of elementary nucleus, a primitive atom, a multiple and inert material on which power comes to fasten or against which it happens to strike, and in so doing subdues or crushes individuals. [...] The individual is an effect of power, and at the same time, or precisely to the extent to which it is that effect, it is the element of its articulation. The individual which power has constituted is at the same time its vehicle (*Power/Knowledge* 98).

Foucault’s subject is, therefore, both an *effect* and a *vehicle* for power. Consequently, although the subject is constructed through ‘practices of subjection’, Foucault also points out how subjectivity is influenced by ‘practices of liberation’ or those activities individuals undertake as vehicles of power to self-style or otherwise affect their identities (*Politics* 50-51).¹⁴ Like practices of subjection, practices of liberation are based upon a ‘number of rules, styles, inventions to be found in the cultural environment’ (51). *Discipline and Punish* is the clearest example of Foucault’s efforts to describe how practices of subjection produce a particular type of subject – the

¹⁴ In his *History*, Foucault calls these self-activities ‘modes of subjectivation’ (*Pleasure* 28).

docile, useful subject of modernity – while the last two volumes of Foucault's *History* show how practices of liberation were used in antiquity to produce individuals of another type.¹⁵

In the absence of the sovereign subject, power becomes the determining ontological force for Foucault's subject – just as it was for Nietzsche. Deleuze's analysis provides additional clarity here; articulating a general principle in Foucault's work whereby all forms, including the modern subject or 'Man-form', are conceptualised as unstable compounds of relations between forces (*Foucault* 124). Some of these forces are internal or self-willed while others originate from outside sources. Consequently, if Nietzsche's subject is 'will to power and nothing besides', Foucault's subject can be understood as a mutable compound of multiple wills imposed through an array of discursive and nondiscursive disciplines. John Richardson lends support here, describing Nietzsche's subject in very similar terms, calling it an 'organised complex of numerous drives of various strengths' (*System* 45).

In summary, like his precursor Nietzsche, Foucault's subject is antithetical to the sovereign ideal – a non-essential, mutable compound created by the power relations indigenous to a particular culture. Furthermore, although Foucault does not speak of his subject as 'will to power and nothing besides', his notion of subjectivity replicates this Nietzschean ideal with great precision.

7

The centrality of power in Nietzschean and Foucauldian ideas of subjectivity elicits a deeper inquiry into the nature of power itself. In Nietzsche's work, two related ideas about power in its guise of will to power are pervasive. These are the linked notions

¹⁵ Indeed, according to Foucault, his entire *oeuvre* can be understood as a multi-faceted 'history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects' (*Beyond* 208).

of productive strife and will to power as domination; ideas so fundamental to Nietzsche's worldview that they assume a quasi-ontological significance. Furthermore, as discussed in more detail below, Nietzsche views strife and domination in an unequivocally positive light; 'natural' manifestations of will to power asserting itself as it expresses force and encounters other forces.

Although allusions to the utility of strife are commonplace throughout Nietzsche's *oeuvre*, one of the most succinct is found in *The Gay Science* in a poem entitled "Heraclitean" that declares: 'Only fighting yields / Happiness on earth, / And on battlefields' (41/57).¹⁶ As the title suggests, this idea is attributable to Heraclitus who asserts: 'It should be understood that war is the common condition, that strife is justice, and that all things come to pass through the compulsion of strife' (*Pre-Platonic* 64).¹⁷ In a lecture first delivered in 1872, Nietzsche offers additional commentary on this notion, characterising 'war-justice (*Πόλεμος-δίκη*)' as the 'first specifically Hellenic idea in philosophy – which is to say that it qualifies not as universal but rather as national' (64). Although this caveat is crucial to avoid the kind of trans-cultural and trans-historical essentialism Nietzsche detested, it nonetheless becomes forgotten amidst a corpus which, more often than not, is complimentary of Pre-Socratic thought and Heraclitus in particular.¹⁸

Thus, even though Nietzsche's lecture notes stop short of universalising the idea of war-justice, he repeatedly elevates this idea elsewhere in his work by extolling

¹⁶ Nietzsche's clever use of the line break nevertheless lends itself to a somewhat equivocal reading of his poem.

¹⁷ Kirk and Raven's commentary also lends clarity here (*Presocratic* 195-196).

¹⁸ Nietzsche's attitude toward ancient Greece and Rome is complicated. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, for example, he characterises the Greeks as 'geniuses' of 'forming, maturing, perfecting [...] new orders of life' (248/180). In a section from *Twilight of the Idols* entitled 'What I Owe to the Ancients', however, Nietzsche is more equivocal, calling Plato 'boring' and the Greek manner 'strange' (105-111). Generally speaking, Nietzsche tends to praise more ancient philosophers like Heraclitus and critique Plato and the philosophers who follow him. As Kaufmann and others have noted, Nietzsche's attitude toward the intervening figure, Socrates, is a matter of much debate. See Chapter 13 of Kaufmann's *Nietzsche* and A.H.J. Knight's *Some Aspects of the Life and Work of Nietzsche* for two perspectives.

the merits of viewing existence as strife. In *The Gay Science*, for example, Nietzsche invokes Heraclitus again, stating: ‘*War is the father of all good things*’ (92/145).¹⁹ In *The Anti-Christ*, Nietzsche reiterates this sentiment, asserting happiness is ‘*not* contentment, but more power; *not* peace at all, but war’ (2/115-116). The perception of peace as antithetical to happiness and even life itself recurs in *Beyond Good and Evil* where Nietzsche writes of the desire of modern man to wish ‘the war which he *is* should come to an end’ (200/121). According to Nietzsche, humanity’s nihilistic longing for tranquillity opposes the nature of material reality where ‘contrariety and war’ act as a ‘stimulus and enticement to life’ (200/122). For Nietzsche, therefore, one renounces the ‘*grand* life when one renounces war’ because a ‘great and small struggle always revolves around superiority, around growth and expansion, around power – in accordance with the will to power which is the will of life’ (*Twilight, Gay* 349/292).²⁰ Strife may not be indigenous to human relations but it represents an essential component of healthy societies and individuals, a stimulus to and affirmation of life. Consequently, when Nietzsche characterises life as ‘a consequence of war [and] society itself a means to war’ (*Will* 53/33), he is not calling for change – quite the opposite. Instead, Nietzsche views conflict as an integral component of strong societies and individuals because it offers scenarios for change and growth or, as Nietzsche might portray it, opportunities for *overcoming*.²¹

¹⁹ In this section, Nietzsche is specifically arguing that good prose is produced only through an ‘uninterrupted, well-mannered war with poetry’ (92/145). As Kirk and Raven note, Nietzsche is paraphrasing Heraclitus who actually writes: ‘It is necessary to know that war is common and right is strife and that all things happen by strife and necessity. War is the father of all and king of all, and some he shows as gods, others as men; some he makes slaves, others free’ (*Presocratic* 195).

²⁰ See “Morality as Anti-Nature” in *Twilight* (3/44).

²¹ Nietzsche’s interpretation of the Old Testament creation story and its aftermath in *The Anti-Christ* offers an interesting counterpoint to this discussion. Here Nietzsche credits the deity with inventing war as a strategy to maintain humanity’s ignorance:

The old God invents *war*, he divides the peoples, he makes men destroy one another (– priests have always had need of war...). War – among other things a great mischief-maker in science! – Incredible! knowledge, *emancipation from the priest*, increases in spite of

Upon this foundation of pervasive and productive strife, Nietzsche overlays a second idea: will to power as domination. In *The Will to Power*, for example, Nietzsche states that ‘will to power can manifest itself only against resistances; therefore it seeks that which resists it’ (656/346). In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche further asserts that all ‘willing’ is ‘absolutely a question of commanding and obeying’ and adds that morality should be understood as the ‘theory of the relations of dominance under which the phenomenon of “life” arises’ (19/49). Later in this text, Nietzsche declares ‘life itself is *essentially* appropriation, injury, overpowering of the strange and weaker, suppression, severity, imposition of one’s own forms, incorporation and, at least and mildest, exploitation’ (259/194). As Foucault observes in a 1973 lecture, knowledge is included within the scope of this general principle because of Nietzsche’s tendency to place ‘something like hatred, struggle, power relations’ at the root or centre of knowledge production (*Essential III* 12). Fragments from *The Will to Power* lend support for Foucault’s claim, including these: ‘The so-called drive for knowledge can be traced back to a drive to appropriate and conquer’ and ‘the criterion of truth resides in the enhancement of the feeling of power’ (423/227, 534/290).

Despite pronouncements like these, Nietzsche’s conceptualisation of will to power as domination is less victorious than one might think, reflecting the real-life complexities of human relations where asserting one’s will is rarely as straightforward as simply commanding and obeying. Deleuze’s analysis is useful for elucidating the nuances of Nietzsche’s formulation. As Deleuze notes, Nietzsche makes an important primary distinction between force (‘what can’) and will to power (‘what wills’) (*Nietzsche* 50). For Nietzsche, force is also ‘essentially differentiated and qualified’;

wars. – And the old God comes to a final decision: “Man has become scientific – *there is nothing for it, he will have to be drowned!*” (48/164-165).

varying in quantity (dominant or dominated) and quality (active or reactive) (53). When force is added to will, will determines the character of the encounter by either affirming or denying that force (53-54). Consequently, even though activities like resentment and depreciation are negative, they still express will to power because there is 'will to power in the reactive or dominated force as well as in the active or dominant force' (53). As Nietzsche writes in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, therefore, the 'will to nothingness' may constitute a 'rebellion against the most fundamental presuppositions of life' but it still remains a will (III.28/163). Nietzsche's notion of 'active passivity' is reiterated in *The Will to Power* where he defines passivity as 'to be hindered from moving forward: thus an *act* of resistance and reaction' (657/346, emphasis mine).

This idea is crucial because it also represents one of the core premises in Nietzsche's view of human psychology which, as Deleuze observes, identifies human beings as 'essentially reactive' creatures – feeling, experiencing, and knowing nothing other than 'becoming-reactive' as they encounter and respond to stronger, more active forces and wills (*Nietzsche* 61-64). Nevertheless, there is power inherent in becoming-reactive – power that can disintegrate, divide, or separate an active force from what it can do, causing it to become-reactive and even turn against itself – the reason behind the 'triumph of reactive forces' like nihilism and *ressentiment* and the ideologies which employ them (63-64).²² Thus, for Nietzsche, there is something 'admirable' and 'dangerous' about the becoming-reactive of forces (66-67). In *Ecce Homo*, for instance, Nietzsche credits a type of reactivity – his ill health ('the perspective of the sick toward *healthier* concepts and values') – with helping him

²² *On the Genealogy of Morals* contains Nietzsche's most extended discussion of this matter.

master the art of ‘reversing perspectives’.²³ The potentialities implicit in reactive force are multifaceted, as Deleuze points out:

In fact the reactive forces are not the same and they change nuance depending on the extent to which they develop their affinity for the will to nothingness. One reactive force both obeys and resists; another separates active force from what it can do; a third contaminates active force, carries it along to the limit of becoming-reactive, into the will to nothingness; a fourth type of reactive force was originally active but became reactive and separated from its power, it was then dragged into the abyss and turned against itself [...] (*Nietzsche* 67).²⁴

In short, the outcome produced from one force encountering another is rarely as straightforward or predictable as one might initially assume. Indeed, although ‘force is, by nature, *victorious* because the relation of force to force, understood conceptually, is one of domination’ (51); power relations are rarely a simple matter of the strong subjugating the weak. Even in their weakness, in their becoming-reactive, individuals can still assert will and force albeit typically in a negative, nihilistic form.

Moreover, Nietzsche does not simply leave it there because just as the recipe against misery *is* misery (*Gay* 48/113); nihilism eventually becomes its own cure. In fact, Nietzsche believes that only through complete, active nihilism – the revaluation of all values – can we hope to escape the incomplete and decadent form of nihilism which has become the normal condition of modernity (*Will* 23/17, 28/19). In pursuit of this goal, Nietzsche declares himself the ‘first perfect nihilist of Europe’ and proposes ‘complete nihilism’ as the chief consequence of his thought, opposing it to the ‘incomplete nihilism’ he sees as commonplace to modern life (*Will* 3/3, 28/19). Nihilism, Nietzsche continues, can be a sign of strength in a spirit grown so strong

²³ “Why I Am So Wise” (1/223).

²⁴ Deleuze’s analysis also illustrates the logical instability of dualistic or binaristic (logocentric) thinking, replicating one of the key lines of thought present in Jacques Derrida’s work. Although dualism creates hierarchies and dominations, it also creates dependencies and contaminations because of the relational nature of language. Consequently, even though dualism has a ‘strong’ side which propagates domination and destruction, it also is strangely weak because it forever carries the potential for self-destruction.

that previous goals, convictions, and articles of faith have become incommensurate (*Will* 23/17-18). Thus, great power lies in ‘active nihilism’ or ‘active destruction’ which, according to Deleuze, Nietzsche sees as the sole expression of the becoming-active of forces or how ‘strong spirits and wills’ annihilate the reactive in themselves (*Nietzsche* 70). As Nietzsche writes in *The Will to Power*, when it becomes active, nihilism represents a ‘violent force of destruction’ unlike its ‘weary’ and ‘passive’ opposite (23/18).²⁵ Nietzsche explores this concept elsewhere in his *oeuvre*, including *The Gay Science* where he writes:

The desire for *destruction*, change, and becoming can be an expression of an overflowing energy that is pregnant with future (my term for this is, as is known, “Dionysian”); but it can also be the hatred of the ill-constituted, disinherited, and underprivileged, who destroy, *must* destroy, because what exists, indeed all existence, all being, outrages and provokes them (370/329).

This passage is doubly significant because it also highlights a linkage between destruction or self-overcoming and Becoming. In *The Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche revisits this idea, speaking of the intertwined Dionysian joys of destroying and becoming.²⁶ When individuals engage in active destruction, either in thought or deed, they affirm life, say ‘yes’ to will to power, and invite their own transformation. Consequently, for Nietzsche, active destruction is the means by which individuals can assert their most profound power, overcoming the negativity that pervades modern life and consciously affecting their own Becoming. This idea also invokes Heraclitus in that active destruction represents a microcosmic expression of the Heraclitean fire (‘the highest form of nature’) that periodically dissolves the world, bringing forth a new world from its flames (*Pre-Platonic* 68, 74). To the extent that individuals invoke this fire within themselves – creating and destroying themselves in a continuous

²⁵ Interestingly, Nietzsche repeatedly identifies Buddhism as passive nihilism *par excellence*. Examples are found in *Will* (23/18), *Gay* (347/289), and *Genealogy* (I.6/32).

²⁶ “What I Owe to the Ancients” (5/110).

Dionysian dance of Becoming – they become isomorphic with the world as it is. As Nietzsche’s alter-ego Zarathustra proclaims: ‘Thou must be willing to burn thyself in thine own flame: how mayst thou be made anew unless thou first become ashes?’²⁷

In summary, Nietzsche views strife as an essential component of a life-affirming existence where will to power endeavours to triumph as it encounters other wills and forces. These encounters may assume a variety of guises depending upon the quantity and quality of force involved and whether or not will to power affirms or denies these forces. Nietzsche further asserts that most human interactions are variations of becoming-reactive, engendering a state of activity akin to a resistance movement or guerrilla war where individuals do whatever they can to thwart, divide, and contaminate the power that seeks to dominate them. Although these strategies are by no means ineffective, they nonetheless remain steeped in the *ressentiment* and negativity Nietzsche associates with social decadence and decay. Paradoxically, therefore, it is only through active destruction that strong spirits and wills can finally overcome ‘nay-saying’, eradicate the reactive in themselves, and say ‘yes’ to self-transformation and indeed, life itself.

8

Analogous ideas about the presence and function of conflict in human relations occur in Foucault’s works, arising obliquely through expositions of the ‘nature’ of society and selfhood. Allusions to conflict are common in these descriptions, forging a tacit association between existence and struggle. In the penultimate paragraph of *Discipline and Punish*, for example, which sums up his treatise on the origins and constitution of modern disciplinary society, Foucault declares:

²⁷ Part I, “Of the Way of a Creator” (55).

In this central and centralized humanity, the effect and instrument of complex power relations, bodies and forces subjected by multiple mechanisms of “incarceration”, objects for discourses that are in themselves elements for this strategy, we must hear the distant roar of battle (308).

This statement, which in effect reconceptualises the whole of modern society as a battleground upon which a multidimensional war of existential containment or subjection is being waged, recalls an earlier discussion in the text where Foucault links military disciplinary tactics to the manufacture of docile-useful bodies and the institution of civil peace in modern societies (168-169). According to Foucault, the widespread use of military-style discipline amongst the general population forged a ‘point of junction’ between ‘war and the noise of battle on the one hand, and order and silence, subservient to peace, on the other’ (168). A related idea occurs in volume one of his *History* where Foucault meditates upon an inversion of Carl von Clausewitz’s proposition that ‘war is politics pursued by other means’ (that is, ‘politics is war pursued by other means’) and subsequently states as *fact* the idea that force relationships once expressed as war ‘gradually became invested in the order of political power’ in Western societies (*Will* 93, 102). Later in the volume, Foucault deepens the connection between conflict and modern existence a second time, describing how life itself became a ‘political object’ in the nineteenth century; the centre of a ‘very real’ struggle to control bodies and minds (144-145).

References to combat or agonistic relations also occur in volume two of Foucault’s *History* in descriptions of the philosophical basis of Greco-Roman self-care. Here the association between life and strife assumes a second dimension, manifesting as an internal struggle where ‘the adversaries the individual had to combat were not just within him or close by; they were part of him’ (*Pleasure* 67). These internal adversaries take the form of appetites and desires that, if not mastered, threaten to enslave the individual and dishonour him socially, disqualifying him to

exert his dominance over others (80-81). This internal struggle also assumes a spiritual dimension, as illustrated in texts like Plato's *Phaedrus*, which Foucault describes as 'the first description in ancient literature of what will later be known as "spiritual combat"' (88). *Phaedrus*, Foucault states, 'presents a whole drama of the soul struggling with itself and against the violence of its desires' – elements destined to have 'a long career in the history of spirituality'. This 'struggle between opposing powers' can be further understood as a fight over truth – truth which is obscured by the violence and movement of unruly desires and rediscovered only through acts of moderation (88-89). Within the Greco-Roman paradigm, therefore, conflict is situated at the very heart of Being; as an unavoidable auto-battle that must be fought and won to achieve social standing and enjoy its associated freedoms. As discussed later in this chapter, Foucault's implicit valorisation of the Greco-Roman ethical model changes the import of these somewhat unsurprising historical observations, transforming them into advice for contemporary living.

Two distinct but intimately intertwined battles thus rage in Foucault's middle and late works: the first between the individual and the society that seeks to control and define it and the second within the individual itself. And despite the fact that Foucault never declares conflict or strife a 'natural' aspect of human relations, he nonetheless repeatedly situates it at the centre of *lived* existence across time and culture. A wider perusal of Foucault's corpus illustrates how these struggles manifest materially through physical violence, exploitation, and oppression and conceptually through modern discourses and disciplinary techniques of law, medicine, and psychiatry. Indeed, for Foucault, conflicts over the 'effects of power' are the only transversal feature of contemporary existence – the constant which connects all of humanity (*Beyond* 211-212).

Foucault's ideas about conflict follow Nietzsche's formulations in several important ways. First, despite the fact that Foucault does not declare war as the fundamental condition of humanity, he frequently invokes it as a 'grid of intelligibility' or a way of understanding how power relations actually operate within societies.²⁸ As described above, Nietzsche envisions power relations in similar terms, as what Foucault calls a 'warlike clash between forces' (*Society* 16). Foucault's approach differs from Nietzsche's only by virtue of its relative circumspection – happily exploiting the model of power relations as war without ever opining upon its 'truth' (282).²⁹ In short, just like his precursor, Foucault sees great utility in portraying power relations as war irrespective of their *actual* status. As a result, Foucault expends little time debating the accuracy of this fundamental assumption and instead focuses his attention on secondary matters such as reportage and armament. This grid of intelligibility is perhaps most apparent in *Discipline and Punish*; a text that not only announces that a covert war is being waged against individuals by the disciplinary institutions of modern society but details the history of the conflict, closing with the murmur of a clandestine war of 'calculated methods, techniques, [and] "sciences" that permit the fabrication of the disciplinary individual' (308). This rumbling resounds as a call to arms that Foucault himself answers in the final two volumes of the *History* when he presents Greco-Roman ethics as a strategy

²⁸ Foucault traces the history and utility of this 'grid of intelligibility' from the sixteenth century onwards in his 1976 lecture series *Society Must Be Defended*. These lectures were delivered at the Collège de France between the publication of *Discipline and Punish* (February 1975) and the first volume of the *History* (October 1976) and provide great insight into the evolution of Foucault's thoughts about power during the transitionary period between his 'middle' to 'late' works. Significantly, Foucault never discusses the drawbacks of employing this grid or the benefits of using other grids.

²⁹ In a 1977 interview, Foucault discusses his reluctance to accept the vocabulary of warfare as the analytic tool *par excellence* for decoding modern power relations despite its popular usage (*Live* 239-240). Foucault's liberal use of the vocabulary of war nonetheless demonstrates its strategic value and, as he would no doubt admit, its power. The discourse of war is, after all, one of the fiercest weapons deployed in any struggle (*Society* 49-50).

to ‘become “stronger than oneself” [...] to exercise self-mastery and to triumph over others in the difficult game of ordeals [...]’ (*Pleasure* 9, 211-212).

This call to arms is reinforced by the militaristic language Foucault uses to close the first volume of his *History*, where he declares: ‘The rallying point for the counterattack against the deployment of sexuality ought not to be sex-desire, but bodies and pleasures’ (157). Foucault’s battle allusions and militaristic rhetoric help establish an atmosphere fraught with real enslavements and curtailed freedoms, motivating his readers to act and reinforcing his thesis of self-care as a way to armour the individual against the machinations of modern disciplinary society. If one wishes to prevail in the contemporary war over self-determination, therefore, it is essential to become a military expert.

Foucault also follows Nietzsche by linking conflict with creative activity. In the “Docile Bodies” chapter of *Discipline and Punish*, for example, Foucault argues institutional discipline endeavours not only to subjugate individuals but also to mould them in particular ways – crafting subjects that are both docile and useful (138). This chapter opens by evoking a specific image – the ‘ideal figure of the soldier’ from the early seventeenth century – which acts as a symbolic marker of the moment when the ‘classical age discovered the body as [an] object and target of power’ (135-136). Throughout the ensuing discussion, Foucault observes how disciplinary techniques once reserved for military and religious uses came to permeate the social field, becoming part of a permanent economy that produces subjects of a specific type.³⁰ The connection of conflict and creation also appears in the latter volumes of the *History*. According to Foucault, in classical Greco-Roman thought, ethical self-production was conceived as a ‘battle to be fought, a victory to be won in establishing

³⁰ As noted in the preceding discussion, this linkage is revisited in the closing paragraphs of the text.

a dominion of self over self, modelled after domestic or political authority' (*Pleasure* 91-92). The product of this interior, self-imposed battle is nothing less than oneself – a self-styled subject borne of the machinations of war.

Foucault's middle and late works on power and ethics thus establish a link between struggle and life hinging upon the concept of productivity – a formulation which follows Nietzsche with the utmost precision. Although conflict may not be the natural state of human relations for Foucault, he finds it useful to conceptualise existence in this way – according to a grid of intelligibility called war. This grid of intelligibility is applicable to not only the dominion of ideas but to the physical realm as well, becoming a way of understanding both the discursive-theoretical and nondiscursive-practical facets of culture. For Foucault, war is the analytic *par excellence* for analysing subject formation at both the level of society and the individual. Consequently, although he never asserts agreement with Nietzsche's Heraclitean dictum that 'war is the father of all good things', Foucault still perceives conflict as highly productive – perhaps not the creator of all *good* things but a prolific forge nonetheless.

9

Foucault's theory of power also invokes Nietzsche's idea of will to power as domination.³¹ A broader discussion of Foucault's theory, including its central

³¹ 'Theory' is used in a general sense to signify the corpus of Foucauldian thought on power, which although quite extensive cannot be understood as a comprehensive or holistic theoretical model, at least in the strict scientific sense. Gary Gutting, for example, views Foucault's theory of power as a 'temporary scaffold' erected for a specific purpose rather than as a permanent structure enduring by virtue of its universal truth (*Cambridge* 16). This characterisation recalls Foucault's idea of grids of intelligibility which act as specific lenses through which phenomena like power can be identified, analysed, and interpreted. Nonetheless, Deleuze's analysis lends support to the conclusion that Foucault *did* establish a general theory of power when he identified the 'diagram of forces' that, although perpetually mutable, is ever-present within the social field (*Foucault* 84, *Discipline* 205). Jana Sawicki ("Feminism" 169) and Helen O'Grady ("Ethics" 112) also note that Foucault's use of 'holistic

‘paradox’ is required to fully appreciate its Nietzschean sensibility. In *Discipline and Punish* Foucault posits a seemingly inescapable and thoroughly oppressive vision of modern disciplinary power exemplified by the image of a ‘carceral city’ where walls, spaces, institutions, rules, and discourses are used to mould, monitor, and punish subjects (307-308). Critiques of Foucault’s middle works frequently coalesce around the bleak vision of power contained in this work. A 1986 essay by Edward Said is representative, describing Foucauldian power as ‘profoundly pessimistic [...] irresistible and unopposable [...] in short, largely *with* rather than *against* it’ (*Critical* 151-2). As Lois McNay observes, this pessimistic stance is further reinforced by studies that apply Foucault’s theory of power to objects of study such as women’s oppression (*Foucault* 3). Foucault’s own study of sexual repression from the seventeenth century onwards is also demonstrative; projecting a worldview where disciplinary power leaves no human activity untouched. As Foucault writes, ‘We must not think that by saying yes to sex, one says no to power; on the contrary [...]’ (*Will* 157).

In Nietzschean terms, therefore, *Discipline and Punish*, the first volume of Foucault’s *History*, and auxiliary works by Foucault that utilise these same ideas about power can be understood as interlinked case studies of will to power as domination. Foucault implies this when he identifies ‘domination effects’ as one of the key outcomes of the ‘perpetual battle’ that attends the operations of modern micro-physical power (*Discipline* 26); a linkage that is repeated in volume one of the *History* (*Will* 102). In a 1976 lecture Foucault strengthens this association between power relations and domination, stating:

rhetoric’ in *Discipline and Punish* invites a wider application for his conclusions, as do the myriad extensions of his work into the realm of contemporary cultural studies.

Once we begin to talk about power relations, we are not talking about right, and we are not talking about sovereignty; we are talking about domination, about an infinitely dense and multiple domination that never comes to an end. There is no escape from domination [...] (*Society* 111).

The idea that we exist in an inescapable state of endless domination is further reinforced by remarks Foucault makes in a 1982 seminar where he presents a four-fold schema for classifying the ‘technologies’ human beings use to understand themselves – technologies of production, sign systems, domination/power, and self (*Technologies* 18). In this seminar Foucault applies this schema to his own corpus, stating that most of his career was spent analysing the final two technologies and domination/power in particular (18-19). Because he associates *each* of the four technologies with a ‘certain type of domination’ (18), however, it is more accurate to characterise Foucault’s entire corpus as an analysis of domination/power or, said slightly differently, as multifaceted analysis of will to power as domination.³² Hence, despite the widespread belief that Foucault’s late interest in ethics signifies a shift away from his prior theoretical concerns or even marks a new chapter in his theory of power, it does not.³³ In fact, Foucault’s ‘turn toward the self’ signals nothing more than a refocusing of his gaze on another aspect of domination/power – *individual* domination (18-19). Foucault’s enduring interest in the various permutations of will to power as domination is also illustrative of the fundamental and pervasive influence

³² In a 1984 interview, Foucault takes a somewhat contrary position, stating his analyses ‘bear essentially on relations of power [...] [which are] something different from states of domination’ (*Essential I* 283). Here Foucault defines states of domination as situations where power relations have lost their mobility or reversibility to the extent that particular individuals or groups are unable to effectively practice freedom. The current analysis holds that Foucault’s abovementioned position is more accurate because even something as seemingly benign as ‘knowing’ constitutes an act of domination by Foucault’s own definition. Foucault also elides the fact that practices of freedom typically *require* renunciations or acts of self-domination. Although it is useful to observe that some states of domination are more rigid than others, it seems disingenuous to assert power relations are somehow *different* from states of domination, especially considering how keen Foucault is to assert domination (and the normalisation it engenders) as the fundamental condition of modern society.

³³ McNay, for example, argues that ‘Foucault’s final work on the self represents a significant shift from the theoretical concerns of his earlier work’ (*Foucault* 4). Elspeth Probyn’s comments are also typical of this perspective, asserting that ‘in the turn to the term of the self, we find a signpost signalling a shift in [Foucault’s] [...] conception of power (*Sexing* 121). Peter Dews makes a similar argument (“Power” 91).

of Nietzsche upon his work. This enduring and thoroughly Nietzschean preoccupation with will to power as domination tends to be overlooked by scholars as does the fundamental continuity of Foucault's theory of power throughout his middle and late works. Nevertheless, a more detailed examination of the texts themselves and particularly, the first volume of Foucault's *History*, demonstrates the stability of theoretical perspective underpinning these texts.

The first volume of Foucault's *History* is something of an anomaly, a 'one off' that displays little connection to its sister volumes apart from the obvious thematic tie. Foucault explains the reason for this discontinuity in the second volume of his *History*, observing how what began as a 'history of systems of morality-based interdictions' on sexuality became a 'history of ethical problematizations based on practices of the self' (*Pleasure* 13). This reorientation not only changed Foucault's central object of study but also his historical and textual focus from modernity to ancient Greece and Rome. As biographer David Macey observes, the *prière d'insérer* for the second volume also illuminates the conceptual reworking of Foucault's project, calling it a 'general recentring' of his vast genealogical study of desiring man (*Lives* 465-466).

Many scholars, including C.G. Prado, have observed that a closer connection exists between *Discipline and Punish* and the first volume of Foucault's *History* than the three-volume *History* as a separate whole (*Starting* 4, 85). Nevertheless, if we bracket off Foucault's specific object of study in volume one of his *History* and focus upon the theory of power that informs Foucault's main thesis ('reversing' the repressive hypothesis), we observe a theory that is more developed but otherwise almost identical to the theory which girds *Discipline and Punish* where Foucault declares:

We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it “excludes”, it “represses”, it “censors”, it “abstracts”, it “masks”, it “conceals”. In fact power produces: it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production (194).

Because the earlier text focuses on how knowledge and power conspire to restrict individual freedom by moulding docile-useful bodies, readers tend to assume Foucault is arguing a repressive theory of power when he is not. Repression is merely one effect among many which are attributable to power. Indeed, throughout *Discipline and Punish*, power is consistently characterised as productive – generating discourses, truths, and most importantly, subjects. In the ensuing text, volume one of Foucault’s *History*, this productive theory of power takes centre stage, becoming the theoretical foundation upon which the repressive hypothesis is quashed.³⁴

This same theory of power also informs the next two volumes of the *History*, where Foucault’s gaze shifts to individual discipline and its role in producing subjects.³⁵ Because the Greco-Roman disciplinary economies Foucault chooses as case studies are governed by relations of ‘domination-submission, command-obedience, [and] mastery-docility’ (*Pleasure* 70), these texts also evoke a repressive conceptualisation of power even though they are simply further demonstrations of its productive capacity. Consequently, the ‘free’ Greek or Roman aristocrat is no different from the ‘unfree’ docile-useful subject of Western modernity in his status as a ‘reality’ produced by a ‘specific technology of power called discipline’.³⁶ Both are subjected to productive disciplinary power that creates a state of domination which

³⁴ Simply stated, Foucault argues in this text that the sexual repression which began in the seventeenth century is a falsehood and this era instead marks the beginning of a ‘veritable discursive explosion’ on sex (*Will* 17).

³⁵ Two of the more important discussions of power contained in these volumes are found in Part One, Chapter 4 (“Freedom and Truth”) of *The Use of Pleasure* and Part Three (“Self and Others”) of *The Care of the Self*.

³⁶ When viewed as companion studies of the productive capacity of disciplinary power, *Discipline and Punish* and the two final volumes of Foucault’s *History* also present a bold illustration of the ambivalent nature of mastery as an ontological state.

engenders a conversion of self. Whether this conversion is viewed as oppressive or liberating is a secondary matter.

In short, power produces. For Foucault, this productivity is most apparent in scenarios where an overt relationship of domination-submission exists – a perspective that aligns well with Nietzsche’s belief in the centrality of relations of domination to ‘life itself’. Furthermore, like Nietzsche, Foucault also sees knowledge as something that is produced through conflict and domination. Indeed, as noted previously, Foucault believes ‘knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting’ (*Language* 154). In a 1973 lecture, Foucault expands upon this idea by asserting his tacit agreement with Nietzsche’s idea that only a ‘relation of violence, domination, power, and force, a relation of violation’ lies between knowledge and things (*Essential III* 9).

Foucault’s state of endless domination is nonetheless strangely fragile because of the ‘odd term in relations of power’ known as resistance (*Will* 96). ‘Where there is power’, Foucault declares, ‘there is resistance’ (95). Like power, which is exercised from ‘innumerable points, in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations’; therefore, points of resistance are also present ‘everywhere in the power network [...] each of them a special case’ (94-96). Furthermore, for power relations to exist at all there must be an underlying base of freedom, as Foucault observes in a 1984 interview:

[T]he statement: “You see power everywhere, hence there is no place for liberty,” seems to me to be absolutely incomplete. One cannot impute to me the idea that power is a system of domination which controls everything and which leaves no room for freedom [...]. [I]f there are relations of power throughout every social field it is because there is freedom everywhere (*Final* 12-13).

The indissolubility of freedom and power mitigates the desolate image of intractable, pervasive oppression evoked by *Discipline and Punish* and related studies. This

image is further nuanced by Foucault's ethical texts which, despite being case studies in self-domination, demonstrate subjectivity is not completely beyond our control but instead is co-produced (at least in part) by individual actions and beliefs.

The Nietzschean *cum* Deleuzian notion of becoming-reactive offers an analytic for understanding how individuals can assert this control. As Foucault states in the first volume of his *History*, there may be no 'single locus of great Refusal' because of the manifold and unstable nature of power but there is a 'plurality of resistances' which are not merely 'reactions' or 'rebounds' and thereby 'always passive, doomed to perpetual defeat' (96). Accordingly, every micro- or macro-application of disciplinary power – every instance of domination – is a possible site for resistance. In addition, the transitory nature of power relations makes resistance anything but futile. Instead, as Foucault suggests, resistance produces cleavages, fractures unities, and spurs regroupings of power relations and the individuals they traverse. According to Foucault, resisting is not simply an act of negation but a creative process: indeed, saying "no" is only a bare minimum, an opening gambit in one's practice of freedom (*Essential I* 168).

Following Nietzsche once more, Foucault also advocates something like complete nihilism or active destruction as a means for transcending existential constraints. In the realm of selfhood, for example, Foucault states that the target nowadays should be to *refuse* rather than discover who we are (*Beyond* 216). This refusal might mean rejecting culturally imposed forms of subjectivity or it might entail a more radical approach, refusing the idea of stable identity altogether. For Foucault, genealogy represents an important practice of active destruction – a seek-

and-destroy mission directed against ‘lofty origins’ that reveals the non-essence of things and opens up new possibilities for knowing ourselves and the world.³⁷

Like Nietzsche, therefore, Foucault’s theory of power evokes the idea of domination as a central aspect of life and its creative processes. Domination pervades human life, arising in each of the four quadrants of human technological endeavour, affecting activities as diverse as language and ethics. Furthermore, as an ontological state, domination is intrinsically productive, forming subjects and creating knowledges as it applies forces to bodies and things. Be this as it may, the co-presence of freedom throughout the social field and intrinsic instability of power relations renders states of domination strangely fragile, engendering reactions and resistances that can significantly alter the operations of power. Engaging in active destruction, particularly in the realms of subjectivity and genealogy, are also important ways of asserting power or, as Foucault might conceptualise it, attending to the ongoing work of freedom.

10

Although Nietzsche’s concept of will to power as domination provides a useful grid of intelligibility for understanding certain continuities within Foucault’s middle and late works, his *oeuvre* can also be viewed from another Nietzschean perspective on will to power. More specifically, as Schutte notes, despite his fairly consistent portrayal of power as domination, Nietzsche distinguishes another form of will to power – namely, will to power as recurring energy or dynamism (*Nihilism* 76). As the preceding discussion indicates, delineating between this form of will to power and

³⁷ See “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” in *Language* (139-164). As William Connolly suggests, by denying the necessity of existing forms of social relations and highlighting their historical contingency, genealogy opens up new possibilities for humanity (“Beyond” 110). In this context, Foucault’s advice to Sawicki to ‘write genealogies’ rather than ‘spend energy talking about him’ seems astute indeed (*Disciplining* 15).

will to power as domination is complicated because both are productive and hence fundamentally similar. One way to differentiate between the two forms of will to power is to consider *how* power is manifesting and, more specifically, whether it is arising in a dualistic or nondualistic manner. For will to power to manifest as domination, there must first be division, some form of separation between force and its target, subject and object. Conflict may also arise in these scenarios as will to power attempts to assert authority over a target and the target reacts. Within this dualistic and frequently rancorous paradigm, however, there is another less differentiated realm of will to power marked only by the temporal play of forces. The final fragment from *The Will to Power* beautifully captures the essence of this second conceptualisation of power:

This world: a monster of energy, without beginning, without end; a firm, iron magnitude of force that does not expend itself but only transforms itself [...] and not a space that might be “empty” here or there, but rather force throughout, as a play of forces and waves of forces [...], a becoming that knows no satiety [...]: this, my *Dionysian* world of the eternally self-creating, the eternally self-destroying [...]; without goal, unless the joy of the circle is itself a goal [...] (1067/550).

This conceptualisation of power also aligns with Heraclitus who perceives material reality as flux:

Be not deceived. It is the fault of your myopia, not the nature of things, if you believe you see land somewhere in the ocean of coming-to-be and passing away. You use names for things as though they rigidly, persistently endured; yet even the stream into which you step a second time is not the one you stepped into before (*Philosophy* 5/51-52).³⁸

If there is conflict in these visions of reality and the power that pervades it, it resides only in what Eagleton characterizes as a struggle for self-realization marked by ‘richness, profusion, [and] excess’ (*Ideology* 247). Ceaseless activity or play is the

³⁸ Schutte also comments on this point (*Nihilism* 40-41). See also Kirk and Raven’s commentary (*Presocratic* 196-199).

elemental quality of this worldview because its essence – power – is restless, the world is fecund.

Eagleton further characterises Nietzsche's vision of the world as will to power as 'fundamentally aesthetic' bearing its ends 'entirely within itself, positing them as mere points of resistance essential to its own self-actualizing' (247).³⁹ Several passages from *The Will to Power* lend support for Eagleton's stance:

The world as a work of art that gives birth to itself— (796/419).

Art reminds us of states of animal vigor; it is on the one hand an excess and overflow of blooming physicality into the world of images and desires; on the other, an excitation of the animal functions through the images and desires of intensified life; —an enhancement of the feeling of life, a stimulant to it (802/422).

Art and nothing but art! It is the great means of making life possible, the great seduction to life, the great stimulant of life. Art as the only superior counterforce to all will to denial of life, as that which is anti-Christian, anti-Buddhist, anti-nihilist *par excellence* (853/452).

In addition, because Nietzsche views the 'strongest, most intrepid' individuals as 'will to power – and nothing besides' (*Will* 1067/550), crafting oneself as a work of art becomes both the most natural and sublime of human endeavours.⁴⁰ This idea is traceable to Nietzsche's earliest works, including *The Birth of Tragedy* where he states 'it is only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* that existence and the world are eternally *justified*' (5/52). Through the isomorphism of will to power, therefore, Nietzsche unites world and individual in essence and task, reconnecting humanity to its primordial state of transience and its principle task of artistic self-production.

This dynamic view of reality and self has obvious differences to a 'Being-centred' philosophy or morality and as such, represents a type of counter-discourse or what Schutte calls a 'counterteaching' for liberating humanity from the *ressentiment*

³⁹ Atkins provides additional support for this reading (*Self* 71-72).

⁴⁰ Nietzsche's observation is evocative of a similar orientation in two other important nineteenth century authors, Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867) and Oscar Wilde (1854-1900).

and nihilism that accompany its ‘bondage to being’ (*Nihilism* 43). According to Schutte, the immediate aim of Nietzsche’s will to power metaphor is the ‘cancellation of boundaries between self and world’ (93). Significantly, this ‘cancellation’ can also be understood as the inaugural gesture in establishing a philosophy of nonduality – a gesture Nietzsche repeats in various ways throughout his *oeuvre*. For instance, as mentioned above, in *On the Genealogy of Morals* Nietzsche undermines traditional beliefs about Being, causality, and subject-object separation by declaring ‘there is no “being” behind doing, effecting, becoming; “the doer” is merely a fiction added to the deed – the deed is everything’ (I.13/45). In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche continues this critique, characterising our beliefs in ‘unity, identity, duration, substance, cause, materiality, [and] being’ to be errors perpetuated by language.⁴¹ ‘I fear’, Nietzsche adds, ‘we are not getting rid of God because we still believe in grammar’ (38). Nietzsche also advances one of the strongest and most controversial forms of nondualistic critique in his preceding text, *The Gay Science*, where he erases the separation between God and humanity by declaring God dead and then suggesting only those who have become gods themselves are worthy of so great a deed (125/181).⁴² In *Twilight*, Nietzsche cancels yet another longstanding philosophical division – the separation between the real and apparent worlds – by arguing that only the apparent world exists.⁴³

Through repeated problematisation or outright denial of the core binaries embedded within conventional views of reality and selfhood, therefore, Nietzsche identifies the practice of nondual thinking as essential for overcoming the costly errors and prejudices that pervade modern cultural consciousness and prevent

⁴¹ “‘Reason’ in Philosophy” (5/37-38).

⁴² Notably, the mad herald of God’s death states, ‘I have come too early [...] this tremendous event is still on its way [...] [and] has not yet reached the ears of men’ (125/126).

⁴³ “‘Reason’ in Philosophy” (2/36).

humanity from existing in a life-affirming way. Despite these repeated gestures, however, Nietzschean will to power never completely overcomes its tendency toward dualism even when it is conceptualised as creative dynamism. This lingering dualism is apparent in discussions where Nietzsche praises will to power's movement toward one form of life (strength, vitality) at the expense of another (weakness, decadence). Schutte characterises this lingering dualism as Nietzsche's 'prolife' tendency (*Nihilism* 36). This propensity is explicit in a passage from *The Anti-Christ* where Nietzsche asks: 'What is good? – All that heightens the feeling of power, the will to power, power itself in man. What is bad? – All that proceeds from weakness. What is happiness? – The feeling that power *increases* – that a resistance is overcome' (2/115). Although Nietzsche's overriding project – that is, overcoming nihilism and resentment of the transience of life – is admittedly prolife, by placing a negative value on weak or waning forms of life Nietzsche devalues an intrinsic aspect of existence and therein disparages a whole realm of natural phenomena. Declining power is just as crucial to life's circle of energetic exchange as increasing power. One creature dies and becomes food for another – a fact that Nietzsche acknowledges in *The Will to Power* when he writes: 'it [the world] lives on itself: its excrements are its food' (1066/548). Declining power, death, and excrement are neither noble nor contemptible yet Nietzsche makes them appear so by glorifying will to power in only its prolife manifestation. This substitution of qualitative judgments for quantitative differences is in fact the essence of value creation – an activity that Nietzsche frequently critiques in others yet cannot avoid performing himself as he explicates his own philosophy.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ To be fair, it is not value creation itself that Nietzsche despises but its lack of honesty and transparency. Indeed, Nietzsche believes that as commanders and law-givers, 'actual philosophers' must create values because 'their "knowing" is *creating*, their creating is a law-giving, their will to

When it serves his purposes, Nietzsche is also quite keen to assert and defend other dualisms, most of them socio-political (master-slave) but some more ‘naturalistic’ (masculine-feminine).⁴⁵ All of these dualisms are arguably variations of the strong-weak binary that pervades Nietzschean thought. Nietzsche’s writings about women offer a case in point and, despite opinions to the contrary, are philosophically relevant.⁴⁶ “Of Womenkind, Old and Young” in *Thus Spake Zarathustra* is a showcase of Nietzsche’s thoughts about women, including statements like: ‘Man’s happiness is, I will. Woman’s happiness is, He will’ (58). Whatever the source of Nietzsche’s opinions about women,⁴⁷ they are noteworthy not so much for what they *say* but for what they *do* or, more precisely, for what they *fail* to do. Nietzsche’s thoughts on women are significant because they are so utterly conventional – hyperbolically conventional perhaps, but hardly critical of the negative or dismissive attitudes toward women of his day – and hence, strangely un-Nietzschean. Nietzsche’s brilliance lies in his contrariness yet when it comes to women, as when he espouses other authoritarian and elitist views such as those concerning rank order,⁴⁸ Nietzsche merely reinforces the unenlightened attitudes that already pervade society and thereby lessens his value as a philosopher and theoretician-critic of culture.

In other words, when Nietzsche resorts to dualism he lessens his critical force because dualism is the bedrock of conventional thought systems and traditional societal arrangements. And Nietzsche’s dualism runs deep, traceable to the primary interpretations he attaches to his flux-based worldview. Indeed, although Nietzsche’s

truth is – *will to power*’ (*Beyond* 211/142-143). Nevertheless, one wonders how honest Nietzsche was being with himself in this instance.

⁴⁵ Schutte presents an extended analysis of this issue.

⁴⁶ Kaufmann states: ‘[Although] the unjust and unquestioned prejudices of a philosopher may be of interest to the historian as well as to the psychologist [...] Nietzsche’s prejudices about women need not greatly concern the philosopher’ (*Nietzsche* 84).

⁴⁷ There are a variety of theories on this matter, as Rosalyn Diprose observes (“Nietzsche” 69-70).

⁴⁸ A good example is found in Nietzsche’s praise of Hinduism’s ancient law book, *The Laws of Manu*. See *The Anti-Christ* (57/176-179).

adherence to this Heraclitean vision of the world remains stable throughout his mature works, his views on the *meaning* of flux do not. As mentioned above, Nietzsche frequently promotes the Heraclitean idea of flux as ‘war-justice’ or conflict. Elsewhere, however, Nietzsche projects a different idea of flux – also Heraclitean – as innocent play or ‘the game Zeus plays or, expressed more concretely, of the fire with itself’ (*Philosophy* 6/58). As Nietzsche writes in *The Will to Power*: ‘Becoming aims at *nothing* and achieves *nothing*’ (12/12).⁴⁹ Although neither interpretation of the meaning of will to power is value-free, the latter is less dualistic because it presupposes neither division (the game is unitary, played by Zeus alone) nor goal apart from pure enjoyment. This is the meaning of will to power as dynamism: energy dancing for sheer joy. As an isomorphism of will to power as dynamism, the individual is also in flux, a manifestation of Dionysus, the god who dances within (*Zarathustra* 33).⁵⁰

11

Following the Heraclitean-Nietzschean ideal, flux is another essential quality of Foucauldian power. As noted above, Foucault characterises power as pervasive and productive, immanent to the economic, political, familial, and interpersonal relationships that comprise society (*Will* 94, 102). As Foucault states, ‘Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere [...] because it is produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another’ (93). This active, immanent, and utterly productive power is also constantly moving because ‘power is not something

⁴⁹ Danto asserts that ‘apart from the bare *assertion* of power striving, there appears to be little one can say about the world which is not interpretation’ (*Nietzsche* 222). What Danto fails to acknowledge is his choice of verb is already interpretive.

⁵⁰ Part I, “Of Reading and Writing”. The Heraclitean and Dionysian aspects of existence are also aligned in *The Birth of Tragedy* (24/141-142).

that is acquired, seized, or shared, something that one holds on to or allows to slip away; power is exercised from innumerable points, in the *interplay* of nonegalitarian and mobile relations' (94, emphasis mine).

Like Nietzsche, Foucault also conceptualises power in aesthetic terms and considers its application through self-discipline as a way of making one's life into 'an *oeuvre* that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria' (*Pleasure* 10-11). Foucault characterises these 'intentional and voluntary actions by which men not only set themselves rules of conduct, but also seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being' as 'arts of existence' (10-11). The two latter volumes of the *History* are case studies in one ancient version of the arts of existence, Greco-Roman self-care. By practicing self-care, the Greeks and Romans not only moulded their bodies and minds, they committed their existence to the maintenance and reproduction of a specific aesthetic-ontological order (*Pleasure* 89).⁵¹ Although Foucault never characterises it as such, the aesthetic-ontological order maintained by Greco-Roman self-care practices is obviously governed by Apollo who, according to Nietzsche, is the god of images, dreams, and sculpture and, more significantly the 'apotheosis of the *principium individuationis*'; the ethical deity who demands 'know thyself' and 'nothing in excess' (*Birth* 1/33, 4/45-46). Quoting Plato, Aristotle, and Xenophon, Foucault asserts Apollo's ruling presence over the ethical system described in his last works by sketching a cultural realm where individuals aspire to achieve a state of perfect self-dominion; a carefully crafted and constantly supervised 'beautiful order' of restraint and mastery undisturbed by violence, frenzy, and excess (*Pleasure* 89-91).⁵²

⁵¹ Foucault makes a slightly stronger point here, omitting the qualifier 'aesthetic'.

⁵² Amongst other texts, Foucault quotes Plato's *Republic* (402d-403c). Notably, these passages from Plato rely upon two forms of dualism: (1) a binary between 'forms of temperance and courage and

Significantly, Greece's other god of the arts and Nietzsche's personal deity, Dionysus, is absent from Foucault's ethical works. As the god of music and dance, Dionysus personifies the pulsation of life and is the deity who presides over Heraclitean flux (*Birth* 1/33, 36, 16/104, 24/142).⁵³ His presence serves as a reminder of the ecstatic unity of life and the pain associated with individuation and disconnection from nature (2/38-41). Nietzsche further suggests is it only through practicing the Dionysian arts of song and dance that individuals can embody the 'real idea of the world' – music – and become works of art rather than artists (1/37, 21/129). Furthermore, contrary to Kaufmann's analysis, Nietzsche does not characterise Dionysus in *The Birth of Tragedy* as a 'negative [...] yet necessary dialectic element' for the creation of aesthetic values (*Nietzsche* 128-130). In fact, even in this early and self-proclaimed 'flawed' work, Nietzsche has already cast the Dionysian aesthetic element in positive, if not therapeutic, terms.⁵⁴

Dionysus's exile from the sphere of Greco-Roman self-care is, as suggested above, a function of ontology. More specifically, as Nietzsche points out and Foucault reiterates, the Hellenes valorised beauty and order above all else and sought to order their lives accordingly (*Birth* 18/109-110, *Pleasure* 90-91).⁵⁵ This cultural

liberality and high-mindedness' and their opposites and (2) a division between body and soul (*Republic* 91-93).

⁵³ Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty provides a good overview of the Dionysus myth as retold by Euripides in the *Bacchae* and other texts (*Other* 103-111). Some of the key features of this myth are Dionysus' otherness, his connection to irrational behaviour and women, his linkages to animals both domestic and wild, his dismemberment at the hands of the Titans, and the initial Greek refusal to recognise his divinity. Apollo, of course, is also a musician but one of a very different sort. Nietzsche describes this difference by contrasting his 'phantom harp-sound' with Dionysus's 'demonic folk-song' (*Birth* 4/46). Walter Otto's *Dionysus: Myth and Cult* is also informative.

⁵⁴ In his Preface to the second edition ("Attempt at a Self-Criticism"), which was written fifteen years after the text was first published, Nietzsche describes *The Birth of Tragedy* as 'impossible [...] badly written, ponderous, embarrassing, image-mad and image-confused, sentimental, in places saccharine to the point of effeminacy, uneven in tempo, without the will to logical cleanliness, very convinced and therefore disdainful of proof, [and so forth]' (*Birth* 19). Despite all these flaws, however, Nietzsche also praises the text for expressing (albeit poorly) a 'strange voice' – that of a nascent disciple of Dionysus (20).

⁵⁵ Perhaps ironically, Nietzsche's elucidation of this point is also quite beautiful:

preference is probably a function of the Platonic worldview that links a virtuous and noble life with the more ‘real’ unchanging realm of Forms rather than the ever-mutable corporeal world.⁵⁶ As Foucault further notes in a 1976 lecture, the idea that knowledge and truth must belong to the register of order and peace rather than disorder and violence has been circulating in the West for millennia (*Society* 173).⁵⁷ According to this viewpoint, a beautiful life is stable and orderly and thus has nothing whatsoever to do with flux and disorder. In short, therefore, a beautiful life cannot be achieved by swearing allegiance to Dionysus, the god who dances.

The Apollonian ethical perspective that pervades Foucault’s ethical work aligns well with his views on power and more specifically, the interpretation he attaches to flux. As noted above, Foucault conceptualises power relations as omnipresent and unstable, a perspective analogous to the Heraclitean-Nietzschean ideal. In late interviews, Foucault uses the word ‘game’ to characterise these relations and, particularly, to describe the relationship between power and truth. Although the word ‘game’ brings up ideations of play, the point of the game for Foucault is never simple amusement but always contestation – the winning or losing that comes from invoking a particular set of principles and rules of procedure (*Essential I* 297). Accordingly, Foucauldian power relations are always intentional and imbued with

It is an eternal phenomenon: the insatiable will always find a way to detain its creatures in life and compel them to live on, by means of an illusion spread over things. One is chained by the Socratic love of knowledge and the delusion of being able thereby to heal the eternal wound of existence; another [the Hellenic] is ensnared by art’s seductive veil of beauty fluttering before his eyes; still another by the metaphysical comfort that beneath the whirl of phenomena eternal life flows on indestructibly – to say nothing of the more vulgar and almost more powerful illusions which the will always has at hand (*Birth* 18/109-110).

⁵⁶ Vastly oversimplified, Plato argues the realm of unchanging, intelligible Forms is the true realm of Being and as such, we should prepare our souls for habitation there rather than attuning ourselves to the mutable corporeal world of Becoming. See James Arieti’s overview of the Platonic doctrine of the Forms and its implications for personal ethics in *Philosophy* (175-179).

⁵⁷ Foucault also suggests this idea probably originated with Plato.

calculation, aiming toward a particular objective (*Will* 94-95).⁵⁸ This view of power is also in keeping with the Heraclitean-Nietzschean ideal but only in its manifestation as strife, war-justice, and will to power as domination. Significantly, this view of power is also profoundly dualistic and elides the equally important playful side of power, which is also productive-dynamic but in a less intentional and consequently, less dualistic way.

Foucault's preference for describing power relations according to this analytic framework is particularly apparent in his discussions of *enkrateia* in *The Use of Pleasure*. According to Foucault, *enkrateia* is the Greek word designating the 'form of relationship with oneself' necessary to and manifested by the practice of self-care (63). It is the attitudinal foundation upon which the entire ethical system rests. In the Greco-Roman paradigm, this relation took the form of a 'dynamic of domination of oneself by oneself' (65). Rather predictably, references to combat, competition, struggle, and polemics are common throughout this thoroughly dualistic exposition (63-77). Later in the text, Foucault further observes how these same principles were reflected in Greco-Roman social dynamics, creating an isomorphism where only one role is 'intrinsically honorable and valorized without question: the one that consisted in being active, in dominating [...]' (215).

Conversely, a more playful notion of power arises only obliquely in Foucault's ethical texts, generally manifesting through subtle implication rather than open declaration. For example, in his discussions of *askēsis* or the practical training individuals undertake as part of a self-care regimen, Foucault's tone is less agonistic, depicting existence not as a battle but as a 'continuous exercise' or work-in-progress defined only 'by the rule of the individual over himself' (*Pleasure* 73, *Care* 68). A

⁵⁸ Foucault's views on fluidity of power relationships in sadomasochistic sex play may represent an exception to this rule (*Live* 387-388).

modicum of pleasure even creeps into one passage where Foucault observes how the rule governing the self-relation could take the form of not only ‘a domination but also of an enjoyment without desire and without disturbance’ (*Care* 68). This pleasure is, however, Apollonian and hence far removed from the joyful Dionysian world of ‘voluptuous delight’ Nietzsche envisions when he writes of will to power as dynamism (*Will* 1067/550). Consequently, although elsewhere Foucault bids us to formulate an ethics that prefers ‘flows over unities’ and ‘mobile arrangements over systems’,⁵⁹ his ethical works seem destined to produce more concrete and orderly results.

Nietzsche, on the other hand, is more likely to assert a playful-creative interpretation of power and existence as a whole. This inclination is particularly clear in *Thus Spake Zarathustra* and *The Gay Science*, which were both written during the period when Nietzsche’s health was most robust.⁶⁰ As Zarathustra’s beasts declare, ‘to such as think as we do, all things dance: they come and take hands and laugh and flee – and return’⁶¹ or as Zarathustra himself declares:

To me that love life it seemeth that butterflies, soap-bubbles, and whatsoever is of their nature amongst men, know most of happiness. The sight of such light, foolish, delicate, mobile little beings on the wing – this moveth Zarathustra to tears and song. I would believe only in a god that knew how to dance. [...] I have learned to walk: since then I run. I have learned to fly: since then I need none to urge me to bestir myself. Now am I without weight, now I fly, now I see myself beneath myself, now a god danceth in me.⁶²

For Zarathustra and for his creator, Nietzsche, the divinity of existence is not found in those things and beings that seem stable or appear to be ruled by what Zarathustra calls the ‘Spirit of Gravity’ but instead is most apparent in things that are light,

⁵⁹ Foucault makes this assertion in his Preface to Deleuze and Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus* (xiii).

⁶⁰ See Nietzsche’s preface to the Second Edition of *The Gay Science* and Kaufmann’s introductory comments (12, 32-38).

⁶¹ Part III, “The Convalescent” (193).

⁶² Part I, “Of Reading and Writing” (33).

mobile, and ultimately, Dionysian. Dionysus's creative-productive potential is also captured in *The Gay Science* which, as Kaufmann observes, provides an apotheosis of Dionysus as he was conceived in Nietzsche's more mature works (*Nietzsche* 282). Here Dionysus, who is no longer contrasted with Apollo but instead with decadence and *ressentiment*, is the god of superabundance, the embodiment of excessive 'procreating, fertilizing energies that can [...] turn any desert into lush farmland' and 'overflowing energy that is pregnant with future' (370/328-329). For Nietzsche, there is no better spiritual ideal for the philosopher than the 'good dancer' for the dance is 'his ideal, also his art, and finally also his only piety, his "service to God"' (381/346).

By favouring the striving, war-justice interpretation of Heraclitean-Nietzschean flux, however, Foucauldian power retains a fundamental dualism as does his domination-based ethics. Foucault is nevertheless much more circumspect than his precursor when it comes to asserting and valorising other forms of dualism including the grandiose master-slave, noble-base, aristocrat-herd, and masculine-feminine oppositions that pervade Nietzsche's works. Instead, Foucault's dualism is generally a thoroughly mundane affair, surfacing in the myriad relationships that comprise social existence, within the micro-politics of daily life. For Foucault, therefore, 'great radical ruptures' and 'massive binary divisions' are the exception rather than the rule in modern societies where domination-resistance clashes tend to be both local and transitory (*Will* 95-96). Nevertheless, Foucault also acknowledges that struggle and binary opposition are useful grids of intelligibility for analysing power relations in various socio-historical contexts including the present day (*Beyond* 211-213). Women struggle against the power men exercise over them, people of different races and ethnicities fight for equality, workers clash with employers, and citizens resist laws and other governmental constraints. According to Foucault, these

struggles have several things in common: they are simultaneously immediate and transversal and revolve around power effects, the privileges of knowledge, and questions about the status of individuals (211-212).⁶³ Struggle and division may not be faithful representations of the actual state of human affairs but even if they are not, the analytic of war makes society and history intelligible (*Society* 163).

In some ways, therefore, Foucault can be read as more successful than Nietzsche in rejecting dualism, especially dualisms of an overtly naturalistic sort.⁶⁴ Nonetheless, like his precursor, Foucault never fully eludes dualism, a fate that is most apparent in the deep structure of the Greco-Roman ethics he implicitly champions. More specifically, by promoting a mastery-centred relational dynamic, this Apollonian form of ethics aligns itself with a traditionally masculine sphere of order, control, and rationality. Significantly, it achieves this status obliquely, by valorising a specific type of ‘doing’ with longstanding connections to the masculine form of ‘Being’ rather than by postulating a straightforward metaphysics of presence. Virile deeds thus lend shape to the empty substratum of human existence, crafting individuals of a very specific type – disciplined, dominant, and ultimately, divided.

In addition to being deeply dualistic, the ethical model of Foucault’s late works also represents an incongruous moral response to his own interlinked thoughts about power and subjectivity because, as Deleuze suggests, nothing in Foucault’s schema is sedentary, especially the unstable compound of force relations known as the modern subject (*Foucault* 129). This instability is not a weakness, however,

⁶³ In lectures delivered at the Collège de France in 1976, Foucault establishes another grand division in modern societies – a biological-political line between a super- and sub-race that determines what lives or dies in a particular state (*Society* 254-255). This thesis is oddly reminiscent of Nietzsche’s discussions about the noble-base or aristocratic-herd divisions within society *sans* the glorifying rhetoric.

⁶⁴ Ladelle McWhorter makes a similar observation, stating that ‘Foucault’s opposition to the dualistic and naturalistic assumptions of classical liberal theory [like mind-body separation] is explicit’ (*Bodies* 149).

because in a disciplinarian society where power uses definition and positivity to adhere to Being and enslave, flux becomes the subject's greatest strength.⁶⁵ The individual in its precise discursive splendour is not only the creation of modern discipline; therefore, it is the 'stable' entity power needs to control bodies and minds. This symbiotic, mutually reinforcing relationship is essential to the operations of modern discipline because the less defined individuals are, the more difficult it becomes for power to adhere to them. As a result, domination – as an effect or terminal form of power (*Will* 92, 102) – is more likely to occur when once-mobile force relations have become ossified, stabilising to benefit a particular player or group of players in the power game. Keeping force relationships mobile and maintaining one's 'essential' state of existential instability are therefore critical components to any effective practice of freedom. By promoting an ethics of domination and control, Foucault runs the risk of marginalising the positive and altogether *necessary* Dionysian aspects of the arts of existence. Indeed, it is only because Foucault does not prescribe a specific *telos* or goal for self-care, leaving the eventual product of one's *askēsis* to personal preference and continuous reformulation, that this ethical model avoids exiling Dionysus altogether.

Nietzsche once wrote that 'On this earth, one pays dearly for every kind of mastery' (*Gay* 366/322-323).⁶⁶ By cultivating order, stability, and control individuals may attain an approximation of the Apollonian ideal but they may also sacrifice equally important existential benefits associated with instability and flux – the Dionysian joys of the dance. Although these costs may not outweigh the benefits of a mastery-centred ethics, they nonetheless are quite real. For in this central and

⁶⁵ Foucault implies this connection in a 1973 lecture. See Part V of "Truth and Juridical Forms" (*Essential III*).

⁶⁶ Herbert Marcuse makes a slightly different but related observation, stating there are two kinds of mastery, one which represses and one which liberates by reducing misery, violence, and cruelty (*One-Dimensional* 236).

centralized humanity, amid the roar of the battle over who will control minds and bodies, where everyone is a combatant in an unending war of subjugation, it is not stability but flux that represents the subject's most powerful weapon of all.⁶⁷

12

Full appreciation of Nietzsche's positive philosophy and Foucault's ethical works is predicated upon a deeper understanding of the mechanics and targets of their own will to power. Broadly stated, Nietzsche and Foucault assert will to power in its becoming-reactive form as they advance their critiques of society's moral-philosophical foundations. These critiques are focused upon a specific point of problematisation – namely, Christian morality and the socio-cultural institutions and practices this morality fosters and sustains. In short, in their becoming-reactive to the existing Christian-based ethos, Nietzsche and Foucault ask not only 'what we are' but how various ideals and limitations imposed upon Being have created this state of existence.⁶⁸ In this regard, their discourse is, as Foucault suggests, a *diagnosis* of the ills affecting modern society and a search for the causes of this condition (*Archaeology* 206).⁶⁹

Nietzsche's diagnosis further identifies nihilism as the supreme affliction of modernity, a disease he specifically attributes to Christianity:

Nihilism stands at the door: whence comes this uncanniest of all guests? Point of departure: It is an error to consider "social distress" or "physiological degeneration" or, worse, corruption, as the *cause* of nihilism. Ours is the most decent and compassionate age. Distress, whether of the

⁶⁷ This may explain Nietzsche's praise of brief habits and condemnation of enduring ones in *The Gay Science* (295/236-237).

⁶⁸ See Foucault's "What is Enlightenment?" (*Reader* 50).

⁶⁹ According to Kaufmann, Nietzsche also conceived of himself as a physician of humanity (*Nietzsche* 145). Veyne makes a related assertion about philosophers in general: 'To be a philosopher is to make a diagnosis of present possibilities and to draw up a strategic map – with the secret hope of influencing the choice of combats [for] enclosed in his own finitude, in his own time, man cannot think just anything at any time' ("Foucault" 230).

soul, body, or intellect, cannot of itself give birth to nihilism (i.e., the radical repudiation of value, meaning, and desirability). Such distress always permits a variety of interpretations. Rather: it is in one particular interpretation, the Christian-moral one, that nihilism is rooted (*Will* 1/7).

‘Distress’ or suffering is not our greatest ill; rather, it is humanity’s nihilistic response to this unavoidable fact that is problematic. Indeed, as he notes in *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche posits a very different view of suffering:

The discipline of suffering, of *great* suffering – do you not know that it is *this* discipline alone which has created every elevation of mankind hitherto? That tension of the soul in misfortune which cultivates its strength, its terror at the sight of great destruction, its inventiveness and bravery in undergoing, enduring, interpreting, exploiting misfortune, and whatever of depth, mystery, mask, spirit, cunning and greatness has been bestowed upon it – has it not been bestowed through suffering, through the discipline of great suffering? (225/155).⁷⁰

In Nietzsche’s view, therefore, suffering is an integral aspect of personal growth and the work of self-transformation. In another text, Nietzsche further argues that by prescribing nihilism as a balm for distress and developing a whole ‘mysterious machinery of salvation’ in suffering (*Genealogy* II.7/68), Christianity has actually exacerbated humanity’s pain rather than curing it. This idea permeates Nietzsche’s corpus, starting with the ‘careful and hostile silence’ directed at Christianity in *The Birth of Tragedy*⁷¹ to the culminating invective of *The Anti-Christ* where Christianity is proclaimed a ‘conspiracy against health, beauty, well-constitutedness, bravery, intellect, *benevolence* of soul, *against life itself...*’ (62/186).

On the other hand, Foucault’s critique of Christianity is less straightforward; manifesting as a catalogue of negative effects arising from the ideals and limits imposed by Christian morality rather than as a direct attack upon the paradigm itself. In *Discipline and Punish*, for example, Foucault demonstrates how the techniques of generalised contemporary discipline (the apparatus which produces ‘docile-useful’

⁷⁰ A similar point is made in *Daybreak* (18/16-17).

⁷¹ This is Nietzsche’s own characterisation of this work. See his “Attempt at a Self-Criticism” (5/23).

subjects) were modelled upon Christian ascetic practice (135-169). In the first volume of his *History*, Foucault continues along this line of attack, linking Christian pastoral and penitential practices to the deployment of normalising and oppressive modern sexuality (37, 116-117). In *The Use of Pleasure*, Foucault further argues that code-based moralities like Christianity tend to promote a quasi-juridical ethos of discipline and punishment rather than fostering a more open-ended culture of aesthetic self-production (29). In other words, Foucault foregoes Nietzsche's overtly anti-Christian diatribe and instead presents example after example of the carceral effects of the ethos created by Christian mores. For him, therefore, modernity's greatest affliction is not nihilism but confinement.

Moreover, Foucault views confinement as the major cause of suffering in contemporary subjects – a perspective best demonstrated by Foucault's varied analyses of the 'suffering subject'.⁷² Even a quick perusal of Foucault's works shows that the general theme of Foucault's research was never the subject but the *suffering* or *afflicted* subject in the guise of madmen, prisoners, the sick, hysterical women, school-age children, and a lone 'hermaphrodite'. Foucault hints at this preoccupation by declaring his interest in 'social outcasts' in a 1982 interview (*Technologies* 10-11). According to Foucault, the suffering subject is a product of the 'dividing practices' used by the human sciences:

In the second part of my work, I have studied the objectivizing of the subject in what I shall call "dividing practices." The subject is either divided inside himself or divided from others. This process objectivizes him. Examples are the mad and the sane, the sick and the healthy, the criminals and the "good boys" (*Beyond* 208).

In other words, Foucault believes the Western approach for knowing the subject is a cause for its suffering rather than an antidote. This idea not only renders suspect the

⁷² Pierre Macherey and Roger Celestin also observe Foucault's interest in the 'suffering subject' in a 1995 essay ("Production" 50).

‘humanity’ of the human sciences but also seems to imply a broader indictment of Western rationalism and its dualistic approaches for knowing and ordering the world.

What remains in the aftermath of these critiques of the existing ethos is what can be loosely described as the Nietzschean-Foucauldian worldview. This worldview is, as many have charged, profoundly nihilistic in its rejection of traditional Being-centred ontologies and insistence upon ever-fluctuating will to power as the real ground of existence.⁷³ Ironically, these charges of nihilism, which are obviously meant to be critical, become high praise in a paradigm where absolute nihilism represents the sole expression of will to power in its becoming-active form. Moreover, as Nietzsche astutely observes, nihilism is ambiguous and therefore not necessarily a sign of weakness or passivity (*Will* 22/17). Instead, nihilism – especially in its most extreme form – can be a sign of strength, a mark of a spirit grown so strong that all previous goals, convictions, and articles of faith have become incommensurate (*Will* 23/17-18). After all, destruction is also the destiny of those who would create new values.⁷⁴

Upon this nihilistic foundation Nietzsche and Foucault take up this project, creating new values which support their objectives of affirming life and loosening the restrictive bonds of culture. *Thus Spake Zarathustra* serves as a testament of Nietzsche’s efforts in this regard. As Zarathustra declares: ‘That which ye have called world is yet by you to be created: itself shall become your reason, your conception, your will, your love!’⁷⁵ Despite the heady rhetoric, Zarathustra’s ‘new’ values are actually a recollection of some very ancient ideals lain fallow since the advent of

⁷³ As noted in the preceding discussion, Nietzsche calls himself ‘the first perfect nihilist of Europe’ (*Will* 3/3). Although Foucault does not describe himself as a nihilist he was aware that others did (*Technologies* 13). Hayden White, for example, describes Foucault’s philosophical position as ‘close to the nihilism of Nietzsche’ but without the optimism (“Michel” 81).

⁷⁴ Part I, “Of a Thousand and One Goals” (*Zarathustra* 51).

⁷⁵ Part II, “In the Happy Isles” (76).

Christianity. More specifically, Nietzsche argues that Christianity springs forth from a hatred of existence, from recognising our impotence and the inevitability of suffering when faced with an ever-mutable and thoroughly amoral reality. This realisation compels Christians to throw filth upon creation, despising the body and the earth alike, and create an escapist fantasy world where bliss, immortality, and justice reign.⁷⁶ Nietzsche's 'new' value is, therefore, a return to perhaps the oldest value of all – the affirmation of life – but with a twist. Instead of affirming life in just its 'good', 'moral', or 'just' forms as many religions and philosophies do, Nietzsche asks us to accept existence just as it is, without illusion, as a pulsating realm of 'will to power and nothing besides' where the sole aim is to become what one already is.⁷⁷ In other words, as Schutte notes, the purpose of Zarathustra's trans-valuation of values is to 'destroy the need for a belief in a world of being in order to make possible the complete and joyful acceptance of existence as a process of becoming' (*Beyond* 6). The 'otherworld' of Being is rejected for the 'real world' of Becoming; repeating the philosophical gesture Heraclitus made almost two and a half millennia before Nietzsche's day.

Like his precursor, the 'new' values established by Foucault are also quite old. As Veyne notes, Foucault's final works can be understood as a diagnosis of the 'present' where it has become impossible to ground an ethics in nature, reason, God, or another 'authentic origin' ("Foucault" 230). In this philosophical environment, the self, becomes the new ground zero for morality, both means and end in a highly

⁷⁶ See *Twilight* "What I Owe to the Ancients" (4/110) and *Zarathustra* Part I, "Of Otherworldlings" (24). Of course, rejection or denigration of the world of Becoming is hardly unique to Christianity but instead represents something of a core post-Axial spiritual ideal. Nietzsche's critique nonetheless must focus upon Christianity because of its widespread influence in the West, which was always his central object of study. See Karl Jaspers for a more detailed discussion of the spiritual-historical significance of the Axial Period (*Origin* 1-21). Notably, in 1988 Richard Falk suggested we may be experiencing the 'early stages of a second axial upheaval' ("Pursuit" 88).

⁷⁷ This is an illusion to the subtitle of *Ecce Homo*. What one already is, of course, is will to power.

individualised and strategic form of ethics cut loose from traditional moorings (231). Foucault's 'present' is, of course, late modernity – an era where belief in anything *solid* or *universal* is increasingly viewed as passé. Nihilism is no longer at the door; it has taken up residence. Foucault's advice to respond to the present by shunning code-based moralities and embracing forms of subjectivation does not merely constitute a rejection of Christianity, a valorisation of ancient Greece or Rome, or a methodology for minimising the confining effects of a 'quasi-juridical' disciplinarian ethos; therefore, it also signals acceptance of a profoundly nihilistic worldview where 'self-as-art' represents the sole remaining basis for situating an ethics.⁷⁸

It is nonetheless inaccurate to portray Foucault's ethical work as wholly disengaged from nature and tradition. In fact, this ethics remains securely connected to nature and a longstanding ethical-philosophical tradition through its reliance upon a flux-based notion of reality. Like Nietzsche's positive philosophy, therefore, Foucault's ethical work re-valorises the world of Becoming and nominates self-care as the best way to manage the ongoing production of self. In this way, Foucault's Greco-Roman ethical framework does signify a return to the past, to a pre-Christian era before self-care was 'denounced as being a kind of self-love, a kind of egoism or individual interest in contradiction to the care one must show others or to the necessary sacrifice of the self' (*Final* 4-5). According to Foucault, the present culture of the self (the 'Californian cult of the self') cannot be understood as a reprise of this ancient culture because of their differing objectives which he identifies self-discovery/decipherment and self-creation respectively (*Reader* 362). While the former is commonplace in contemporary culture, Foucault believes the latter to be rare indeed:

⁷⁸ Foucault's comparison of code-based moralities and forms of subjectivation is found in *The Use of Pleasure* (29-30).

We have hardly any remnant of the idea in our society, that the principal work of art which one has to take care of, the main area to which one must apply aesthetic values, is oneself, one's life, one's existence. We find this in the Renaissance, but in a slightly academic form, and yet again in nineteenth-century dandyism, but those were only episodes.

In short, Foucault does not view self-care as a methodology for finding a 'true self' lurking beneath layers of cultural conditioning but rather as a methodology for dynamic, self-production – a technology for guided Becoming. Furthermore, the self produced by this technology can be understood as an isomorphism of the reality that creates it – an unstable entity continually subjected to the ordering effects of discipline.

Nietzsche and Foucault's efforts to create new values (or perhaps more precisely, to reactivate old values) are not, however, entirely successful. As noted above, Nietzsche's positive philosophy is profoundly individualistic, elitist, and sexist. It is a philosophy that wages war against nihilism by purporting to affirm life 'just as it is' but in fact affirms life in only its strong and dominant forms. As Eagleton observes, neither sympathy nor compassion – the latter being Zarathustra's last sin – seem to have much of a place in Nietzsche's world.⁷⁹ For these reasons, Nietzsche's positive philosophy can be understood as an archetypal form of aristocratic-barbaric morality. The ethical model found in Foucault's last texts, which represent the only quasi-prescriptive work of his corpus, does not fare much better. Although it may be more subtle in its approach, this ethics also places a high value on mastery and dominance; qualities that make it a truly paradoxical and highly problematic strategy for combating the domination effects of a thoroughly disciplinarian society. Unlike Nietzsche, however, Foucault's works are suffused

⁷⁹ See Eagleton (*Ideology* 244) and *Zarathustra* Part IV, "The Sign" (288). Zarathustra also seems to have little use for pity or neighbourly love, among other emotions. See Part I, "Of War and Warriors" (39) and "Of Love for One's Neighbour" (52-53). Nevertheless, as discussed in Chapter Two, certain passages from *The Will to Power* tend to contradict Eagleton's point.

with a profound concern for humanity in all its forms. Not only is Foucault's compassion demonstrated by his abiding interest in suffering subjects, for example, it also manifests in his personal politics and perhaps best in his work on behalf of prisoners.⁸⁰ Unlike his precursor, Foucault also places a high value on more reciprocal and egalitarian relationships like friendship.⁸¹

Despite these and other differences, it is significant that Nietzsche and Foucault both nominate the same figure – a warrior – as the carrier of new values or bridge between what humanity currently is and what it might be.⁸² This idea is commonplace in Nietzsche's corpus and, as noted above, also irrupts in Foucault's work through his repeated allusions to battle and use of war as a grid of intelligibility for inter- and intra-social power relations. Both philosophers also associate freedom with the warrior ideal. In *The Twilight of the Idols*, for instance, Nietzsche declares the 'free man is a *warrior*' and 'war is a training in freedom'; adding that 'freedom means that the manly instincts that delight in war and victory have gained mastery over the other instincts – for example, over the instinct for "happiness"' (38/92). Zarathustra makes several similar assertions, including: 'I counsel you not to work, but to fight. I counsel you not to make peace, but to conquer. Let your work be battle, your peace victory! One can be still and at rest only when one hath bow and arrow [...]'.⁸³ Although Foucault's rhetoric is less overt and flamboyant, he also believes that one must fight to minimise the domination effects of contemporary society. Indeed, the roar of battle is far from distant in Foucault's works but instead

⁸⁰ See Macey's comments on Foucault's involvement with the Groupe d'Information sur les Prisons (*Lives* 257-289).

⁸¹ See *Essential I* (138-140, 257-258). Nietzsche, on the other hand, does not seem convinced that real friendship is possible. As Zarathustra muses in Part I, "Of the Friend": 'There is comradeship: oh, that there were friendship!' (49).

⁸² Interestingly, Baudelaire also characterises his cultural hero and transitional figure, the dandy, as a 'stupendous warrior' ("Dandy" 799).

⁸³ Part I, "Of War and Warriors" (39).

issues forth from a much more intimate place, from deep inside the bodies and minds of those who endeavour to be free.

Nietzsche and Foucault are also in agreement that morality or more specifically, ethics, represents the key battleground upon which the ongoing war of subjugation is fought. If the warrior is the bridge between what is and what will be, then ethics is the cultural ground upon which freedom must be sought and won. In *Discipline and Punish* and *The Use of Pleasure*, Foucault observes the crucial role that asceticism-based disciplines play in the production of unfreedom and freedom within cultures (*Discipline* 135-169, *Pleasure* 29). In the latter text, Foucault also describes ‘practices of the self’ – the key technology for forming ethical subjects in the Greco-Roman model – as ‘ascetics’ in a broad sense (*Pleasure* 29). Because of the centrality of asceticism to ethics and the importance of ethics as a privileged site for the production of unfreedom and freedom within a culture, a more detailed analysis of Foucault and Nietzsche’s writings on asceticism is warranted if we wish to understand how a will to power ethics can support the cause of liberty. Chapter Two provides this analysis.

Chapter Two: Asceticism and Feminist Praxis

All honor to the ascetic ideal *insofar as it is honest!*
— Nietzsche¹

1

Foucault's observations about the centrality of asceticism-based discipline to any ethical system invite a deeper exploration of the uses of asceticism within modern culture. Once again, a closer analysis of Nietzsche's writings on asceticism, which are extensive, is useful for elucidating the import of Foucault's more covert commentary on the subject. Contrary to the popular notion that asceticism is a marginal societal phenomenon, Nietzsche and Foucault view it as foundational to culture, a meta-praxis of subjection and social existence. Moreover, on a meta-analytic level and in keeping with their productive theories of power and contingent subjectivity, both philosophers view ascetic discipline as neither repressive nor liberating despite its localised applications and expressions. Instead, Nietzsche and Foucault view ascetic discipline as a highly productive yet essentially ambivalent technology of power; equally useful for confining or freeing subjects, affirming life or denying it, and advancing nihilism or combating it.

The pervasive, productive, and ambivalent nature of ascetic discipline within modern Western society problematises its use as a technology of individual freedom. This dilemma is especially apparent for women and others who are already favoured targets of the diffuse and omnipresent form of modern power ('generalised contemporary discipline') Foucault describes in *Discipline and Punish*. In this social reality, feminists need to consider how to identify and structure asceticism-based disciplinary practices that will further their emancipatory agenda and not simply

¹ *Genealogy* (III.26/158).

perpetuate their subjugation by replicating the existing ethos of discipline and punishment. In short, feminists need to ask themselves how asceticism – the meta-praxis of ethics – can be used to support and advance a feminist ethics.

Nietzschean-Foucauldian thought represents a useful philosophical basis for this endeavour. In 1887 Nietzsche declared he wanted to make asceticism ‘natural’ again, perhaps following up on his previous suggestion that a ‘new form of morality’ would include ‘the emphatic renunciation of many things (*Will* 914-915/483). In keeping with Nietzsche’s conceptualisation of the world and self as ‘will to power and nothing besides’, fulfilling this wish to re-naturalise asceticism would necessitate developing a form of ascetic discipline which acknowledges and supports a flux-based or Becoming-centred worldview. Inasmuch as the Greco-Roman ethical model described in Foucault’s final works, which is arguably the pinnacle of Nietzschean-Foucauldian ethical thought, privileges open-ended self-cultivation as its primary means for moulding ethical subjects; it may be understood as a realisation of Nietzsche’s wish. Feminist critiques of Foucault’s late works nonetheless illuminate the drawbacks of this domination-centred ethical model originally designed for an elite cadre of men. Reinterpreting these critiques using the two definitions of Nietzschean will to power as a grid of intelligibility can highlight the components of the model that support feminist praxis and those that may not. Indeed, what such an analysis shows is if a feminist ethics is to be salvaged from Nietzsche and Foucault, it must utilise discourses and practices that are supportive of a view of self and world as dynamic-creative will to power.

When Foucault describes practices of the self as ‘ascetics’, ‘*l’ascétisme*’, or ‘asceticism in a broad sense’ (*Pleasure* 29, *Reader* 355), he situates his ethical thought within a much larger (if not global) philosophical and religious tradition. According to Philip Quinn, asceticism or the voluntary, sustained, and systematic practice of self-discipline to attain some valued existential state is a component of all major world religions and certain philosophies as well.² It has been practiced in various guises for millennia by religions and thought systems as diverse as Christianity, Hinduism, and Stoicism. Like Quinn, Foucault defines asceticism quite broadly, using the term to denote a wide variety of practices individuals may use to form themselves as ethical subjects including dietary regimens, physical exercises, and meditation (*Pleasure* 28-29, 72-77; *Care* 101-104). Citing Baudelaire, Foucault further identifies ‘an indispensable asceticism’ as the ‘deliberate attitude of modernity’ (*Reader* 41). To the extent this attitude continues to pervade contemporary society and serves as a basis for myriad and diverse discourses and practices of embodiment, asceticism can be understood as a routine, if not essential, aspect of everyday life. In addition, as asceticism scholar Richard Valantasis suggests, definitions like these place asceticism at the centre of culture rather than relegating it to a particular religious or philosophical context (“Theory” 544).

Like any practice, asceticism can be performed at varying levels of intensity. Dietary asceticism, for example, may be practiced by engaging in fasts or veganism or through more moderate practices such as avoiding caffeine or alcohol. In other words, asceticism is not extreme by definition but, just like any other practice, can assume extreme forms. Examples of these can be found in a variety of socio-cultural

² See Quinn’s entry on ‘asceticism’ in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy Online*.

contexts throughout history. Nevertheless, when Foucault speaks of *l'ascétisme*, he is not just referencing starvation diets or acts of self-mortification but gesturing toward a broad continuum of actions individuals may take (or avoid taking) to affect their subjectivity (*Beyond* 239). These activities, while typically associated with achieving a spiritual goal, may also have secular origins and objectives. Indeed, it is arguable that a whole range of contemporary subjectivities including bodybuilders, elite athletes, environmentalists, religious fundamentalists, vegetarians, and yogins are produced through ascetic discipline. Broader scholarship on the influence of asceticism upon more pervasive cultural phenomena, including economic systems, is helpful here. In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, for example, Weber famously argues the influence of ascetic Christian attitudes and practices on the rise of Western capitalism. Other scholars including Valantasis might go one step further, describing asceticism as a universal phenomenon (“Constructions” 794). As asceticism scholar Geoffrey Harpham notes:

Just as the mark of culture is the conviction of the value and necessity of self-denial, the mark of human consciousness is the capacity for self-observation or self-criticism. These are the bases of asceticism, whose manifest, explicit, and conscious forms appear now not as intrinsically unnatural and perverse but rather as an intensification, a repetition, of the earliest and most instinctive psychic and cultural developments (*Imperative* xii).³

According to Harpham, asceticism is like the ‘MS-DOS of cultures’ – a ‘fundamental operating ground on which [a] particular culture [...] is overlaid’ (xi). Consequently,

³ Other academics might disagree with Harpham’s viewpoint. For example, Gavin Flood asserts that while there are ‘what seem to be ascetical dimensions to all of our lives, and what appear to be ascetic practices take place by other names in the form of varied bodily regimes, from dietary disciplines for the purposes of health or beauty to physical training for athletic competitions, there is no ideology of repeated abstinence in secular life’ (*Ascetic* 1). According to Flood, ‘proper’ asceticism is ‘always set within or [...] [is] part of a *religious* tradition, moreover, a *cosmological* religious tradition’ (9). This curiously constrained definition is highly debatable, however, considering it defies both trans-cultural historical experience and etymology. One wonders, for instance, how Flood would characterise Stoic practices of the self or explain the secular origins of the Greek term *askēsis*. In any event, as the aforementioned scholars, the *OED*, and the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy Online* attest, the current study assumes contemporary asceticism is practiced in both secular and religious contexts.

as Harpham further asserts, ‘where there is culture there is asceticism’. Sigmund Freud makes a similar statement in a 1927 essay where he declares all civilisations are formed on the basis of renunciation (*Future* 4). Freud’s declaration echoes a somewhat more hyperbolic statement Nietzsche made four decades earlier when he called the earth the ‘distinctively *ascetic planet*, a nook of disgruntled, arrogant and offensive creatures filled with a profound disgust at themselves, at the earth, at all life, who inflict as much pain on themselves as they possibly can out of pleasure in inflicting pain – which is probably their only pleasure’ (*Genealogy* III.11/117). These perspectives lend credence to the idea that asceticism is not something practiced strictly on the margins of culture, within the walls of nunneries or hermitages, but is instead central to a wide range of cultural phenomena, if not serving as the foundation of culture itself.

3

Nietzsche wrote a great deal on asceticism and because of its significance in the Christian tradition, much of what he wrote was negative. Nietzsche’s corpus also includes numerous comments on the ascetic components of other philosophical and religious traditions including Stoicism, Buddhism, and Hinduism. Although Nietzsche was also critical of these traditions, he sometimes expressed admiration for some of their theoretical or practical components including certain ascetic elements. There is also compelling evidence Nietzsche viewed himself as an ascetic of sorts and understood and valued the close kinship that exists between philosophic thought and ascetic activity. Perhaps the most convincing evidence of this attitude is found in Nietzsche’s alter-ego, Zarathustra, who displays several typical ascetic qualities

including a lifestyle that vacillates between eremitism and something reminiscent of a wandering Hindu *parivrajaka* or *samnyāsan*.⁴

Nietzsche's third essay in *On the Genealogy of Morals* ("What Is the Meaning of Ascetic Ideals?") represents his most extended discussion of asceticism. In this essay, Nietzsche paints a decidedly negative picture of Christian ascetic ideals and practices; arguing their tendency to fashion subjects who are tamed, weakened, discouraged, refined, and emasculated (III.21/142). *The Anti-Christ* contains numerous passages in a similar vein. In this second work, for example, Nietzsche refers to Christians as 'sick animal men' and warns against 'embellishing' or 'dressing up' a paradigm that has 'waged a *war to the death* against [...] [his] *higher* type of man [...] [taking] the side of everything weak, base, [and] ill-constituted' (3/116, 5/117). According to Nietzsche, if asceticism is the 'cure' for human suffering that Christianity suggests it is, it is an abysmal failure because

...when such a system is chiefly applied to the sick, distressed, and depressed, it invariably makes them *sicker*, even if it does "improve" them: one need only ask psychiatrists what happens to patients who are methodically subjected to the torments of repentance, states of contrition, and fits of redemption. One should also consult history: wherever the ascetic priest has prevailed with this treatment, sickness has spread in depth and breadth with astonishing speed (*Genealogy* III.21/142).⁵

This medical allusion is particularly apt in light of Nietzsche's ensuing comments where he states: 'I know of hardly anything else that has had so destructive an effect upon the *health* and racial strength of Europeans as this [ascetic] ideal; one may without any exaggeration call it *the true calamity* in the history of European health' (III.21/143). For Nietzsche, the ascetic ideal is an affront to life, a symbol of a 'will to nothingness' that expresses

⁴ See Georg Feuerstein's discussion of these cultural phenomena (*Tradition* 67-71).

⁵ Notably, Nietzsche is not just critiquing religious asceticism in this essay but is also critiquing the ascetic foundations of science, which he says is founded upon 'the same overestimation of truth (more exactly: on the same belief that truth is inestimable and cannot be criticized)' (III.25/153). According to Nietzsche, it is this underlying 'will to truth' that 'requires a critique' (III.24/153).

...a hatred of the human, and even more of the animal, and more still of the material, this horror of the senses, of reason itself, this fear of happiness and beauty, this longing to get away from all appearance, change, becoming, death, wishing, from longing itself (III.28/162-163).

This passage is doubly significant because it also links Nietzsche's critique of asceticism with another central aspect of his thought – namely, the Heraclitean notion of existence as continual flux. According to Nietzsche, the ascetic ideal is Christianity's response to the realisation that life is transitory and painful. This knowledge initiates a process of turning away from the ephemeral world of suffering and turning toward a better, albeit wholly fictional, world of timeless Being. Nihilism thus becomes the cure for the 'sickness' of Becoming. In addition, because Christian morality associates virtue and weakness ('Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth'),⁶ it opposes the natural and healthy expression of will to power which, according to Nietzsche, is always a movement toward strength. Christian ascetic practices reinforce these ideals by inscribing them upon the bodies of adherents through acts of subservience and enervating bodily practices such as fasting and self-mortification.

Christian asceticism is not, however, Nietzsche's only target. Stoicism, which was a primary object of study for Foucault in volumes two and three of his *History*, also attracts Nietzsche's attention as does Buddhism and Hinduism.⁷ Buddhism was of particular interest to Nietzsche because for him it represented a 'perfected' version of its fellow decadence religion, Christianity. In the *Anti-Christ*, for example, Nietzsche praises Buddhism for being 'a hundred times more realistic' and 'objective'

⁶ *The New Testament* (Matthew 5.5/6).

⁷ Nietzsche's assessments of Stoicism and Buddhism are perhaps more refined (although not without their problems) than his comments on Hinduism due to what appears to be a more extensive knowledge of these thought systems. Nietzsche's avid early interest in Schopenhauer would have exposed him to Buddhist thought and his extensive personal study of ancient Greece and Rome would have exposed him to Stoic literature. As Chapter Four will demonstrate, Nietzsche's knowledge of Hindu philosophy was likely more idiosyncratic in comparison to his knowledge of Buddhism and Stoicism.

than Christianity because it ‘no longer speaks of “the struggle against *sin*” but, quite in accordance with actuality, “the struggle against *suffering*”’ (20/129). In Nietzschean parlance, therefore, Buddhism is ‘beyond good and evil’.⁸ Oddly, in this same passage, Nietzsche also praises Buddhism for ‘excluding asceticism’ after cataloguing its ‘hygienic measures’ which include a wandering or monastic lifestyle, dietary restrictions, and other forms of moderation (20/130) – practices which are, of course, ascetic in nature. Despite these positive comments, Nietzsche views Buddhist pessimism and veneration of the will to nothingness as too similar to Christian attitudes to make it an interesting or healthy alternative. For him, Buddhists (like Christians) are simply tamed animals or ‘perfect cows’ (*Will* 342/188, *Twilight* 38/97).

Nietzsche’s assessment of Stoicism is also marked by a similar mixture of appreciation and derision. If Buddhists and Christians are cows, then the Stoic is a hedgehog, trained to ‘swallow stones and worms, slivers of glass and scorpions without nausea; [because] he wants his stomach to become ultimately indifferent to whatever the accidents of existence might pour into it’ (*Gay* 306/245). As ‘physicians of the soul’, Nietzsche thought the Stoics were too focused upon the pain of existence, offering only a ‘hard, radical cure’ of ‘self-tyranny’ (*Gay* 326/256-257, *Beyond* 9/39). To punctuate this point, Nietzsche asks: ‘Is our life really painful and burdensome enough to make it advantageous to exchange it for a Stoic way of life and petrification? We are *not so badly off* that we have to be as badly off as Stoics’ (*Gay* 326/257). Elsewhere, Nietzsche expands on this same line of thought by asserting Stoic ‘cheerfulness’ comes only from enjoying the sensation of oneself as ‘dominator’ within the realm of ‘formalities he himself has prescribed for his conduct’ (*Daybreak*

⁸ In *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche makes what appears to be a contradictory remark, describing Buddhism as a purely moral value system (19/16). In light of Buddhism’s acceptance of certain aspects of *karma* doctrine, this assessment is perhaps more accurate than those noted above.

251/143). In light of the analysis of Greco-Roman self-care practices contained in Chapter One, Nietzsche's assessment rings decidedly true.

On the other hand, Nietzsche's views on Indian asceticism are generally more positive perhaps due to his admiration of the Hindu caste system and Brahmins (the noble priestly caste) in particular. In *Daybreak*, for example, Nietzsche writes:

There are recipes for the feeling of power, firstly for those who can control themselves and who are thereby accustomed to a feeling of power; then for those in whom precisely this is lacking. Brahminism has catered for men of the former sort, Christianity for men of the latter (65/38-39).⁹

Linkages between asceticism and the cultivation of power are echoed in a later passage where Nietzsche states his admiration for the will to power expressed in the Brahmin's ascetic 'drive for distinction' (113/68-69). In this section Nietzsche recounts the story of King Vishvāmitra (a renowned yogi or *tapasvin* and one of the seven great Vedic sages).¹⁰ As Nietzsche explains, Vishvāmitra derived such strength from '*practicing penance* for a thousand years that he undertook to construct a new *Heaven*'. Vishvāmitra's story must have sparked Nietzsche's imagination because his commentary continues; broadening into an extended general meditation upon the meta-significance of Indian asceticism:

I believe that in this whole species of inner experience we are now incompetent novices groping after the solution of riddles: they knew more about these infamous refinements of self-enjoyment 4,000 years ago. The creation of the world: perhaps it was then thought of by some Indian dreamer as an ascetic operation on the part of a god! Perhaps the god wanted to banish himself into active and moving nature as into an instrument of torture, in order thereby to feel his bliss and power doubled! And supposing it was a god of love: what enjoyment for such a god to create *suffering* men, to suffer divinely and superhumanly from the ceaseless torment of the sight of them, and thus to tyrannise over himself! And even supposing it was not only a god of love, but also a god of holiness and sinlessness: what deliriums

⁹ More praise for Brahmins and the Hindu caste system can be found in *Daybreak* (96/54-55), *Genealogy* (III.10/115), and *Anti-Christ* (57/176-179).

¹⁰ Vishvāmitra's story is told in several Hindu texts, including the *Mahābhārata*. As Prabhupāda notes, Vishvāmitra was originally a *ksatriya* (warrior) but later acted as a *brāhmaṇa* (priest) after realising asceticism is true strength (*As It Is* 174).

of the divine ascetic can be imagined when he creates sin and sinners and eternal damnation and a vast abode of eternal affliction and eternal groaning and sighing! (113/69).

As the analysis in Chapter Four will suggest, Nietzsche's fantastic meditation on the ascetic origin of the world is at least partially true to the Hindu tradition. The *Rg Veda*,¹¹ for instance, proposes the cosmos was created by an ascetic operation – namely, through *tapas* or the 'might of the heat-of-austerity'. Nonetheless, the remainder of Nietzsche's meditation must be considered pure supposition (as he implies) because texts like the *Rg Veda* do not overtly assign any specific intention to this *tapas*.¹² Furthermore, this ascetic act *precedes the appearance of the gods*, as noted in the following passage:

Who knows the truth? Who here will pronounce it whence this birth, whence this creation? The Gods appeared afterward, with the creation of this [world]. Who then knows whence it arose? Whence arose this creation, whether it created itself or whether it did not? He who looks upon it from the highest space, He surely knows. Or maybe He knows not.¹³

Be this as it may, Nietzsche's meditation, which is ultimately just another critique of Christianity rather than an accurate account of Hindu thought, is still instructive because it highlights the importance of the quality assigned to the inaugural creative activity of any spirituality or philosophy. David Maclagan's analysis is helpful here, pointing out how creation accounts offer a template for thinking about all forms of creative activity and, analogously, what it means to be a creator (*Creation* 8-10). If

¹¹ The *Rg Veda* is Hinduism's most ancient text, composed sometime prior to 2000 B.C.E. See Feuerstein (*Tradition* 446).

¹² Marie-Luise von Franz, a Jungian psychologist, offers an interesting analysis of the subjective moods surrounding creation in selected myths from around of the world. As Franz notes, these moods can range from boredom to anxiety (*Creation* 181-223). The mood she assigns to the *Rg Veda*'s creation account is 'brooding' – in the dual sense of meditating and incubating or warming as a hen does an egg – an interpretation which captures variable meanings of *tapas* quite well (204-205).

¹³ Section 10.129, quoted in Feuerstein (*Tradition* 112). This creation account may appear somewhat paradoxical in light of later philosophical speculation that assigns a form of 'godliness' to *purusha* and *prakriti* (the two constituent elements of the cosmos) or ascribes some meaning to their separation/entanglement. Furthermore, as Barbara Powell observes, the Hindu canon contains several different creation accounts (*Windows* 101). This multiplicity is unsurprising given the tradition's inclination to accept a variety of spiritual or philosophical viewpoints (*darshanas*), even if they seem contradictory.

creation is an ascetic operation as the *Rg Veda* suggests it is, this logic would suggest the meanings ascribed to ascetic practices and ideals are extremely important because they reflect individual and cultural attitudes toward Becoming and Being – the essence of existence.

Nietzsche once asked the ‘meaning’ of the ascetic ideal and answered that while it has meant so many things, it has mostly meant a valorisation of the will to nothingness (*Genealogy* III.1/97). This interpretation, which was offered as a therapy for the suffering of the world, has only brought ‘fresh suffering with it, deeper, more inward, more poisonous, more life-destructive suffering’ (III.28/162). Although the question still stands, perhaps a different answer is possible.

To this end, it is useful to re-examine Nietzsche’s works to identify any contrasting comments he makes about ascetics and asceticism and especially, to illuminate comments of a more positive or productive nature. Upon closer examination, one finds these sorts of comments are more plentiful than one might first imagine. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, for example, Nietzsche observes how the ‘mightiest men have still bowed down reverently before the saint as the enigma of self-constraint and voluntary final renunciation’ because they intuited in him a ‘superior force’ and ‘strength of will’ reminiscent of their own (51/79). Kaufmann’s analysis of Nietzsche’s corpus lends additional evidence here, illuminating several passages where Nietzsche proclaims the ascetic among the ‘most powerful of men’ (*Nietzsche* 203). Elsewhere in *Beyond Good and Evil*, for instance, Nietzsche makes several allusions to the salutary effects of asceticism, including one where he states ‘asceticism and puritanism are virtually indispensable means of education and ennobling if a race wants to become master over its origins in the rabble, and work its way up towards future rule’ (61/87). Asceticism also arises in a latter section of this

text entitled “What Is Noble?” In this section Nietzsche extols the virtues of solitude and insight and, by referring to himself as a ‘hermit’, overtly marks himself as a participant in the ascetic tradition (283-284/214). In *The Will to Power* Nietzsche further asserts that ‘asceticism of every kind’ is required to ‘create control and certainty in regard to one’s strength of will’ (921/487). Book Four of this text contains several additional comments demonstrating Nietzsche’s favourable disposition toward a fortifying form of asceticism, including:

The identical discipline that makes a strong nature even stronger and capable of great undertakings, shatters and withers the mediocre (904/480).

I also want to make asceticism natural again: in place of the aim of denial, the aim of strengthening; a gymnastics of the will; abstinence and periods of fasting of all kinds, in the most spiritual realm, too; a casuistry of deeds in regard to the opinions we have regarding our strengths; an experiment with adventures and arbitrary dangers (915/483).

What has been ruined by the church’s misuse of it: 1. *asceticism*: one has hardly the courage so far to display its natural utility, its indispensability in the service of the education of the will [...] 2. *fasting*: in every sense [...] 3. the “*monastery*”: temporary isolation, accompanied by strict refusal, e.g., of letters; a kind of most profound self-reflection and self-recovery [...] (916/483-484).

Passages like these demonstrate Nietzsche’s view of asceticism is much more complex and certainly more positive than the anti-Christian invective of the *Genealogy* or the *Anti-Christ* might suggest. In fact, Nietzsche believes asceticism has a ‘natural’ utility for strengthening and educating individuals but, as the Christian and perhaps Buddhist examples demonstrate, asceticism can also be misused to produce opposing results. Furthermore, the third fragment shown above (916) is doubly significant because it ties this misuse to an institution, highlighting a central concern of Foucault’s thesis in *Discipline and Punish*.

Perhaps the most compelling evidence of Nietzsche’s appreciation of ascetics and asceticism is found in the rhetoric concerning his ideal being, the *Übermensch*, a

self-created warrior-artist forged by ascetic discipline.¹⁴ Kaufmann's analysis offers additional support here. According to him, the *Übermensch* is a being who has 'overcome his animal nature, organized the chaos of his passions, sublimated his impulses, and given style to his character – or, as Nietzsche said of Goethe: 'he disciplined himself to wholeness, he *created* himself' (Nietzsche 316). Although he is only a precursor to the *Übermensch*,¹⁵ Nietzsche's depiction of his beloved Zarathustra's eremitic-itinerant lifestyle serves as yet another reminder of the importance of asceticism and renunciation in crafting a transcendent being. Indeed, in the last scene of the text, the reader finds Zarathustra engaging in an archetypal acetic act, sitting upon a great stone and meditating until he realises his 'last sin' of compassion.¹⁶

In summary, Nietzsche views asceticism as an ambivalent technology of will to power, equally capable of fashioning weak or strong subjects depending upon how it is utilised and by whom. In its Christian and Buddhist incarnations, asceticism supports a nihilistic or world-denying agenda, reversing the natural expression of will to power as a movement toward strength and creating 'tamed' and 'weak' subjects. In its life-affirming or creative-dynamic incarnations, however, asceticism represents a technology for self-overcoming, a way to strengthen the body and the mind and perhaps eventually 'discipline oneself to wholeness'. Consequently, as Nietzsche writes:

All honor to the ascetic ideal *insofar as it is honest!* so long as it believes in itself and does not play tricks on us! But I do not like all these coquettish

¹⁴ This figuration is suggested by David Owen's analysis in *Maturity and Modernity* (78-83).

¹⁵ Zarathustra makes this clear in Part II, "Of Priests" by stating: 'never yet has there been a Superman' (83). The appearance of the lion, which represents an intermediary phase of humanity's development, in the final pages of the book also lends credence to this reading. See Part I, "Of the Three Metamorphoses" (19-20) and Part IV, "The Sign" (286-288). Nietzsche's gloss on *Zarathustra* in *Ecce Homo* is also helpful (2/298-299).

¹⁶ Part IV, "The Sign" (288).

bedbugs with their insatiable ambition to smell out the infinite, until at last the infinite smells of bedbugs (*Genealogy* III.26/158).

In other words, insofar as asceticism is used to affirm life and achieve worldly ambitions, Nietzsche views it as a powerful and appropriate tool of will to power. When this tool is wielded by an institution such as the Church, however, it may advance a less positive, life-denying agenda.

4

Although it is left unacknowledged, the role of asceticism in society is also one of Foucault's primary concerns in *Discipline and Punish*. Foucault's interest in asceticism is most evident in his discussions of discipline and particularly, in the "Docile Bodies" chapter of this text where he traces the genealogy of generalised contemporary discipline back to its ascetic roots. By establishing a number of key linkages between these two disciplinary economies, Foucault simultaneously extends and historicises Nietzsche's thesis of the pervasive and deleterious impact of the ascetic ideal upon modern society – a thesis Foucault then immediately problematises by arguing ascetic discipline's co-capacity to build skills and strengths. Nietzsche's thesis is critiqued again in the latter volumes of the *History* where Foucault argues the liberating potential of ascetic discipline – an argument that is absolutely necessary if Foucault wishes to remain true to his (and Nietzsche's) productive theory of power. A more detailed analysis of Foucault's argument in these texts follows.

In *Discipline and Punish* Foucault analyses the permutations of Western disciplinary institutions and practices beginning in the seventeenth century to show how modern culture became suffused by a complex web of power relations that

simultaneously fabricate and subjugate individuals.¹⁷ As Foucault notes, these power relations have a long history within Western culture:

These methods, which made possible the meticulous control of the operations of the body, which assured the constant subjection of its forces and imposed upon them a relation of docility-utility, might be called “disciplines”. Many disciplinary methods had long been in existence – in monasteries, armies, workshops. But in the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the disciplines became general formulas of domination (137).

Foucault expands upon his point by outlining several differences between these newer ‘general formulas of domination’ (hereafter ‘generalised contemporary discipline’) and the antecedent disciplinary approaches used in slavery, service, vassalage, and asceticism. The differences between these older approaches and generalised contemporary discipline are multiple but, according to Foucault, are particularly apparent in changes in the scale, object (or locus), and modality of control of bodies (136-137). According to Foucault, therefore, society’s institutionalised ‘grip’ on the body was far from new but the nature of that hold changed during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, transforming into the infinitesimal, economical, and uninterrupted form of ‘constant coercion’ and ‘meticulous control’ of bodies in evidence throughout Western society today (137).

In his more specific comments on asceticism, Foucault states this paradigm differs from generalised contemporary discipline because its purpose was ‘to obtain renunciations rather than increases of utility and which, although they involved obedience to others, had as their principal aim an increase of the mastery of each individual over his own body’. In other words, Foucault believes asceticism differs from generalised contemporary discipline in two key ways: operational purview

¹⁷ Although his analysis centres mostly on France, Foucault also uses selected data from the United States, England, and other European nations to formulate his conclusions. As mentioned in Chapter One, there are several strong arguments favouring the generalisation of Foucault’s thesis across the whole of Western culture.

(individual versus general scope) and overall objective (renunciation versus utility). Another way to conceptualise these differences is asceticism is chiefly concerned with self-reflexive or interior power relations; whereas, generalised contemporary discipline mainly focuses upon exterior power relations between self and society, although it may also employ 'self-centred' approaches such self-surveillance to achieve its aims. Deleuze, who has commented extensively on Foucault's middle and late works, might characterise these two processes as 'subjectivation' and 'subjection' – a delineation no doubt based upon Foucault's discussion of the process for transforming oneself into an ethical being in *The Use of Pleasure* (Foucault 103-106, *Pleasure* 28).

Although Foucault's overall observation about the differences between the two paradigms is essentially defensible, his underlying argument is nonetheless flawed in at least two ways. First, by contrasting renunciation with increases in utility (a key, albeit typically cloaked objective of generalised contemporary discipline), Foucault seems to imply asceticism's objective is simply renunciation when it is usually understood quite differently, that is, as a technology for achieving a broader spiritual objective such as transcendence or salvation. Simply stated, the ascetic's journey does not end with a turning away from the world. Instead this journey culminates with a turning toward or perhaps, merging with, something *else*. Second, Foucault claims asceticism's principal aim is 'an increase of the mastery of each individual over his own body'. This, too, is an anomalous statement since self-mastery is also usually considered a means rather than an end for the ascetic, at least within confines of the Christian-based Western socio-cultural context Foucault is examining. Undoubtedly, the fundamental aim of ascetic discipline within this socio-cultural milieu is neither renunciation nor self-mastery but, as noted above, something extra-

personal or metaphysical such as knowledge of or union with the deity. Significantly, this *telos* stands in stark contrast with the utterly worldly aims of the Greco-Roman self-care practices Foucault analyses in the latter two volumes of his *History*. These practices *were* chiefly concerned with self-mastery or what Foucault calls ‘an ethics of control’ whereby an individual becomes ‘his own master’ (*Care* 65). In short, the chief difference between religious asceticism and what will be shown to be a secularised form of asceticism is simply this: the former has a transcendental *telos* whereas the latter has purely material ambitions. While economies require acts of renunciation and self-mastery, the motivations behind these activities in fact differ quite markedly.

Following this initial parsing of asceticism and generalised contemporary discipline, Foucault continues to refine his division as he describes the various ways the newer form of discipline effects an ‘individual and collective coercion of bodies’ (*Discipline* 169). Here Foucault argues that generalised contemporary discipline is comparable to ascetic discipline in at least four ways while simultaneously maintaining significant differences between the paradigms. The first commonality is their orientation toward detail. Foucault states that one of the exemplary characteristics of generalised contemporary discipline is its ‘meticulous observation of detail’ combined with ‘a political awareness of [...] small things’ (141). Although this discussion is mostly concerned with demonstrating how this fixation became increasingly precise and shifted ‘to cover the entire social body’, Foucault also observes “‘detail’ had long been a category of theology and asceticism’ (139-140). Indeed, as Foucault adds, ‘for the disciplined man, as for the true believer, no detail is unimportant, but not so much for the meaning that it conceals [...] [but for] the hold it provides for the power that wishes to seize it’ (140). The second point of comparison

is the spatial distribution of individuals. According to Foucault, generalised contemporary discipline ‘proceeds from the distribution of individuals in space’ and, more particularly, the *combined* use of enclosures, partitioning, functional sites, and ranking methodologies that render space ‘at once architectural, functional and hierarchical’ (141-148). Significantly, in this discussion Foucault specifically links two of these architectural or functional techniques – enclosures and partitioning – to coenobitism, noting the particular influence of the monastic cell upon the modern spatial distribution and control of individuals (141-143).

The third common feature is the use of timetables which is, Foucault notes, ‘an old inheritance [...] no doubt suggested by monastic communities’ (149). The use of this technique would be refined under the paradigm of generalised contemporary discipline to effect a ‘more detailed partitioning of time’ aiming to ‘assure the quality of the time used’ through constant supervision (149-150).¹⁸ The final point of comparison is the reliance on exercises. In this discussion, Foucault writes that ‘the ever-increasing rigorous exercises’ of ascetic life or ‘tasks of increasing complexity that marked the gradual acquisition of knowledge and good behaviour’ were perhaps ‘the first nucleus of methods intended to produce individually characterized, but collectively useful aptitudes’ (161-162). In the modern era, he adds, this ‘ordering of earthly time for the conquest of salvation’ would take on a secular direction, becoming an important part of the ‘political technology of the body and of duration’ that now pervades society (162).

In summary, Foucault’s analysis demonstrates how generalised contemporary discipline is indebted to religious asceticism, and particularly Christian monasticism,

¹⁸ Although Foucault does not mention it explicitly, one could also argue ascetic discipline and generalised contemporary discipline share another temporal or ‘genetic’ concern – namely, both valorise ‘non-idleness’. Weber offers a useful discussion of the wider socio-economic ramifications of this aspect of Western consciousness in his *Protestant Ethic* (157-162).

for at least four of its key technologies and tactics. These borrowed technologies and tactics would be further refined, combined, and diffused throughout the social body under the newer paradigm but, for the most part, are simply secular iterations of older religious practices.

Upon the conclusion of this analysis, one might be inclined to simply accept Foucault's genealogy if not for the peculiar rhetoric he employs to make his point. More specifically, throughout this discussion, Foucault seems especially keen to erect an unambiguous boundary between asceticism and generalised contemporary discipline, an end he attempts to achieve by repeatedly reconsidering and clarifying his initial division, almost defensively, as if pre-empting a critique. As one might expect, a closer analysis reveals the problematic nature of Foucault's act of *partage*.¹⁹ For despite the sharp decline or near disappearance of the three other forms of ancient discipline (service, vassalage, and slavery) in the modern West, asceticism still flourishes, co-existing alongside and intermingling with its newer counterpart, generalised contemporary discipline. It is this reality coupled with generalised contemporary discipline's multiple historical linkages to religious forms of ascetic theory and practice that complicates Foucault's efforts to separate the two paradigms. In short, Foucault cannot separate the two paradigms because the newer economy is simply a more diffuse, secularised, and involuntary incarnation of its precursor.

Foucault's attempt to draw clear distinctions between asceticism and generalised contemporary discipline becomes even more tenuous following a closer examination of the specific methods the two economies use to achieve their objectives. As noted above, for example, exercises are one of four 'great techniques' generalised contemporary discipline uses to subjectify bodies, rendering them

¹⁹ From the French *partager*, which means 'to share or divide'. Deborah Cook offers an illuminating discussion of the role of *partage* in Foucault's *Madness and Civilisation* in *The Subject Finds a Voice*.

simultaneously docile and useful (*Discipline* 167). Exercises, which economise ‘the time of life, to accumulate it in a useful form and to exercise power over men’, now pervade the operations of a whole range of contemporary institutions from schools to military organisations (162). Be this as it may, the use of increasingly rigorous exercises also permeates the older paradigm of asceticism, a topic Foucault explores in more detail in *The Care of the Self* under the somewhat obscure heading of ‘testing procedures’ (58-60). According to Foucault, these procedures, which typically consist of reductive tests such as exercises in bodily privation, have ‘the dual role of moving one forward in the acquisition of virtue and of marking the point one has reached (58). Elsewhere in this text, Foucault further notes the importance of physical exercise in caring for oneself (102, 129-130).²⁰ When read in tandem with Foucault’s discussion of exercises in *Discipline and Punish*, it becomes clear that Foucault is explicating an ancient form of secularised asceticism that uses techniques not unlike those employed by generalised contemporary discipline. Just how the Stoic ascetic paradigm differs from generalised contemporary discipline other than the simple fact that the former is voluntary and perhaps more extreme than its newer and oftentimes involuntary cousin is, however, anyone’s guess.

Both ascetic discipline and generalised contemporary discipline also employ surveillance mechanisms and frequently, self-surveillance combined with confession technologies,²¹ to achieve their ends. Within asceticism, surveillance typically takes the form of the lone gaze turned inward through practices of introspection,

²⁰ A modern-day example of the use of exercises in both of these senses – that is, as a testing procedure and as physical exercise – is found in the Ashtanga yoga system formalised by Pattabhi Jois. This type of yoga employs six increasingly challenging series of postures to achieve its ends. See Nicolai Bachman’s *The Language of Yoga*.

²¹ Foucault discusses the disciplinary implications of confession technologies in the first volume of his *History* (Will 58-73). As Foucault notes, the discursive ritual of confession inevitably ‘unfolds within a power relationship’ for one’s confessor is ‘not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console and reconcile’ (61-62).

contemplation, and so forth. The meditating yogin and the self-examining Greek aristocrat that Foucault describes in his *History* are two examples of the application of this ascetic technique. With regard to the latter example (and arguably, the former), Foucault asserts that acts of self-surveillance or self-inspection serve as ‘a test of power and a guarantee of freedom: a way of always making sure that one will not become attached to that which does not come under our control’ (*Care* 60-64). In addition to self-surveillance, of course, traditional asceticism also disciplines subjects using hierarchical forms of surveillance from church officials and the omnipresent, all-seeing gaze of the deity. Although its aims are basically the same, Foucault argues that generalised contemporary discipline tends to assume more complex or varied modalities – that is, as a disciplinary gaze that is simultaneously ‘multiple, automatic, and anonymous’ (*Discipline* 176). This panoptic gaze describes, classifies, hierarchises, normalises, and judges from within and without and, as handmaiden to the modern disciplines, becomes ‘the technique, universally widespread, of coercion’ (222). In other words, the modern panoptic gaze is a very real and powerful incarnation of the eye of God.²²

No doubt there are additional commonalities between the two paradigms. But even without extending the list of shared features, one can already begin to understand Foucault’s uncertainty in placing a boundary between these two disciplinary realms. For, if generalised contemporary discipline is not *exactly* a disguised, broad-based form of asceticism, it certainly operates in the same manner, using many of the same techniques to achieve its ends. Hence, Foucault’s difficulty in separating the two paradigms stems from the fact that the two economies are intricately intertwined.

²² The modern panoptic gaze is, of course, supported by certain architectural and spatial considerations which originate in monastic life (*Discipline* 141-149). Foucault offers additional commentary upon the modern use of space as a political tool in a 1982 interview. See “Space, Knowledge and Power” in *Live* (335-347). Foucault’s lecture-essay on ‘heterotopias’ provides an interesting counterpoint to these selections (“Of Other Spaces”).

Generalised contemporary discipline is the modern expression of asceticism torn asunder from its spiritual roots to serve a culture (and economy) that needs docile-useful bodies to operate. *Discipline and Punish* is not only a genealogy of the prison; therefore, it is also a genealogy of asceticism which, when misused by powerful institutions, becomes a tool of existential incarceration. What Foucault's genealogy demonstrates is rather than fading into obscurity amid the rituals of a few antiquated communities posed on the margins of culture, asceticism has instead become a routine feature of contemporary life as a whole range of modern institutions adopted and converted its methodologies for secular use. Foucault's history of the rise of generalised contemporary discipline is also a history of the penetration of ascetic discipline into Western culture as a whole, a historicised account of the simultaneous diffusion and secularisation of the corporeal and subjective management techniques once contained within abbey walls. Consequently, modern disciplinarian culture is also a profoundly ascetic culture, an observation that aligns neatly with prior commentaries by Freud, Nietzsche, Weber, and others who would argue the importance of asceticism in cultural formation. Asceticism is indeed the mark of culture as Harpham suggests, therefore, because of the way ascetic discipline has come to pervade the social field, constantly inciting individuals to form attitudes and perform acts of self-critique and self-denial until it has become an inextricable component of the fabric of contemporary existence.

Nevertheless, *Discipline and Punish* is not simply an updated or expanded version of Nietzsche's thesis in *On the Genealogy of Morals*. More specifically, although Foucault argues (*pace* Nietzsche) that ascetic discipline in its guise of generalised contemporary discipline produces 'tamed' or 'docile' subjects, he also argues its fortifying or aptitude-building capacities. According to Foucault,

generalised contemporary discipline simultaneously ‘increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience)’ (*Discipline* 138). In short, ascetic discipline produces bodies that are both practised (useful) and subjected (docile). These bodies are not enervated or ‘emasculated’ by discipline; quite the opposite. These are strong bodies with practiced aptitudes that not only make them expressions of the power relations that forged them but vehicles for the further expression of power. But because these bodies exist amidst a ‘machinery of power’ designed to produce and extract labour from them, their practiced aptitudes are not entirely their own. As Foucault declares:

The historical moment of the disciplines was the moment when an art of the human body was born, which was directed not only at the growth of its skills, nor at the intensification of its subjection, but at the formation of a relation that in the mechanism itself makes it more obedient as it becomes more useful, and conversely (137-138).

Although *Discipline and Punish* extends the central thesis of Nietzsche’s *Genealogy*, therefore, it also problematises this thesis by concurrently arguing asceticism’s fortifying properties which, as demonstrated above, Nietzsche also routinely acknowledges elsewhere in his corpus. It is this observation about the fortifying properties of asceticism that provides a conceptual bridge to Foucault’s final works, further extending his thesis on bodily discipline and linking it to a discussion of freedom.

5

Foucault’s interest in the fortifying properties of ascetic discipline is even more pronounced in the second and third volumes of his *History* where, through an examination of Greco-Roman self-care practices, he argues asceticism’s liberating potential. The appearance of this belated ‘counter-thesis’ of ascetic discipline as a

practice of freedom may also explain why some critics suggest there is a late shift in Foucault's theory of power or his concept of the subject. For certainly, if a Greek or Roman aristocrat could employ ascetic discipline to conjure freedom, modern subjects could do the same, using self-care technologies to loosen the oppressive and normalising grip of generalised contemporary discipline. Perhaps Foucault's last works also jettison the passive subject of *Discipline and Punish* for what Sylvia Pritsch describes as a 'self-determining agent' who employs bodily discipline to resist the disempowering effects of institutional power-knowledge relations ("Inventing" 120). Although these interpretations seem reasonable and perhaps even heartening to those who found Foucault's portrait of modernity in *Discipline and Punish* depressing or even nihilistic, they are nonetheless misguided in light of the remarkable stability of Foucault's theory of power and his notion of the subject as demonstrated in Chapter One. Simply stated, Foucault's final works do not suggest that practices of the self can be used to nullify or reverse the subjectifying forces of power relations. Instead, Foucault is arguing that practices of the self represent a technology for cultivating knowledge and personal aptitudes to ensure 'games of power [...] [are] played with a minimum of domination' (*Final* 18). While Foucault's late works explore additional dimensions of power, subjectivity, and the discipline(s) that bind these concepts together, therefore, the key elements of Foucault's worldview remain unchanged. Power remains productive, the subject is still culturally constructed, and discipline retains its ambivalence as a tool of bodily transformation.

If Foucault is not proposing a counter-theory of power, subjectivity, or discipline in his last works, his objective must lie elsewhere. A more detailed analysis of salvage value of the ethics Foucault describes in the latter volumes of his *History* sheds some light upon this matter. As Foucault states in a late interview, during times

of intellectual crisis the West has repeatedly ‘returned to the Greeks’, using their discourses and practices as archetypes of and alternatives to contemporary mores (*Live* 469). Although he uses the Greco-Roman example in both of these ways, unlike some of his contemporaries and precursors, Foucault is not interested in praising these ancient moralities as ‘the domain of morality *par excellence*’ (470). Instead, Foucault gazes toward the ancient world in a search for alternatives or what he calls ‘fishing around’ to see what aspects of the Greco-Roman example might be worth saving and applying to our contemporary situation. Consequently, Foucault views ancient practices and discourses as useful to his argument only to the extent they *differ* from contemporary practices and discourses. While Foucault also notes certain similarities and continuities between the ancient and contemporary worlds, the *critical* value of his analysis comes from the dissimilarities and discontinuities it exposes.

According to Foucault, one key difference between ancient and contemporary ethics is the former does not rely upon reified or essentialised notions of selfhood. Instead, the ancient paradigm rejects the idea that one should try to achieve a Being-form that is either ‘natural’ (a hidden, authentic self) or ‘transcendent’ (an idealised manifestation of a specific moral code or ascetic ideal). In other words, unlike contemporary Christian-based mores, Greco-Roman ethics do not depend upon a legalistic moral framework, the Enlightenment concept of the sovereign self, or the Christian-humanist predilection for self-decipherment. These concepts and practices bind individuals to stable identities, confining them and making them more vulnerable to the oppressive effects of societal discipline.

For Foucault, therefore, the Greco-Roman ethical paradigm avoids the problem of the divided subject because it does not circumscribe Being around a preconceived template in either the form of a hidden, authentic self or an external

moral code. The subject simply cannot be divided against itself because it is conceptualised as an unfixed work-in-progress moving toward self-selected, infinitely mutable aesthetic criteria. In other words, the subject remains undivided because it exists within an undifferentiated ontological space rather than upon a ground of Being, neither concerned with what might be discovered through hermeneutical practices – what Nietzsche calls ‘turning oneself into an adventure’²³ – nor striving toward an externally prescribed *telos*. Moreover, by committing itself to dissipation and striving only to self-actualise or ‘become what one is’, the self is freed.²⁴ Pritsch’s analysis lends support here. According to her, Foucault’s late works endeavour to identify a Western ethos ‘where questions of morals (such as how to lead a good life) and aesthetic techniques for organizing one’s life were not based on universal codes or on the divided individual’ and where the ethical work centres upon self-production rather than unearthing or deciphering a hidden, authentic self (“Inventing” 121).²⁵ This, in a nutshell, is the primary salvage value of Greco-Roman ethics for Foucault.

As demonstrated in Chapter One, however, Greco-Roman ethics cannot entirely evade the problem of the divided subject because of its reliance upon domination as its foundational relational construct. The subject remains divided not because it searches for a hidden self or strives for an idealised self but because it manages its reality according to constructs that are inherently dualistic and hierarchical. Moreover, because this ethics views body and mind as problematic, chaotic substances that must be mastered in order to be free, care of the self is

²³ *Genealogy* (II.16/85).

²⁴ Freedom is, of course, a relative concept for Foucault since his worldview holds all freedom exists within the omnipresent network of power relations (there is no ‘escaping’ power) (*Will* 95).

²⁵ This interpretation is supported by Foucault’s own conceptualisation of his project (*Pleasure* 3-13).

conceptualised as an ongoing battle of self against self coalescing around one primal emotion – fear.

As Foucault observes in *The Use of Pleasure*, the moral problematisation of pleasures – sexual, dietary, or otherwise – has long revolved around fear (15-17). Fears, which are expressed in pagan texts dating to the first century C.E., include anxieties over losing one's personal power or the possibility of inflicting self-harm. Fear is therefore the founding emotion for the ethics of ancient Greece and Rome, which is hardly surprising since, as Nietzsche observes in *Beyond Good and Evil*, 'fear is the mother of morality' (201/123). Although Nietzsche makes this comment with regard to the moral ramifications of external anxieties such as fear of one's neighbour, in light of Foucault's observations about the emotional basis of Greco-Roman ethics, Nietzsche's maxim seems to have a wider application. Indeed, whether a fear is internal or external is probably less important than the simple fact of its presence in the deep structure of an ethics. The implications of this presence are myriad because, as many including feminist writer bell hooks have noted, 'cultures of domination' routinely use fear as a tool to compel obedience (*Love* 93). As Foucault also demonstrates in *Discipline and Punish*, fear is the motivation behind a variety of modern disciplinary interventions including exclusions (leper colonies), confinements (plague measures), and surveillances (panopticonism) (195-228). Fear-based interventions such as these are now commonplace in contemporary, post-'9-11' Western society. Thus, where there is fear, there is a higher likelihood of not only more varied and pervasive disciplinary interventions but conformity and ultimately, oppression.

Foucault once said 'everything is dangerous' and 'the ethico-political choice we have to make every day is to determine which is the main danger' (*Beyond* 231-

232). One serious danger of the ethical model Foucault describes in his late works is its innate tendency to foster an ethos of fear, division, and oppression; making it a poor alternative for anyone seeking more egalitarian and harmonious models for living. On the other hand, the idea of conceptualising the work of the self around an unfixed *telos* is intriguing because it may help individuals avoid or minimise the dangers associated with the sorts of fixed models for Being which are generally associated with contemporary moralities. Considering the effort he put into distancing himself from the ethical paradigms described in his late works, it is likely Foucault was also aware of these advantages and disadvantages. In the last interview he gave before his death, for example, Foucault carefully qualifies his endorsement of Greco-Roman ethics, asserting that while classical Greece was no Golden Age, it still might offer certain lessons for contemporary living.²⁶ In another interview, Foucault specifically denounces the domination focus of this ethics, describing its fixation on virility, dissymmetry, and exclusion as ‘quite disgusting’ (*Beyond* 233). Foucault’s ambivalence toward the Greco-Roman example is perhaps best explained by Veyne. Veyne argues that while Foucault saw Greek ethics as ‘quite dead [...] [and] undesirable [...] he considered one of its elements, namely, the idea of the work of the self on the self, to be capable of reacquiring a contemporary meaning, in the manner of one of those pagan temple columns that one occasionally sees reutilized in more recent structures’ (“Foucault” 231).

If this is an accurate portrayal of Foucault’s views on the salvage value of Greco-Roman ethics, then it appears much work will be required to integrate this

²⁶ See “The Return of Morality” (*Live* 465-473) and “On the Genealogy of Ethics” (*Beyond* 229-252). Whether Foucault was truly a champion of Greco-Roman ethics, either overtly or tacitly, is a matter of much debate. James Bernauer, for example, states Foucault found Greek morality ‘neither exemplary nor admirable’ but nevertheless also notes Foucault’s deep admiration of the Cynics (“Beyond” 191, 198). Paul Veyne’s observations are also equivocal; simultaneously pointing out Foucault’s ‘strong attraction’ to Greco-Roman antiquity and disinterest in renewing the Stoic ethics of the Greeks (“Foucault” 225-226).

‘column’ into an ethics that does not simply replicate the ethos of fear, domination, and oppression apparent in both the ancient and contemporary worlds. As the following sections discuss in greater detail, feminist critiques of Foucault’s final works provide a range of more specific insights into how this objective might be achieved. Because ethical thought requires reflection upon the nature of subjectivity, power, and discipline; these critiques also serve as rich source of general criticism and commentary on some of the more prominent concerns of Foucault’s corpus. In addition, due to his profound influence upon Foucault, these critiques also provide valuable insights into the value of Nietzschean philosophy for a contemporary feminist ethics.

6

The feminist debate over Foucault’s late works, which commenced in the late 1980s, rehearses a range of pertinent dilemmas arising from Foucault’s contention that contemporary audiences can garner useful ethical insights from the Greco-Roman experience. During the course of the debate, two broad feminist perspectives on Foucault’s ethical works were formed. One perspective, championed Foucauldian feminists such as Ladelle McWhorter and Dianna Taylor, favoured a positive interpretation of these texts, highlighting the creative-dynamic possibilities of what is now sometimes known as Foucauldian ethics.²⁷ McWhorter, for example, found

²⁷ Like the matter of Foucault’s so-called advocacy of Greco-Roman ethics, this label is also controversial. Strictly speaking, however, the final volumes of Foucault’s *History* do not (and indeed *cannot*) establish a Foucauldian ethics because of their reliance upon the archaeological-genealogical research method. As products of this methodology, these works simply offer a detailed account of Greco-Roman ethics and the changes these paradigms underwent during the early Christian era. Nonetheless, when the analysis in these texts is juxtaposed with the arguments contained in Foucault’s two preceding works – *Discipline and Punish* and the first volume of his *History* – something akin to a positive ‘Foucauldian’ ethics starts to emerge. The negative portrayal of modern mores in these works establishes his preference for something different and sets a tacit agenda for his ‘fishing expedition’ in the ancient world. Thus Greco-Roman ethics are not Foucauldian ethics but because they contain features Foucault thought useful for contemporary ethical praxis, compelling arguments can be made to

Foucauldian self-styling promising as a practice of freedom because of its ‘openness to becoming’ and genuine ‘opposition to normalization’ (*Bodies* 193). Critics from this group also showed support for Foucault’s choice of aesthetics as the best guide for self-fashioning, noting the dangers associated with setting static ideals for selfhood. For these feminists, therefore, Foucault’s late works offered women and other marginalised individuals a practical philosophical basis for resisting the oppressive effects of contemporary power-knowledge relations.

The other feminist perspective, supported by representatives such as Jean Grimshaw and Kate Soper, found Foucault’s late works to be of marginal value for at least three main reasons – their masculine bias, individualism, and lack of a clear normative framework for advancing broad-based political action. Jean Grimshaw, for example, characterises Foucault’s late work on ethics ‘disappointing’ because of its reliance upon a ‘masculinist conception of the self which sidesteps many of the most crucial questions in ethical thinking which feminism needs to confront’ (“Practices” 70). Soper’s 1993 commentary is even less forgiving, arguing Foucault’s focus upon the ‘politics of “self-making”’ and the ‘aesthetics of the self’ makes his idea of liberation ‘individualistic and even narcissistic’ (“Productive” 35-36). For these feminists, the textual sphere of Foucault’s last works is, as Frances Bartkowski would succinctly declare, ‘a world of men’ (“Epistemic” 51). Consequently, any ethics based upon these texts tends to uphold rather than transform the gender oppression and other forms of domination already present in Western society.

A more detailed discussion of these three general axes of feminist critique follows. The first concern is Foucault’s masculine bias or androcentricity. Charges of androcentrism are commonplace amongst the feminist critiques of Foucault’s

label them as such. For purposes of the current discussion, however, the appellation ‘Foucauldian ethics’ will be avoided unless it is used in quoted material.

middle and late works, particularly in those published in the late 1980s and early 1990s. These include works by Soper, Grimshaw, and Bartkowski, among others.²⁸ Paradoxically, other feminist critiques of this era routinely charge Foucault with ‘gender blindness’ or assuming what McNay calls a ‘desexualised perspective’ which, of course, is something altogether different from a masculine bias (*Foucault* 194).²⁹ In fact, some feminists including McNay view Foucault’s disregard for issues of sexual difference and his refusal to ‘colonise the “feminine”’ as other poststructuralist thinkers such as Derrida and Baudrillard have done as one of his strengths rather than a weakness (192-195).³⁰

Be this as it may, even a desexualised perspective cannot mask the androcentricity of the Greco-Roman ethics Foucault describes in his last works. For although it was never Foucault’s intent to recover a feminist ethics from his study of pagan self-care practices, if this had been his aim, his object of study was a poor choice indeed. As Foucault himself notes, the works he analyses in latter volumes of his *History* formed

...an ethics for men: an ethics thought, written, and taught by men, and addressed to men – to free men, obviously. A male ethics, consequently, in which women figured only as objects or, at most, as partners that one had best train, educate, and watch over when one had them under one’s power, but stay away from when they were under the power of someone else (father, husband, tutor). This is doubtless one of the most remarkable aspects of that moral reflection: it did not try to define a field of conduct and a domain of valid rules – subject to the necessary modulations – for the two sexes in common; it was an elaboration of masculine conduct carried out from the viewpoint of men in order to give form to *their* behaviour (*Pleasure* 22-23).

²⁸ A general survey of feminist perspectives on Foucault’s work is available in the following essay collections: *Feminism & Foucault* (ed. Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby), *Up against Foucault* (ed. Caroline Ramazanoğlu), and *Feminist Interpretations of Michel Foucault* (ed. Susan Hekman).

²⁹ Jon Simons, for one, notes Foucault’s androcentrism and gender blindness in the same breath (“Foucault’s Mother” 179).

³⁰ Whether it is perceived as strength or weakness, Foucault’s desexualised perspective has certainly been productive considering the number of feminist works written to address his ‘lacuna’.

In other words, not only were these texts authored by men but their implied readers were categorically male. In addition, these readers were not just any men but members of the male elite because, as Foucault notes, Greco-Roman ethics were never organised into a ‘unified, coherent, authoritarian moral system that was imposed on everyone in the same manner; they were more in the nature of a supplement, a “luxury” in relation to the commonly accepted morality’ (21). As such, participation in this ethics was a purely voluntary act undertaken by men of a certain social position who wished to lend style to their existence. This ‘desire for style’ was neither frivolous nor inconsequential in terms of its socio-cultural significance, however, because in the Greek and Roman cultures self-care was seen as a way to retain and enhance one’s personal power (78-86). As an ethics for free men who wished to retain and enhance the power and liberties their social positions afforded, therefore, this ethics is intrinsically androcentric. It is, in short, an archetypal patriarchal ethics.

Furthermore, for these same reasons the ethics Foucault elaborates in his final works can also be understood as an archetypal will to power ethics in both its creative-dynamic and domination forms. More specifically, as a relatively open-ended methodology for attending to the work of the self, this ethics provides a conceptual framework for the expression of will to power in its creative-dynamic guise. It is, as McWhorter states, a way to engage in practices that ‘acknowledge and invite the possibility of becoming other’ (*Bodies* 195). For rather obvious reasons, this feature of Foucault’s ethical work tends to elicit more positive responses from feminists although some still find it too nebulous to offer any wider political import. Because the ethics revolves around a core relational dynamic of mastery, however, it also provides a conceptual framework for the expression of will to power as domination.

As one might intuit, this is the feature of Foucault's ethical work that tends to attract negative critiques from feminists and perhaps rightly so because even if one does not assume a feminist viewpoint, as an ethics of domination, the Greco-Roman model offers absolutely no alternative to the status quo. Indeed, if the critical value of a genealogy rests in the discontinuities it uncovers between the past and the present, then the utility of Foucault's genealogy of ethics is fairly circumscribed, residing only in those concepts and practices it illuminates which do not promote an ethos of domination.

A more detailed analysis of the various components of the Greco-Roman model and particularly, those features which tend to express will to power in its creative-dynamic mode rather than its domination mode, is useful here. As noted in Chapter One, the dual character of this ethics is perhaps most apparent in Foucault's respective discussions of *enkrateia* (the form of relationship with oneself necessary to and manifested by the practice of self-care) and *askēsis* (the practical training individuals undertake as part of a self-care regimen). These discussions of *enkrateia*, or the attitudinal foundation upon which the ethics rests, are beset with dualistic metaphors of struggle and confrontation because, as Foucault notes, 'the term *enkrateia* in the classical vocabulary seems to refer in general to the dynamics of a domination of oneself by oneself and to the effort that this demands' (*Pleasure* 63-72). Moreover, because the *telos* of this ethics was to achieve an orderly and controlled state of being (qualities which are typically gendered as masculine in the West), the ethics is doubly androcentric. In other words, the 'masculine' quality of the relationship to self underlying the practices of self-care in this ethics produces a particular form of *Being* which is also gendered as masculine. On the other hand, in his discussions of *askēsis*, Foucault presents the work of self-care in less agonistic and

therefore, less dualistic, terms (72-77). Instead of describing the work of the self as a combat, for instance, it is understood as a sort of 'continuous exercise' where virtue becomes indistinguishable from the activities one undertakes to cultivate it (73, 77). In these discussions, the urge to self-actualise seems less positioned to win the war against oneself than toward experimentation and play in a project of creative-dynamic self-production.

What this comparison suggests is the masculine bias of this ethics is not necessarily a function of the specific practices it advocates which, as forms of ascetic discipline, are essentially ambivalent and only meaningful insofar as practitioners imbue them with meaning. Instead, the masculinity of Greco-Roman ethics resides in the mastery-centred attitude one assumes in attending to the work of the self. This attitude affects not only the nature a practitioner's self-reflexive relationship but his interpersonal relationships as well because in the Greco-Roman example, the former relationship was seen as 'isomorphic with the relationship of domination, hierarchy, and authority that one expected, as a man, a free man, to establish over his inferiors' (83). The quality of the self-reflexive relationship also affects the *telos* of the ethics, producing a being that embodies the 'masculine' qualities of the power-knowledge relations which fashion it. In short, if an ethics is founded upon a core relational dynamic of mastery, domination, or, as discussed earlier in this chapter, fear; then this attitude will pervade every aspect of that ethics including the type of being it produces. There is no reason to believe that a similarly structured contemporary ethics would operate differently or produce dissimilar results.

The androcentricity of this ethics is not, therefore, merely a function of its authorship, implied readership, or the cultural norms of Greco-Roman society although these things contribute to its masculine orientation. The androcentricity of

this ethics is instead a surface effect of the deep structure of an ethics that valorises the activity of mastery (an existential state which is typically gendered as masculine) as its core relational dynamic, its chief mode of ‘doing’. This ethics is masculine because its attitude toward the self is masculine; bound up in notions of division, struggle, domination, and ultimately, fear. Consequently, if (as Veyne suggests) the ‘idea of a work of the self on the self’ is the ‘column’ worth saving from the Greco-Roman model, then it appears that a new conceptual – if not *emotional* – base for this column must be found.

7

A second line of critique levelled by feminists against Foucault’s ethical work concerns its individualism and socio-political disengagement. As Allen notes, many of the early feminist commentaries on Foucault’s late works, including those advanced by Lois McNay and Nancy Soper, voice concerns about the wider social implications of Foucault’s theory of the self (“Foucault” 237-240). Soper, for example, argues that Foucault defines the ethical as a ‘very private – and masculine – affair: a matter primarily of self-mastery and authorial creation’ (“Productive” 41). Although Soper’s assessment has certain merits, a closer examination of Foucault’s late works does much to dispel concerns about their individualism and socio-political disengagement, revealing an ethics which is not an ‘exercise in solitude’ but a ‘true social practice’ reliant upon a diverse array of institutional and personal relationships (*Care* 51-53). In fact, critiques portraying this ethics as anti-social or self-serving stand in stark contrast to the highly nuanced ethics Foucault actually describes in his *History* – an ethics which counts preparing individuals for social life and responsibility among its chief concerns (*Pleasure* 78-82). More recent essays by other

feminists lend additional support, including one by Taylor which asserts: ‘Clearly, practices of the self are social: they are shaped by social norms and occur within particular sociocultural contexts’ (“Foucault’s Ethos” 267). Margaret McLaren’s 1997 essay offers almost identical insights, describing self-care as a highly social process that does not necessarily result in individualism (“Foucault” 118-119).

In addition, feminist critiques depicting Foucault’s subject or his vision of freedom as excessively autonomous have been debated and countered in a variety of compelling ways.³¹ McLaren, for example, views Foucault’s subject as ‘fundamentally social’ and even argues its resemblance to the relational ideal of selfhood advanced by the feminist ethics of care (112). Assessments like McLaren’s ring doubly true when one considers the studied unlikelihood of Foucault showing any interest in an ethics that was *not* based upon a constructivist or performative notion of selfhood. For Foucault, the self is constructed through a complex interaction of power, knowledge, discipline, and bodies. Although the configuration and specific expression of these elements are mutable, changing across time and culture, the elements themselves remain the same. In fact, if one accepts and connects two of Foucault’s more general theoretical propositions – namely, that individuals are realities fabricated by power and power is immanent to all relationships (*Discipline* 194, *Will* 94) – then his subject must be relational in the extreme, intelligible only because inter- and intra-personal interactions have brought force into contact with flesh.

Moreover, the freedom enjoyed by this subject cannot arise from a pre-existing ontological state untouched by power because, for Foucault (just like his precursor Nietzsche), no such state exists. Any freedom this subject experiences must

³¹ Many of these critiques reach beyond the specific components of the ethics Foucault describes in his final works, speaking more generally to Foucault’s theories of subjectivity and power.

instead manifest through interaction or ‘work’ – activities which make up what Foucault calls a ‘deliberative practice of liberty’ (*Final* 5). Moya Lloyd adds support here, stating that for Foucault, ‘freedom is primarily a *practice*, an *askēsis* [...] an incessant process, the repeated subversion and transformation of power relations in the production of the self’ (“Feminism” 246). This work necessarily occurs within the realm of power (there is no ‘outside’ of power) and, accordingly, is indivisible from the exercise of power since no power relations would exist without free subjects (*Will* 95, *Final* 12). Hence self-transformation always occurs, as Lloyd notes, ‘within certain parameters; it is not creative work *ex nihilo*’ (“Feminism” 246). If self-care enhances freedom, it is not by creating a hermitage where individuals can cloister or emancipate themselves from power. Such a notion is contrary to Foucault’s propositions about power which, as noted in Chapter One, envision power as immanent to all human relationships or coextensive with the entire social field (*Will* 94-95).

To summarize, the ethics Foucault describes in his late work does not produce freedom through autonomy or by isolating individuals from the social milieu. Instead, as Deleuze suggests, self-care enhances the possibility for personal freedom by modifying the diagram of forces and knowledges which surround and permeate individuals, by reconfiguring the inter-social abstract machine which makes subjects (*Foucault* 34). While these abstract machines differ across time and culture, they inevitably operate in the same basic manner, using discourses and practices to connect bodies with forces that mould them in specific ways. If freedom is ‘work’ – the product of ongoing, conscious effort – then self-care offers a strategy for attending to this work, a way to identify and direct the forces which constitute us, to build

capacities and competencies that do not result in autonomy although they may render individuals relatively more self-sufficient.

In the Nietzschean-Foucauldian paradigm, the work of freedom is perhaps best conceptualised as deliberate or active management of the discourses and practices that proscribe certain *possibilities* for Being. These possibilities can be visualised as manifestations of will to power which, as noted above, typically assume two basic guises. Each guise has certain ramifications for Being and, most importantly, elicits a specific kind of ethical response. If will to power is interpreted as the will to *overpower*, for example, mastery and domination become the most logical ethical responses because they are the most effective ways to guarantee freedom in a world defined by competition and strife. Individuals who subscribe to this viewpoint may subsequently understand all their relationships in agonistic terms, including those of a self-reflexive nature, creating a rigid and possibly fear-based ethos of authority, division, and hierarchy. On the other hand, if will to power is viewed as creative dynamism, mastery becomes a less likely ethical response since existence is framed in less static terms, making every attempt at mastery a provisional endeavour at best. Individuals who subscribe to this viewpoint may be more inclined to see themselves and the material realm experimentally, focusing their energies on the open-ended activity of Becoming rather achieving a specific state of Being. Furthermore, because this viewpoint endorses no particular goal for existence, self-actualisation becomes both means and end, creating an ethos of creativity, play, and mutual respect for the self-expressions others may pursue.

Perhaps the most fundamental contemporary dilemma associated with Greco-Roman ethics is not, therefore, its *asocial* conceptualisation of subjectivity and freedom but rather its promotion of a relational norm which most feminists would

probably view as oppressive and *anti-social* or at the very least antithetical to the cause of women's liberation. Simply stated, this ethical system advocates self-domination as a prophylactic against the domination imposed by others. For women and others who already suffer from the myriad oppressions of the existing ethos, this proposal must seem problematic at best. Nonetheless, Foucault's advice to care for the self is not completely bereft of any use value for feminists. Taking a more active role in the 'abstract machines' that constitute us may, for example, render individuals less vulnerable to the oppressive effects of generalised contemporary discipline. Adopting a pugilistic attitude toward exterior forces that seek to define and control individuals is also an intelligent ethical response, especially for women and others who as disproportional sufferers of societal oppression need effective resistance strategies.

Despite these benefits, it is most certainly counterproductive for individuals to constitute all inter- and intra-personal relationships as domination scenarios. This is especially true for women's self-reflexive relationships because, as Susan Bordo and other feminists have observed, the costs associated with perceiving oneself as a battlefield are both myriad and dire, a contributing factor to a whole range of negative cultural phenomena including anorexia and depression. As Bordo notes, there is a long tradition in Western metaphysics which imagines the body as an enemy, the 'locus of *all that threatens our attempts at control*' (*Unbearable* 145). Bordo argues this ideal fosters a hostile attitude toward the self, inciting a continual auto-battle where individuals attempt to master the unruly forces inside to make them "obey and serve" (145). For Bordo, this situation is doubly true for woman, who *is* body, marking her as a 'site of struggle' inside and out (143, 184). A domination-centred will to power ethics cannot possibly transform these perceptions and indeed may only serve to fortify and propagate a hostile self-image even further.

In addition, on a purely theoretical level, Foucault's call to self-mastery represents an incongruous ethical response to his own interlinked theories of power and subjectivity. More specifically, as Deleuze suggests, nothing is sedentary in Foucault's schema, especially the unstable compound of force relations known as the modern subject (*Foucault* 129). In light of the Heraclitean influence upon Nietzsche's work, a similar observation can be made about his subject who, as will to power, is a 'sea of forces flowing and rushing together, eternally changing' (*Will* 1067/550). The instability of the subject is not problematic, however, because in a disciplinarian society where power uses definition and positivity to adhere to being and enslave, flux becomes the subject's greatest strength.³² The subject in its precise discursive splendour is not only the creation of modern discipline; therefore, it is the 'stable' entity power needs to control bodies and minds. This symbiotic, mutually reinforcing relationship is essential to the operations of modern discipline.

Nonetheless, the reverse proposition is also true because the less defined individuals are; the more difficult it is for power to adhere to them. Accordingly, domination – as an 'effect' or 'terminal form of power' – is more likely to occur when once-mobile force relations become ossified, stabilising to benefit a particular player or group of players in the power game (*Will* 92, 102). This is why, as Foucault declares in his Preface to Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*, the 'art of living counter to all forms of fascism, whether already present or impending' requires us to 'believe that what is productive is not sedentary but nomadic' and to prefer 'flows over unities' and 'mobile arrangements over systems' (xiii). Keeping force relationships mobile and maintaining one's 'essential' state of existential instability are therefore crucial components of any effective practice of freedom in an ethos

³² Foucault offers a detailed discussion of this matter in a 1973 lecture. See Part V of "Truth and Juridical Forms" (*Essential III*).

where existential definition and containment are used as tools of oppression.³³ An ethics founded upon the stabilising relational dynamic of domination, even if it is self-imposed, cannot possibly serve these objectives.

In summary, because Foucault's linked theories of power and subjectivity imagine the self as a fundamentally social entity formed through inter- and intra-subjective *relations* of power, it is vital for those power relations to exemplify the qualities individuals wish to imbue in themselves. According to this logic, Being is largely a function of how power is exercised by and upon bodies within a particular socio-cultural milieu. If an environment naturalises conflict and continually seeks to dominate and control individuals through fear, it will produce subjects who embody those qualities. Foucault suggests the Greeks and Romans understood this idea because they sought to make self-reflexive relationships isomorphic with the model of 'social virility' their culture valued so highly (*Pleasure* 83). This idea of creating an isomorphism between self and world as a means to assure a particular form of existence is also an important consequence of Nietzsche's work. Indeed, as Jerrold Seigel points out, one of Nietzsche's innovations was to posit a 'new version of the isomorphism between self and world' that superseded the 'purposiveness that thinkers from Kant to Hegel had injected into nature and history' (*Idea* 537). Nietzsche's isomorphism was will to power and, as the preceding discussions demonstrate, so was Foucault's. Because of the dual conceptualisations of will to power that manifest in their work, however, the ethical praxis required to create and uphold a vision of self and world as will to power can assume two forms; one based on notions of domination and the other on creative dynamism. It is clear that an ethics founded predominately upon the 'masculine' ideal of domination is unacceptable to feminism.

³³ Connolly argues a related point, observing how Foucault's ethical sensibility requires 'active cultivation of the capacity to subdue resentment against the absence of necessity in what you are and to affirm the ambiguity of life without transcendental guarantees' ("Beyond" 110).

If a feminist ethics is to be recouped from Nietzsche and Foucault, therefore, it must embrace discourses and practices supportive of a view of self and world as creative-dynamic will to power.

The feminist debate over Foucault's refusal to establish clear normative standards provides a productive context to further explore the ramifications of this proposal, which is not without its own complexities and drawbacks. As the ensuing section demonstrates, every ethical system advances certain explicit or implicit norms which may have a repressive effect on individuals who are voluntarily or involuntarily subject to its influence. The challenge for those who are interested in advancing an ethics supportive of the creative-dynamic worldview is adopting normative standards that encourage flexibility and possibility rather than discouraging it.

8

The third line of feminist critique levelled against Foucault's ethical work coalesces around his refusal to establish clear normative frameworks or prescriptive models; a stance which is partially methodological but also likely a consequence of his conviction that no ethico-political choice is without its dangers (*Beyond* 231-232). Anyone familiar with Foucault's corpus is cognisant of the dangers he associates with norms and normalising discipline. In his study of modern sexuality and the bio-political regime coincidental to it, for instance, Foucault asserts that a 'normalizing society is the historical outcome of a technology of power centered on life' (*Will* 144). Elsewhere Foucault observes how the normalising urge has become so ingrained in our dualistic Western consciousness that when the option of framing a judgment in terms of good and evil is unavailable, the binary of normal and abnormal is now substituted (*Language* 230). For Foucault, therefore, norms and their prescriptive

progeny assume a sort of malice in excess of the quotidian oppressions they produce as instruments of bio-political rationality. Connolly offers an astute related comment here, stating Foucault (along with Nietzsche) contends that ‘systemic cruelty flows regularly from the thoughtlessness of aggressive conventionality, the transcendentalization of contingent identities, and the treatment of good/evil as a duality wired into the intrinsic order of things’ (“Beyond” 109).

Foucault’s abhorrence of norms and the oppressions they represent led him to advocate aesthetics as the best way to guide self-cultivation (*Live* 379). As noted in Chapter One, this idea has Nietzschean roots, a connection Foucault acknowledges in a late interview (*Beyond* 237). In *The Gay Science*, for instance, Nietzsche argues self-styling is crucial to avoid the type of dissatisfaction that fosters resentment of others and the world (290/232-233). Perhaps more importantly, however, self-styling is the most appropriate ethical response to Nietzsche and Foucault’s constructivist views of the subject; the way to instil ‘substance’ of one’s own choosing to something that is inherently insubstantial. Numerous studies have used Foucault’s ethico-aesthetic dictum to create oneself oneself as a ‘work of art’ as a starting point to develop more tangible visions of what it actually means to self-style. McWhorter’s ‘local political study’ of the impact of Foucault’s texts upon her own thought and life practices is one example of these efforts.³⁴

Despite the appearance of compelling studies like McWhorter’s, however, some feminist critics still believe aesthetics represents an unsatisfactory moral basis for an ethics, especially one concerned with affecting widespread socio-political change.³⁵ As Fraser declares, for example, ‘Clearly, what Foucault needs, and needs desperately, are normative criteria for distinguishing acceptable from unacceptable

³⁴ For a related discussion, see Alexander Nehamas’s *The Art of Living*.

³⁵ See Pritsch (“Inventing” 119).

forms of power' (*Unruly* 33). McNay further asserts that Foucault's failure 'to establish any basic normative guidelines or collective aims for practices of the self' makes it 'unclear how the self can be called out of the self on to a plane of generality where it is reminded of its [social] responsibilities' (*Foucault* 8). Without basic norms, she asserts, this ethics of the self runs the risk of retreating into 'a form of unregulated introversion'. McLaren also references critiques by Fraser, Charles Taylor, and Eagleton who insist Foucault's work must contain a hidden normative framework or, at the very least, includes implicit appeals to normative concepts such as freedom, truth, and justice ("Foucault" 117, 125-126).

While any of these positions are subject to debate, what becomes clear upon a closer inspection of *The Use of Pleasure* is Foucault never actually disputes the idea that norms are a necessary structural component of an ethics, however dangerous they may be. In fact, Foucault makes the opposite contention, stating his belief that *every* morality is composed of two basic elements – codified morals or norms of behaviour and forms of subjectivation – which 'can never be entirely dissociated, though they may develop in relative independence from one another' (29). According to Foucault, when a morality emphasises forms of subjectivation as the Greco-Roman model does, its norms or code of behaviour will tend to be more rudimentary and less restrictive, revolving around 'a rather small number of rather simple principles' (30, 32). On the other hand, when a morality emphasises a code of behaviour, subjectivation assumes a quasi-juridical quality, occurring in reference to a normalising law which constantly monitors and threatens to sanction non-adherents (29-30). In other words, Foucault never argues moralities should (or even could) be cleansed of their normative components. Instead, what he asserts is that code-based moralities are likely more dangerous than subjectivation-based moralities because of their tendency to foster a

carceral ethos of discipline and punishment. This proclivity may be exacerbated when, as human beings are wont to do, a moral code is ascribed to natural or divine law, rendering it inflexible and obscuring its real, wholly human origin. Because subjectivation-based moralities draw attention to the fact that humans construct morality not gods or nature, these moralities may be more transparent than code-based moralities as products of human choice and convention.³⁶ Subjectivation-based moralities are also more in keeping with the Nietzschean-Foucauldian view of subjectivity as nonessential or a construction of socio-cultural power relations. Nonetheless, even by Foucault's own standards, every morality is incomplete without some system of generally accepted rules and values, however skeletal and provisional it might be.

In addition, although he personally eschewed prescriptive work, Foucault openly encouraged others to build their own ethics using whatever socio-historical analysis was available to them (*Live* 380). Using these observations and admonitions as point of departure and building upon Foucault's key assumptions about power and selfhood, one can then posit a provisional 'Foucauldian' moral code comprised of four basic principles. Such a code would be: (1) rather rudimentary to minimise the possibility of creating a quasi-juridical ethos of discipline and punishment; (2) relatively flexible to reflect the mutable concept of existence upon which Foucault's (and Nietzsche's) theory of subjectivity rests; (3) utterly transparent as an artefact of human contrivance and convention rather than declaring itself a product of natural or transcendental imperatives; and (4) less important than its practical counterpart. In short, such a code would embody the ideal of will to power as creative dynamism by

³⁶ Nietzsche shores up this point nicely by reminding us phenomena are neither inherently moral nor amoral; it is only our interpretations that make them so (*Beyond* 108/96).

saying ‘yes’ to the open-ended activity of self-creation rather than simply imposing a static set of moral interdictions.

Some might argue a code that adheres to these four principles is barely a code at all; inviting abuses of power through a dangerous lack of depth and breadth. And critiques such as these would be accurate because if a dynamism-based will to power ethics is anything, it is an ethics of pragmatism. Not only would such an ethics question the validity and necessity of foundations like moral codes, it would also demonstrate the relative unimportance of theoretical constructs in a world where ‘real’ (embodied) meaning is chiefly constituted through nondiscursive means. A more robust framework might seem less dangerous than this sketchy counterpart but, if the whole of modern Western cultural experience can be considered predictive, a highly codified morality *will* create an oppressive, normalising society where marginalised groups *will* repeatedly bear the brunt of power’s subjugating force. In the face of these probabilities, it is essential to consider the benefits and drawbacks of alternative ethical models, including those like Foucault’s which emphasise the importance of praxis over theory in matters of ethical self-formation.

9

Foucault once mused how difficult it was to free himself of the idea that power is merely repression,³⁷ a struggle also evident in Nietzsche’s works. This struggle is perhaps clearest in their discussions of ascetic discipline, one of the most ancient and widely used techniques of power. Although both men seem predisposed toward portraying asceticism as an instrument of institutional oppression, they also routinely caveat this position by arguing its utility as a tool of personal liberation. Hence, what

³⁷ See *The Foucault Reader* (60-61).

an analysis of Nietzsche and Foucault's thoughts on asceticism demonstrates is the profound ambivalence of ascetic discipline as a tool of power because just like a hammer, asceticism can be used for either construction or destruction. This ambivalence problematises the truth value of discourses that characterise asceticism as inherently negative or positive including works like Nietzsche's *Genealogy* and the two latter volumes of Foucault's *History*. Indeed, although the core thesis of *Discipline and Punish* is more closely aligned with the negative argument Nietzsche makes in his *Genealogy*, one of the central observations of this text – namely, that generalised contemporary discipline produces docile *and* useful subjects – is probably the most accurate statement either Nietzsche or Foucault ever makes about the highly ambivalent existential ramifications of asceticism.

An analysis of Nietzsche and Foucault's thoughts on asceticism also shows that because asceticism is a pervasive feature of Western culture, critiques of it will necessarily become embroiled within broader critiques of our culture and particularly, any cultural meta-discourses that identify ascetic discipline as an essential component of moral pedagogy. This is why Nietzsche's acerbic critique of the ascetic ideal in his *Genealogy* cannot help but become entwined in a broader indictment of Christianity, the principal moral construct of Western modernity. Foucault's account of modern disciplinarian society in *Discipline and Punish* is similarly embroiled – albeit in a more covert, nuanced, and dispassionate way. By demonstrating the myriad linkages between generalised contemporary discipline and Christian asceticism in this text, however, Foucault also advances a critique of Western society's Christian roots. In light of the intertwined critiques of asceticism and Christianity also contained in this text, it is perhaps paradoxical that Foucault not only defends *l'ascétisme* as a practice of freedom in his final works but also traces Western ascetic praxis back to another

older, non-Christian source. More specifically, as Foucault observes in *The Use of Pleasure*, many of the themes, anxieties, and exigencies found in Christian ethics were already present in Greco-Roman thought (15). Accordingly, the moralities of paganism and Christianity share several important components although as Foucault notes they do not form a strict continuity (21). The meta-ethical framework Foucault introduces in this text helps identify some of these shared components including the fact that both paradigms rely upon ascetic discipline as a primary technology of existential transformation. In fact, if Foucault's framework is the robust grid of intelligibility for understanding ethics across time and culture that Martha Cooper and Carole Blair suggest it is,³⁸ then asceticism – as one of the four components of this framework – must be recognised as the meta-praxis of ethics. As a meta-praxis of ethics, asceticism can be wielded by individuals or institutions, practiced on a voluntary or involuntary basis, or constituted as a technology of freedom or oppression. It can also be used to express will to power in either its creative-dynamic form or its guise as domination. In Foucauldian-Deleuzian terms, therefore, ascetic discipline is the engine driving the abstract machine that makes subjects but because of its essential ambivalence as a tool of power, the type of subjects it fashions and localised power effects it produces will vary across time and socio-cultural context.

Following Nietzsche, Foucault uses genealogical analysis as a tool to trace the pagan and Christian roots of contemporary Western ascetic praxis and identify differences and similarities between the moralities of past and present. The central objective of these genealogical explorations is a critique of modern mores which, in turn, sparks a search for alternatives. Nietzsche's search was motivated by his abhorrence of the nihilism he associates with Christianity, the prevailing moral

³⁸ "Ethics" (516-517). Cooper and Blair also note the similarity of their reading to interpretations by Rabinow, Rajchman, and Bernauer and Rasmussen.

paradigm of Western modernity. As he asserts in *The Will to Power*, a critique of Christian morality is required because ‘residues of Christian value judgments are found everywhere in socialistic and positivistic systems’ (1/7). On the other hand, Foucault’s investigations were prompted by the existential confinement he associates with not only Christian-based morality but with Enlightenment constructs such as the sovereign ideal.³⁹ Indeed, the modern prison Foucault describes in *Discipline and Punish* is not just a stone-and-mortar institution for separating reprobates and criminals from the rest of society; it *is* society. It is the carceral ethos produced by the extensive and omnipresent web of modern disciplinary apparatuses and practices which impose certain ideals upon existence.

Although neither Nietzsche nor Foucault ever produced a stand-alone ethical treatise of his own, their combined corpuses provide a foundation for the development of such a treatise. Foucault’s deep conceptual and practical acceptance of Nietzschean philosophy also renders his final works something of a compilation of both philosophers’ thoughts on Western ethics. As a result, assessments of Foucault’s final works perform a broader critical function, serving as meta-evaluations of the foundations of contemporary Western ethical praxis. Feminist assessments of these texts perform a special role within this archive because even though feminists share Nietzsche and Foucault’s interest in alternative ethical models, they reject the idea that an ethics of domination represents any real alternative to contemporary moral practice. Hence, feminist critiques of Foucault’s late works help pinpoint the functional components of an ethics that will likely replicate the oppressions of the current (or past) paradigm.

³⁹ Nietzsche’s *Genealogy*, among other works, also includes an imbedded critique of the sovereign ideal (I.13/45).

As argued throughout this chapter and the previous chapter as well, Greco-Roman ethics revolve around core relational dynamics of domination, dualism, and fear and thus cannot offer ready-made solutions to the problems women and other marginalised groups face in today's world. Nevertheless, because this ethics also displays nuances of another, less oppressive relational model – creative dynamism – it also holds promise as basis for contemporary feminist praxis. Perhaps ironically, it is the dual character of Foucault's will to power ethics that renders it vulnerable to feminist critique but also makes it intriguing to feminists and others who are searching for alternative ethical models. Overcoming the masculinity and anti-sociality of this ethics thus becomes a function of avoiding practices which will tend to foster will to power as domination and embracing those which support will to power in its creative-dynamic guise. Be this as it may, a dynamism-based will to power ethics is also not without its problems. Feminist critiques of some of the more ephemeral features of Foucault's ethical schema, including its lack of clear normative frameworks and use of aesthetics as the best guide for self-fashioning, highlight some of the problems associated with such an ethics. Although these problems are not insurmountable, a great deal of creative investment will be required to develop a normative framework which is flexible and yet sufficiently robust to serve as a meaningful guide for generating productive forms of human interaction.

Further meditation on will to power in its creative-dynamic manifestation, which is an inherently open-ended construct, may also open up the possibility for building an ethics around other core relational dynamics including care, compassion, or even love. Even Nietzsche, who was hardly a champion of such emotional concepts, understood the creative power of such ideals. In *The Will to Power*, for example, Nietzsche counts reverence, love, and 'gratitude toward earth and life'

among what he calls the ‘affirmative affects’ which for him also include will to power (1033/533). Because these emotions affirm or even deify life, they are *transfiguring* virtues for Nietzsche. The discipline of feminist moral theory has also considered the personal and socio-political ramifications of building an ethics around such affects, paying special attention to an ethics centred upon the notion of care. Foucault’s final work, *The Care of the Self*, also hints at the possibility of creating an ethics centred upon care, conjugality, reciprocity, and other communitarian values. In the face of these possibilities, one wonders if love or care rather than fear might be recast as the true ‘mother of morality’.

Chapter Three explores these possibilities beginning with a survey of selected feminist critiques of contemporary women’s fitness practices. Fitness practices are one of the chief voluntary means women use to apply ascetic discipline to their bodies and as such, represent an important potential avenue for practicing freedom in the Foucauldian mode. Feminist critiques of these practices show how bodily disciplines like aerobics may or may not represent a platform for resisting or transforming societal oppression and, in particular, the negative subjugating effects of dualistic conceptions of embodiment.

Chapter Three: Toward a Feminist Will to Power Ethics

But perhaps this is the most powerful magic of life: it is covered by a veil interwoven with gold, a veil of beautiful possibilities, sparkling with promise, resistance, bashfulness, mockery, pity, and seduction. Yes, life is a woman.

— Nietzsche¹

What insists within the sign is flux.

— Vicki Kirby (*Telling* 66)²

1

Building upon the conceptualisation of ascetic discipline as the meta-praxis of ethics introduced in Chapter Two, this chapter presents a more detailed argument of the importance of formulating alternative, less dualistic approaches to bodily discipline if a feminist will to power ethics is to be salvaged from Nietzsche and Foucault. The necessity of a reformulated approach to bodily discipline is bolstered by a review of feminist discourses of embodiment that show how dualistic discourses and practices of the self produce suffering rather than serving as uncomplicated tactics for overcoming it. Feminist philosophical speculation on the role dualism plays in oppressing women and other marginalised individuals problematises Foucault's late thesis about the emancipatory potential of a highly dualistic, mastery-centred ethics in the Greco-Roman style.

A survey of feminist critiques of women's fitness practices – which many contemporary women already use as a voluntary means of applying ascetic discipline to transform their bodies, minds, and subjectivities – presents a range of more specific

¹ Gay (339/271-272).

² Kirby is quoting Ferdinand de Saussure. As Kirby points out, Saussure theorises the mutability of the sign constituted its 'fundamental difference from an ordinary object' rather than entertaining the idea that 'the stuff of ordinary objects is also a volatile text whose variations are not indifferent to the regime of the sign'.

insights into the utility of these disciplines to minimise the negative effects of contemporary discourses and practices of the body. As the ensuing analysis demonstrates, women's fitness practices are situated in a complex, multi-disciplinary realm which makes it extremely difficult to gauge their potential to resist or transform the prevailing cultural figurations of embodiment. This complexity establishes the need for women to simultaneously form and manage a variety of self-reflexive relationships – relationships of knowing, mastering, and caring for the self – in order to mediate among the competing manifestations of will to power that seek to define their embodied existence. Despite this complexity, studies like these lend themselves to the important observation that discourses and practices of the body which valorise and sustain dualistic perceptions of the self and world are antithetical to feminist praxis because of their tendency to uphold a 'masculine' worldview of domination and oppression. Practicing feminism is, therefore, intimately bound up in practicing nonduality.

The modern penetration of religious-based ascetic disciplines into secular society, which was discussed in Chapter Two, further complicates the idea that asceticism can mould subjectivity in ways that might contravene the docile-useful norm. Analysing the various ways ascetic activity is situated within culture is useful for understanding how something as commonplace as an ascetic act may acquire critical or transformative value and assume a wider political significance. Accordingly, this chapter argues the critical-transformative-political value of asceticism is not simply a function of individual renunciation, detachment, or refusal. Instead, the critical-transformative-political value of asceticism is also a function of its less obvious but equally salient unifying effects. As the founding act of society, the ascetic act is part of the fundamental operating system beneath culture, the meta-

praxis of ethics, the activity which makes communal living possible. Inasmuch as an ascetic act is also a highly social act, therefore, the ascetic activities which comprise a self-care regime may also constitute acts of interconnection and socio-political engagement. This paradoxical functionality is perhaps most apparent in ethical systems that valorise reciprocal forms of care as their most important relational dynamic. As the ensuing discussion suggests, Foucault's late texts, feminist critiques and extensions of these works, and works from the separate domain of feminist moral theory all represent possible discursive platforms for grounding such an ethics. To the extent these discursive platforms also ascribe to a more dynamic and perhaps less dualistic understanding of the body, selfhood, and material reality, they also gesture toward a dynamic-creative form of will to power ethics with the potential to advance the feminist emancipatory agenda.

The chapter closes by introducing yoga, another discursive platform which may prove useful for situating a will to power ethics that simultaneously advances feminist goals. Because yoga relies upon the voluntary practice of ascetic discipline as its primary means for crafting ethical beings, it exhibits a certain likeness to the Greco-Roman ethics of self-mastery described in Foucault's late works. Unlike this ethics, however, the *telos* of yogic *askēsis* is nonduality; an orientation that is not only inherently critical of the dualistic Western discourses and practices of the body but also naturally supportive of an ethics centred upon interconnection and care.

2

Chapter One demonstrates how Nietzsche and Foucault never completely transcend dualism within their own philosophies despite staging a variety of critiques of dualistic thinking. Nietzsche's dualism is most apparent and perhaps most intractable

in the deep structure of his philosophy; in the meaning he associates with flux or the ‘sea of forces’ he calls will to power which (*pace* Heraclitus) is usually strife, conflict, or war-justice. Given these realities, it seems appropriate to caveat Schrift’s suggestion that Nietzsche issues a ‘standing challenge to all future dualisms’ when he announces the world is will to power and nothing besides (*French* 65). *Sans* interpretation, Nietzsche’s polyvalent monism of will to power does present a challenge to dualistic thought, as would any equivalent conceptualisation of material reality. But when Nietzsche uses conflict as a grid of intelligibility for understanding the permutations of will to power or assigns a positive value to flux (‘my Dionysian world of voluptuous delight’),³ he immediately steps back into a dualistic philosophical framework which is just as moralistic as the viewpoints he attempts to interrogate.⁴ Schutte’s analysis is useful here, pointing out how dualistic thinking prevents us from reaching a proper understanding of Nietzsche’s will to power theory (*Beyond* 85). It is perhaps ironic that Nietzsche himself is sometimes to blame for obfuscating the profundity of his own ontological speculations.

Nietzsche’s dualistic revaluation is not without critical value, however, because by recasting flux and power in positive terms, he is interrogating two of humanity’s most deeply held philosophical views. In short, Nietzsche’s revaluation problematises the assumption that flux and power are ‘bad’ or ‘evil’ and instead assigns affirmative values to these components of material reality, recasting them as natural, positive, and healthy aspects of existence. Although these valuations pervade Nietzsche’s corpus in both subtle and overt forms, an obvious example is found in the opening pages of *The Anti-Christ* where Nietzsche asks and then answers his own question: ‘What is good? – All that heightens the feeling of power, the will to power,

³ *Will* (1067/550).

⁴ Nietzsche acknowledges this in a circuitous fashion by stating Heraclitus’s view of the world is moralistic (*Will* 412/222).

power itself in man' (2/115).⁵ Nietzsche's repeated veneration of Dionysus, the god of flux, is perhaps the best evidence of his positive valuation of flux. Life may be ephemeral and subject to the whims of power but Nietzsche does not believe this knowledge should be a cause for *ressentiment* or nihilism. Instead, this realisation becomes the basis for affirming life, however brief or mercurial it might be, and for cultivating and exercising will to power to one's best advantage.

As productive as Nietzsche's revaluation of flux and power might be, it nevertheless sparks a series of subsequent revaluations more problematical in nature. By assigning a positive value to will to power and defining it as strife, for example, Nietzsche also imputes a positive value to conflict, domination, and even the suffering these operations produce. As noted in Chapter One, positive valuations such as these occur with regularity throughout Nietzsche's corpus. Opposing valuations also arise, following the sort of logic Nietzsche asserts when he writes: 'One is *fruitful* only at the cost of being rich in contradictions; one remains *young* only on condition the soul does not relax, does not long for peace'.⁶ In other words, if one accepts the statement 'all is ephemeral' as a true depiction of the nature of the world, then one must also acknowledge that longing for peace and stability is not only futile but also unnatural because nature never rests. Thus for Nietzsche 'life is at an end where the "kingdom of God" begins' because yearning for immortality, permanence, or any of the qualities typically associated with the 'otherworld' is the same as wishing to be situated outside

⁵ A similar statement is made in *The Will to Power*: 'There is nothing to life that has value except the degree of power – assuming that life itself is the will to power' (55/37). Power is further sanctified in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Part III, "Of the Three Evils" (169-170). Nietzsche's belief in will to power as an essential or natural component of the human condition is also clear when he writes: '*Homo natura*. The "will to power"' (*Will* 391/210).

⁶ "Morality as Anti-Nature" (*Twilight* 3/44).

life.⁷ Such thoughts are, as Nietzsche declares in *Twilight*, a ‘condemnation of life by the living’.

In his commentary on *The Twilight of the Idols* and *The Anti-Christ*, R.J. Hollingdale argues Nietzsche insists “‘knowledge’ is always ‘interpretation’ [...] [and] that a ‘fact’ is never something simply seen, it’s a mental construct into which a very large number of habits and prejudices enter’ (195).⁸ Nietzsche’s own work illustrates the accuracy of this statement because even he writes very little about the ‘fact’ of flux or will to power that is completely prejudice-free. When Nietzsche assigns a positive value to what Danto calls ‘power striving’ or equates happiness with the feeling of increasing power,⁹ for example, he implicitly valorises a dualistic interpretation of will to power; one that is quite different from more nondualistic interpretations such as ‘power plays’ or even ‘power produces’. As demonstrated previously, these interpretations have significant consequences for the design of an ethics. The most appropriate ethical response to Nietzsche’s view of a flux-filled, strife-torn world where happiness is attained only by increasing one’s personal power seems to be an aristocratic-barbaric or ‘master’ morality of continuous overcoming similar to the Greco-Roman model elaborated in Foucault’s final works. Obviously, this type of will to power ethics has serious drawbacks for individuals who seek more harmonious and egalitarian models for living.

In light of Foucault’s extended critique of what he calls the ‘dividing practices’ of the human sciences,¹⁰ it seems unlikely he would support, even implicitly, an ethics based upon division, hierarchy, and domination. Yet, because his

⁷ “Morality as Anti-Nature” (*Twilight* 4/45).

⁸ In *Daybreak* Nietzsche also reminds his readers that interpretations (even moral ones) are subject to change by observing there have also been eras where suffering, cruelty, and revenge were counted as virtues and well-being, pity, and peace were considered dangerous (18/17).

⁹ See Danto’s *Nietzsche* (222) and *The Anti-Christ* (2/115).

¹⁰ See *Beyond* (208).

genealogy of ethics implies there is something contemporary audiences can learn from the Greco-Roman example, this must be one plausible interpretation of Foucault's final works. Moreover, even if the salvage value of Greco-Roman ethics is restricted to one practical idea (self-cultivation), it is patently unclear how dualistic practices of the self might enhance personal freedom within a culture where dualistic ascetic disciplinary practices are already used to normalise and oppress individuals. Consequently, if practices of the self represent Foucault's 'line of flight' from the contemporary ethos, a way to 'practice freedom' by refusing what we are, it seems his flight path may be circular because the vehicle he nominates for transcending the current ethos is identical to the one modern institutions now use to produce docile-useful subjects. Although this does not preclude the use of self-cultivation as a means for transcending the present, it does highlight the importance of designing practices that somehow differ from those which are already in place.

In addition, using practices of the self to conjure freedom is especially difficult for women who, as noted in Chapter Two, are already among the favoured targets of modern disciplinary power. As Bordo and other feminist scholars have noted, modern disciplinary power is reliant upon a dualistic metaphysics that disproportionately subjugates women. Bordo's specifically demonstrates how dualistic thinking plays a primary role in what she calls 'axes of continuity' or the meta-discourses and practices that contribute to the formation of specific cultural phenomena including oppression (*Unbearable* 141-142). Although Bordo's specific concern is eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa, her observations about the negative consequences of the dualism imbedded in cultural attitudes toward women's bodies have a much wider application. Because Bordo's thesis is extensively indebted to Foucault (27, 142-143), her analysis also aligns well with the philosophical basis of this study.

Like Foucault, for example, Bordo theorises no natural body exists beyond the grip of cultural discourses and practices and the power relations they signify (142). Instead, the body is 'a surface on which the central rules, hierarchies, and even metaphysical commitments of a culture are inscribed and thus reinforced through [...] concrete language' (165).¹¹ Following Foucault once more, Bordo further theorises the body as a practical, direct locus of social control and consequently, a site of ongoing struggle (165, 184). As a contested text of culture, the deep logic of a culture's discourses and practices of the body will affect not only how individuals experience themselves as human beings but how they are affected by and wield power.

According to Bordo, eating disorders like anorexia stand at the confluence of a number of meta-discourses and practices of dualism, control, power, and gender and, rather than being anomalies or aberrations, are instead characteristic (albeit 'remarkably overdetermined') symptoms of the 'multifaceted and heterogeneous distresses' of our social milieu (141-142). Significantly, the meta-discourses and practices responsible for anorexia are traceable to ancient Greece and even arise in some of the same texts Foucault analyses in his *History*.¹² As Bordo notes, these texts typically present the body and the mind as separable substances and place them in a hierarchical relationship where the mind is tasked with exerting power over and controlling the alien, unruly, and animalistic body (144-145). Because women not only have bodies but (as a range of feminist discourses have asserted) are more closely associated with the body in a general philosophical sense, they are more

¹¹ Bordo is quoting anthropologist Mary Douglas here.

¹² Plato's *Phaedrus*, which Foucault mentions several times in *The Use of Pleasure*, is one example.

vulnerable to cultural discourses and practices aimed at manipulating flesh (143).¹³ If these cultural discourses and practices conceptualise the body as an enemy to be conquered by the will or an unruly substance to be disciplined by the mind, then women's self-reflexive relationships will tend to reflect these dualistic ideations. Moreover, because the mind is typically gendered as masculine in mainstream Western philosophy, the mind's will to power over the body, if not nature herself, becomes equated with the institution of male dominance or patriarchy. Urges to control the passions and vagaries of the flesh thus become institutionalised in disciplinary practices that disproportionately subjugate women because, as Bordo and McWhorter suggest, women *are* flesh, *are* nature, and *are* flux.¹⁴

Elizabeth Grosz makes similar remarks in her survey of mainstream Western philosophy's perceptions of the body (*Volatile* 3-13). At the heart of these perceptions is the mind/body binary that, through a series of lateral associations also noted by Bordo and others, has become correlated with other oppositional pairs including masculine/feminine, reason/ passion, psychology/biology, and transcendence/immanence (3-4). Amongst these oppositional pairs, the first or 'masculine' term – through its alliance with the mind, reason and, to a certain extent, stability rather than flux – is always privileged over the second term. Conversely, through their association with the second term, women have somehow come to be understood as '*more* biological, *more* corporeal, and *more* natural than men' (14). Of

¹³ Kirby, for one, makes a similar claim, stating, 'The identity of woman has traditionally been associated with the essential stuff of the body and nature, just as man's identity has been located in their transcendence and aligned with mind and culture' (*Telling* 67).

¹⁴ See Bordo (*Unbearable* 143) and McWhorter (*Bodies* 139). A passage from Hélène Cixous's *The Laugh of the Medusa* is also evocative of the flux-nature of women:

I wished that woman would write and proclaim this unique empire so that other women, other unacknowledged sovereigns, might exclaim: I, too, overflow: my desires have invented new desires, my body knows unheard-of-songs. Time and again I, too, have felt so full of luminous torrents that I could burst [...] (2040).

course, cultural discourses and practices based upon these types of philosophical assumptions are androcentric and thus implicated in the web of patriarchal power relations which actively oppress women.

Grosz's particular project coalesces around questions of how feminism, which has also been known to perpetuate dualism by uncritically adopting various binaristic philosophical assumptions, can advance a different and perhaps more liberating, non-dichotomous understanding of the body (13, 21). To this end, she establishes a six-point agenda which is basically a multi-faceted call to arms against dualistic, normalising, and essentialist philosophies of the body (21-24). Grosz further suggests that an analysis of 'anomalous' nondualist or anti-dualist Western philosophies including those advanced by Spinoza, Nietzsche, Foucault, and Deleuze may assist feminism's endeavours to reconceptualise the body (13).¹⁵ McWhorter's account of her own struggle to rethink her existence in feminist terms advances a similar anti-dualist or nondualist agenda but places a particular emphasis on the practical aspects of such a project. According to McWhorter, the concerns motivating feminist philosophers cannot be addressed on paper alone but instead require real-life actions aimed at manifesting the transformations and critiques they want culture to emulate ("Practicing" 159). For McWhorter, breaking down the barrier between *living* and *thinking* philosophy was an important part of this process, a crucial step in her own journey to become what she describes as 'a living critique of (albeit still a site of ongoing struggle with) Western metaphysical dualism' (148). In other words, because oppression is produced through the interaction of dualistic discourses and practices of the body, McWhorter believes eliminating it also requires an integrated approach – a *lived* philosophy of nonduality. McWhorter credits two particular

¹⁵ Moira Gatens's work on Spinoza is demonstrative. See "Towards a Feminist Philosophy of the Body" (*Crossing* 67-68).

practices within her lived philosophy of nonduality – gardening and line dancing – with helping her develop new understandings of and interactions with the natural world, culture, and her own body (*Bodies* 162-175). McWhorter’s discovery of dance is particularly relevant to the current study because, as she notes, dance is a ‘disciplined activity [...] [that] requires knowledge and practice and musculature of a sort that nobody’s born possessing’ (171-172). As a bodily discipline, dancing requires skills and capacities that must be acquired through training not unlike the training used to craft the dutiful soldiers and obedient school children Foucault studies in *Discipline and Punish*. Perhaps paradoxically, this sort of training is also a factor in producing the ‘free’ Greek and Roman men Foucault studies in his later works. McWhorter’s ‘turn to discipline’ is also noteworthy because it echoes the actions of other contemporary women who have used bodily discipline, including the discipline afforded by dieting and fitness practices such as aerobics and yoga, as a way to self-style and cultivate personal power. A review of feminist critiques of these practices provides valuable insights into their cultural significance and, more importantly, their liberating potential as examples of Foucauldian ‘practices of freedom’.

3

Feminist studies of diet and fitness practices are frequently staged as investigations into the ability of a particular bodily practice or set of practices to neutralise or reverse the oppressive effects of societal discourses of the body. The relationship between practices and discourses of the body is highly complex and can be understood in a variety of ways. For example, a bodily practice like aerobics may be understood as supportive of certain discourses of the healthy body including those advanced by medical authorities and the health and fitness industry. Nevertheless,

this same practice may also be constituted as unhealthy or repressive by other discursive arenas such as feminist politics. As Lloyd notes, for instance, many feminists are particularly interested in the relationship between fitness practices and an aesthetic discourse which

...Kim Chernin has perceptively labelled the “tyranny of slenderness”; that norm of feminine embodiment that requires women to diet and exercise in order to be slim and which, according to Susie Orbach, endows women with a “culturally induced body insecurity” (“Feminism” 79).¹⁶

As one might imagine studies like Lloyd’s tend to be inconclusive; perhaps reflecting the sheer power of existing societal discourses of feminine embodiment and the fundamental ambivalence of bodily discipline as a tool of existential transformation. A 2002 study by Leslea Haravon Collins, which analyses the contradictions self-styled feminists face when participating in aerobics classes, is characteristic. Among other observations, Collins notes women in her study group felt compelled to rationalise their involvement in a bodily practice typically understood as complicit with the ‘tyranny of slenderness’ rather than resistant or transformative of this norm. As Collins observes:

Living as feminists in a patriarchal world, these women attempt to work out (with) the contradictions by using strategies that, *although not necessarily transformative*, allow them to benefit from the aerobic workout without having to ascribe to the dominant reading of aerobics as trivial or sexualised practice (“Working” 107) (emphasis mine).

Coping strategies – which are basically auxiliary or compensatory practices for addressing the uncomfortable aspects of practice while enhancing feelings of empowerment and enjoyment – included distancing, rejecting the critique, asserting agency, and ‘making do’ (105). Participants also reported various efforts to ‘create meaning’ or reconceptualise their involvement with aerobics around wholly personal, non-oppressive objectives such as stress release, camaraderie, and intrinsic enjoyment

¹⁶ See Chernin’s *Womansize* and Orbach’s *Fat Is a Feminist Issue* and *Hunger Strike*.

to subvert the dominant hegemonic reading of aerobics as a conformist, sexist practice (101).

Collins interprets these efforts to ‘make meaning’ as resistant but ‘not necessarily transformative’ and cites related findings by John Fiske, George Lipsitz, and Pirkko Markula to further support her conclusions (101). Conservative as her assertion is, however, even it must be considered problematical when one observes that the control, competence, and stress release benefits women experience from their practice may simply help them conform within a society which expects them to be ‘nice, civilized people’ (91) or, as Foucault might have it, docile-useful subjects. Collins, quoting additional research by Maguire and Mansfield, suggests these ‘civilised bodies’ are characteristic expressions of a culture where bodies in general are highly regulated (91). The upshot of these findings is that despite their efforts to conceptualise their fitness practices around non-oppressive, personalised goals, women may still produce an ‘oppressed’ or ‘conformist’ body simply because they have chosen to subject their bodies to a disciplinary regime. This outcome is, of course, highly equivocal in terms of its resistance value.

Feminist scholarship also shows that because fitness practices like aerobics simultaneously inhabit multiple discursive arenas, it can be extremely difficult to demonstrate or deny their value as a ‘practice of freedom’. This difficulty stems from the fact that discourses and practices of the body within separate disciplines may complement, contradict, or compete with one another. As Bordo (following Foucault) notes, Western discourses of the body include discourses of not only the ‘intelligible body’ (the scientific, philosophic, and aesthetic representations of the body which manifest as norms of beauty, models of health, and so forth) but discourses of the ‘useful body’ (the practical rules and regulations through which the living body is

trained, shaped, obeys, and responds) (*Unbearable* 181). Although these two forms of discourse exist within a larger, meta-discursive arena of the body and thus sometimes mirror and support one another, they may also work in opposition (181-182). A beautiful body may not be a particularly useful body, for example, and a useful body may not meet societal norms for beauty. Likewise, a body that has been subjected to rigorous ascetic discipline may lack the spiritual qualities historically associated with such practices and vice versa.

Lloyd's study, which compares the positive cultural discourses associated with aerobics with the negative discourses surrounding eating disorders, offers a case in point about the oft competing and contradictory qualities of contemporary Western discourses and practices of the body. For example, diet and exercise practices aimed at eliminating excess body fat – an ostensible goal of aerobicizers and anorexics alike – are, as Lloyd notes, equally bound up in discourses of the healthy/normal body and discourses of the sick/abnormal body ("Feminism" 95). Because very different meanings can be attached to identical practices aimed at achieving identical goals, judging whether a practice is healthy/unhealthy, normal/abnormal, or liberating/oppressive is a highly subjective enterprise and largely dependent upon the disciplinary context in which the practices are discussed. Moreover, diet and exercise practices generally portrayed as salutary across the range of discourses and disciplines run the constant risk of being reconstituted as unhealthy, abnormal, or oppressive if they enter into a largely indeterminate zone of the 'extreme' although, as most women will attest, the ideals these practices aspire to manifest are *extreme on their face* and thus require extreme measures to produce. Consequently, the dutiful practitioner is admired for her discipline as long as she does not 'go too far' even though this may be exactly what is required to attain her goal. Women's avid participation in the

consumer economies propagating cultural discourses and practices of the body further complicate efforts to label a practice as categorically subjugating or liberating or even to assign blame to a clearly identifiable oppressor.

Further complicating efforts to situate women's fitness practices within a continuum of freedom- or oppression-producing actions is the simple reality of the physiological effects of regular exercise upon the female body. Generally speaking, most women's fitness regimes will tend to produce bodies that are either masculinised or some (albeit widely variable) approximation of the slender, toned feminine ideal. These tendencies hold true despite a participant's stated resistance toward or 'critical awareness' of the dominating discourses supporting these ideals. Accordingly, even if a practitioner frames her intent around notions of self-empowerment or resistance to oppressive physical norms, she may still produce a body that replicates the feminine ideal or imitates the masculine. Despite these tendencies, however, some scholars suggest that developing a critical awareness of the dominant (oppressive) fitness discourses may be the key to transforming fitness practices into a Foucauldian-style practice of freedoms. Pirkko Markula, for example, argues that 'the more critical awareness, the greater the possibility of practices of freedom emerging' ("Tuning" 319).¹⁷ Like the coping strategies and efforts to create meaning discussed earlier, developing an attitude of critical awareness or heightened consciousness can be understood as an auxiliary or compensatory practice aimed at minimising the oppressive effects of another bodily practice. As the experience of other 'liberation' movements such as feminism has shown, this 'consciousness-raising' effect is not without importance. Sawicki's feminist reappraisal of the critical value of Foucault's work provides several useful insights here. As Sawicki states, feminist practices of

¹⁷ Markula's specific study object was a Hybrid fitness regime that combined yoga, Pilates, strength training, and Tai Chi.

consciousness-raising assume women's intra- and inter-personal relationships may contain 'elements of domination that can lead to collaboration in [their] own oppression' (*Disciplining* 104). Drawing attention to the nature of these relationships may subsequently engender personal or more widespread social change as individuals develop a greater understanding of the oppressions and freedoms endemic to their social milieu and seek ways to transform existing power networks. Another feminist, bell hooks, makes the same point in slightly more affective terms:

When I look at my life, searching it for a blueprint that aided me in the process of decolonization, of personal and political self-recovery, I know that it was learning the truth about how systems of domination operate that helped, learning to look both inward and outward with a critical eye. Awareness is central to the process of love as a practice of freedom. (*Outlaw* 295).

For hooks, simply noticing the disciplinary forces which have already 'colonized' our bodies and minds is a crucial aspect of practicing freedom.¹⁸ While participating in a self-care project may not wholly disengage an individual from societal power relations or significantly change the corporeal effects of applying discipline to her flesh, it may nevertheless represent a way to render visible and possibly transform the quality of those relations. This logic aligns well with an observation Foucault makes in *Discipline and Punish* about the reasons for the success of generalised contemporary discipline. According to Foucault, generalised contemporary discipline owes its success to its *unspectacular* quality, operating as a sort of ambience – simultaneously indiscreet (everywhere and ever-alert) and discrete (permanent and silent) (177).

Moreover, considering the myriad health benefits associated with regular exercise and good nutrition, shunning fitness or dieting practices altogether seems ill-

¹⁸ One of the aerobics practitioners Collins interviewed aptly describes this as a process of freeing her body from the 'tentacles of culture' ("Working" 105).

advised if not counterintuitive to a lived philosophy of emancipation. After all, as Cressida Heyes observes, these practices are not just repressive but also have salient enabling effects (“Weight Watchers” 136). Heyes further notes that feminist studies like Bordo’s *Unbearable Weight* and Sandra Bartky’s *Femininity and Domination*, which are closely aligned with Foucault’s thesis in *Discipline and Punish*, tend to obscure the ‘paradoxically enabling’ elements of practices like dieting which are better theorised through Foucault’s final works (136).¹⁹ Although this suggestion is certainly debateable considering the fact that Foucault’s final works promote the same ethos of domination he so vehemently critiques in *Discipline and Punish*, Heyes’s point about the enabling effects of self-cultivation is well-taken. As Heyes notes, the capacities an individual cultivates through bodily self-discipline have a ‘resonance and potential’ that can exceed the regimes of normalisation that generate them (138). Fitness practices may, for example, help women cultivate the self-esteem they need to pursue less conventional lifestyles or leave abusive or exploitative relationships. Their example may, in turn, inspire others to follow. Simply extending an ethic of care to oneself can also be vastly empowering for women, especially if they are typically cast in a caregiving role. As Heyes notes: ‘Balancing the often culturally prescribed care of others with more attentive, and prior, care of the self is something that a Foucauldian feminist might well recommend’ (143).²⁰ These commentaries suggest that as technologies of power, practices of the self can enable practitioners to transform their existence in ways that surpass and even interrogate the disciplinary frameworks in which they are practiced.

Heyes also mentions Nikolas Rose’s tripartite schema which, following Foucault, categorises relations to the self as epistemological (know yourself), despotic

¹⁹ Foucault discusses dietetics in *The Use of Pleasure* (95-139).

²⁰ As Heyes notes, O’Grady considers this suggestion at length. See “An Ethics of the Self” in *Feminism and the Final Foucault* (91-117).

(master yourself), or attentive (care for yourself) (138). According to Rose, 'technologies of the self take the form of the elaboration of certain techniques for the conduct of one's relation with oneself' that require individuals to relate to themselves in these three ways ("Identity" 135). What the preceding discussion demonstrates is the nature of the self-reflexive relationship underlying practices of bodily transformation is highly complex and, at times, even paradoxical – or, in short, a reflection of the multifaceted nature of the discourses of the body which inform these practices of the self. Accordingly, participating in a fitness regime may require an individual to constitute her self-reflexive relationship in several ways simultaneously. Following Rose, for example, practitioners may come to see themselves as knowledgeable, caring masters of the self. Studies like those by Markula and Heyes, that point out the enabling effects of all three approaches to self-cultivation underscore the need for a multifaceted approach to self-cultivation to ensure the benefits of any one approach are not lost in pursuit of another. Indeed, although 'thinking otherwise' about bodily discipline may not constitute a transformative strategy in and of itself, when it is used in combination with other techniques, it may become an effective tool of empowerment.

In Nietzschean parlance, constituting one's fitness regime as a practice of freedom becomes a matter of finding ways to harmonise competing manifestations of will to power. As asceticism-based disciplines of the body, fitness practices are fundamentally ambivalent in terms of their potential to uphold, resist, or transform oppressive cultural norms although as noted above they may still tend to produce bodies that are either masculinised or gravitate toward the slender, toned feminine ideal regardless of a practitioner's mindset toward these norms. The liberating or transgressive potential of a fitness practice like aerobics is, therefore, just one

possibility among many. Amidst the complex realm of competing, complementary, and opposing discourses and practices of the body, where so-called healthy practices can change into an unhealthy ones simply by crossing into a largely indeterminate zone of 'the extreme', establishing conditions conducive to the possibility of favourable change is no easy task.

The contemporary woman's body stands at the convergence of a wide range of discourses and practices of embodiment. Some of these discourses and practices, including those which foster the 'tyranny of slenderness' and the production of docile-useful bodies, generate oppressive effects. Given the realities of applying ascetic-based discipline to the female body, these results may be unavoidable to a certain extent. Nevertheless, these same discourses and practices also have the capacity to produce enabling effects in excess of the oppressive disciplinary regimes used to generate them. Knowledge- and care-based compensatory practices such as coping, creating personal meaning, asserting critical awareness, or constituting discipline within an ethic of care may help practitioners minimise the oppressive effects of bodily discipline. Women who use bodily disciplines such as diet and exercise as technologies of the self are, therefore, neither inherently free nor unfree but instead both voluntary and involuntary participants in a complex discursive and practical bodily economy with the ability to produce wide-ranging effects. The complex nature of this economy requires women to cultivate a variety of self-reflexive relationships which, following Rose's tripartite schema, can be understood as epistemological, despotic, and attentive. Harmonising these relationships, which can be understood as competing manifestations of will to power, may be the key to ensuring one's 'turn to discipline' produces more freedom than unfreedom.

Feminist studies like those mentioned in the previous section are also noteworthy for the linkages they elucidate between fitness practices and a group of institutional concerns invested in the promotion of what is basically a secularised form of asceticism. The fitness industry, which utilises a whole array of self-disciplines to craft specific forms of corporeality and subjectivity, is the most obvious examples of this phenomenon. As a form of ascetic discipline, aerobics and other contemporary fitness practices like yoga and Pilates are also subject to the positive and negative cultural significations and interpretations which exist within asceticism's discursive realm including those advanced by Nietzsche and Foucault. Nietzsche's critique of the ascetic ideal is one such signification; while the explication of asceticism's liberating power found in Foucault's final works is another.

Foucault's critique of generalised contemporary discipline is also broadly applicable to asceticism-based fitness practices because of the myriad discursive and practical connections between these two economies. The blending and subsequent dispersal of asceticism *cum* generalised contemporary discipline throughout present-day society problematises the oppositional, resistive, or counter-cultural status of all forms of personal asceticism. In a society defined as disciplinarian, the voluntary practice of asceticism becomes a fraught, if not downright paradoxical, method for ensuring personal freedom. On one hand, ascetic acts are nothing more than commonplace cultural performances that simply uphold conventional mores and thus hold little or no resistive potential. Yet, on the other hand, ascetic acts also hold the promise of serving as privileged markers of difference because of their innate capacity to fashion new corporeal and subjective states. Valantasis describes this capacity

using terminology reminiscent of J.L. Austin,²¹ characterising them as ‘performances within a dominant social environment intended to inaugurate a new subjectivity, different social relations, and an alternative symbolic universe’ (‘Constructions’ 797). As Valantasis attests, these bodily performances have the potential to raise the very issue of culture by ‘structuring an opposition’ (795).²² Nevertheless, because culture rests upon an ascetic base and uses ascetic discipline as a means to ensure conformity, it can be very difficult to delineate between an ascetic act that actively supports culture and one that might resist or transform it. Making these delineations is crucial, however, because through them one can better understand the resistive or transformative potential of asceticism.

Walter Kaelber has devised a five-fold typology which is useful for conceptualising the relationships between asceticism and culture. Following Max Weber and H. Richard Niebuhr, Kaelber asserts asceticism can be situated: (1) against culture, (2) within culture, (3) beyond culture, (4) in paradox with culture, and (5) as transformative of culture (‘Understanding’ 324). In discussing the first type of relationship, Kaelber suggests any form of extreme or deviant ascetic behaviour may serve as a ‘language of challenge or protest’ against culture (325). Hermits and wandering monks or *samnyāsins* are archetypal ‘protesters of culture’ or ‘anti-culturalists’; embodying their rejection of culture through their physical detachment from society and its institutions. Be this as it may, the broader transformative value of this type of extreme renunciation seems equivocal considering the very act of disengaging from culture may leave an individual with little or no access to the resources and alliances needed to manifest cultural change. The longstanding toleration of eremitism and other forms of anti-culturalism within modern societies

²¹ See Austin’s ‘Performative Utterances’ (Norton 1430-1442).

²² Valantasis is quoting Harpham here.

also suggests such acts pose little threat to the social order.²³ Although society may cast a suspicious eye toward a homeless man or an isolationist religious cult or even endeavour to bring them back into mainstream society, such lifestyles appear to be more or less accepted in Western nations like the United States, a status that signalling their relative neutrality in terms of fomenting widespread social transformation.

The second form of asceticism, where the ascetic is understood as a sort of ‘cultural hero’ or ‘pinnacle of cultural achievement and mainstream values’ (325), also seems highly ambivalent in terms of its resistance value despite Kaelber’s assertion that ‘the ascetic of culture may effect significant social change’ (326). This is due to the rather obvious reason that anyone who embodies mainstream values does little to critique them unless that embodiment is consciously parodic or in some other way destabilises naturalised categories of identity.²⁴ Nietzsche would no doubt cast the ‘ascetic as cultural hero’ as a living incarnation of the ascetic ideal; able to foster social change only to the extent he or she serves as a target for critique. In Foucauldian terms, such an individual might be understood as a sort of perfected docile-useful body – a flesh-and-blood cautionary tale for those who would resist the normalising influences of modern disciplinarian society.

The third form, asceticism beyond culture, has close alliances with the first type because it also represents a rejection of culture and its worldly aims and endeavours. As Kaelber notes, in this form of asceticism, worldly endeavour and value may serve as a foundation for attaining the ascetic goal of liberation but this objective cannot be attained unless worldly preoccupations are left behind (326).

Kaelber points to the Hindu practice of staged renunciation of worldly aims as

²³ As noted in Chapter Four, there are exceptions to this rule. See, for example, Feuerstein’s comments about the social implications of renunciatory trends in pre-modern India (*Tradition* 68-69).

²⁴ Judith Butler’s analysis of drag performances in *Gender Trouble* is noteworthy here.

illustrative of this form of asceticism (326-327). Due to its inherent devaluation of the world, however, this is the form of asceticism that Nietzsche would have considered either futile or utterly conservative because it does nothing to spark the revaluation of values necessary to foster social change. Moreover, as individuals leave behind their worldly pursuits, they enter into the realm of nihilism where will to power is forsaken.

The fourth typological category, which Kaelber asserts is the form of asceticism advanced by India's *Bhagavad Gītā*, does not advocate worldly disengagement but instead proposes a sort of paradoxical compromise – renunciation *in action* or selfless agency (327). As the ensuing chapter will discuss in greater detail, this ascetical orientation presents some interesting ethical, if not socio-political, consequences because it enjoins practitioners to acknowledge their interconnectedness with the world and then act in a manner befitting this expanded notion of selfhood.²⁵ This ideal of selfless agency is expressed in stanza 3.20 of the *Gītā* where Krishna declares: 'Only by selfless action / did Janaka and other wise kings / govern, and thus assure / the wellbeing of the whole world' (65).²⁶

The fifth and final form of asceticism – transformative asceticism – casts the ascetic as a social engineer in the tradition of Gandhi ("Understanding" 327). In this form of asceticism, the ascetic's quest for personal transformation is intertwined with a larger quest to transform culture. In his discussion of transformative asceticism, Kaelber mentions the example of Mirabai, a medieval Indian *bhakti* poet-saint who

²⁵ As ensuing discussions will demonstrate, women may more culturally pre-disposed than men to understand their subjectivities in relational or nondual terms, a fact that may render them more likely to act selflessly. Although selflessness is neither inherently empowering nor disempowering on its face, it can lead to a kind of self-sacrifice or self-effacement that Nietzsche would no doubt argue is problematic because it creates resentment. Nevertheless, women may also find that inhabiting a selfless persona can be an effective way to garner respect and power without appearing to threaten the patriarchal power structure.

²⁶ The Sanskrit word for 'wellbeing' is *lokasangraham*.

rejected her royal status and family to worship Krishna or, in other words, to pursue personal enlightenment by becoming a yogin (an atypical subjectivity for women at that time). Although Mirabai's rejection of conventional mores did not spark a full-scale feminist revolution in medieval India, her example continues to serve as an inspiration for women who endeavour to live differently.²⁷ Indeed, as John Stratton Hawley suggests, Mirabai is iconoclastic if only by virtue of her status as India's only female *bhakti* poet ("Mirabai" 301).

Of these five ways of juxtaposing asceticism and culture, the two that appear to have the greatest potential for affecting widespread social change are the last two, paradoxical asceticism and transformative asceticism. Paradoxical asceticism has the potential to bring about positive social change because it (paradoxically) utilises personal renunciation as a way to deepen social engagement. According to this paradigm, selfish, individualistic, and egocentric actions are renounced for actions which uphold an expanded or nondual notion of selfhood. The sense of interconnectedness or nonduality one attains from renouncing egoistic concerns can subsequently serve as the foundation for an ethics of care in the Foucauldian style.

²⁷ Feuerstein offers additional information about Mirabai's life (*Tradition* 293), as does Hawley ("Mirabai" 301-319) and Stephen Mitchell (*Enlightened* 160). Mirabai's poem, "Why Mira Can't Go Back to Her Old House", illustrates her transgressive orientation:

The colours of the Dark One have penetrated Mira's body; all the
other colours washed out.
Making love with the Dark One and eating little, those are my
pearls and my carnelians.
Meditation beads and the forehead streak, those are my scarves
and my rings.
That's enough feminine wiles for me. My teacher taught me this.
Approve me or disapprove me: I praise the Mountain Energy
night and day.
I take the path that ecstatic human beings have taken for
centuries.
I don't steal money, I don't hit anyone. What will you charge me
with?
I have felt the swaying of the elephant's shoulders; and now you
want me to climb on a jackass? Try to be serious (*Enlightened* 77).

It is worth noting that modern interpretations sometimes evacuate Mirabai's life of its transgressive salience, rendering her as a sort of domestic saint or idealised example of asceticism within culture. See Kaelber ("Understanding" 327-328).

Kalpana Ram, following Martin Heidegger's thesis in *Being and Time*, asserts the importance of care or concern (*Sorge*) as an underlying basis for feminism's 'ethical call to action' ("Temporality" 203-207).²⁸ As Ram notes, however, *Sorge* is not interchangeable with the 'wellbeing of others' but instead must be understood as manifesting in diverse ways that run the gamut of all the possible subjective stances an individual may take toward the world and its inhabitants including solicitude, indifference, or even disdain (204). Illuminating the diverse manifestations of *Sorge*, which (as Ram also observes) are *pre-ethical* conditions of being in the world (205), may nonetheless help individuals construct their ethical responses more consciously. To the extent that paradoxical asceticism can help foster feelings of oneness with the world or, at the very least, remind us that the world matters to us ('shedding light upon *Sorge*'), it may also assist individuals in transforming their ethical orientations. Indifference may, in turn, be transformed into care, disdain replaced by compassion, and so forth.

Unlike the paradoxical ascetic, the transformative ascetic (who also sees her wellbeing as intertwined with that of the world) makes no attempt to disengage from the fruit of her actions but instead, as Kaelber suggests, intentionally sets out to change the world by serving as a role model or performing acts of service ("Understanding" 327). Gandhi's willingness to suffer the hardships of prison and, in the end, to sacrifice his own life to ensure India's independence is illustrative of the mode of transformative asceticism. In addition, feminism's orientation toward the alleviation of women's suffering is, as Ram suggests, not unlike the call to action one finds in various religious or philosophical prototypes including the ethical stance

²⁸ The triangular influences amongst Heidegger, Nietzsche, and Foucault are noted. See *Technologies* (12-13). Timothy Rayner's *Foucault's Heidegger* is useful for elucidating the connections between these three thinkers. Schutte also presents an interesting critique of Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche's theory of will to power (*Beyond* 84-87).

embodied by the transformative ascetic (“Temporality” 205-206). From a Nietzschean standpoint, this shared orientation comes as little surprise because, as Nietzsche notes in *The Gay Science*, all philosophies presuppose suffering and sufferers (370/328). If, as Ram asserts, feminism can be understood as a ‘political project that seeks to release women from suffering’ (“Temporality” 206), then perhaps it too is a form of transformative asceticism – a set of discourses and practices designed to alleviate the present-day suffering of women and the suffering-yet-to-come. Feminism’s linked efforts to advance a more liberating, non-dichotomous understanding of the body and illuminate practices in keeping with this less dualistic discursive construct are also integral to this project.

In 1990 Sandra Bartky declared that feminists lack an ‘effective political practice around issues of personal transformation’ (*Femininity* 61). Perhaps such a politics may be found somewhere amidst the overlapping disciplines of religion and philosophy or, more specifically, with the realm of ascetic discourses of individual transformation which simultaneously aim to effect positive social change.

5

The discussion thus far has identified several separate, yet highly complementary discursive foundations for such an ethics. Amidst the works of Nietzsche, Foucault, and feminist theory there is a meeting ground upon which this ethics might establish roots and begin to grow. Although each of these discursive platforms is unique, they share several common features. These include a profound critique of sovereignty, a conception of reality and selfhood as mutable and interrelated, a strong nondualistic bent, and a futuristic orientation.²⁹ Nietzsche, for example, acknowledges this

²⁹ With the possible exception of Nietzsche’s work, each of these philosophies also asserts the stated or implicit goal of minimising human suffering whether in the form of a carceral society or gender

futuristic orientation through his Zarathustra, who proclaims: ‘Superman is my care; *he* – not man – is my first and only care: not my neighbour, nor the poorest, nor the greatest sufferer, nor the best’.³⁰ Foucault’s essay on Bataille, which is a meditation on the language of transgression, professes a similar orientation. According to Foucault, ‘in spite of so many scattered signs [transgression finds] its space and the illumination of its being [...] almost entirely in the future’ (*Language* 33). Ram illuminates the same sensibility in feminism when she characterises it as ‘a highly conscious and interventionalist structure of action that makes it a political project oriented towards *change*’ (“Temporality” 203). The futuristic orientation of these discourses binds them together as philosophies of transcendence within immanence, establishing the need for what Deleuze might characterise as a ‘line of flight’ from the current ethos. As Claire Colebrook explains, Deleuze theorises all forms of life, including bodies and the cultures they inhabit, are made up of connections (*Understanding* xxiv). Just as our DNA sequences are prone to mutation and can produce altered life forms, any body or territory can ‘open up to a line of flight that would transform it into something else’ (xxv). Manifesting this ‘something else’ is the *telos* of a dynamism-based will to power ethics.

All three of these philosophies also acknowledge, albeit in varying degrees, the importance of practices in establishing, upholding, and transforming a particular worldview. Although it is frequently situated as separate from other practices that involve bodies and other material things, discourse is also a practice; a practice where, according to Foucault, knowledge and power join together (*Will* 100). In his middle

oppression. Even Nietzsche, who frequently praises suffering as a means for fostering growth and self-overcoming, seems a bit hypocritical when these sentiments are juxtaposed against an *oeuvre* wholly oriented toward overcoming nihilism and affecting positive change. Vincent Leitch lends support here; observing how ‘human suffering figures largely in Nietzsche’s thought’ and cautioning readers against understanding Nietzsche solely as a ‘philosopher of heroic individualism’ (*Norton* 872).

³⁰ Part IV, “Of Higher Men” (3/253-254).

and late works, Foucault demonstrates how the power of discourse is never simply a function of its existence but instead is also bound up in the practices which surround it. A comment from Foucault's "The Discourse on Language" lends itself to a rethinking of the real power of words:

[D]iscourse is really only an activity, of writing in the first case, of reading in the second and exchange in the third. This exchange, this writing, this reading never involves anything but signs. Discourse thus nullifies itself, in reality, in placing itself at the disposal of the signifier (*Archaeology* 228).

Although Foucault's point about the self-destructive tendencies of discourse is well-taken, perhaps Kirby's Saussurean statement that 'what insists within the sign is flux' is more useful here (*Telling* 66). Although the meaning and power of discourses may fluctuate, discourse – as an activity that speaks the self and is inscribed upon the self through various practices of the self – is not devoid of any capacity to effect real change in the world. It is a practice which, just like other intellectual and bodily practices of transcendence within immanence, is potentially transformative on a grand scale.

The transformative power of practices is also reflected in the works of Nietzsche, Foucault, and feminism. Nietzsche's practical orientation is perhaps most apparent in the methodologies and approaches he used to produce his corpus – in his genealogies, critiques, and efforts to reevaluate the value of concepts like flux, power, and morality. Nietzsche's personal practices of solitude, itinerancy, and meditation are also indissoluble from his textual output because without these practices, it is unlikely he would have produced the philosophical works he did. Likewise, Foucault's Nietzschean archaeologies and genealogies, his penchant for paradoxes and reversals of thought,³¹ and advocacy of the concept of a *lived* philosophy which inherently problematises the traditional separation of theory and praxis express his

³¹ See White's essay on Foucault in *Structuralism and Since* (81-115).

dedication to manifesting positive change in the world. Foucault's personal practices of protest and political activism also demonstrate his commitment to 'practicing what he preached'.³² Feminism's commitment to positive change is self-evident in its ongoing and multifaceted efforts to secure equal rights for women and expose and correct the institutionalised biases of culture. The practical orientation of these philosophies demonstrates Foucault's dictum that freedom is work or the result of deliberate, ongoing practices of the self situated within a particular socio-cultural environment (*Final* 3-4). Inasmuch as a professional or personal practice has a positive effect upon human liberty, it can be understood as a practice of freedom. To the extent that practices of freedom require discipline or perhaps even constitute a discipline, they can also be understood as forms of paradoxical or transformative asceticism. A care-based ethics, which finds its basis in a constructed view of subjectivity and focuses upon interconnection and mutual concern as its primary means to mould ethical beings, is also in keeping with the philosophical basis of transformative asceticism.

Foucault's final works and the works of feminist Foucauldians like McWhorter are detailed explorations of this ancient but somewhat disused ethical model of care. The separate discipline of feminist moral theory has also extensively explored the idea of a care-based ethics. It is noteworthy that on a more schematic level, these investigations represent something more profound than a reorientation of ethics toward care. They also signify acceptance of the idea that selfhood is relational, mutable, and somewhat opaque rather than autonomous, stable, and coherent. In short, they explore the wider ethical consequences of a perception of reality as flux or dynamism-based will to power. This concept is the foundation of the

³² See Macey's *The Lives of Michel Foucault*.

Nietzschean-Foucauldian worldview but despite its longstanding and widespread acceptance by the academy in one form or another, it is a concept that continues to be marginalised in daily life, overshadowed by discourses and practices which comprise a practical metaphysics of the sovereign self.

What are the ethical ramifications of Nietzsche's assertion that self and world are 'will to power and nothing besides'? The preceding discussion demonstrates the answer to this question is dependent upon one's interpretation of will to power. As noted in Chapter One, Foucault's late works adopt a more Apollonian approach where will to power is interpreted as domination. This interpretation engenders an ethical response along the lines of those found in the ascetic traditions of ancient Greece and Rome which professes only one relational dynamic is intrinsically honourable and valorised without question – domination (*Pleasure* 215). On the other hand, Nietzsche's corpus (and particularly *Zarathustra* and *The Gay Science*) advocates a somewhat more Dionysian approach, a dynamism-based will to power ethics of flux, levity, dance, and 'overflowing energy that is pregnant with future' (*Gay* 370/329). Echoes of the Apollonian approach are also found in Nietzsche's work, just as Foucault's work contains gestures toward the Dionysian, particularly in his discussions of aesthetics and the open-ended work of self-cultivation. Both men also recognise that just as an ethics of self-care necessitates the cultivation of a certain amount of self-knowledge, any ethics, even an ethics of perpetual Becoming, requires certain practices of self-mastery. Moreover, practicing freedom is not about stepping outside culture to some mythical state of innocent anarchy because, as Nietzsche and Foucault both assert, freedom is a product of culture. Instead, practicing freedom means finding ways to modify the diagram of power relations or inter-social abstract

machine that makes subjects within a particular culture so that existential possibilities are expanded rather than limited.

The following sections offer more detailed discussions of three of the more robust and promising discursive platforms that might be used to situate a dynamism-based, care-centred will to power ethics which advances the feminist emancipatory agenda. They include Foucault's final works, critiques and extensions of these works by Foucauldian feminists like McWhorter, and feminist moral theory. The ensuing discussions are not meant to be exhaustive explorations into the suitability of any one vehicle for advancing this ethical perspective. Instead, they simply illuminate possible 'lines of flight' from the existing ethos, taking into account the extensive and highly productive work already completed by others. As such, the following sections are not detailed charts of the new territories but instead are more akin to early explorers' maps which contain a mix of details, bold demarcations, and blank spaces awaiting further delineation. To paraphrase Foucault, these discursive arenas represent vantage points from which it may become possible to rethink the necessities of the present, establish intentions and trajectories for productive change, and perhaps, one day, to venture out a ways from there (*Pleasure* 11). Because of its flux-based and contingent nature, a dynamism-based will to power ethics will necessarily ground itself in a space that is part knowing and part unknowing, secure in only one truth, that no ethico-political choice is, as Foucault notes, without its dangers (*Beyond* 231-232).

6

Foucault's final work, *The Care of the Self*, contains an extended discussion about care, conjugality, reciprocity, and other communitarian values that may provide a platform for developing a more robust form of dynamism-based will to power ethics.

Values like care and reciprocity are integral to a dynamism-based will to power ethics because an ethics that valorises care helps its practitioners uphold a perception of reality and selfhood as interrelated. In other words, placing care (*Sorge*) at the centre of an ethics serves as a continual reminder that we are in the world and its wellbeing and our own are interconnected. Although an ethics of care can be focused on service to others, it is also self-serving because it creates conditions where everyone has the opportunity to thrive.

According to Foucault, certain permutations occurred in the arts of living and the care of the self around the time of the decline of the Greek city-states (*Care* 147-185). These changes were particularly evident in the dynamics of certain primary interpersonal relationships such as marriage. Foucault argues that during this period of social change and upheaval, virtues of reciprocity and unity became more important and although these concerns would not entirely replace the long-standing socio-cultural norm of domination, they transformed practices of self-care and the social dynamics surrounding them.³³ Foucault's observations are not important inasmuch for the commentary they provide on the philosophy of marriage in Greco-Roman society but for the insights they offer into the human proclivity for communal living and companionship where individuals 'exchange mutual care' and 'compete in attentiveness and kindness for one another' (151). As Foucault, quoting Hierocles and Musonius, states: 'Humans are made to live in twos and also to live in a multiplicity. Mankind is at once conjugal and social; the dual relation and the plural relation are linked together' (153). Moreover, because the Greco-Roman paradigm assumes there can be no 'essential and primary incompatibility between the relationship one establishes with oneself and the rapport one forms with the other', the arts of

³³ Interestingly, Baudelaire makes a slightly different argument, stating that the self-care phenomenon of dandyism 'appears above all in periods of transition, when democracy is not yet all-powerful, and aristocracy is only just beginning to totter and fall' ("Dandy" 799).

conjugalities are also seen as an indispensable component of the arts of self-cultivation (163).

These values, which are quite dissimilar to those underpinning the mastery-centred ethics which otherwise dominates the pages of Foucault's final texts, are the essential building blocks of a reconceived dynamism-based will to power ethics valorising care and communality rather than domination and division. Foucault's observation that care became a more important value during a time of social upheaval and uncertainty is also noteworthy. Although uncertainty has always been a certainty, it seems clear that the contemporary era is a period of profound, worldwide change in nearly every area of life including religion, politics, social life, economics, technology, and even the natural world. While a domination-based ethics focused on increased stability and autonomy might appear to be the most appropriate response to a world marked by incessant and pervasive change, perhaps a more pragmatic and flexible ethics that acknowledges flux and interconnection might prove more effective in meeting the challenges of the contemporary era.

Foucault's incomplete, if not one-dimensional elaboration of the pleasures associated with self-care and how these pleasures may be associated with freedom represents another point of departure for further study.³⁴ In *The Care of the Self*, Foucault describes the enjoyment derived from achieving a state of self-domination as an utterly serene, Apollonian form of pleasure in the Stoic mode (68). Significantly, Hadot argues Foucault's interpretation of the pleasures associated with self-care is misleading because it fails to account for another form of enjoyment the Stoics associated with their ascetic disciplinary practices – namely, the 'cosmic' joy of 'plunging oneself into the totality of the world' (*Philosophy* 208). According to

³⁴ Several contemporary feminist authors, including McWhorter and Collins, have also noted the importance of pleasure in practices of the self. See *Bodies* (176) and "Working" (89-92).

Hadot, Foucault's reading focuses too heavily upon a materialist conception of the self and does not acknowledge the self's transcendent potential in the manner it is recognised in the supporting texts (207).³⁵ If Hadot's reading is correct,³⁶ the enjoyment associated with self-care is not just the sort of mundane pleasure which comes from self-mastery but also something much more 'cosmic' and perhaps even 'Zarathustrian' – the joy of 'going beyond oneself' or self-surmounting (207). For the Stoics, reaching this goal was not a theistic enterprise but a wholly rational one, a way to act in accordance with 'universal reason'. Hadot believes Foucault chose to bracket this aspect of Stoic thought, although he was undoubtedly aware of it, because it did not align well with his 'tacit attempt' to offer a contemporary audience an alternative model of life (208). Be this as it may, eliding this feature of Stoic philosophy may weaken Foucault's thesis because it gives readers the impression self-care is simply concerned with self-repression when it actually has much more profound and expansive objectives.

Moreover, although Stoic ethics sought to harmonise individual action with universal reason, contemporary practitioners could place other, less essentialist or immutable concepts at the centre of their ethics including will to power. Situating an ethics around will to power does not even necessarily rule out a theistic moral approach since not all deities are constituted as stable or unchanging entities. The Greek god Dionysus and the Indian goddess Prakriti, deities of flux and universality, are archetypal in this regard. In fact, worshipping a god or goddess of ubiquitous change seems rather Nietzschean because it serves as a way to sanctify transitoriness, revere the necessary unity of creation and destruction, and affirm the joyful-sorrowful

³⁵ Foucault is specifically quoting Seneca's twenty-third *Letter* in this discussion (*Care* 66-67).

³⁶ It is important to remember that Hadot, not Foucault, is the antiquities scholar. See *Pleasure* (7-8). Wolfgang Detel's *Foucault and Classical Antiquity* provides additional analysis of other possible misinterpretations perpetuated by Foucault.

totality of existence.³⁷ Such a deity could also serve as an embodiment of nonduality or an existential state of ‘beyond good and evil.’³⁸ Thus, as Zarathustra suggests, perhaps there is much to be gained by believing only in those gods or goddesses who know how to dance.³⁹

Foucault also mishandles an associated idea in *Discipline and Punish* when he asserts asceticism differs from generalised contemporary discipline because its purpose was ‘to obtain renunciations rather than increases of utility and which, although they involved obedience to others, had as their principal aim an increase of the mastery of each individual over his own body’ (137). As discussed in Chapter Two, this assertion seems misguided, considering that most religious scholars and authorities would argue the ultimate goal of asceticism as something transcendental such as achieving a state of union or harmony with the cosmos or a chosen deity. Hadot’s critique suggests Greco-Roman self-care practices also had this orientation which, of course, is something altogether different from achieving a state of mastery or domination.⁴⁰ Although self-mastery is an important if not indispensable component of an ethics, it is an unlikely *telos* for an ethics, at least within the discursive realms traversed by Foucault’s middle and late works. Renunciation may be the basis for civilisation as Freud and others have suggested but civilisation’s goal must be something else, something more ‘cosmic’ such as mutual wellbeing or

³⁷ See *The Will to Power* (1050/539). Luce Irigaray makes a related observation from a feminist perspective, stating:

The only diabolical thing about women is their absence of God, and the fact that, without a God, they find themselves squeezed into models which don’t suit them, which exile them, go in their stead, mask them, cut them up inside, taking away their progress in love, art, though, her/their ideal and divine achievement (*Divine* 6).

³⁸ Interestingly, Rayner reads *Discipline and Punish* a work of ficto-criticism, which is also a gesture toward nonduality. See *Foucault’s Heidegger* (59-85)

³⁹ Part I, “Of Reading and Writing” (33).

⁴⁰ This does not preclude the notion of ‘surrendering’ to a chosen deity. Hinduism is no exception this idea. In the *Bhagavad Gītā*, for example, Krishna repeatedly asks Arjuna to surrender to him. See Chapter 12, ‘The Yoga of Devotion’, in particular.

providing a nurturing environment for self-actualisation. And although there are certain pleasures associated with mastery, there are more profound joys beyond exerting control including those inherent in losing control and erasing separation – in a word, the Dionysian pleasures of excess, dissolution, and forgetting.⁴¹

A second source of inspiration for a dynamism-based will to power ethics centred on care is found in feminist critiques and extensions of Foucault's late texts. As the discussion in Chapter Two illustrates, feminists have been debating the salvage value of Foucault's final works for at least two decades. During the course of this debate, compelling arguments have been made both for and against his thesis of self-care as a positive alternative to contemporary Christian-based mores. Although Foucault's idea has merit, the specific utility of the Greco-Roman model he describes in the second and third volumes of his *History* is nevertheless circumscribed because of its reliance on the core relational dynamic of mastery. In addition to its representing no real alternative to the status quo, this androcentric, domination-based ethics must be considered hostile to the feminist agenda. Perhaps ironically, feminists may be better served by an ethics which revolves around the very qualities of flux, interdependence, and pragmatism which philosophers have used to denigrate and marginalise women since time immemorial. If transience is reality and life *is* a woman as Nietzsche suggests, then the appropriate ethical response must be to devise discourses and practices supportive of flux and interconnection rather than those which would deny these existential qualities.

There are numerous ways to consider this matter, including one approach which recalls the Nietzschean and Foucauldian ideas of nihilism and confinement as the supreme afflictions of modernity. As the discussion in Chapter One shows,

⁴¹ Nietzsche presents a more extended discussion of Dionysian joys and values in *The Will to Power* (1050/539-540).

Nietzsche and Foucault view nihilism and confinement as the key human responses to the existential angst generated from our realisation that ‘all is transitory’ and ‘all is painful’. As physicians of culture, philosophers like Nietzsche and Foucault assess the efficacy of conceptual and practical treatments like nihilism, confinement, or the oft prescribed ‘medicine’ of bodily discipline to address the disease of flux and the fear and pain it represents. Yet the ‘truth’ of the underlying and seemingly universal assessment of flux as problematical remains relatively uncontested. Foucault’s analysis in *The Use of Pleasure* begins with an identification of the anxieties underlying ancient sexuality; fears that spark certain discursive and practical exigencies such as stigmatisations, abstinences, and models of conduct (15). Although Foucault does not credit his precursor, this analysis can be understood as a historically specific sketch of the ramifications of Nietzsche’s dictum ‘fear is the mother of morality’ (*Beyond* 201/123). If fear is the generating force behind morality, then fear of flux may be the most prolific mother of all.

Understanding the various exigencies that manifest from anxieties about the transitory nature of existence is a crucial, if not central, task of philosophy; a diagnostic tool *par excellence*. One wonders, however, what ethics might arise from a worldview where flux was left unproblematised and instead simply understood as a benign condition of existence, not in the medical sense but in the sense of a legal proviso or stipulation. Insofar as Nietzsche and Foucault advocate a Dionysian approach where the self is understood as a dynamic, open-ended work in progress – an aesthetics of existence – their ethical frameworks support an unproblematised concept of flux. Nevertheless, when they advocate a strongly Apollonian approach of control and domination, this orientation is weakened, lost amid the *principium individuationis* and the will to order and stable sense of identity it engenders. In *The*

Birth of Tragedy, Nietzsche writes that as an ‘ethical deity’, Apollo is the god of ‘know thyself’ and ‘nothing in excess’; whereas, Dionysus is a god of ‘forgetting’ and ‘excess revealed as truth’ (4/46). Contemporary culture is dominated by the Apollonian approach and, as Nietzsche suggests, a Socratic love of knowledge which perpetuates the delusion that the ‘eternal wound of existence’ can somehow be healed through reason or perhaps science (*Birth* 18/109). Although these perspectives have certain merits, they tend to obscure or deny the metaphysical comforts associated with another (more Heraclitean) perspective that ‘beneath the whirl of phenomena eternal life flows on indestructibly’ (18/109-110). Perhaps this is the true tragedy of the Greeks – the triumph of Apollo and Socrates and the simultaneous forgetting of the message of Heraclitus and Dionysus.

Certain themes that pervade Foucault’s *oeuvre* and particularly, his middle and late works, also provide more insight into an ethics of flux. These works feature a number of skirmishes in the ongoing battle over subjectivity which can be broadly grouped into two categories – conflicts over forms and relationships between forms.⁴² In the category of forms, Foucault’s work demonstrates how humanity has repeatedly erected structures to define Being, imprisoning the self through various discourses that seek to explain not only what we are in material, relational, and reflexive terms but what we should be.⁴³ Discourses on forms include a wide range of philosophical, religious, and scientific speculation on so-called indigenous Being, encompassing theories as diverse as the rational, sovereign subject of the Enlightenment and the sin-stained subject of Christianity. These discourses are the textual spaces where power and knowledge join together to profess truth about what it really means to be human.

⁴² The word ‘forms’ should not be confused with the Platonic notion of ‘Forms’. Indeed, the forms that humanity constructs around Being are akin to the passing shadows of Plato’s cave despite being routinely mistaken for something real.

⁴³ This three-dimensional schema is Seigel’s. See *The Idea of the Self* (5-6).

The Foucauldian or, more generally, the late modern subject represents ‘ground zero’ in this process of self-definition, a void that implicitly critiques each preceding representation of selfhood. A second sub-grouping subsumed within the larger category of forms is what might be called ‘aspirational’ forms or prescriptions for Being. Aspirational forms include those ontological states we simultaneously valorise and strive to achieve such as liberty and purity – the ostensible *teloses* of practices of the self (*Pleasure* 27-28). Aspirational forms assume both the possibility and desirability of transformation and, in many cases, are based upon an assumption of indigenous Being as somehow flawed or obscured by ignorance, sin, or other defects.

Not only do discourses create forms for Being, they also establish relations between these forms which subsequently act as guidelines for the work of self-transformation. This is the site where practices such as self-discipline begin to operate in concert with discourses to effect material changes in bodies and minds, eventually moulding the indigenous self into the aspirational self. Relations between forms manifest diversely but are frequently based upon the aforementioned conviction that something is intrinsically wrong with the self and needs to be repressed or renounced in order for the self to be right, worthy, or good. Although, as Freud and others have noted, living in a multiplicity requires a certain amount of renunciation, perhaps these renunciations have become excessive or too heavily influenced by negative conceptions of the indigenous self – throwing ‘filth on creation’ or creating ‘despisers of the body’. Even if one believes that ‘becoming what one is’ requires work, the work of self-transformation need not originate from a remedial urge. It can also originate from a creative-aesthetic impulse to self-cultivate or create oneself as a work of art. In short, the work of self-transformation need not centre upon self-domination

but can instead honour a notion of selfhood as neither good nor bad but simply flux, open-ended possibility, or our essence as ‘will to power and nothing besides’.

Inasmuch as a dynamism-based will to power ethics acknowledges and venerates a Heraclitean-Nietzschean reality where ‘all things flow’ or, as Foucault himself suggests, upholds this reality by establishing a preference for ‘mobile arrangements over systems’, it may represent an avenue for reconsidering these or other fundamental assumptions about existence. In addition, to the extent that such an ethics is contrary to contemporary mores which subjectify and oppress women, it also aligns well with the goals of the feminist project. Although the works of Foucauldian feminists such as McWhorter, Taylor, McLaren, and others have already established a firm foundation for this endeavour, further analysis of Foucault’s final texts or the ancient ethical paradigms he analyses in those texts, or paradigms he *exempts* from study, may also prove productive.⁴⁴ Stripping back moralities and other cultural constructs to expose the fears and existential assumptions which lurk beneath them is also a crucial aspect of this endeavour.

7

Coincidental to the time when Foucault’s final works were being published in the early 1980s, academics from the separate discipline of moral theory began conceptualizing a feminist ethics of care.⁴⁵ According to Virginia Held, the central focus of the feminist ethics of care is upon the ‘compelling moral salience of attending to and meeting the needs of the particular others for whom we take

⁴⁴ One wonders, for example, what might be learned from feminist studies of the discourses and practices surrounding the cult of Dionysus or Indian gods or goddesses of a similar ilk. After all, as Nietzsche prophetically declares, we will never truly know the Greeks as long as the hidden, subterranean ‘Dionysian’ entrance to them remains blocked (*Will* 1051/541).

⁴⁵ Virginia Held marks Sara Ruddick’s 1980 essay “Maternal Thinking” and Carol Gilligan’s 1982 book *In a Different Voice* as the inaugural texts in this strand of feminist moral theory (*Ethics* 26-27). Nel Nodding’s 1984 book *Caring* is another important early text.

responsibility' (*Ethics* 10). The feminist ethics of care is based upon research conducted by Carol Gilligan and others such as Nancy Chodorow who suggest women are more likely than men to make moral judgments according to a 'care perspective' that assumes self and other are interdependent and views action as responsive and, therefore, inevitably arising in relation ("Moral" 37-38).⁴⁶ Advocates such as Held view this morality as an alternative to dominant moral theories like Kantian ethics and utilitarianism which are founded upon an autonomous, rational ideal of self and valorise an abstract, justice-oriented model of moral reasoning (*Ethics* 9).⁴⁷ Nevertheless, as Gilligan notes, the care and justice perspectives are not theoretical opposites but instead 'denote different ways of organizing the basic elements of moral judgment: self, others, and the relationship between them' ("Moral" 34).

Because the feminist ethics of care uses a different way of organising the basic elements of moral judgment, it also shares several common features with Greco-Roman self-care, which is also based upon an alternative moral construct. One of the most salient common features between these two paradigms is their 'fundamentally social' view of selfhood. Like the Nietzschean-Foucauldian notion of subjectivity or the Greek or Roman aristocrat who intuitively seeks to make his self-relation isomorphic with the social dynamics which surround him, the feminist ethics of care

⁴⁶ According Chodorow, women are more likely to define themselves relationally because of the prevalence of female primary caregivers within Western culture. Men, on the other hand, tend to form their identities differentially to this primary influence, leading them to suppress relational capacities and needs and view others with a heightened sense of detachment. As Amy Allen points out, the relational model of selfhood underlying this research has been critiqued from numerous perspectives ("Foucault" 240-243). Gilligan also notes the problematical nature of the object relations theory, which links self-formulation to the experience of separation, which underpins Chodorow's work ("Moral" 41). Despite these problems, as Allen notes, feminists still tend to agree that the self is 'thoroughly relational inasmuch as it can only be created, sustained, and remade in the face of threats to its coherence in and through certain sorts (communicative, reciprocal, mutual) of relations with others' ("Foucault" 243).

⁴⁷ Feminist support for a care-based ethics is not unanimous. See, for example, Chapter 7 of Bartky's *Femininity and Domination*.

relies also upon a constructed or relational model of selfhood that implicitly rejects the Kantian ideal of sovereignty not only upon theoretical grounds but, as Held's analysis implies, because it overlooks the 'reality of human dependence and the morality for which it calls' (*Ethics* 10). Further research may uncover additional commonalities between these two bodies of thought – commonalities that may subsequently serve as a basis for advancing the partnership between Foucault and feminism or, as suggested before, formulating a more robust vision of a dynamism-based will to power ethics. Additional research may also shed light upon significant differences between the two paradigms. One important difference between the two paradigms is apparent in the emotional states behind the urge toward self-care. In the Greco-Roman model, for example, self-care had little to do with reciprocity or mutuality but instead was based upon a fear-based belief in domination as the best way to retain one's personal power (*Pleasure* 15-17). In fact, considering the myriad anxieties about losing one's power that lie beneath this social construct, the ethics Foucault depicts in his last works might be better characterised as a highly strategic ethics of *concern* rather than *care*. Indeed, if Foucault's depiction of modern disciplinarian society or studies by Bordo and others who have extended Foucault's work in this area offer an accurate portrayal of contemporary life, perhaps little has changed since ancient times. Contemporary ethics still revolves domination and a fear-based concern for the self rather than reciprocity and a love- or compassion-based urge to care for the self. From this perspective, the feminist ethics of care may represent a more significant departure from contemporary mores than the Greco-Roman paradigm ever could (at least *in situ*).

It is also worth exploring how the ethics outlined in Foucault's final works might be understood as a complement to the feminist ethics of care. More

specifically, unlike the Greek and Roman paradigm, the feminist ethics of care has historically emphasised relationships with the ‘other’ rather than the self.⁴⁸ Indeed, it is significant that Held’s depiction of the central focus of feminist care ethics does not even mention the self as an important object of care. This oversight is important because it speaks to one of the recurring themes in feminist moral theory – namely, whether the care perspective fosters servility or self-sacrifice. Although Diana Meyers argues it does not, asserting ‘mature adherents’ to the care perspective can attend to their own wants and desires while giving care to others (“Socialized” 152), the lived experiences of women and particularly, those who structure their maternal or spousal roles according to traditional values or find themselves in total dependency situations, suggests otherwise. For women who feel servile to the needs of others, self-care may offer an approach for better attending to their own needs, lending balance to what might otherwise be a woefully asymmetrical care equation. In this way, care of the self and the feminist ethics of care may also lend support to one another, combining their discursive powers to elaborate a more comprehensive ethical model than either perspective has heretofore constructed alone.

If, as Gilligan suggests, women are at the present time the key custodians of a story about human attachment and interdependence, not only within the family but also in the world at large, then one must ask what practices and supporting discourses of selfhood will keep this story alive (“Moral” 45). A love- or compassion-based ethics of care represents one viable platform for disseminating this narrative. As a form of what Deleuze might call ‘minoritarian literature’, a literature which ‘haunts the glacial zones of the Universe and the feminine zones of History’, this narrative may subsequently ‘trigger uncontrollable movements within the mean or the majority’

⁴⁸ As noted previously, Greco-Roman ethics are also concerned with the quality of social relations and in fact view them as isomorphic with the self-reflexive relationship.

which effect positive social change (*Essays* xliii, 55).⁴⁹ Because discourses and practices of an opposing nature currently dominate Western culture, popularising this ‘minoritarian’ or ‘feminine’ perspective is no easy task. It will necessitate significant changes in the discourses and practices which seek to explain contemporary life as we know it.

8

A number of philosophical assumptions stand at the centre of the practical metaphysics of duality and oppression that pervades contemporary Western society. Some of these assumptions have proven especially resistant to change despite the countless critiques levelled against them. The Enlightenment ideal of a coherent, stable, and autonomous subject is one such assumption. Over a hundred years ago, Nietzsche proclaimed there is no neutral substratum, ‘no “being” behind doing, effecting, becoming; “the doer” is merely a fiction added to the deed – the deed is everything’ (*Genealogy* I.13/45). For Nietzsche, as it was for Heraclitus over two millennia before, the substratum of existence is Becoming not Being, activity not stability, or dynamic will to power which, by definition, is subject to constant change. According to this viewpoint, human beings are *embodied activity* like everything else in the world yet we hold firm to the fiction of our endurance, stability, and autonomy. The intractability of this idea is, as Nietzsche suggests, a function of fear and what he calls ‘herd morality’:

“You shall be knowable, express your inner nature by clear and constant signs—otherwise you are dangerous: and if you are evil, your ability to dissimulate is the worst thing for the herd. We despise the secret and unrecognizable.— Consequently you must consider yourself knowable, you

⁴⁹ There is no reason why such an ethics must be understood as essential passive because, as Foucault states in a 1981 interview, there is something subversive about relations of love and friendship which can short-circuit existing power structures by negating institutional codes, laws, rules, and habits (*Live* 309).

may not be concealed from yourself, you may not believe that you change.”
(*Will* 277/158).

Herd morality is, of course, inherently conservative because it actively suppresses diversity and change. In addition, because it loathes opacity in individuals (and, for that matter, the world at large), it also tends to foster an ethos of surveillance and disclosure. Norms are established and enforced because they represent an existential safety zone, a ‘known’ world where things and people seem more predictable. The sovereign subject is not, therefore, a benign philosophical assumption; it is an assault against reality, a violent act perpetrated against the world, and ourselves.

At some moment in the ancient world, the activity of *knowing* the self became more important than another activity, *caring* for the self – an orientation which has also shaped Western culture in countless ways. As Foucault discusses in a late seminar, there are several reasons for this reorientation (*Technologies* 22). One causal factor is the rise of Christian asceticism and widespread acceptance of the idea that salvation requires self-renunciation. In order to renounce the self, however, it must first be known. In such an economy, caring for the self becomes less important and may even be perceived as immoral because it demonstrates a commitment to what is transient and therefore somehow imperfect, fallen, or corrupt. These principles are, as Foucault notes, still very active throughout the modern world and have myriad implications for modern life (22).

Indeed, a whole range of negative and positive consequences can be linked to this one-word philosophical reorientation. For instance, the thirst for knowledge has generated numerous advancements in science, medicine, and other disciplines which have served humanity and alleviated its suffering in numerous ways. At the same time, however, the notion of caring for oneself, one another, other life-forms, or the world at large has received far less attention than perhaps it is due. This inattention to

the arts of care has served us less well; producing ill health and other forms of human suffering, environmental degradation, and irreversible losses of other species and the natural diversity of the world. Whether we believe the world is good, bad, or indifferent, as Heidegger reminds us, it is our concern because *we are in it*.

Consequently, it matters little whether one believes that a potentially devastating global phenomenon such as climate change is or is not influenced by human activity. The climate is our concern because our wellbeing, if not our very existence, is dependent upon it. The recent collapse of the world economy also demonstrates how interdependent we have become and how materialism and greed in one culture can have devastating effects for everyone. Placing a higher value on care and making it the central tenet of contemporary ethics may represent a salient positive deviation from the current ethos, one that may produce a range of positive effects for humanity and the world at large. Because an ethics of care is a highly contextualised way of being in the world – an approach to living that pays more attention to the relationships that influence so-called Being than it does to specific forms of Being – it may also be more flexible than ethical models which rely upon more reified notions of self, other, or material reality. In this way, an ethics of care may also align well with the idea of a dynamism-based will to power ethics in the Nietzschean-Foucauldian mode.

The following chapter explicates the ethics advocated by one of the most well-known and beloved scriptures of yoga, the *Bhagavad Gītā*. There are several reasons why yoga, like the other discursive platforms described in the preceding sections, represents a potential site for developing an alternative form of contemporary ethics. Despite their studied ambivalence about the meaning and value of the ascetic ideal, a close reading of Nietzsche and Foucault's corpuses shows that both men view asceticism as a necessary component of ethics because of its ability to fortify and

transforms subjects or, as Foucault might have it, effect *askēsis*. Yoga, which has its roots in ascetic practices dating back to the *Vedas* (the earliest books of what would eventually become Hinduism) asserts a similar, albeit much more straightforward position about the transformative properties of bodily discipline. Simply stated, in yoga practices of the self are viewed as indispensable components of the process of self-transformation and enlightenment. Yoga's reliance upon voluntary self-subjection as its primary mode of subjection or method for inciting practitioners to recognise their moral obligations and assume the work of becoming an ethical being is also reminiscent of the Greco-Roman model. More specifically, as noted in preceding discussions, Foucault's interest in this ancient ethical framework was chiefly a factor of what it *was not*, namely a code-based morality of discipline and punishment in the contemporary style. Like the Greco-Roman model, yoga also lacks a strong external basis for practice, relying instead upon a personal commitment that may be reinforced by a community or something as simplistic as personal observations of the empirical benefits of practice. Yoga's heavy reliance upon bodily disciplines as its primary means for self-subjection constitutes another correspondence between these two ethical paradigms.

Unlike the bodily disciplines of Greco-Roman self-care, however, yogic practices of the self have an explicit nondual trajectory and thus can be understood as antithetical to ascetic practices aimed at shoring up the ego, the sovereign self, or dualistic perceptions of reality. This aspect of yoga is particularly evident in the tantric tradition where the body is constituted as a divine abode or bridge to transcendence. The connection between dualism and oppression or other forms of suffering is widely accepted in contemporary Western philosophy. Foucault's works, for example, are littered with bodies – madmen, prisoners, hysterical women, and

school-age children – who have suffered at the hands of dualism and the dividing practices it engenders. Bordo's work extends this theme of suffering bodies by illuminating the deadly consequences the gendered mind-body dualism that pervades contemporary attitudes toward diet and exercise and causes psychopathologies like anorexia and bulimia. As Bordo states, there is nothing benign about the dualism behind contemporary discourses and practices of the self because

...mind/body dualism is no mere philosophical position, to be defended or dispensed with by clever argument. Rather, it is a *practical* metaphysics that has been deployed and socially embodied in medicine, law, literary and artistic representations, the psychological construction of self, interpersonal relationships, popular culture, and advertisements – a metaphysics which will be deconstructed only through concrete transformation of the institutions and practices that sustain it (*Unbearable* 13-14).

If, as Bordo's commentary suggests, a practical metaphysics of duality is chiefly to blame for modern forms of unfreedom and particularly, gender-based oppression, then perhaps a practical metaphysics of nonduality can help transform contemporary society and maximise freedom for all. By creating a disciplinary framework where practitioners can experience nonduality in whatever form it might take – from destabilising the scission between mind and body to realising one's intrinsic divinity – yoga offers a praxis of nonduality which inherently critiques dualistic ways of experiencing the world. As a form of socially engaged renunciation in action or paradoxical or transformative asceticism, yoga also provides a philosophical basis for framing collective political action, a quality some critics find lacking in Foucault's late works.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ See McNay, for example (*Foucault* 8).

Chapter Four: Yoga as a Practice of Feminist s/Self-Actualisation

The scriptures dwell in duality.
Be beyond all opposites, Arjuna:
anchored in the real, and free...
— *Bhagavad Gītā* (2.45/54)¹

1

Chapter Three discusses the utility of Foucault's final works, feminist critiques and extensions of these texts, and research from the separate domain of feminist moral theory as viable platforms for advancing a dynamism-based will to power ethics in keeping with the feminist emancipatory agenda. Building upon this analysis, Chapter Four explores the possibility such an ethics may also be situated amidst the discourses and practices of yoga and, more specifically, the nondualist yoga advanced by the *Bhagavad Gītā* (hereafter '*Gītā*'). Although some recent research has been conducted into the feminist import of yogic discourses and discourses from the goddess-venerating tradition of tantra in particular;² the ensuing analysis is, to the best of the author's knowledge, unique. Reading the *Gītā* through a Nietzschean-Foucauldian-feminist lens is an unprecedented act of interpretation, a way of contemporising an ancient non-Western philosophical paradigm for a readership which differs markedly from its originally intended audience.³ This analysis also differs from traditional

¹ Unless otherwise noted, Stephen Mitchell's translation of the *Gītā* will be used. All references will appear in a stanza/page number format.

² The essays contained in a recent collection entitled *Is the Goddess a Feminist?* (ed. Alf Hiltebeitel and Kathleen M. Erndl) are demonstrative.

³ The author is intensely aware of the 'Orientalist' implications of such a reading. Nevertheless, as Harold Bloom would attest, the *Gītā* has become a part of the Western canon and thus invites a reading using Western analytic tools and literary approaches. See *The Western Canon* (498). As Sarah Strauss also notes, the West's appropriation of yoga has resulted in significant changes to the practice worldwide, including in its native India (*Positioning* 1-2). In addition, as a lived and living philosophy, yoga is constantly being subjected to reinterpretation by its practitioners – practitioners who are situated in diverse socio-cultural circumstances around the globe. This reading is simply an effort to

commentaries on the *Gītā* in that it privileges a quasi-tantric worldview. Tantra, despite its ancient roots, is generally considered to be an unorthodox discourse within the vast archive of Hindu spiritual literature.⁴ Nevertheless, because tantra is the primary repository for nondualist texts of Hinduism that specifically venerate the feminine, its discourses are particularly well-suited to a feminist reading of yoga. The suitability of a quasi-tantric interpretive approach is further bolstered by the fact that the yoga typically practiced by Westerners is deeply influenced by tantra's practical and more overtly 'corporeal' orientation which views the body as a divine abode and tool of transcendence rather than an object of disgust or disdain.⁵ A quasi-tantric reinterpretation of the ethics of the *Gītā*, although somewhat idiosyncratic, is therefore entirely in keeping with a project endeavouring to develop a practical understanding of Krishna's message from a contemporary Western feminist perspective.

In addition, the use of Eastern philosophical texts for comparison or critique has a long history in the West, especially during periods of marked social upheaval and change.⁶ As Wilhelm Halbfass notes, for example, 'Romantic interest in India was inseparable from a radical critique of the European present' (*India* 83). Like most modern philosophers, Nietzsche and Foucault were also cognizant of the value of using other cultures' discourses and practices as a way to gain insight into their own socio-cultural milieu, as a way to critique the present. Nietzsche's trans-cultural eye scanned a variety of Western and Eastern cultures and philosophies in a search for alternatives to the Christian-moral paradigm while Foucault's exploration remained

understand yoga from one very specific Western perspective whilst simultaneously honouring ancient India's unique contribution to the world's wisdom.

⁴ See Georg Feuerstein regarding the current status of tantra in India (*Tradition* 343).

⁵ This matter is discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

⁶ J.J. Clarke's *Oriental Enlightenment*, Ronald Inden's *Imagining India*, and Halbfass's *India and Europe* provide more detailed discussions of the various historical encounters between Indian and Western thought.

somewhat closer to home, amidst the ethical discourses and practices of ancient Greece and Rome. Following this tradition, the current project seeks to position yoga as yet another ethical paradigm that may offer a basis for critiquing contemporary Western morality or, following Nietzsche and Foucault, for developing of a will to power ethics.

Yoga is an appropriate choice for this endeavour for at least two reasons. First, although yoga was originally an Eastern ethical paradigm, it has now become a naturalised component of contemporary Western culture. This makes yoga an appropriate object of study for those who wish to understand the genealogy of Western ethics. More specifically, yogic philosophy has been known to Westerners for centuries and since the late eighteenth century, these discourses have played an important role in the West's ongoing practice of self-critique and philosophical speculation. Although yoga's nondiscursive or practical elements – its physical and mental disciplines – are much newer to Westerners, even these more novel elements are a now commonplace feature of Western culture, having become widely popularised during the latter half of the twentieth century. In short, yoga has demonstrated its adaptability to a Western context yet, because of its Eastern origins and attributes, still retains certain philosophical differences which allow it to serve as a potent source of cultural critique.

Second, and perhaps more importantly for the current project of this thesis, yoga is chiefly a women's practice in the West despite its androcentric origins.⁷ As such, many Western adherents already constitute yoga as a practice of personal empowerment, citing the discipline's myriad physical and mental benefits as proof of

⁷ Although reliable demographic data on yoga participation is unavailable, at least one fairly recent study (2005) suggests that over 75 percent of U.S. yoga practitioners are women. See (<http://www.yogajournal.com>).

its ability to craft strong, resilient, and self-sufficient beings.⁸ As an existing practice of personal empowerment for Western women, therefore, yoga represents a ready-made platform for advancing a contemporary feminist ethics focused upon practices of the self. Yoga's emphasis on practices of the self as its primary mode for moulding ethical beings also aligns the paradigm with the Greco-Roman model described in Foucault's late works and therein provides another basis for comparison.

The 'metaethical' framework Foucault introduces in *The Use of Pleasure* offers a productive analytic lens for understanding the ethics advanced by the *Gītā*. This analysis is preceded by a short discussion of Nietzsche and Foucault's engagements with Indian philosophy and an overview of main components of Foucault's framework. On a schematic level, the metaethical analysis demonstrates how asceticism-based yogic practices of the self mould ethical beings by inducing a shift in consciousness whereby individuals begin to understand themselves in more expansive terms. This expanded sense of self is inherently critical of the sovereign ideal and supportive of a more interconnected or nondual worldview. This nondual *telos* may also offer certain existential, if not socio-political, advantages not apparent in more heavily dualistic ethical constructs such as the Greco-Roman model.

The metaethical analysis is followed by a quasi-tantric interpretation of how power is conceptualised in *Gītā*. As noted above, tantric yoga – which is known for its veneration of the feminine principle of *prakṛiti* and positive views of the body – represents a viable theoretical-practical basis for a feminist incarnation of yogic ethics. Because *prakṛiti* can be understood as a feminine iteration of Nietzsche's notion of will to power as creative dynamism, tantrism-inspired yoga may also offer a conceptual foundation for a will to power ethics in its creative-dynamic guise. Any

⁸ Personal accounts like those found in Stephen Cope's *Will Yoga & Meditation Really Change My Life?* are demonstrative of this point.

feminist incarnation of yogic ethics is, of course, predicated upon an explication of the gender biases apparent within the discourse which, like most if not all traditional philosophies, are pervasive. Yoga's modern association with the fitness industry also complicates its ability to serve as a straightforward practice of freedom for contemporary Western women, echoing the findings of Chapter Three. Nevertheless, the myriad associations between yoga and ecstasy, which are explored in the final sections of the chapter, may make yoga a privileged vehicle for exploring a different, more intensely nondual economy of bodies and pleasures.

In a 1978 interview, Foucault declared the end of Western philosophy and stated 'if a philosophy of the future exists, it must be born outside of Europe or equally born in consequence of meetings and impacts between Europe and non-Europe'.⁹ This chapter explores the idea that a platform for such a philosophy may exist in a zone of convergence where the works of Nietzsche, Foucault, feminist philosophy, and yoga meet.

2

Two millennia before Nietzsche and Foucault suggested a warrior would serve as the bridge between humanity's present and its future, another warrior stood upon a battlefield in what is now modern India and laid down his arms, despairing for his yet-to-be-slain kinsmen. This warrior's name is Arjuna and his story is told in the *Gītā*. Barbara Powell characterises the *Gītā*, which is an episode from India's national epic poem the *Mahābhārata*, as the 'most beloved scripture in Hinduism' (*Windows* 33).¹⁰ Although its exact composition date is unknown, the *Gītā* is generally dated between

⁹ See Jeremy Carrette's *Religion and Culture* (113).

¹⁰ Within the vast archive of Hindu spiritual texts (*sāstra*), the *Gītā* is categorised as a *smṛti* or 'remembered' text. *Smṛti* texts are less sacred than *śruti* or 'heard' texts like the Vedas and the Upanishads but are nonetheless highly regarded as important sources of spiritual wisdom for Hindus and yogins alike.

the fifth century B.C.E. and the second century C.E.,¹¹ or roughly during the same period when Greek and Roman philosophy reached its apex in the West. As yoga scholar Georg Feuerstein further notes, the *Gītā* is typically understood as the first ‘full-fledged’ yoga scripture despite references to yogic and proto-yogic practices in more ancient texts including the Vedas, the oldest texts of Hinduism (*Tradition* 188). In this regard, the *Gītā* is also a highly integrative work, pulling together diverse strands of spiritual thought prevalent during India’s Pre-Classical Age (circa 1000 to 100 B.C.E.) (188, 63). Consequently, as Powell notes, the *Gītā*’s philosophical breadth and synthetic nature give the text a kind of mass appeal generally absent with other spiritual texts, leading exponents of rival philosophical camps to claim it as their own (*Windows* 33).

The *Gītā* itself consists of a 700-stanza poem written as a framed dialogue between Arjuna, a Pāndava warrior or *ksatriya*, and Krishna, his kinsman and charioteer. Their dialogue is set upon the brink of a battle between the Pāndavas and their cousins, the Kauravas, to settle a dispute over who will rule their kingdom. Overwhelmed by pity and grief for the endangered lives of his kinsmen, friends, and honoured teachers, Arjuna declares he will not fight. Time stops and Krishna’s dialogue with Arjuna begins. During their discussion, Krishna reveals himself as God incarnate and a source of great wisdom about the nature of reality, spirituality, and ethics. Krishna and Arjuna’s dialogue can thus be understood as a philosophy lesson between teacher (guru) and student (yogin) in a format akin to the Socratic style.

One of the principle aims of Krishna’s lesson is to convince Arjuna that a spiritual life can be lived within the bounds of conventional life and does not require

¹¹ See Feuerstein (*Tradition* 63) and Gavin Flood (*Hinduism* 20-21). For a more specific discussion of the *Gītā*’s likely composition date, see Feuerstein (188), Powell (*Windows* 33), and Mitchell (*Gītā* 14).

extreme acts of renunciation.¹² As Feuerstein notes, the practice of *samnyāsa* or renunciation of worldly life in either a literal or symbolic form has a long history in Hinduism, dating back to India's Post-Vedic Age (circa 1500-1000 B.C.E.) (*Tradition* 67-68). At times, as Feuerstein further remarks, the widespread urge toward 'world resignation' or nihilism has even posed a significant threat to India's social fabric (68-69). The *Gītā*, which establishes renunciation *in* action rather than renunciation *of* action as its spiritual and ethical ideal, represents one attempt to settle this debate.¹³ In this capacity, the *Gītā* also offers a subtle critique of nihilistic spirituality and ethics in the Nietzschean mode.

As Powell and Feuerstein both observe, the *Gītā* has enjoyed a wide reception amongst Western audiences since it was first translated into English in 1785; generating numerous translations and an extensive range of scholarly and devotional commentaries (*Windows* 33, *Tradition* 187-188). Feuerstein further notes how the text has served as a source of inspiration for many well-known Westerners including prominent German philosophers Georg Friedrich Hegel and Arthur Schopenhauer (*Tradition* 188). According to Johann Figl, Nietzsche may have also become acquainted with the text during his schooldays at Schupforta through study of the *Mahābhārata* ("Encounters" 52-53, 55, 60). Nietzsche's early fascination with Schopenhauer and his associations with Richard Wagner and Paul Deussen may have also inspired him to read Vedāntic texts like the *Gītā*.¹⁴ Be this as it may, there is no clear evidence Nietzsche ever read the *Gītā* or that the text held any particular

¹² The debate over how to best pursue one's worldly and spiritual goals (*purusārthas*) is a longstanding one in India. Hinduism sometimes divides these endeavours into four realms. Three of these realms are mundane (*dharma* or virtue, *artha* or wealth, and *kāma* or pleasure) while one is transcendent (*moksha* or liberation). See Donald Davis's discussion of the *purusārthas* and Hindu identity ("Being Hindu").

¹³ Hindu lawgivers have also responded to this threat by suggesting that a person's life-stage should determine the severity and form of his or her renunciation. Under this scheme, radical renunciation is fully sanctioned only for those who have fulfilled their householder (*grihastha*) duties (*Tradition* 69).

¹⁴ Halbfass offers a useful discussion here (*India* 124). As Uta Liebmann Schaub notes, most nineteenth century thinkers had some familiarity with Eastern philosophic texts because of their penchant for using Orientalism as a basis for critiquing Occidental culture ("Oriental" 308).

significance for him despite what Mervyn Sprung describes as Nietzsche's 'lifelong interest in Sanskrit philosophy and Indian thought' ("Trans-European" 76).

Irrespective of his specific knowledge of the *Gītā*, Nietzsche's corpus provides ample evidence of his familiarity with some of the other key texts of Hinduism.¹⁵ *Daybreak*, for example, opens with an epigraph ('There are so many days that have not yet broken') paraphrased from the *Rg Veda*, the oldest text of Hinduism. In addition, *Twilight* (3/56-57) and *The Anti-Christ* (56-57/175-179) both offer comments on the *Laws of Manu*, a key *dharma sāstra* or Hindu law book. The *Will to Power* also includes numerous references to India, Hinduism, *Manu*, Vedānta, and Brahmins. Even Nietzsche's first book, *The Birth of Tragedy*, mentions the 'veil of *māyā*', a Sanskrit word connoting the illusory nature of reality (1/37).¹⁶

On the other hand, Foucault's works provide almost no evidence of a working knowledge of Eastern philosophy in general or Indian sacred texts in particular. As Uta Liebmann Schaub notes, 'Foucault rarely refers explicitly to Orient' even though such references are commonplace amongst other French poststructuralists ("Oriental" 307).¹⁷ One of the few direct comments Foucault makes about the East occurs in volume one of his *History*, where he compares the West's *scientia sexualis* to the East's *ars erotica*; an opposition he later said he regretted (*Will* 57-58, *Reader* 347-348). As Carrette notes, Foucault also made two trips to Japan in the 1970s and once visited a Zen temple where he spoke with the priest about his interest in Buddhist philosophy and the effects of meditation (*Religion* 39, 110-114). Foucault's interest in Nietzsche's works also offers an indirect point of contact with Indian philosophy

¹⁵ See also David Smith's "Nietzsche's Hinduism, Nietzsche's India."

¹⁶ It is likely Nietzsche encountered this term through reading Schopenhauer, who had a keen interest in Buddhist philosophy. See Kaufmann (*Nietzsche* 26-27, 131).

¹⁷ Carl Olson has written extensively on the comparisons between 'postmodern' philosophy and ancient Indian thought. See *Indian Philosophers and Postmodern Thinkers* and *The Indian Renouncer and Postmodern Poison*.

but the significance of this decidedly idiosyncratic exposure upon Foucault's thought is difficult to assess with any exactitude.

Despite the lack of any concrete evidence Foucault had a deep understanding of Asian thought systems, some argue his work nonetheless *seems* Eastern, exhibiting what Schaub calls a 'yet unexplored non-Western counter-discourse or subtext that also affects his mode of thought and, as a result his style' ("Oriental" 306). Certain critics, including White, extend this aura to Foucault himself, describing him as 'guru' and a 'carrier of a "secret wisdom" hidden from the profane eyes of the uninitiated' ("Decoded" 53).¹⁸ Despite these characterisations, it is more likely that Foucault's 'Orientalism' is illusion (*māyā*) rather fact; a surface effect of his anti-Western philosophic bent rather than hard evidence of an undisclosed knowledge of or affinity for the East. More specifically, because Foucault's discourse tends to position itself in opposition to traditional Western philosophic views, it may appear Eastern but in fact is typical of a line of subjugated Western philosophical thought dating back to ancient Greece. There are various ways to characterise this lineage. For example, David Loy might situate Foucault (through his Nietzschean connection and possibly through his generally unacknowledged interest in Heidegger) in a lineage of Western philosophers of nonduality (*Nonduality* 1-2). Although assertions of nonduality are not unknown in Western philosophies, as Loy notes, they are more common in Asian philosophies like Vedānta, Buddhism, and Taoism (3). Championing nonduality does not, however, make Foucault's philosophy 'Oriental' but only marks it as somewhat atypical to the dualist philosophies which tended to dominate Western thought prior to the late modern era. Consequently, Foucault's philosophy cannot be understood as an example of the aforementioned 'philosophy of the future' that he prophesizes as

¹⁸ Edward Said characterises Foucault as an 'ascetic' in a quasi-obituary contained in the collection *After Foucault* (3); while Alan Sheridan describes him as a 'reverse guru' in the tradition of the Zen master who knows nothing (*Michel* 222).

arising from meetings of European and non-European philosophical thought. Instead, Foucault's philosophy, like that of other poststructuralists such as Deleuze and Guattari, merely extends a subjugated line of *indigenous* nondualist or anti-dualist thought.

Foucault's connection to works like the *Gītā* is, therefore, most likely indirect. Nonetheless, there is a certain generic kinship between the texts Foucault studies in the final two volumes of his *History* and ancient Indian texts like the *Gītā*. In fact, as the remaining sections of this chapter will demonstrate, like the texts Foucault analyses in his final works, the *Gītā* can also be understood as a theoretical and practical guide to ethical self-formation emphasising practices of the self as its primary methodology for producing moral subjects. As noted in Chapters One and Two, this emphasis on self-care was one of the features Foucault found particularly attractive about the ancient Greek and Roman ethical model and one of the main reasons he found it useful as a comparative paradigm for critiquing contemporary mores. As a non-Christian and a non-Western ethics, however, the *Gītā*'s value as an alternative ethical model may exceed that of the Greco-Roman example. Furthermore, unlike the texts Foucault scrutinises in his *History*, the *Gītā* is still widely read by yogins and others worldwide and thus continues to exert a direct influence upon contemporary subjectivity and ethical praxis. Although this influence must be considered marginal in the West, it is nonetheless apparent, unlike the influence of long-forgotten paradigms such as Stoicism or Epicureanism.¹⁹

To better understand how the *Gītā* purports to transform a practitioner's subjectivity, it is useful to develop a working knowledge of nondualist yoga as an

¹⁹ For example, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness or 'Hari Krishnas' view the *Gītā* as their primary sacred text. See A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda's comments in *As It Is* (xvii).

ethical system.²⁰ A close reading of the *Gītā* will serve as the primary textual basis for this analysis, with secondary exegetical and popular contemporary texts consulted as appropriate in order to provide more detailed insights. As discussed in the following section, the ‘metaethical’ framework Foucault introduces in *The Use of Pleasure* provides a particularly useful schema for endeavour.

3

As discussed in the Introduction and Chapter One, Foucault’s definition of ethics carries a double meaning, encompassing not only what is typically called ethics or how individuals conceptualise and conduct themselves in relation to one another; but also comprising the activities individuals use to form themselves as moral subjects. In *The Use of Pleasure* Foucault notes the importance of considering ethics in both relational and self-reflexive terms, stating that ‘all moral action involves a relationship with the reality in which it is carried out, and a relationship with the self’ (28). It is this latter, ontologically prior relationship that becomes the main focus of this text and the ensuing volume of Foucault’s *History, The Care of the Self*.

In *The Use of Pleasure* Foucault introduces a four-point interrogatory framework to guide his analysis of ethical self-formation in ancient Greece and Rome. Cooper and Blair characterise this schema as a ‘metaethical’ framework, noting its versatility as a tool for analysing ethical systems across time and culture, particularly in the ‘fragmented, multicultural environment’ of late modernity where the ‘bases for ethical action and judgment appear to be at least multiple if not illusory’ (“Ethics”

²⁰ The yoga explicated by the *Gītā* is merely one of many types of yoga native to Hinduism and Buddhism. Moreover, yogic philosophies can be just as dualistic as those found in the West. For example, Sāṃkhya (the philosophy which informs Patañjali’s *Yoga Sūtras* to a certain extent) is generally thought to be dualistic although as Ian Whicher notes this traditional reading is debatable (*Integrity* 55, 307). As the ensuing analysis will demonstrate, the *Gītā*’s yoga has both dualistic and nondualistic elements but tends toward a nondual *telos* or goal.

516). This versatility has been amply demonstrated by the framework's disparate applications. James Bernauer, for example, used Foucault's framework to analyse German ethics during the Nazi epoch and Paul Rabinow used the schema to analyse Foucault's own ethical thought.²¹ The diversity of these objects of study illustrates the flexibility of Foucault's schema which attempts to expose the 'how' or the actual mechanics of ethical self-formation rather than focusing solely upon the theory behind an ethics. Moreover, although Foucault's framework considers both the discursive and nondiscursive aspects of an ethics, it focuses more heavily upon the latter element; that is, the practical, bodily-based elements of an ethics. This emphasis renders the framework particularly useful for examining the operations of disciplines like yoga where practices of the self serve as the primary means for moulding moral subjects.

According to Foucault, the four components of ethical self-formation are: (1) the *telos* (goal) or the type of ethical being we aspire to be such as pure, immortal, or free; (2) the ethical substance or the part of the self concerned with moral conduct that we hope to influence such as feelings, acts, or intentions; (3) the mode of subjection or how we are invited or incited to recognise moral obligations such as reason or legal codes; and (4) self-forming activities or the practices we use to change ourselves into ethical beings (*Pleasure* 26-28, *Beyond* 237-240). The following sections offer an analysis of how the *Gītā* conceptualises each of the four components of ethical self-formation, beginning with the *telos* or goal of yogic practice. The objective of this analysis, which mirrors that of Foucault's final works, is two-fold: to describe how yoga understands and problematises Being and to identify the practices of the self yoga prescribes to address these problematisations.

²¹ See Bernauer's "Beyond Life and Death" in *Critical Essays* (190-207) and Rabinow's Introduction to *Essential I* (xi-xlii). Flood also alludes to schema in his discussion of theories of the ascetic self (*Ascetic* 244-245).

As Foucault notes, there is a medical sensibility to such an endeavour, something akin to a physician diagnosing a patient's affliction and then prescribing a specific cure (*Pleasure* 12). This sensibility echoes the discussion in Chapter One which identifies a similar medical theme in Nietzsche and Foucault's works as a whole. As the ensuing discussion demonstrates, yoga nominates individual consciousness or perception as the key affliction of humanity in much the same way Nietzsche and Foucault nominate nihilism and containment, respectively, as the central maladies of Being. Following Foucault's thesis in the two latter volumes of his *History*, yoga also prescribes asceticism-based practices of the self as its chief 'cure' for the problems of existence. Although these practices are remarkably similar to those found in the Greek and Roman model, the self-care model advanced by the *Gītā* is specifically aimed at achieving another quite different objective – namely, prompting experiences of nonduality or yoga. As linguist M. Monier-Williams states, the Sanskrit word 'yoga' is derived from the root 'yuj' which means to yoke or unite (*Dictionary* 856-857). To practice yoga is, therefore, to practice unity in whatever form it might take including that which comes from experiencing oneself as a holistic 'minded body' or 'embodied mind' or realising one's intrinsic divinity. As the ensuing section will show, yoga also understands this *telos* of unity as a means for finding freedom in a reality defined by transience and suffering.

4

Simply stated, the *telos* of yoga is freedom (*moksha*) from the suffering (*duhkha*) that typifies human existence. As yoga scholar Mircea Eliade notes, the idea 'all is pain, all is ephemeral (*sarvam duhkham, sarvam anityam*)' is a leitmotiv of all post-Upanishadic Indian speculation and 'to "emancipate" oneself from suffering [...] is

the goal of all Indian philosophies and all Indian mysticisms' (*Immortality* 11-12).²² Consequently, as Eliade adds, yoga strives to manifest another plane of existence for its practitioners, a mode of being that inherently transcends the human condition and the pain it connotes (4). Tropes of bondage are commonly used to illustrate the mechanics of this mode shift. Indeed, as Eliade observes, 'liberation cannot occur if one is not first "detached" from the world' (5). In yoga, therefore, unfreedom can be understood as bondage to the ephemeral world of change and eternal Becoming; an idea not unlike the ancient Greco-Roman concept of unfreedom discussed in Chapter One. For yogins, however, bondage is generally conceived of as attachment rather than servitude or enslavement as it was understood in ancient Greece and Rome although these ideas are not altogether dissimilar.²³ Within traditional Hindu spirituality, the ultimate *moksha* is liberation from the laws of *karma* that bind individuals to the material world and, as Eliade states, condemn them to transmigrate indefinitely (3). Practitioners who do not subscribe to the Hindu theory of eternal return may nonetheless conceptualise *moksha* and the mode shift it engenders somewhat differently, ranging from the simple and mundane (e.g., cultivating non-attachment toward tangible goods) to the complex and esoteric (e.g., achieving enlightenment). For the contemporary Westerner who practices mainly postures or *āsana*-based yoga, freedom may manifest primarily in corporeal forms such as improved physical flexibility or a becalmed mental state.

²² Feuerstein reiterates this idea by stating: 'According to all liberation teachings of India, conditioned or finite existence is inherently sorrowful or painful. It is this insight that provides the impetus for the spiritual struggle to realize liberation' (*Tradition* 455).

²³ The nature of bondage is particularly complex in yoga, if not somewhat paradoxical. In Chapter 14 of the *Gītā*, for instance, Krishna states that the three modes of being (*gunas*) in material reality (*prakṛiti*) bind the mortal body to the deathless embodied Self but also bind it to objective and subjective experiences and conditions which hinder liberation (14.5-8/158). *Karma* doctrine, which informs yogic texts like the *Gītā*, also speaks to the issues of bondage and release. See B.K.S. Iyengar (*Light* 40), Whicher (*Integrity* 102-104), and Feuerstein (*Tradition* 189).

In the *Gītā*, Arjuna's pre-battle anguish is a symbolic representation of *sarvam duhkham, sarvam anityam*. This anguish is both the existential condition prompting Krishna's discourse and the problem his teachings seek to solve. The fratricidal nature of the war between the Pāndavas and Kauravas is another significant aspect of this existential condition; symbolising the painful and seemingly inevitable division that occurs within the 'family' of humanity when will to power disrupts peaceful co-existence.²⁴ These ideas are reinforced by other more overt references throughout the text, including allusions to the 'sorrowful', 'fleeting', and 'temporary' nature of material reality (8.15/109, 9.33/120). This is the yogic world of Becoming – transient and painful – a realm where even pleasures, which have their beginnings and ends, are viewed as 'wombs of suffering' (5.22/85).

According to Krishna, this reality is nonetheless surmountable through yoga, the practice that 'unbinds the bonds of sorrow' (6.23/92). In the *Gītā*, therefore, yoga is situated as a therapy or cure for the pain attending existence. As Sohail Inayatullah observes, the idea of philosophy as therapy is not uncommon within the Indian tradition (*Understanding* 39). Chapter Three identified a similar, if not broader claim imbedded in Nietzsche's declaration that '[e]very art, every philosophy may be viewed as a remedy and an aid in the service of growing and struggling life: they always presuppose suffering and sufferers' (*Gay* 370/328). As noted above, the therapeutic effects of yoga can be understood in both metaphysical and physical terms despite the fact that transcending the laws of *karma* is traditionally viewed as ultimate *telos* of practice. This is because yoga, particularly in its tantric-inspired contemporary Western form, also aims to create a material, embodied type of freedom in practitioners by improving their physical and mental wellbeing. As Whicher notes,

²⁴ The war started because the Kauravas reneged on a promise to restore the Pāndavas as rightful rulers of the kingdom. See Powell (*Windows* 34).

yoga does this because it is ‘committed to a practical way of life implying “physical training, exertion of will power and acts of decision, because it wants to deal with the complete human situation and provide *real* freedom, not just a theory of liberation”’ (*Integrity* 279, emphasis mine).²⁵ Echoes of this commitment can be found in various passages of the *Gītā*, including in stanza 7.11 where Krishna states, ‘I am the strength of the strong man’ (101). Later in the poem, the linkage between yoga and physical wellbeing is reinforced by Krishna’s advice to eat only *sattvic* foods or foods that promote vitality, health, pleasure, strength, and a long life (17.8/177).²⁶ The text also contains numerous references to the mental benefits of practice, including serenity and clarity (6.27/93).

Yoga is not, therefore, merely an abstract, metaphysical enterprise. It also has empirical value as a practical approach for achieving physical and mental wellbeing or, more colloquially, for realising the ‘good life’. This is because yoga does not attempt to separate theory from practice but instead, as Whicher notes, unites or ‘yokes’ them and thereby bridges and heals rifts between thinking and acting, metaphysics and ethics, transcendence and immanence (*Integrity* 46). Expressed slightly differently, philosophy becomes a way of life for the committed yogin. According to Arnold Davidson (who is quoting Hadot), this mode of existence has all but disappeared in the modern West, fading away during the Middle Ages when philosophy became a purely theoretical and abstract activity (“Introductory” 199). In ancient Greece and Rome, however, ‘philosophy as a way of life’ was a central tenet of ethics and, as Davidson argues, was a primary reason for Foucault’s interest in this

²⁵ Whicher is quoting Klaus Klostermaier here.

²⁶ As noted in the preceding discussion, material reality (*prakṛiti*) is comprised of three modes of being (*gunas*). They are: *sattva* (luminosity), *tamas* (inertia), and *rajas* (activity). In the *Gītā*, cultivating *sattva* is advocated as a way to quell the influence of the other *gunas* but even this attachment must be abandoned to realise final liberation because attachment to *sattva* binds individuals to joy (14.9/159). Feuerstein offers a more detailed discussion of the *gunas* (*Tradition* 75-76), as does Whicher (*Integrity* 62-64).

era (201).²⁷ By bridging the gap between theory and practice, metaphysical and embodied existence, yoga may represent a viable contemporary approach to this all-but-forgotten way of life. Hence, realising ‘philosophy as a way of life’ is another way to conceptualise the *telos* of yoga.

Additional perspectives on the *telos* of yoga exist. According to Foucault, for instance, self-care also engenders a ‘conversion to self’ whereby practitioners ultimately ‘rejoin’ themselves ‘like a harbor sheltered from the tempests or a citadel protected by its ramparts’ (*Care* 64-65). Although the self-reflexive relationship at the centre of this conversion process belongs to an ethics of control in the Greek and Roman model, as Foucault explains, it can also be understood as a form of self-delight produced by forging a sacred, everlasting, and utterly serene state of self-possession (65-66). It is a concrete and everlasting relationship which ‘enables one to delight in oneself, as in a thing one both possesses and has before one’s eyes’ (65-66). While Foucault implies this experience self-delight is not transcendental; Hadot argues it is, at least according to Seneca, the author Foucault is quoting to substantiate his point (*Philosophy* 207). More specifically, as alluded to in the previous chapter, Hadot believes that when Seneca writes of rejoicing in ‘your very self and the best part of you’ he is not suggesting he rejoices in Seneca the man but in the very best part of Seneca, the transcendent self within (*Care* 66-67, *Philosophy* 207).

Yoga establishes an identical objective. By engaging in practices of the self, yogins cultivate not only a more acute understanding of themselves as living, breathing individuals but also come to realise the transcendental totality of existence of which they are a part. This latter element is known by a variety of names in the

²⁷ As Hadot and others have noted, Henry David Thoreau’s life at Walden can be conceptualised as a quasi-yogic experiment in lived philosophy. See Frank Macshane’s “Walden and Yoga” and Robert Sattelmeyer’s *Thoreau’s Reading*. Elizabeth De Michelis notes the pivotal role Thoreau plays in the West’s appropriation of yoga, serving as one of the first examples of a Westerner taking up yoga whilst still remaining a Westerner (*History* 3).

discourse including the Higher Self (hereafter, ‘Self’), *ātman*, Brahman, and the Absolute. Krishna, who embodies the Self in the *Gītā*, speaks of the Self as a pervasive, ageless, fathomless, and eternal presence that is ‘beyond *is* and *is not*’ (2.17-2.18/48-49). Yogic practices of the self attempt to ‘yoke’ the ephemeral and suffering self with this imperishable and blissful Self, creating a ‘s/Self’²⁸ that, while remaining subject to change because of its embodied form, also partakes of the serenity and stability of the immutable, unconditioned Self.

In short, s/Self-realisation is yet another way to conceptualise the *telos* of yoga. The *Gītā* includes several allusions to the process of detachment and reattachment required for s/Self-realisation. For example, in stanza 9.33 Krishna declares that by turning to him, individuals can find liberation from this ‘sad, vanishing world’ (120). While ‘turning to Krishna’ may suggest a variety of acts and subject positions, according to the literal translation of this stanza, it means becoming a devotee (*bhaktah*) of the Self.²⁹ In other words, freedom comes from attaching the self to the Self which although it pervades the universe, somehow still stands apart; inviolate and therefore impervious to flux and pain. Elsewhere in the poem, Krishna implies the end of suffering comes from performing the complimentary action or by *turning away* from worldly cravings and concerns. For example, in stanzas 2.64-65, Krishna asserts:

But the man who is self-controlled,
who meets the objects of the senses
with neither craving nor aversion,
will attain serenity at last.

In serenity, all his sorrows
disappear at once, forever (58).

²⁸ ‘s/Self’ is the author’s coinage.

²⁹ See Prabhupāda’s translation (*As It Is* 421-422).

In yoga, the rejection of the painful, transitory world of sense objects is balanced by acceptance of ‘another’ world of stability, serenity, and joy. The practitioner still lives in the world of Becoming but also enjoys the constancy and other existential benefits of the world of Being. According to the Vedāntic tradition, which holds that the ultimate reality is nondual, the practitioner who attains this state is called a *jīvanmukti* – a living, liberated being.³⁰

Two additional *teloses* commonly discussed throughout yogic discourse are purity and immortality.³¹ As Feuerstein notes, ‘Purification is a key metaphor of yogic spirituality’, taking on meanings that are both internal (mental clarity) and external (physical cleanliness) (*Tradition* 246). In yoga, purity (*sauca*) is not only a necessary precursor to enlightenment but an intrinsic quality of an enlightened being. Indeed, one could argue the liberated yogin is *sauca* in an embodied form, having become free of the defilements and afflictions of ordinary consciousness and material reality. In the *Gītā*, Krishna advises Arjuna to cultivate both internal and external forms of purity. In Chapter 4, for example, Krishna states: ‘Nothing in the world can purify / as powerfully as wisdom; / practiced in yoga, you will find / this wisdom within yourself’ (4.38/79). Bodily cleanliness is advised in Chapter 17, along with other bodily practices aimed at creating a *sattvic* or pure existence (17.14-17/178). Achieving a state of yogic purity is also sometimes equated with attaining immortality because, as Krishna declares in Chapter 14, through practice yogins are not only freed from the pain of material existence, they also cease to produce the karmic residue that causes cyclic rebirth (14.20/161). Chapter 13 also states that by realising the truth –

³⁰ See Feuerstein (*Tradition* 191, 254).

³¹ The term ‘yogic discourse’ will be used to refer to the global archive of texts on yoga, both ancient and contemporary.

namely, that Krishna or the Self permeates all of existence, abiding nowhere but containing all things – one can become immortal (13.13-14, 13.28/152-155).³²

Feuerstein observes the more general kinship that exists between freedom, purity, and immortality in the yogic tradition when he declares that: ‘Liberation, which is identical to immortality, is the realization of the Self in its immutable purity’ (130). In other words, when yogins come to realign their identities with the Self, they also align themselves with its attributes, which include the ‘non-attributes’ of purity and deathlessness.³³ As such, terms like purity and immortality are merely more precise ways to capture the *non*-essence of yogic freedom, which is a state that inherently resists description. Although the Self is the yogic equivalent of Being, it represents *Being without attributes* or conversely *Being with every attribute*. To be liberated in yoga is thus to be freed from the pain of delimitation, as Whicher astutely observes:

Liberated from the pain of self-limitation and all destructive personality traits or habit patterns (*vāsanās*), and having incorporated an expanded and enriched sense of personal/empirical identity embodying virtues such as nonviolence (*ahimsā*), compassion (*karunā*), and yogic insight (*prajñā*), the yogin can dwell in a state of balance and fulfillment serving others while feeling/being truly at home in the world (*Integrity* 306).

Yoga’s association of pain and self-limitation echoes Foucault’s association of suffering with the forms of existential confinement that result from the operations of generalised contemporary discipline. To aspire to s/Selfhood is, therefore, to transcend the delimiting confines of the prison-house of Being, at least in its conventional Western form.

In summary, the *telos* of yoga can be conceptualised in at least six interrelated ways: freedom, philosophy as a way of life, s/Self-realisation, purity, immortality, and

³² Chapter 2 offers additional insights about yogic immortality.

³³ Eliade’s analysis of other yogic texts, including the *Katha Upanishad*, provides another perspective on this matter (*Immortality* 117-127).

self-delimitation. Although additional ways of characterising the goal of yoga no doubt exist, these definitions will serve as guideposts for the current study with the greatest emphasis placed on freedom, s/Self-realisation, and self-delimitation because of their resonance with the Nietzschean-Foucauldian worldview.

5

The second aspect of Foucault's metaethical framework is the ethical substance or the part of the self concerned with moral conduct that we hope to influence such as feelings, intentions, and acts. According to Foucault, the ethical substance is the 'prime material' of moral conduct (*Pleasure* 26). It is the material that an ethics problematises and therefore, aims to 'work over' or change through various means (*Beyond* 238). The primary ethical substance of yoga is consciousness. The importance of consciousness as an object of yogic practice cannot be overstated because, as Whicher points out, 'without the mind no world could be known nor could any action be accomplished. Moreover, [...] [consciousness] becomes the instrument through which either enslavement to worldly existence or spiritual freedom is cultivated' (*Integrity* 91). In yoga, consciousness is not only a principle cause for suffering; it is the mechanism through which the pain of existence is transcended. Moreover, by altering consciousness, practitioners also affect other ethical substances including intentions and acts through a sort of chain reaction or domino effect. A more detailed discussion of how the yogic tradition conceptualises consciousness is required to fully understand this process.³⁴

³⁴ Students of Western psychology may observe certain similarities between the yogic model of consciousness and Freud's tripartite model of the id, ego, and superego as advanced in *The Ego and the Id*. For further discussion of some of the conceptual differences between Classical Yoga's model of consciousness and other models such as Cartesian and Kantian thought, see Whicher (*Integrity* 89-91).

As noted in stanza 7.4, the *Gītā* relies upon a theory wherein individual consciousness (*citta*) is divided into three parts: *manas* (the desiring mind and the senses), *asmitā* or *ahāmkara* (the ego), and *buddhi* (the reasoning mind or intellect) (100).³⁵ As already noted, yoga also theorises a pure and unchanging type of meta-consciousness – the Self – which yogins come to know through practice. By realising this meta-consciousness, the yogin becomes emancipated from constraints and afflictions associated with individual consciousness. In the *Gītā* the Self takes corporeal form as Krishna.³⁶ Consequently, Krishna and Arjuna’s dialogue can be understood as pedagogical scenario in which meta-consciousness teaches individual consciousness about itself and how it can be known through yoga. It is only by gaining this knowledge that individual consciousness transcends its painful limitations and becomes free. This is the ‘secret of life’ Krishna alludes to in Chapter 9; to know this secret is to ‘be free of suffering, forever’ (9.1/113).

Of the three facets of individual consciousness, the aspect that most closely aligns with what Foucault means by ethical substance is *manas*, a Sanskrit term with a whole range of meanings including desire, intention, inclination, affection, and will.³⁷ *Manas* is, as Whicher notes, a lower or grosser part of consciousness concerned with assimilating sensory data (*Integrity* 94). Yogic discourse is rife with discussions of the problematic nature of *manas*. Passages associating the mind with suffering and, perhaps paradoxically, with liberation are found not only in the *Gītā* but in many older texts including the Upanishads. For instance, section 6.34.11 of the

³⁵ Patañjali’s *Yoga Sūtras* relies upon this same theory. See Iyengar’s commentary on Sūtra II.19 (*Light* 128, 132-133). It is also worth noting that the *Gītā* employs a whole range of terms to refer to consciousness and its component parts including those noted above and others like *ātman*. The English equivalent for certain Sanskrit terms can also be broad or somewhat imprecise, creating further confusion for the Western reader. For example, as Monier-Williams notes, the word ‘*ātman*’ can mean mind, body, or soul (*Dictionary* 135).

³⁶ ‘I am the Self, Arjuna, / seated in the heart of all beings’ (10.20/125).

³⁷ See Monier-Williams (*Dictionary* 783-784).

Maitrāyana-Brāhmaṇa Upanishad states: ‘What a man thinks, that he is: this is the old secret [...]. Mind alone is the cause of bondage and liberty for men; if attached to the world, it becomes bound; if free from the world, that is liberty’ (*Upanishads* II 333-334). Stanzas 2.55-68 and 5.26-28 of the *Gītā* offer equivalent observations, linking the unsteady mind to pain and the controlled mind to serenity, joy, and ultimate freedom (56-59, 86-87).

The various types of desire (*kāma* or less frequently, *icchā*) *manas* produces in response to external stimuli are also considered to be especially problematic in yoga. In stanzas 3.37-39 of the *Gītā*, for instance, Krishna depicts desire as the ‘deadly’ and ‘all-devouring’ enemy of the sage; obscuring wisdom just as a ‘fire is obscured by smoke’ (69). In stanza 16.21, desire is further identified as a demonic trait; a soul-destroying aspect of the ‘threefold entrance to hell’ (173).³⁸ Only through ‘knowledge of the Self’ and ‘sustaining the self by the Self’ can the ‘difficult-to-conquer enemy called desire’ be vanquished (3.43/70). Nevertheless, it is worth noting that within the vast corpus of Indian spiritual and moral thought, desire is not always perceived problematically and is in fact sometimes cast in a quite positive and healthy light. As noted above, for example, in the ethical-legal texts of Hinduism *kāma* – along with material welfare (*artha*), morality or duty (*dharma*), and liberation (*moksha*) – is recognised as one of the four great goals (*purusārthas*) of humanity.³⁹ Tantric literature is also famous for its valorisation of *kāma* in the guise of sexual pleasure.⁴⁰

³⁸ Anger (*krodha*) and greed (*lobha*) are the other two aspects which, as Prabhupāda notes, arise from the first (*As It Is* 640-641).

³⁹ See Feuerstein (*Tradition* 207-208) and Davis (“Being Hindu”).

⁴⁰ See Ajit Mookerjee and Madhu Khanna (*Tantric* 163-188). As noted in the preceding discussion, Foucault favourably contrasts the East’s *ars erotica* with the West’s *scientia sexualis* in the first volume of his *History*. No doubt he had texts like India’s *Kāma Sūtras* in mind when he made this comparison.

Chapter 12 of the *Gītā* also extols the virtues of a love-centred form of yoga known as *bhakti-yoga*.⁴¹

Be this as it may, throughout the remainder of the text, Krishna repeatedly advises Arjuna to give up all varieties of desire, practicing dispassion (*vairāgya*) and finding satisfaction and contentment in the Self alone.⁴² For the yogin, therefore, controlling desire is seen as a necessary precursor to liberation because it causes individuals to cling to the material realm, reinforcing painful and ultimately false identifications with the ephemeral phenomena of the world. Enmeshed in cycles of pain and pleasure, individuals also continue to experience the world dualistically, which yogic discourse perceives as another impediment to freedom. Stanzas 7.27-28 of the *Gītā* address this matter directly, identifying hatred (*dvesa*) and craving (*icchā*) as aspects of the primal duality (*dvamdva*) that keeps individuals bound (104-105).⁴³ Consequently, although following Krishna's advice to give up all varieties of desire would certainly include the renunciation of materialistic and hedonistic attitudes and behaviours, the problematisation of *manas* and the desire it produces represents something much more profound for the yogin. It signifies the overarching need to detach consciousness from all material phenomena and the binding effects these phenomena represent. For the yogin, therefore, controlling the desiring mind is not just about being virtuous but instead represents a way to loosen one's attachments to material phenomena and thereby stimulate a fundamental transformation in the practitioner's 'Being-in' the world.

⁴¹ Krishna is a common object of devotion (*bhakti*) within the realm of Indian spirituality. This affection sometimes takes erotic form, as it did amongst the *gopīs* (cowgirls) who ignored their families and duties because of their intoxicating love of God. Significantly, love of God is the only form of attachment that does not have a binding effect. See Feuerstein (*Tradition* 36-41). Loy also provides an interesting commentary on the *Gītā*'s approach to *bhakti-yoga* (*Nonduality* 283).

⁴² See stanza 2.55 in particular (56).

⁴³ As a side note, there is a story in the *Vishnu-Purāṇa* of a king who hated the Divine in the form of Vishnu so intensely and obsessively that he could think of little else. Ironically, this 'Yoga of Hatred' (*dvesa-yoga*) eventually led to his enlightenment. See Feuerstein (*Tradition* 38).

Yoga also problematises the ego (*asmitā*). Ego dissolution or non-clinging to the ‘I-sense’ is probably one of the most misunderstood aspects of practice, evoking fears of psychotic breaks and other grave psychological ramifications for practitioners.⁴⁴ Regardless, yogic discourse is unequivocal about the need to interrogate the ego or, more broadly, to question the sovereign ideal of selfhood. In stanza 18.58 of the *Gītā*, for example, Krishna states:

Focused on me at all times,
you will overcome all obstructions;
but if you persist in clinging
to the I-sense, then you are lost (193).⁴⁵

This stanza is doubly illuminating because it also identifies the alternative sense of self yogins come to realise through practice – namely, Krishna- or Self-consciousness. In other texts including the *Bṛihadāranyaka Upanishad* (sections II.4.12 and IV.4.13), this activity is identified as the creative work of existence because he who has found and awakened to the Self ‘is the creator, for he is the maker of everything, his is the world, and he is the world itself’ (*Upanishads II* 112, 178).⁴⁶ Feuerstein offers additional commentary on this aspect of yogic thought:

The methods and lifestyles developed by the Indian philosophical and spiritual geniuses over a period of at least five millennia all have one and the same purpose: to help us break through the habit patterns of our ordinary consciousness and to realize our identity (or at least union) with the perennial Reality (*Tradition* xxvi).

⁴⁴ Carl Jung’s *Psychology of Kundalini Yoga* (xxx-xxxi) is demonstrative. Feuerstein also notes how some commentators have interpreted *samādhi*, or yogic union, as a form of artificially induced schizophrenia (*Tradition* 252). Nevertheless, hard evidence linking yogic practices with psychosis or other mental illnesses is difficult to find, although some anecdotal evidence exists. In November 2007, for example, Jessica Lu and Joseph Pierre wrote a letter to the *American Journal of Psychiatry* reporting a case of psychosis in a participant in a Bikram yoga instructors’ training seminar. The *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry* received a similar report in June 2003 from Sujata Sethi and Subhash Bhargava detailing psychotic breaks in two individuals who had been engaging in intensive meditation practices. Notably, all of these individuals had a prior history of psychosis which, according to the literature, may render them more vulnerable to subsequent breakdowns whilst engaging in yogic practices like intensive meditation.

⁴⁵ Stanzas 3.30-31 relate similar ideas (67).

⁴⁶ Eliade makes an equivalent observation about Sāmkhya which, like almost all Indian philosophies, views the genesis of the world as a ‘psychic act’ (*Immortality* 23).

One of the ‘habits’ of ordinary consciousness is thinking of oneself as an autonomous being. Yoga seeks to dissolve this sense of sovereignty, which coalesces around the ego, and replace it an infinitely larger notion of s/Selfhood that Feuerstein calls the ‘perennial Reality’. In Vedānta, the perennial Reality or Self is sometimes also known as *tat* or *tattva* (‘that’ or ‘thatness’) and the culmination of an individual’s self-identification with *tat* is summed up by the dictum *tat tvam asi* (‘Thou art That’).⁴⁷ This association of ‘self’ and ‘Self’ (s/Self) is absent in non-practitioners, creating a false sense of separateness in which individuals, as Whicher suggests, become ‘locked into an epistemological and ontological duality with the objective world’ (*Integrity* 151). Yoga attempts to overcome this division and the distress it causes through practices that alter a yogin’s perception of reality, eventually eliminating the habits of consciousness which lead practitioners to view themselves as wholly autonomous beings. Whicher speaks of this transformation as a process of overcoming a ‘mistaken identity’ whereby the ‘finite, egoic self’ is re-conceptualised as unbounded (110).⁴⁸ Consequently, the outcome of practice is not an uncompensated and potentially devastating loss of self; rather, it is an *unbinding* of identity from the self-limiting, fictitious ideal of sovereignty.

It is nonetheless important to remember that although Feuerstein correctly equates the goal of yoga with achieving a state of union or identity with the Self, yogic discourse is not always in agreement on this matter. As Whicher states, the ‘definition of Yoga as “union” is popular among Vedānta and neo-Vedānta followers and [...] generally implies a union between the individual self and the supreme Self, an identity that can be equated with *brahman* (the underlying, transcendent Reality)’

⁴⁷ See Feuerstein (*Tradition* 311, 459) and Monier-Williams (*Dictionary* 432-433). The dictum *tat tvam asi* is found in stanza VI.12.3 (and ensuing stanzas) of the *Chāndogya Upanishad* (*Upanishads I* 104-105). See Whicher’s commentary (*Integrity* 37).

⁴⁸ Douglas Allen argues a similar point (*Culture* 10).

(*Integrity* 29). This is the definition of yoga found in the *Gītā*, the Upanishads, and tantric forms of yoga – ‘all of which basically subscribe to a form of Vedāntic, nondualist, or panentheistic philosophy’ (29). Within Classical Yoga, however, the goal of practice is better understood as *disunion* or as a disentanglement of the spirit (*purusa*) from matter (*prakriti*) and a realignment of one’s identity with the former, which is *alinga* or ‘beyond qualities’. The name for this state of being is *kaivalya* or ‘aloneness’. Whicher describes the notion of selfhood associated with attaining *kaivalya* as follows: ‘The yogin is *in* the world but is not defined by worldly existence’ (*Integrity* 292). This, too, is a realisation of true identity as ‘one’ (*purusa*), although it is not identical to the monistic ‘oneness’ realised through Vedānta.

Because the *Gītā* is generally considered to be a Vedāntic text, however, the current analysis will focus upon the subjective ramifications of the nondualist perspective.⁴⁹ As noted in the preceding discussion, the *Gītā*’s ideal of s/Selfhood proposes that individuals participate in the phenomenal world but are not wholly confined or defined by it. As Krishna declares in stanza 9.4-5, although he (the Self) permeates the universe in his unmanifest form and provides support for all beings, he is not confined by these material manifestations (114). In the ensuing chapter, Krishna suggests Arjuna (the self) is the same when he declares, ‘I am Krishna; / [...] I am Arjuna’ (10.37/129). Realising this ideal of s/Selfhood is impossible, however, unless Arjuna first interrogates his former understanding of selfhood. By problematising the ego, yoga helps practitioners explore the real-life ramifications of conceiving of themselves as something other than wholly self-contained, sovereign beings. And if ‘thought alone’ determines the qualitative nature of one’s being in the world, then to ‘think oneself otherwise’ cannot help but have profound life effects.

⁴⁹ In stanza 15.15, Krishna declares himself to be the compiler of Vedānta (*As It Is* 613-614). Nonetheless, as Eliade notes, because the *Gītā* incorporates aspects of Sāṃkhyan metaphysics, it is actually a synthetic work (*Immortality* 158-159).

In Vedānta, this radical interrogation of subjectivity is founded upon an underlying notion of reality as singular and therefore also offers a critique of traditional dualistic approaches for ordering existence. An analysis of Krishna's description of 'himself' in Chapter 10 helps illuminate this point. In response to Arjuna's request for examples of his form, Krishna offers a long list of his manifestations, which cover a whole range of natural and cultural phenomena.⁵⁰ The effect of this recitation is a denaturalisation or collapsing of the binary oppositions typically used to order existence. Krishna closes his recitation by stating:

But what need is there for all these
details? Just know that I am,
and that I support the whole universe
with a single fragment of myself (10.42/130).

In this monistic model of reality, the multiplicity of the world (which is signified by Krishna's recitation of his many forms) is not denied but it is viewed as trick of appearances, a product of limited human perception.⁵¹ This idea becomes clearer in Chapter 11 where Krishna is required to give Arjuna 'divine eyes' so that he can see reality as it truly is – 'without end, middle, or beginning' (11.8/133, 11.16/135). Once freed from the strictures of the ego, practitioners can grasp this alternative reality because they too have been reconstituted as beyond duality and delineation, unified, boundless.

The third aspect of consciousness that yoga seeks to problematise, although perhaps to a lesser extent than *manas* or *asmitā*, is *buddhi* or the intellect. This aspect of yogic philosophy counters the typical post-Kantian Western moral perspective where intellect is regarded as an indispensable component of ethical substance. By

⁵⁰ Natural phenomena include the sun and moon (10.21/125); whereas, cultural phenomena include the syllable *Om* and the mantra (10.25/126).

⁵¹ Nonetheless, as Prabhupāda notes, material reality is still posited as 'real' rather than illusory in the *Gītā* (*As It Is* 8). This philosophical stance is Sāṃkhyan rather than Vedāntic and demonstrates the synthetic nature of the text.

problematizing reason and more specifically, by linking rationality with suffering rather than transcendence; however, yogic discourse displays nuances of what might be considered late modern thought. Yoga's critique of reason manifests in a couple of important ways. First, as already discussed, yoga offers a profound critique of the dualistic thought processes that typically underpin reason. Loy notes the crucial role nonduality plays more generally in Asian philosophy and religion, identifying five different ways it is expressed in these thought systems (*Nonduality* 17). These expressions include the negation of dualistic thinking, the non-plurality of the world, the non-difference between subject and object, the nonduality of duality and nonduality, and the possibility of a mystical unity between God and human. Loy further observes that the first expression – negation of dualistic thinking – is a precursor to realising other forms of nonduality (21). All five expressions of nonduality appear in yogic discourse, particularly in Vedānta-based texts like the *Gītā* but even in so-called radically dualistic texts like the *Yoga Sūtras*. In Sūtra IV.7, for example, Patañjali declares that the actions of the (adept) yogin are 'neither white nor black' or, in other words, beyond duality.⁵² Sūtra II.33 also suggests a mental practice called *pratipaksha* or 'opposite thinking' to assist in the process of moving from duality toward equanimity.⁵³

Examples of nondualistic thinking in the *Gītā* include a stanza in Chapter 2 where Krishna commands Arjuna to be 'beyond all opposites [...] / anchored in the real, and free' (2.45/54). Later in the text, Krishna identifies aversion (*dvesa*) and craving (*icchā*) as the 'primal dualities' that keep individuals bound and states that once they are released from duality, individuals can act purely, without attachment, and become free (7.27-28/104-105). By asserting he is 'all that is or is not' (9.19/117)

⁵² See *Sūtras* (210-211) and Iyengar (*Light* 253-254). The *Yoga Sūtras* also problematise the subject-object relationship. See Whicher (*Integrity* 107-109).

⁵³ Iyengar (*Light* 145-147) offers a good commentary on *pratipaksha*.

and then providing several examples to illustrate this point, Krishna further problematises some of the other core binaries used to order the world. Stanzas 9.17-19 present several examples including father-mother, origin-dissolution, and death-deathlessness (116-117). It is noteworthy that *dvamdva*, the Sanskrit word for duality, can also mean strife, quarrel, contest, and fight.⁵⁴ When yogins retrain their intellects to think and perceive reality in more nondualistic terms, they also begin to transcend the strife that attends dualism, denaturalising it (*contra* Heraclitus and Nietzsche) as a fundamental aspect of existence. As discussed in previous chapters, this strife manifests in a variety of ways and causes a wide range of negative, real-life consequences, particularly for women.

Yoga further problematises the intellect or, more precisely, the knowledge attained through reason (*jñāna*), by valuing it somewhat differently than it might be in traditional Western intellectual contexts. Two examples will suffice to illustrate this point. First, as Eliade observes, in India truth is not considered ‘precious in itself’ but ‘becomes precious by virtue of its soteriological function, because knowledge of truth helps man to liberate himself’ (*Immortality* 4). Inayatullah puts a finer point upon this notion by observing that in the Indian episteme, truth is defined as ‘that which leads to physical, mental and spiritual growth’ (*Understanding* 63). In the yogic paradigm, therefore, knowledge is not pursued for its own sake but instead is valued for its therapeutic utility, as a balm to relieve the pain of existence.

Second, as Eliade notes, in the yogic tradition the ultimate knowledge is not attained by intellectual activity but through something akin to a revelation or ‘awakening’ wherein an alternative reality is unveiled; a reality where ‘object completely identifies itself with subject’ (*Immortality* 29). Krishna alludes to this

⁵⁴ See Monier-Williams (*Dictionary* 503).

idea in stanza 9.2 when he states that: ‘the supreme wisdom, / the knowing beyond all knowing, / [is] experienced directly, in a flash’ (113). By placing a high value on experiential knowledge or other ways of knowing besides reason that may seem irrational or, at the very least, unscientific to the Western mind, the tradition further problematises the intellect as the best way of accessing truth.⁵⁵

Preparing the self for enlightenment nevertheless still necessitates the acquisition of more mundane or worldly forms of wisdom such as instruction in scriptures and meditation techniques. This type of knowledge is traditionally attained through the guru-yogin bond; a relationship which has been a vital part of the yogic tradition since the beginning. As Eliade asserts, ‘one does not learn Yoga by oneself: the guidance of a master (*guru*) is necessary’ (*Immortality* 5).⁵⁶ The *Gītā* reiterates this sentiment, not only by mirroring the guru-yogin interaction through its dialogical narrative format but overtly through Krishna’s advice to Arjuna to ‘find a wise teacher [...] [to] guide you on the path to wisdom’ (4.34/78). So crucial is this student-teacher relationship that gurus, as Feuerstein notes, are ‘traditionally regarded as an embodiment of the living Truth that is indicated in the sacred texts’ (*Tradition* 10). A verse from the *Taittirīya Upanishad* (1.3.3) highlights this idea: ‘Then, as regards learning, the teacher is the first form, the pupil is the last form, knowledge is the junction and instruction is the joining link. Thus, one should meditate upon learning’ (*Nine* 216). The importance of knowledge as a soteriological tool is made clear in other ways in the *Gītā*. For example, in Chapter 4 – a chapter that provides a general description of the importance of *jñāna* in yogic practice – Krishna declares:

⁵⁵ There are additional differences between the paradigms. In the yoga tradition, for example, new knowledge does not necessarily displace old knowledge and consequently, contradictory or paradoxical knowledges are better tolerated than they might be in the West. See Inayatullah (*Understanding* 45-47).

⁵⁶ Contemporary opinions on this matter differ. For example, the Kripalu Center – one of America’s largest ashrams and yoga centres – now operates as a post-guru community. See Stephen Cope’s commentary (*Will* 286).

Just as firewood is turned
to ashes in the flames of a fire,
all actions are turned to ashes
in wisdom's refining flames.

Nothing in the world can purify
as powerfully as wisdom;
practiced in yoga, you will find
this wisdom within yourself (4.37-8/79)

In fact, knowledge is so crucial to liberation that the *Gītā* considers *jñāna-yoga* to be a separate *marga* or distinct path to transcendence (*Gītā* 19). Of course, as Krishna declares in stanza 13.12, the ultimate goal of all knowing is always knowledge of the Self, what differs from this objective is simply ignorance (151).⁵⁷

While transforming the three aspects of consciousness is the chief focus of practice, the *Gītā* also offers guidance for altering other ethical substances including feelings, intentions, and acts. Significantly, the text tends to couch this advice in negative terms, highlighting the need to transform existing or conventional modes of feeling, willing, and acting. For example, in stanzas 2.48 and 2.71, Krishna tells Arjuna to act in a detached, dispassionate, and selfless manner:

Self-possessed, resolute, act
without any thought of results,
open to success or failure.
This equanimity is yoga.

Abandoning all desires,
acting without craving, free
from all thoughts of "I" and "mine,"
that man finds utter peace' (55, 59).

The idea of selfless action or decentred agency introduced in these stanzas is discussed further in Chapters 3 and 18 and, as Eliade notes, represents the solution to one of the fundamental soteriological problems underlying the text – namely, whether action can lead to liberation (*Immortality* 154-155). Because of the centrality of this

⁵⁷ Loy's reading of the *Gītā* lends support here. As he observes, the aim of *jñāna-yoga* is to create a sort of pervasive perceptual equanimity which comes from training the mind to stop seizing on sense-objects and reifying a mundane (autonomous) sense of self (*Nonduality* 280-281).

idea in the text and the importance of acts as a second-order ethical substance, a more detailed discussion is warranted.

As Matthew Mackenzie notes, the *Gītā* relies upon a five-fold theory of action from Sāmkhya doctrine (“Five” 141). According to this theory, every action requires a body, a doer or agent, an instrument of action, behaviour, and divine providence (“Five” 142-143, *Gītā* 18.14/185). It is this final component, divine providence or *daivam*, which renders the *Gītā*’s theory of agency different from the typical post-Enlightenment view. In Kantian ethics and moral psychology, for example, to be a moral agent is to be self-legislating and consequently, no external source can serve as a motivation for action (“Five” 146). In the *Gītā*, however, Kant’s underlying assumption of sovereignty is considered to be incorrect, an illusion created by *asmitā* (18.16-17/185). Although individuals still have agency in the *Gītā*’s model, only those with limited understanding see themselves as the *sole* agent (18.16/185). To act in concert with the *Gītā*’s model of decentred agency is nevertheless not the same as surrendering to fate or *karma*.⁵⁸ Simply stated, there would be no point to any of Krishna’s teachings if an individual’s life were completely pre-determined. Instead, according to this model the Self becomes a co-locus for action or, in other words, the s/Self rather than the self becomes the doer. Moreover, because the Self pervades the world, when individuals adopt this model of agency they are consciously acknowledging their interconnectedness with the world

⁵⁸ The Western idea of fate is roughly equivalent to the yogic idea of *karma*. However negatively *karma* has been portrayed (e.g., as fostering quietism or world-resignation), as Whicher notes ‘there is clearly room in the Hindu tradition for a more nondeterministic, creative, and emancipatory dimension to the doctrine of *karma* that, from an ethical and soteriological perspective, takes into account the crucial role played by free will as either positively or negatively affecting one’s life’ (*Integrity* 97-98).

around them.⁵⁹ In short, it is only by realising their ‘essence’ as interconnected, relational beings that yogins truly become moral agents.

In summary, by problematising *manas*, *asmitā*, and *buddhi*, yogins precipitate a change of consciousness that radically shifts their perception of self from the conventional, sovereign ideal to one of boundlessness and interconnection. This transformation engenders further changes in other ethical substances including intentions and acts, motivating a new sense of decentred agency wherein the Self becomes a co-locus for action. Another crucial feature of this transformation is the critique it fosters of concepts fundamental to the conventional model of selfhood including desire, ego, and reason.

6

The third aspect of Foucault’s metaethical framework is the mode of subjection or how individuals are invited or incited to recognise their moral obligations and assume the work of becoming an ethical being. Modes of subjection may include a moral code, reason, and textual or embodied authorities such as scriptures or revered teachers. Several modes of subjection are mentioned in the *Gītā*. In Chapter 4, for example, Krishna invokes the last mode of subjection by situating his doctrine within a multi-generational lineage of divine and non-divine authorities including himself and Manu, the ‘father of humans’ (4.1-2/71).⁶⁰ For those unlikely to lend credence to Krishna’s doctrine simply because of its genealogy, however, the *Gītā* mentions additional modes of subjection. One of these modes is a rudimentary moral code,

⁵⁹ ‘Just as the all-moving wind, / wherever it goes, always / remains in the vastness of space, / all beings remain within me’ (*Gītā* 9.6/114). Chapter 11 includes several additional references to the Self’s pervasive character including stanzas 11.20 (‘you alone fill all space’) and 11.38 (‘the presence that fills all things’) (135, 139).

⁶⁰ This lineage is actually circular, starting and ending with Krishna.

which is outlined in stanzas 17.14-16 (178).⁶¹ The *Gītā*'s moral code revolves around a central premise of self-discipline or exerting control over one's body, speech, and mind through various actions and non-actions including non-harm, purity, honesty, self-restraint, serenity, and compassion. These stanzas also advise practitioners to recite scriptures and honour the gods, priests, teachers, and sages; directives that could also be interpreted as modes of subjection.⁶²

According to Foucault, subjecting oneself to a moral code means establishing a personal relationship with that code; a relationship which in turn compels one to practice the tenets of the code (*Pleasure* 27). Because the mode of subjection represents the interface between an established model of behaviour and the behaviour itself, it can also be understood as a bridge of obligation uniting moral theory and practice. This bridge of obligation may be derived from custom, a sense of duty, divine or secular law, association with a peer group that expects adherence to the code, or from a personal vow (27). The obligation to practice a moral code may also be fortified by a system of enforcement which identifies and penalises infractions or other forms of noncompliance. In such environments, subjectivation occurs in a quasi-juridical form or, as Foucault might characterise it, amidst an ethos of discipline and punishment (29).

As discussed in Chapter One, one of the reasons for Foucault's interest in Greco-Roman ethics was its reliance upon creative self-subjectivation instead of a quasi-juridical ethos of discipline and punishment as its principle means for crafting moral subjects. In this respect, the ethics advanced by the *Gītā* is similar to the Greco-Roman model. Like this ancient Western model, the *Gītā*'s yoga-based ethics is not

⁶¹ Stanza 13.8 reiterates some of these ideas (151). The *Gītā*'s moral code is roughly equivalent to the ethics (*yamas* and *niyamas*) outlined in Pada II.30 and II.32 of the *Yoga Sūtras*. See Iyengar (*Light* 142-145).

⁶² Stanzas 16.23-24 reiterate this idea (174). Nevertheless, other parts of the text offer a critique of scriptural authority including stanzas 2.42-2.46 and 2.52-53 (53-56).

heavily reliant upon a moral code nor does it assert any specific penalties for noncompliance with that code (or, for that matter, any of Krishna's teachings) besides a continuation of existence as it is already known and experienced. Practicing the ethics of the *Gītā* is, therefore, a purely voluntary endeavour and individuals need only reflect upon their own experiences as suffering subjects to understand the 'penalty' for *not* practicing. This idea is reinforced in the final stanzas of the poem where Krishna closes his teacher-student dialogue by telling Arjuna to simply act as he 'thinks best', knowing his advice comes from love and an earnest concern for Arjuna's welfare (18.63-18.65/194-195). These are not the stern commands of a god of discipline and punishment; rather, these are gentle words of counsel spoken by a wise and caring friend.⁶³

Because yoga lacks a strong external basis for compelling practice, it relies mostly upon internal motivators such as reason and personal commitment. These internal motivators may be reinforced by a network of interpersonal relationships – a *sangha* or yogic community. As the discussion in Chapter Two demonstrates, interpersonal relationships are also an important feature of Greco-Roman ethics, despite certain feminist critiques to the contrary. In the contemporary West, a *sangha* may be comprised of a guru, fellow practitioners, friends, relatives, teachers, and other like-minded people – in short, anyone who the yogin might seek out for guidance or support while pursuing his or her self-care goals.⁶⁴ In Foucauldian-Deleuzian terms, the influence of the *sangha* helps practitioners reconfigure the power-knowledge diagram or abstract machine which crafts their subjectivity, reinforcing individual efforts toward this same objective. In yoga, following a moral

⁶³ It is worth noting that prior to revealing himself as the God incarnate, Arjuna knew Krishna only as a friend and kinsman. Stanzas 11.41-42 illustrate this fact (140).

⁶⁴ Other cultural influences, including media coverage of celebrity practitioners like Madonna and Sting, may also motivate some practitioners.

code represents a similar sort of tactical manoeuvre; serving as a way to control one's social and self-reflexive interactions to reduce the possibility of producing what Whicher calls 'unwholesome [binding] volitions and intentions' (*Integrity* 191). In other words, by adhering to a moral code, yogins manifest a more wholesome, positive, and supportive internal and external environment which, in turn, reduces the possibility their yogic endeavours will fail. Consequently, for the yogin, practicing a self-restraint like chastity is not just a matter of adhering to a rule or being virtuous or 'good' in the traditional moral sense. Instead, it represents a tactic for avoiding desire-fuelled interactions and attachments to sense objects that produce suffering and destroy personal equanimity.

In a purely voluntary ethics like yoga, the most important mode of subjection is simply the personal vow one makes to practice. Rather than being enforced and maintained by a system of discipline and punishment, this vow is upheld by the effects of practice itself which, even for beginners, can be extremely compelling.⁶⁵ On a physical level, for example, individuals who practice *āsana* enjoy a variety of health benefits including improved fitness, flexibility, and strength.⁶⁶ Similar claims can be made about the benefits of other yogic practices such as meditation. As legendary yoga guru B.K.S. Iyengar states, 'the practice of yoga helps the lazy body to become active and vibrant' and 'transforms the mind, making it harmonious' (*Light* xvii). Krishna offers a similar observation in stanza 2.40 of the *Gītā*, stating: 'On this path no effort is wasted, / no gain is ever reversed; / even a little of this practice / will shelter you from great sorrow' (53). Unlike other moralities that exist within a quasi-juridical environment of discipline and punishment, yoga becomes its own

⁶⁵ According to contemporary Western yoga guru Baron Baptiste, *āsana* practice is particularly self-reinforcing because it tends to produce immediate benefits (*Journey* 50).

⁶⁶ See <http://www.intelihealth.com>.

inducement because it represents a practical path to better life, a way to manifest material wellbeing and transcend the indigenous suffering of existence.

In summary, self-subjection is the primary mode of subjection in yoga. Yogic ethics is not upheld by a system of external authorities or enforcement mechanisms but instead is left up to the individual who makes a commitment to practice. This commitment may be reinforced by various means including support of a guru or *sangha* or simply through observing the empirical benefits of practice.

7

The fourth component of Foucault's metaethical framework is self-forming activities or practices of the self (*pratique de soi*). In *The Use of Pleasure* Foucault describes self-forming activities as 'the ethical work (*travail éthique*) that one performs on oneself, not only in order to bring one's conduct in compliance with a given rule, but to attempt to transform oneself into an ethical subject of one's behavior' (27). In a 1983 interview where he elaborates on his genealogy of ethics, Foucault further characterises self-forming activities as '*l'ascétisme* – asceticism in a very broad sense' (*Reader* 355). Foucault's depiction of self-forming activities as broadly ascetic in nature is important for several reasons that were previously explored in Chapters Two and Three. At this juncture, however, Foucault's depiction simply highlights yet another correspondence between Greco-Roman ethics and yoga because yoga is one of the oldest forms of asceticism still practiced today.

As Feuerstein observes, ascetic practices have a long history in the yoga tradition (*Tradition* 65). Patrick Olivelle, who calls asceticism the 'cornerstone' of Indian religions ("Deconstruction" 188), lends further support here. The Sanskrit word for asceticism or austerities is *tapas* and, as Monier-Williams notes, is derived

from a root word meaning ‘heat’ (*Dictionary* 436). According to Feuerstein, in early Hindu scriptures like the *Rg Veda*, the word *tapas* refers to the heat of the sun or the sacrificial fire but eventually was used to denote ascetic practices (*Tradition* 66). In early Hindu texts, *tapas* is also sometimes associated with the activity of creation; a linkage previously noted in Chapter Two. This linkage is illustrated in a hymn to creation from the *Rg Veda* (10.129) that declares: ‘In the beginning there was darkness concealed by darkness. All this was [cosmic] water without distinction. The One that was covered by voidness emerged through the might of the heat-of-austerity (*tapas*)’ (*Tradition* 112). In later texts such as the *Taittiriya Upanishad*, *tapas* becomes further associated with the act of acquiring knowledge of the Self which, as discussed above, is one of the chief goals of yoga (*Nine* III.1-6/244-248). Eliade elaborates on this idea by reminding us that the change of consciousness sought in yoga is not easily attained and thus ‘implies a practice (*abhyāsa*), an asceticism (*tapas*) – in short, a physiological technique, compared with which the strictly psychological technique is subsidiary’ (*Immortality* 36).⁶⁷

The *Gītā* mentions a variety of ascetic practices. All of these practices are situated as methodologies for affecting changes in the body and mind conducive to s/Self-realisation. They include: sense withdrawal (2.58/57), rhythmic breathing (4.29-30/77, 5.27/86), fasting and other dietary observances (4.30/77, 6.16-17/91, 17.7-10/176-177), single-pointed concentration (6.10-12/90), seated meditation (6.11-6.14/90-91), chastity and other forms of self-control (17.14-17.16/178), scriptural recitation (17.15/178), and chanting (17.23-25/180). Significantly, the ascetic technique best known to contemporary Westerners, *āsana* or yogic postures, is

⁶⁷ Whicher describes the application of *tapas* to the human body in decidedly Nietzschean terms, stating ‘Through the application of *tapas*, creative intention (*kratu*) is cultivated that has the power to link the microscopic world of the sacrificer [practitioner] with the macrocosm, giving him or her the power to determine and alter circumstances, to bring forth new possibilities’ (*Integrity* 10).

mentioned only once in the text and then only the classic meditational seat is described (6.11/90). The *Gītā*'s relative silence on *āsana* is attributable to the fact that the more complex form of *āsana* known to Westerners comes from a later tradition – namely, tantra-inspired Hatha Yoga.⁶⁸ As Eliade notes:

In tantrism, the human body acquires an importance it had never before attained in the spiritual history of India. To be sure, health and strength, interest in a physiology homologizable with the cosmos and implicitly sanctified, are Vedic, if not pre-Vedic, values. But tantrism carries to its furthest consequences the conception that sanctity can be realized only in a “divine body” (*Immortality* 227).

Kaelber describes the significance of tantra-inspired Hatha Yoga in similar terms, stating: ‘Through yogic practice the body is transformed into what some traditions refer to as a “body of diamond,” a body possessed of superhuman powers, resilient to the ravages of time’ (“Understanding” 322). As Mookerjee and Khanna note, tantra’s positive and receptive attitude toward the body as a precondition to spiritual discipline (*sādhana*) comes from a perception of the body as a link between the terrestrial and cosmic (*Tantric* 136). The tantric view of the body as a divine abode or bridge to transcendence stands in stark contrast to the negative ideations of the body found elsewhere in yogic discourse. The *Maitrāyanīya Upanishad* (1.3) offers a particularly vivid example, describing the body as an abject, ill-smelling conglomerate of bone, flesh, blood, and waste products afflicted by desire, anger, delusion, fear, despondency, disease and death.⁶⁹

Considering the extreme variability of attitudes toward the body within the discursive borders of the yoga tradition, the *Gītā*'s stance should be considered relatively moderate. Like the *Maitrāyanīya Upanishad*, for instance, the *Gītā*

⁶⁸ Nonetheless, as Eliade notes, there are numerous references to *āsana* in other sections of the *Mahābhārata* (*Immortality* 53-54). See John Brockington’s analysis of references to yoga in the *Mahābhārata* (“Yoga” 13-23).

⁶⁹ Quoted in Feuerstein (*Tradition* 382). For a related discussion of the various views of the body in Indian asceticism, see Olivelle (“Deconstruction” 188-210).

presupposes an afflicted, suffering body. In the poem, Arjuna represents this body – a real, flesh and bone man immobilised by despair and delusion. Nonetheless, his body is not presented as object but instead is constituted as a fragment of the divine, similar to the way it might be depicted in tantric literature. On a more general level, the poem’s implicit linkage of freedom with bodily-based practices of the self also serves to constitute the body as a quasi-sacred substance, the raw material for transcendence. Moreover, because the Self pervades the universe (2.17/48), it must be present in the human body because according to Krishna, ‘Whatever in this world is excellent / and glows with intelligence or beauty – / be sure that it has its source / in a fragment of my divine splendor’ (10.41/130). Additional support for the divine capacity of the human body is found elsewhere in Chapter 10 where Krishna conflates himself with Arjuna by declaring: ‘I am Krishna [...] I am Arjuna’ (10.37/129). Later in the poem Krishna strengthens the association between the divine body and human body by stating that when individuals engage in practices of self-mortification, they not only torture their own flesh, they also torture him (17.5-6/176). Krishna’s advice to eat only *sattvic* foods, or foods that promote vitality and good health, is another example of the *Gītā*’s positive attitude toward the body, marking it as an object of care rather than disgust. Certain tenets of the *Gītā*’s moral code also suggest an ethic of care for the body; particularly observances of non-harm (*ahimsa*) and purity (*sauca*).⁷⁰

Because the human body is at least quasi-divine, s/Self-realisation cannot be understood as an additive process but instead must be viewed as an awakening to what already is and has always been. In short, the Self already resides inside the self; yogic practices of the self only help illuminate this actuality. Krishna’s declaration in Chapter 10 – ‘I am the Self, Arjuna, / seated in the heart of all beings’ (10.20/125) –

⁷⁰ Krishna’s call for *sauca* could also stem from a view of the body as defiled. As Eliade notes, Hatha Yoga accords great importance to purification practices (*Immortality* 230). The second chapter of the *Hathayoga-Pradīpikā*, a key text of this tradition, describes a number of them.

provides a textual basis for this understanding of the divine essence of the extant.

s/Selfhood is already our nature; yogic practices are merely tools to reveal it. We are, as Amrit Desai declares, all born divine.⁷¹

Experiences of extreme interrelatedness or nonduality are integral to the yogic process of s/Self-realisation. Simply stated, these experiences provide material or nondiscursive proof of the discursive reality described in the *Gītā*. This reality is nondual and inherently blissful because it knows neither separation nor strife.⁷² The temporary identification between subject and object that occurs in meditation (*samādhi*) is perhaps the most widely recognised example of a yoga-induced experience of nonduality. Eliade characterises *samādhi* as a concrete experience of the ‘coincidence of opposites’ where

...the yogin transcends opposites and, in a unique experience, unites emptiness and superabundance, life and death, Being and nonbeing. Nor is this all. Like all paradoxical states, *samādhi* is equivalent to a reintegration of the different modalities of the real in a single modality – the undifferentiated completeness of precreation, the primordial Unity (*Immortality* 98).⁷³

Chapter 11 of the *Gītā* includes a dramatic portrayal of this ‘coincidence of opposites’ or the *samādhi* experience. In this chapter, Arjuna is treated to a theophanic vision in which Krishna and the cosmos are perceived as one:

After he had spoken these words,
Krishna, the great Lord of Yoga,
revealed to Arjuna his majestic,
transcendent, limitless form.

With innumerable mouths and eyes,

⁷¹ See Cope (*Yoga* 41-42). Cope adds that ‘born divine’ is ‘a notion that fairly saturates Indian philosophy and spiritual practice’ and is present in texts written as early as 600 B.C.E. to the present day.

⁷² Cope offers support here (*Yoga* 35-45).

⁷³ Eliade’s description echoes accounts from other yogins who have experienced *samādhi*. For example, yoga practitioner and psychologist Richard Miller reports a spontaneous experience in which ‘all sense of separation fell away [...] [and] I knew who I was as the vastness itself, empty yet full, open, timeless and without center or periphery’ (*Will* 147). Cope also offers an interesting discussion of this matter (*Yoga* 39-41).

faces too marvelous to stare at,
dazzling ornaments, innumerable
weapons uplifted, flaming –

crowned with fire, wrapped
in pure light, with celestial fragrance,
he stood forth as the infinite
God, composed of all wonders.

If a thousand suns were to rise
and stand in the noon sky, blazing,
such brilliance would be like the fierce
brilliance of that mighty Self.

Arjuna saw the whole universe
enfolded, with its countless billions
of life-forms, gathered together
in the body of the God of gods.
(11.9-13/133-134)

Later in the chapter, Arjuna punctuates this experience by telling Krishna: ‘You alone fill all space’ (11.20/135). The groundwork for Arjuna’s epiphany of nonduality is laid in the previous chapter of the poem where, as noted above, Krishna tells Arjuna of his many manifestations before showing him his ultimate form. This chapter is a long listing of all the beings, qualities, and concepts that are Krishna, or the Self; many of which are paired conceptual opposites such as beginning/end, sun/moon, saint/demon, and speech/silence (10.21, 10.26, 10.30, 10.32, 10.34, 10.38/125-129). Ostensibly, Krishna presents this inventory to try to give form to what is essentially formless and therefore beyond conventional understanding or discursive presentation. But given the oppositional nature of many of the items on Krishna’s list, this cataloguing also performs a second function – namely, to problematise Arjuna’s dualistic perception of reality so he can begin to see reality in its ‘true’, unified or

unlimited state. In other words, in these chapters Krishna is teaching Arjuna how to free himself from dualistic thinking.⁷⁴

Meditation is only one of the techniques yoga uses to achieve this end. As mentioned above, for example, Sutra II.33 the *Yoga Sūtras* mentions a practice called *pratipaksha* or opposite thinking. According to Iyengar, Patañjali recommends this practice as a methodology for cultivating equipoise by replacing negative thoughts with positive ones (*Light* 145-147). Ideations of hate, for example, are met with their opposite, thoughts of love. Yoga also proposes certain practices of self-ideation aimed at fostering a nondual perception of selfhood. Annulment (*apavāda*) is one example; a practice performed through the method of *neti-neti* ('not-thus, not-thus').⁷⁵ As Feuerstein notes, *neti-neti* consists of a 'progressive withdrawal of attention from the various aspects of psychophysical existence, thereby leading to a gradual dismantling of the false sense of identity with a particular body-mind-ego' (*Tradition* 5).⁷⁶ These practices are yogic equivalents to Nietzsche's active destruction; ways to annihilate the reactive in oneself by severing identification with the various aspects of 'normal' reality and selfhood. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the discourse also proposes an opposing ideational practice – *tat tvam asi* (Thou art That) – as a way to align one's individual identity with the Self. Krishna's listing of his many incarnations (which include Arjuna) and Arjuna's subsequent vision of the whole universe as enfolded in Krishna are textual representations of this practice in operation. In Foucauldian terms, *neti-neti* and *tat tvam asi* can both be understood as methodologies to 'refuse what we are'. In yoga, this refusal includes rejecting the

⁷⁴ According to Loy's typology of nondualities, this is an example of 'negation of dualistic thinking' (*Nonduality* 17).

⁷⁵ Whicher provides a useful commentary on *neti-neti* and *apavāda* (*Integrity* 15-16).

⁷⁶ An eighth century didactic poem ascribed to Shankara called the *Nirvāna-Shatka* includes an example of *neti-neti* (*Tradition* 5). As a side note, Roland Barthes also mentions *neti-neti* in his lectures on *The Neutral* (60). Related references also arise in *A Lover's Discourse* and *Camera Lucida*. See Footnote 42 in *The Neutral* (226).

sovereign ideal of the self in favour of a model of selfhood that is interconnected in the extreme.⁷⁷ This philosophical stance is more closely aligned with the relational models of selfhood proposed by post-Enlightenment thinkers like Nietzsche and Foucault than it is with preceding Western paradigms.

Āsana also offers a number of opportunities for cultivating nonduality. In fact, as Eliade notes, all Hatha Yoga treatises propose the ‘absolute cessation of trouble from the pairs of opposites’ as the primary aim of postural practice (*Immortality* 54). This ‘cessation of trouble’ is manifested in a variety of ways. On a basic physiological level, for instance, *āsana* is a fitness practice and thus represents a technology for making the body strong, flexible, and healthy. Because a fit body is less prone to physical forms of distress that may disturb consciousness, *āsana* also helps render the mind more fit for meditation and the experiences of nonduality this practice affords. The nondual experiences fostered by *āsana* can also take on more symbolic or imaginative forms. For example, many contemporary Western *āsana* classes commence with a posture called *bālāsana* (child’s pose) and end with a posture called *savāsana* (corpse pose); ostensibly ‘bookending’ the practice with embodiments of opposing life-states. Postures like *sīrāsana* (headstand) further encourage practitioners to ‘invert’ their normal bodily experience, literally turning the world upside-down. Other postures may evoke more imaginative experiences of nonduality by inviting practitioners to assume various non-human forms including animals, plants, or even inanimate objects.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ According to Feuerstein, yoga presupposes a cosmos of interlocking and nesting wholes, a chain of being with material and transcendental components (*Tradition* 240).

⁷⁸ Postures that may invoke these experiences include: lion, camel, dog, cat, horse, locust, cobra, eagle, crow, fish, frog, heron, swan, peacock, tortoise, pigeon, crocodile, firefly, tree, lotus, plough, boat, wheel, bridge, mountain, scale, bow, and staff poses. See Bachman’s *The Language of Yoga* for a description of these postures.

Yogic practices of the self that prompt experiences of nonduality are, therefore, paradoxical in terms of upholding the traditional Western ideal of selfhood. More specifically, the ascesis of yoga is not to shore up this atomistic ideal but exactly the opposite; to dissolve it and replace it with a notion of selfhood that is relational in the extreme or, in a word, nondual. Because of this nondual *telos*, yogic practices of the self also represent a type of embodied counter-discipline to Western rationalism and its dualistic methods for ordering existence. As Foucault and a range of feminist scholars have observed, the dividing practices intrinsic to rationalism and the human sciences are features of a practical metaphysics of duality that systematically oppresses and marginalises certain individuals and groups within a culture, particularly women. As a practical metaphysics of nonduality, yoga represents an embodied counter-strategy to interrogate and perhaps even transcend dualistic modes of experiencing reality – a ‘practice of freedom’ in the most fundamental sense. This feature of practice marks yoga as distinctive from other philosophies and ethical systems including the morality Foucault describes in his final works which, as demonstrated in Chapter One, operates within a dualistic economy of self-domination. Although the ethical work of yoga also includes mastering the body and the mind, this activity is merely preparation for yoga’s ultimate *telos*, which is nonduality or s/Self-realisation. Consequently, the relationship governing the *Gītā*’s ethical economy is not domination but relation itself – a simple yet profound assertion of the interconnectedness of all things.

8

The preceding analysis illustrates the utility of Foucault’s metaethical framework for isolating the various components of an ethical system and showing how they interact

to produce a moral being. The analysis also demonstrates the robustness of the ethics proposed by the *Gītā*, which is arguably one of the most widely read and influential texts of yoga. Yoga is not just a fitness practice but a complex and complete ethics – a way of conceptualising and attending to the work of becoming a moral being. In simple terms, by committing to practice various ascetic techniques, the yogin engenders a shift of consciousness whereby her or his understanding of selfhood is transformed. The self unites with Self to form a s/Self. Through this realisation of nonduality, the practitioner is freed from the suffering associated with atomistic, ego-centred existence. This perception of the self as interconnected with the cosmos, as a link in the vast chain of being, is the foundation upon which a moral existence becomes possible. According to Foucault's metaethical framework, the *telos* expresses the type of moral subject an ethics aspires to produce. The three remaining components – the ethical substance, mode of subjection, and the practices of the self – are the means of production or how power and knowledge are actually applied to a being to fashion this moral subject. Because they are points of contact between discourses, practices, bodies, and minds; these latter components also represent sites of intensity for power relations. Foucault might characterise them as privileged battlegrounds in the ongoing war of subjugation.

A more complete understanding of ethical self-formation is predicated upon a deep appreciation of the cultural setting in which self-care occurs, including the power relations intrinsic to that environment. Nevertheless, establishing precise boundaries around a specific socio-cultural environment can be difficult, particularly in the present-day West where individuals may encounter a multiplicity of indigenous and non-indigenous ethical discourses and practices through the Internet, travel, literature, and other means. In such settings, a personal ethics may be constructed

through a ‘bricolage’ approach, by combining bits and pieces of different ethical systems rather than being cut from the whole cloth of a specific tradition or philosophy. Individuals who practice *āsana* while simultaneously affirming adherence to traditional Western moralities such as Christianity or Judaism represent one example of this phenomenon.⁷⁹

One effective way to identify the power relations that may influence a particular self-care project is to consider the impact of various interpersonal and institutional relationships. According to Foucault, moral self-production in the ancient world was influenced by institutionalised and non-institutionalised social structures ranging from lectures and tutors to ‘a whole bundle of customary relations of kinship, friendship, and obligation’ (*Care* 52-53). No doubt a similar situation exists in the contemporary world where teachers, trainers, friends, relatives, fellow practitioners, and others may play a role in guiding, supporting, and perhaps even sabotaging a self-care project. All of these relationships represent power networks which may transmit potentially salient disciplinary effects on individual subjectivity. This is also why, as James Faubion astutely observes, ‘there is no thinking of ethics without thinking of power, or rather of powers, whether those which suppress autopoiesis or those which allow it to flourish’ (“Anthropology” 158).⁸⁰

Although Foucault’s metaethical framework is useful for isolating and analysing how interpersonal and institutional power relations might affect a self-care project, his schema does not show how an ethical system conceives of power in a more fundamental or theoretical sense. Despite never specifically reasserting his theory of power in his ethical texts, it is apparent these works rely upon the theory

⁷⁹ Yoga teacher and psychotherapist Sylvia Boorstein – who simultaneously practices Judaism, yoga and meditation – offers some interesting insights into this matter (*Will* 14-27).

⁸⁰ Faubion uses ‘autopoiesis’, a term borrowed from the biological sciences, to signify the process of self-constitution.

Foucault sets forth in *Discipline and Punish*, the first volume of the *History*, and auxiliary texts written around the same time which, following Nietzsche, theorises power relations as productive, pervasive, and dynamic. Yogic discourse proposes a similar theory of power. As noted earlier in this chapter, the *Gītā* relies upon certain tenets of Sāmkhyā philosophy including its theory of material reality (*prakṛiti*). According to this theory, every objective or subjective thing or being in the world is *prakṛiti*. Sāmkhyā philosophy further proposes that *prakṛiti* manifests in three modes of being called *gunas* – *sattva* (luminosity), *rajas* (activity), and *tamas* (dullness) – which are dynamic and coexistent.⁸¹ The multiplicity of the world is a function of *prakṛiti*'s ability to express itself variably through different mixtures of the *gunas*. Strife is one product of the coexistent tension and interplay of the *gunas* and the *Gītā*'s battleground setting provides a narrative representation of this fact.⁸² Sāmkhyā philosophy also posits another aspect of reality, *puruṣa* or the formless meta-consciousness of the Self. Like *prakṛiti*, *puruṣa* also pervades the world but is inactive, serving as an unchanging Witness to the ever-changing substantive realm.⁸³ It is the yogic expression of Being; whereas, *prakṛiti* is the equivalent of Becoming. In stanza 7.12 of the *Gītā*, Krishna explains the coexistent yet differential nature of *prakṛiti* and *puruṣa* by asserting, 'All states of being, whether / marked by *sattva* or *rajas* / or *tamas*, proceed from me; / they are *in* me, not I in them' (101).

Prabhupāda suggests that understanding 'what *prakṛiti* is' is one of the key lessons of the *Gītā* (*As It Is* 7). According to him, *prakṛiti* is the external energy of

⁸¹ As Eliade notes, *prakṛiti* exists in perfect equilibrium (*alinga* or without differentiation) only in its primordial state (*Immortality* 20).

⁸² This association is perhaps more lucid in other yogic texts like the *Yoga Sūtras*. Sūtra II.15 is particularly clear on the matter; linking fluctuations in the *gunas* (*gunavṛttis*) with misery. See Iyengar (*Light* 122-123).

⁸³ See Eliade for a more detailed discussion of the nature of and relationship between *prakṛiti* and *puruṣa* (*Immortality* 15-26). As Eliade notes, the question of just how *puruṣa* became involved with *prakṛiti* is considered to be 'wrongly posed' and therefore unanswerable (18). It just is. Nonetheless, as Alfred Collins notes, Sāmkhyā offers a range of opinions about the *significance* of this involvement ranging from irrelevance to the origin of suffering ("Dancing" 64).

the Self (598). Monier-Williams offers a similar definition, characterising *prakṛiti* as the ‘personified will of the Supreme in creation’ (*Dictionary* 654). In the *Gītā*, Krishna makes an equivalent observation, referring to *prakṛiti*’s three modes of material nature (*guṇa-mayī*) as his ‘wondrous power’ or ‘divine energy’ (7.14/102).⁸⁴ Significantly, *prakṛiti* is a feminine concept in yogic discourse and when it is expressed in an embodied form, it usually appears as a goddess such as the benevolent, eponymous Prakṛiti or the fierce warrior Durgā.⁸⁵ Conversely, and as one might expect, *puruṣa* is a masculine concept.⁸⁶ When they are depicted in bodily form, *puruṣa* and *prakṛiti* typically appear as divine consorts, as the Hindu god Shiva and the goddess Shakti, for example.

As pervasive, productive, and dynamic energy and will, *prakṛiti* is the yogic equivalent of will to power. It is the productive force behind material reality and also its final expression. Furthermore, *prakṛiti* is comparable with more modern concepts of power in yet another way. More specifically, in the *Gītā* Krishna asserts that all living entities are seated upon a ‘carousel’ or ‘machine’ made of material energy (18.61/194).⁸⁷ The Sanskrit word used in the stanza is *yantra* which, according to Monier-Williams, can mean several things including ‘support’, ‘restraint’, and ‘a mystical diagram supposed to possess occult powers’ (*Dictionary* 845). Feuerstein describes *yantras* as thumbnail sketches of the levels and energies of the universe personalised into the shape of a specific deity and thus also serving as representations of the human body (*Tradition* 364).⁸⁸ These geometric designs are used primarily as meditation devices but can also be employed for therapeutic purposes.

⁸⁴ See Prabhupāda’s translation (*As It Is* 324-325).

⁸⁵ See Monier-Williams (*Dictionary* 654).

⁸⁶ See Monier-Williams (*Dictionary* 637).

⁸⁷ See Prabhupāda’s translation (*As It Is* 707).

⁸⁸ Eliade describes *yantras*, which are also related to the more elaborate tantric *mandala*, in a similar way (*Immortality* 219-220).

Krishna's idea that all beings exist within a *yantra* of simultaneously supportive and restrictive power is uncannily reminiscent of Foucault's diagram or Deleuze's abstract machine. Moreover, like Foucault's diagram or Deleuze's abstract machine, the presence of the *yantra* itself is a given but its specific design and products are not. *Prakriti* fluctuates and so do her creations, with each expression reflecting a different proportional composition of *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. Human beings also have the ability to change their constitutions (that is, they can change the relative proportions of the *gunas* that comprise them) by changing their beliefs and practices which, in Foucauldian terms, is akin to altering the diagram of power relations in which they exist.⁸⁹ As Krishna suggests in Chapter 17, for example, individuals can eat healthy foods, practice self-control with no desire for personal gain, avoid ascetic practices which harm the body, and perform acts of charity without any expectation of reward individuals to become more intrinsically *sattvic* (17.4-20/176-179).⁹⁰ This is a highly desirable state because *sattva* is the *guna* or mode of being most closely aligned with the Self. Using a *yantra* to 'conjure' wellbeing or banish illness follows a similar logic.

In summary, *prakriti* or yogic will to power is pervasive, productive, and dynamic. All beings and things are created by it and exist within it. As expressions of *prakriti*, human beings are not only dynamic entities but have the ability to transform their own composition by changing their beliefs and practices. Unlike the Nietzschean-Foucauldian formulation, however, yoga does not theorise individuals as 'will to power and nothing besides' but instead conceptualises them as 'will to power

⁸⁹ Stanza 17.2 states human beings have an inborn nature but, as Prabhupāda notes, this nature can be changed (*As It Is* 646).

⁹⁰ As Whicher notes, Sāṃkhyan philosophy also attaches moral valences to the *gunas* (*Integrity* 63). *Sattva*, for example, is linked with goodness and purity while *tamas* is linked with indolence and defilement and *rajas* with passion and impulsiveness. Chapters 14, 17, and 18 of the *Gītā* offer numerous examples of these associations.

and *something* besides’ – the Self. While the goal of practice is to realise that ‘something’, the activity required to achieve this realisation must be performed within the realm of *prakriti*, which is also divine but marked by flux. As embodied expressions of *prakriti*, human beings are always subject to her instability and the possibility of suffering that attends transitory existence. Nonetheless, by practicing yogic ethics, individuals can realise the coexistence of *purusha* or stable, timeless, and non-differentiated Being within the swirl of endless Becoming.

It is also noteworthy that Krishna does not ask Arjuna to renounce the world despite its (and his own) ‘sad, vanishing’ nature but instead commands him to stay and fight (9.33/120, 2.18/49).⁹¹ This directive stems from the fact that Krishna knows renouncing the world will not stop its activity – *prakriti* endures just like *purusha* despite her ephemeral appearance. Nihilism is not, therefore, presented as Krishna’s cure for the suffering which attends existence.⁹² Instead, as noted above, the spiritual ideal of the *Gītā* is renunciation *in* action not renunciation *of* action. This ideal acknowledges the work required for s/Self-realisation, the battle which must be fought to ‘become what one is’, occurs within *prakriti*. The ethical system proposed by the *Gītā* offers a strategy for attending to this work, as Mohandas Gandhi’s commentary on the text suggests:

Man is not at peace with himself till he has become like God. The endeavor to reach this state is the supreme, the only, ambition worth having. And this is self-realization. This self-realization is the subject of the *Gītā*, as it is of all scriptures. But its author surely did not write it to establish that doctrine. The object of the *Gītā* appears to me to be that of showing the most excellent way to attain self-realization.⁹³

Despite the mention of God, there is something strangely Nietzschean about Gandhi’s commentary, a hint of his doctrine of self-overcoming and his prophesy

⁹¹ Powell’s reading substantiates this interpretation (*Windows* 40).

⁹² Yogic discourse is not in agreement on this matter. See Eliade (*Immortality* 10-11).

⁹³ Quoted in Mitchell (*Gītā* 213).

of the *Übermensch*. Whether the yogic ethics advocated by the *Gītā* is the ‘most excellent way’ to attend to the work of self-realisation is, of course, subject to debate. Nonetheless, Gandhi’s comments show the enduring, cross-cultural significance of the central task proposed by the *Gītā* – the work of self (or s/Self)-realisation. For, as Nietzsche declares, this one thing is needful: that a human being should *attain* satisfaction with himself, whether it be by means of this or that poetry and art; only then is a human being at all tolerable to behold’ (Gay 290/232).

9

The *Gītā* espouses a worldview and ethics with numerous correspondences to the Nietzschean-Foucauldian paradigm described in Chapter One. Both worldviews, for example, assert existence is transitory and suffused with suffering. Nietzsche’s belief in the transitory nature of existence finds its origin in the pre-Platonic thought of Heraclitus who perceives material reality as something akin to will to power. Foucault’s theory of power, which aligns with this Heraclitean-Nietzschean construct, establishes a similar worldview of mutable yet ever-present diagram of forces. For both philosophers, the interplay of these forces produces strife and the sorts of suffering which arise from conflict. Consequently, although *sarvam duhkham*, *sarvam anityam* is a yogic motto, it could just as well be Heraclitean, Nietzschean, or Foucauldian. According to the yogic worldview, suffering can be overcome through discipline and particularly, through practices of the self aimed at transforming consciousness. Whilst Foucault’s perspective aligns fairly well with this viewpoint, Nietzsche perceives suffering somewhat differently; casting it in a salubrious rather than negative light, as a form of fortifying discipline which elevates individuals and

engenders self-overcoming. For Nietzsche, therefore, suffering is a tool of our transcendence rather than something to be avoided or overcome.

Additional correspondences exist between the two worldviews exist. For example, according to the Sāmkhyā philosophical viewpoints espoused by the *Gītā*, material reality is composed of *prakṛiti*, a yogic equivalent to will to power. Like Nietzsche's concept of will to power, *prakṛiti* is the creative will and force of the cosmos, the productive power behind all Becoming. As embodied expressions of *prakṛiti*, human beings also share in this dynamism and the suffering it implies. 'I do suffer' is the reality of the yogic worldview but the *Gītā* does not identify nihilism or 'throwing filth on creation' as appropriate existential responses to this actuality.⁹⁴ Instead of asking Arjuna to deny the world, therefore, Krishna asks him to work with *prakṛiti*, to use yogic practices of the self to realise and become more like the Self through cultivating luminosity (*sattva*). In Nietzschean terms, this process of '*self-sattvification*' is a methodology for affirming life or saying 'yes' to existence (despite its imperfections) while simultaneously disavowing nihilism. In this regard, it is significant that Krishna's discourse is not prompted by Arjuna's actions but his inactions – that is, his laying down of arms and declaration that 'he will not fight'. Thus for Krishna and Nietzsche, doing nothing is not an option; enlightenment comes only through action or, as Foucault might have it, by realising 'freedom is work'.

According to yogic texts like the *Gītā*, self-subjugation or ethics is considered the best means for realising freedom, just as it is for Nietzsche and Foucault. Indeed, yoga's reliance upon voluntary self-subjection as its primary mode of subjection or method for inciting practitioners to recognise their moral obligations and assume the work of becoming an ethical being is highly reminiscent of the Greco-Roman

⁹⁴ As Loy (quoting Spinoza) notes, the realisation that 'God is not other than the universe [...] does not diminish God but rather elevates the universe' (*Nonduality* 289).

model. In addition, as noted in preceding discussions, Foucault's interest in this ancient ethical framework was chiefly a factor of what it *was not*, namely a code-based morality of discipline and punishment in the contemporary style. Like the Greco-Roman model, yoga also lacks a strong external basis for practice, relying instead upon a personal commitment which may be reinforced by a *sangha* or simply through observing the empirical benefits of practice.

Another important aspect of the process of yogic self-subjugation is something akin to Nietzsche's active destruction or revaluation of values where conventional perceptions of reality are interrogated and rejected as harmful or simply false. In yoga, as in the Nietzschean-Foucauldian paradigm, these perceptions include the sovereign ideal of selfhood and dualistic approaches for ordering existence. Alternative values, particularly the relational model of selfhood, become the foundation for a new way of life – one that inherently critiques conventional ways of being in the world. In yoga, this critique is advanced in several ways but perhaps most plainly through an uncannily 'poststructuralist' problematisation of consciousness and the feelings, intentions, and behaviours which arise from misunderstanding oneself as embodied desire, an ego, or a sovereign self. This critique is fortified through a legitimisation (if not a valorisation) of alternative processes and frameworks for establishing truth including experiential knowledge, revelation, and other ways of knowing besides reason.

Both yoga and the Nietzschean-Foucauldian paradigm further valorise the body and place a high value on practices of the self as the best technology for creative self-actualisation. In its contemporary tantrism-infused incarnation, the yogic body is constituted as an object of care; a quasi-divine vehicle for transcendence rather than an object of disdain. In *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Nietzsche asserts a similar stance,

declaring his contempt for ‘despisers of the body’ and stating: ‘Behind thy thoughts and feelings, my brother, standeth a mighty lord, an unknown sage – whose name is Self. In thy body he dwelleth, thy body he is. There is more intelligence in thy body than in thy best wisdom’.⁹⁵ Nietzsche’s preoccupation with health and life-affirming attitudes are also evocative of tantric yoga’s positive orientation toward the body. Foucault’s ethical works, which also valorise bodily-based practices of the self, further echo this orientation. As Foucault notes in *The Use of Pleasure*, for example, bodily exercises were an indispensable aspect of Greco-Roman self-care, to be *agymnastos* or to forego physical training was a sign of an individual’s ethical deficiency (72).

Unlike the Greco-Roman bodily disciplines of self-care, however, yogic practices of the self have an explicit nondual trajectory and consequently, can be understood as antithetical to ascetic practices aimed at shoring up the ego, the sovereign self, or dualistic perceptions of reality. This aspect of yoga is particularly evident in the tantric tradition where the body is constituted as a divine abode or bridge to transcendence. By creating a disciplinary framework where practitioners can experience nonduality in whatever form it might take – from destabilising the scission between mind and body to realising one’s intrinsic divinity – yoga offers a praxis of nonduality which inherently critiques dualistic ways of experiencing the world. Yogic practices of nonduality may also foster an enhanced sense of connection and continuity with others, strengthening what Chodorow calls the ‘relational self’. This may subsequently promote or strengthen an ethics of care amongst yogins – a consequence with important ramifications for male and female practitioners alike.

⁹⁵ Part I, “Of the Despisers of the Body” (26).

The yogic concept of reality and power as all-pervasive, ever-mutable, and endlessly productive *prakriti* also resonates with the Nietzschean and Foucauldian concept of power as dynamism-based will to power in keeping with the Heraclitean thought. Be this as it may, yoga's insistence upon the co-existence of an unchanging, immortal form of meta-consciousness (*purusha*, the yogic expression of Being) represents a significant departure from Nietzsche and Foucault.⁹⁶ Simply stated, yoga proposes we are 'will to power and *something* besides' – simultaneously self and Self (s/Self), *prakriti* and *purusha*. This difference is likely irreducible unless one accepts the *telos* of Nietzschean and Foucauldian philosophy, at least in its dynamism-based iteration, to be a nonessential or unbounded form of selfhood or Being (*purusha*) within Becoming (*prakriti*).⁹⁷ Nevertheless, the Self is an indispensable aspect of yogic ethics, so important that, as Feuerstein notes, Hindu philosophy is sometimes known as *ātma-vidyā* or 'the science of the Self' (*Tradition* 72). That said, if as Nietzsche asserts we are 'will to power and nothing besides', then we are nothing if not embodied possibility or, as Krishna asserts, 'beyond is and is not' (*Gītā* 2.17-2.18/48-49).

Other similarities and reconciliations between the two stances may also exist. For instance, Gandhi's assertion that human beings will never be at peace until they have become like god begs the question of god's (or the Self's) 'true' essence.⁹⁸ In the yogic tradition, both *prakriti* (flux) and *purusha* (stability) are divine and although the discourse is heavily oriented toward realising one's *purusha*-essence, it constantly

⁹⁶ Kaufmann lends support here, stating that the Hindu conception of happiness as union with Atman (the Self) seems the 'very antithesis of Nietzsche's apotheosis of creativity' (*Nietzsche* 276).

⁹⁷ As Robert Magliola notes, any theory of nothingness also buys into a theory of somethingness (*Derrida* 25).

⁹⁸ Nietzschean-style atheism is a simple remedy to this problem, of course.

reminds practitioners their nature is also *prakṛiti*.⁹⁹ The divine nature of *prakṛiti* is particularly evident in tantrism and other Indian traditions where goddess worship assumes a more important, if not preeminent, role. Hence, even though time stops on the battlefield where Krishna and Arjuna's discourse takes place, symbolising Arjuna's realisation of Krishna or the atemporal Self; the battle continues once their discourse has ended, symbolising the reassertion of the temporal realm's enduring power of dissolution and creation.¹⁰⁰ Simply stated, therefore, our power to change and possibly realise *puruṣa* is entirely a function of *prakṛiti* – an epiphany that renders these and all other dualistic concepts wholly indissoluble and interdependent or, in a word, nondual. Consequently, even though some strands of yoga are deeply nihilistic – valorising *puruṣa* whilst denigrating *prakṛiti* – the yoga of the *Gītā* avoids this dilemma by establishing renunciation in action, or paradoxical asceticism, as its ideal.¹⁰¹ Once practitioners realise their interconnectedness with the world around them, what was once paradoxical asceticism may assume a transformative quality, engendering political action aimed at effecting positive social change for others. In yogic terms, this is the mission of the *karma-yogin* or *bodhisattva* who embodies the intention to improve collective human destiny.¹⁰²

Deleuze's analysis of the Nietzschean notion of becoming-reactive, which was discussed in Chapter One, is also useful for shedding light upon the transformative potential of the paradoxical asceticism advanced by texts like the *Gītā*. As Deleuze

⁹⁹ As Prabhupāda's commentary notes, the yogic urge to realise the Self is motivated by a perception that *prakṛiti*'s transitory nature makes her inferior to the masculine *puruṣa*, much in the same way that women are traditionally viewed as subordinate to men (*As It Is* 8).

¹⁰⁰ This feature of the narrative is extra-textual to the *Gītā* and only discernable by reading the ensuing chapters of the *Mahābhārata*.

¹⁰¹ As Prabhupāda's notes, both *prakṛiti* and *puruṣa* are real and so the work of Self-realisation cannot be understood as a process of rejecting illusion or falsehood (*māyā*) for reality or truth (*satya*). Nevertheless, not all yogic discourse is in agreement on this matter (*As It Is* 8).

¹⁰² As Feuerstein notes, yoga tends to place a higher significance on individual spiritual growth than, for example, Mahāyāna Buddhism where the more socially-oriented *bodhisattva* ideal originates (*Tradition* 94). Nevertheless, even the spiritually self-concerned yogin may act as a social engineer by serving as a role model in the tradition of Gandhi or Mirabai.

notes, Nietzsche perceives humans as ‘essentially reactive’ creatures – feeling, experiencing, and knowing nothing other than ‘becoming-reactive’ as they encounter and respond to stronger, more active forces and wills (*Nietzsche* 61, 64). The negative consequences of this essential relation between forces are myriad – producing *ressentiment*, bad conscience, world-denying forms of asceticism, and nihilism. Deleuze asks: ‘Is there another becoming?’ and then answers his own question, stating: ‘Everything tempts us to think that perhaps there is. But, as Nietzsche often says, we would need another sensibility, another way of feeling. We can not yet reply to this question, we can hardly even contemplate its possibility’ (64). One wonders if the dispassion or non-reactivity one cultivates through yoga could provide a platform for a new sensibility or, at the very least, minimise the effect of active forces upon an individual to the extent that she or he might become *less* reactive. In becoming less reactive, individuals might become more likely to test the limitations of their own abilities and cultural settings, or as Deleuze might have it, go to the limit of what they can do and make that goal an object of continual affirmation (68).

On a more symbolic level, it is also significant that Krishna’s is addressed to a warrior or a member of the elite *ksatriya* caste. Foucault’s ethical works and Nietzsche’s positive philosophy are similarly addressed and, as noted in the closing pages of Chapter One, nominate a warrior as their carrier of new values or bridge between what humanity currently is and what it might be. The *Gītā* makes a similar association yet, unlike Nietzsche and Foucault, is more inclusive. More specifically, in stanza 9.32 Krishna declares that all those who take shelter in him, ‘though they be of lower birth – women, *vaishyas* [merchants], and *shudras* [workers] – can attain the

supreme destination'.¹⁰³ Here Krishna is acknowledging that even though his discourse is addressed to a higher-caste man, it is applicable to everyone regardless of their social class or gender. In yoga, therefore, the technology for self-surmounting is available to all – man or woman, elites and non-elites alike – all that is required is one's dedication to practice.

In summary, the ethics proposed by the *Gītā* contains many of the components and characteristics Nietzsche and Foucault thought indispensable to a reconceived contemporary ethics that opposes nihilism and confinement and instead supports a vision of selfhood as dynamism-based will to power. Although the affinities between these ethical positions are not categorical, they are numerous enough to mark yoga as another possible platform for situating a dynamism-based will to power ethics. Like the three platforms nominated in Chapter Three – Foucault's final works, extensions and critiques of these works by Foucauldian feminists and others, and the sister discipline of feminist moral theory – yoga represents another possible line of flight from the existing ethos of domination and duality. Perhaps the most compelling reason behind this idea is yoga's nondual *telos* which, because it strives to reinforce rather than deny the reality of our mutual dependency and interconnection, is intrinsically critical of autonomy-based moralities of the sovereign ideal. This nondual *telos* manifests in a variety of ways, including through a proclivity to unite theory and practice or, to use Hadot's formulation, its perspective that philosophy is not just discourse but also praxis, a way of life. Moreover, as a form of socially engaged renunciation in action or paradoxical or transformative asceticism, Krishna's

¹⁰³ See Prabhupāda's translation (*As It Is* 420-421).

yoga may also provide a philosophical basis for framing collective political action, a quality some critics find lacking in Foucault's late works.¹⁰⁴

10

A comparative analysis of the yogic and Nietzschean-Foucauldian worldviews also elicits a more detailed discussion about gender bias. Gender bias represents an especially troubling correspondence between yoga, the Greco-Roman ethics described in Foucault's last works, and certain aspects of Nietzsche's corpus. Simply stated, yoga is no different from the ancient Greek and Roman philosophies Foucault studies in his final works or, for that matter, philosophy in general, which typically has strong and pervasive androcentric tendencies. Yet, standing in the shadow of these facts is the figure of the contemporary Western yogin who, as noted earlier in this chapter, is typically female. Western women's enthusiastic turn toward the bodily discipline of yoga elicits important questions about the nature of the discourses beneath the practice. Does yogic philosophy, for example, denigrate or marginalise the feminine in the same ways that Western philosophies typically do? Or does the nondual orientation of some strands of yogic thought help it avoid the sorts of gender biases that pervade its Western equivalents?

Addressing these questions is crucial because even though the philosophical issues yogic texts like the *Gītā* attempts to address – such as the nature of reality and transcendence, ethics, and self-realisation – are perhaps timeless concerns, the settings in which they are discussed are subject to continual change. The contemporary Western socio-cultural milieu differs markedly from pre-modern India where yoga originated, as do the characteristics of yogins themselves. The fundamental nature of practice has also changed markedly since the time of the *Gītā*. For example, *āsana*

¹⁰⁴ See McNay, for example (*Foucault* 8).

practice has become much more elaborate and important in the present day when compared with the simple meditative seat Krishna recommends in Chapter 6 of the *Gītā*. In addition, in ancient India women were not the typical intended recipients for yogic wisdom although, as Whicher (quoting U. Arya) notes, ‘there have been many great women yogis [...] known to the tradition’ (*Integrity* 357). Nancy Falk’s analysis, which suggests women may have composed some of the Vedic hymns, lends support to Whicher’s observation (“Gender” 313). It is also worth noting that the *Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upanishad* contains a well-known account of a female yogin named Maitreyī, who was a wife of the sage Yājñavalkya.¹⁰⁵

Nonetheless, as Whicher and Feuerstein observe, most Sanskrit texts display the sort of gender bias found in texts specifically written for and by a privileged class of men living in a patriarchal society (*Integrity* 357, *Tradition* xix). Even the word ‘yogin’ is masculine although, as Whicher indicates, in contemporary usage it has taken on a generic quality (*Integrity* 31-2). Although mild observations such as these are certainly accurate, they tend to elide the modern implications of a bias that pervades an entire textual tradition; a problem that extends well beyond a dearth of stories about female yogins or a preference for masculine pronouns. This bias manifest in a variety of ways; including outright misogyny, accounts of the ill treatment of women, an implicit valorisation of patriarchy, the use of non-inclusive language, and a silenced feminine perspective.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ See Powell (*Windows* 221-223) and Feuerstein (*Tradition* 10). For further discussion of the role of women in Hinduism, see Shakambhari Jayal’s *The Status of Women in the Epics* and A.S. Altekar’s *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilisation*.

¹⁰⁶ Falk argues that the dominant Arya- and Brāhmanic-centred paradigm is much to blame for the exclusion of women and women’s perspectives from the history of Indian religion (“Gender” 316). Olivelle also notes that while misogynous attitudes and statements are found in most Brāhmanical texts, the tone of these statements is perhaps harshest in Indian ascetic literature, connoting a ‘total abhorrence of the female species’ (“Deconstruction” 196).

In her commentary on the *Srimad Bhāgavatam*,¹⁰⁷ for example, Powell discusses the matter of the exclusion of women from the Hindu *āśramas* or four ideal life-stages which lead to Self-realisation (*Windows* 290). Rather than being expected to adhere to four life-stages, women's lives were split into only two phases – maidenhood and marriage – a socio-cultural reality which, as one might imagine, left women with few life choices and little time for things like spiritual quests.¹⁰⁸ Later in the commentary, Powell even suggests a coping strategy for her female readers, asserting that: 'Women ought to ignore the sexist content, keeping in mind the unflattering position of women in the historical and cultural milieu in which the *Bhāgavatam* was composed' (292). Texts denigrating or marginalising women in even less subtle ways are also common, perhaps demonstrating what Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty characterises as the 'general misogyny of the Indian ascetic tradition' where 'women are [...] the abstract cause of a number of evils and sins in the world' (*Origins* 27). Chapter IX.5 of *The Laws of Manu* (which concerns marriage) demonstrates this proclivity by proclaiming: 'Women must particularly be guarded against evil inclinations, however trifling (they may appear); for, if they are not guarded, they will bring sorrow on two families'.¹⁰⁹ It is also difficult to ignore the profound bias of stories like that of Sītā (Rāma's wife in the *Rāmāyana*) who, as Powell notes, was blamed for the injustices she endured at the hands of men and male demons (*Windows* 388-389).

¹⁰⁷ This eclectic text, which is also known as the *Bhāgavata Purāna*, was composed sometime between the fourth and tenth centuries C.E. (*Windows* 253).

¹⁰⁸ As Powell notes in a commentary on another text, the point of the *āśrama* system was to allow ordinary men the opportunity to achieve spiritual realisation (350).

¹⁰⁹ See <http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/manu/manu09.htm>. *The Laws of Manu* basically treat women as chattel; allowing marriages for girls as young as eight (IX.94) and even making overt comparisons between them and domesticated she-animals (IX.48). Yet, in *The Anti-Christ* Nietzsche writes, 'I know of no book in which so many tender and kind remarks are addressed to women as in the Law-Book of Manu; these old greybeards and saints have a way of being polite to women which has perhaps never been surpassed' (56/176).

The *Gītā* is no exception to the pervasive gender bias found elsewhere in yogic discourse. On a general level, for example, no women are present in the battle scene where Krishna delivers his discourse and the recipient of his advice is obviously male. The unfailing use of non-inclusive language throughout the text also leads one to assume the *Gītā*'s implied reader is masculine. Other, more pointed examples of bias are also apparent in the text. In the opening chapter, for instance, Arjuna implicates 'lawless' and 'corrupt' women in the destabilisation of two fundamental components of Hindu culture – *dharma* (law) and *varna* (caste) (1.37-43/44-45). Prabhupāda's commentary compounds the bias of this chapter by describing women as 'prone to degradation' and 'generally not very intelligent and therefore not trustworthy' (*As It Is* 57). Even more inclusive passages of the text such as stanza 9.32, which assures readers that salvation is available to anyone including women and others of 'lower birth', become tarnished by the translator's decision to render the Sanskrit word *striyah* ('women') as 'prostitutes' (119).

Although sexist details like these could simply be ignored by female practitioners, their presence is far from benign. For example, the gender bias of texts like the *Gītā* may cause practitioners to question the applicability or efficacy of yogic teachings for women. Being a female yogin thus requires certain auxiliary or compensatory practices to deal with gender bias of the tradition and the discourse which perpetuates it. These practices might, as Powell suggests, include ignoring sexist content or they could assume some of the more active forms of critical awareness and resistance discussed in Chapter Three. One could even argue that noticing the sexist content of yogic texts is part of the process of discernment (*viveka*) or separating truth from untruth, a crucial step on the path to enlightenment.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ See Monier-Williams (*Dictionary* 987).

Despite the sexism and gender bias that pervades the tradition, yogic discourse also exhibits certain philosophical orientations which simultaneously tend to problematise these attitudes, at least in theory. These compensatory philosophical orientations are no doubt related to Hinduism's strong tradition of venerating what Rita DasGupta Sherma calls the 'divine feminine' ("*Sa Ham*" 24). According to Alf Hiltebeitel and Kathleen Erndl, Hinduism has the most elaborate *living* goddess traditions known in all the world's religions ("Introduction" 11). As Mookerjee and Khanna also note, Hinduism's tantric traditions are especially known for their 'rediscovery of the mystery of woman' (*Tantric* 16). Eliade elaborates on this point, characterising the goddess worship of tantrism as part of a return to the 'ancient religion of the Mother' that was the chief form of devotion among the autochthonous people of India (*Immortality* 202). In tantric discourse, the Mother or Great Goddess commonly takes the form of Shakti, who is the consort of Shiva (the 'Lord of Yoga') and incarnation of 'both the mystery of creation and the mystery of Being, of everything that *is*, that incomprehensibly becomes and dies and is reborn' (203).¹¹¹ As Sherma states, although the concept of *shakti* is also found in Vedic literature, *shakti* as a 'fully systematized cosmogonic and cosmological feminine principle' arises primarily in the margins of Indian orthodoxy, in the tantric and Shakta scriptures ("*Sa Ham*" 32).

Indian representations of the divine feminine may also assume variable manifestations. In a sixth-century text known as the *Devi Mahatmya*, for example, the feminine principle combines with the concept of the Ultimate Reality to 'create a Great Goddess [Maha Devi] who is the power inherent in creation and dissolution, the primordial material substance, as well as the creative impulse, formless yet the matrix

¹¹¹ Each god in the Hindu trinity has a feminine counterpart or consort. Vishnu's consort is Lakshmi and Brahmā's is Sarasvatī.

of all forms, transcendent as well as immanent’ (“*Sa Ham*” 32-33). According to Cynthia Ann Humes, devotees of one north Indian variant of Maha Devi (Vindhyavasini) believe she is ‘simultaneously the formless absolute reality known as *brahman*; *prakriti* or matter; *adi shakti*, the original or first power; as well as Krishna’s savior’ (“*Devi*” 123). Humes adds that while most goddesses are married and subordinated to a husband, this particular embodiment of the Great Goddess is ‘ever virgin’ and ‘independent of all male control’.

This concept of the Great Goddess as all-encompassing differs from other, more dualistic representations of the divine feminine in yogic in the discourse including those found in Sāmkhyan philosophy and even other tantric texts where the feminine is associated with *prakriti* or material reality and its counterpart, *purusha* or spirit, is portrayed as masculine.¹¹² As noted previously, even these more dualistic conceptualisations do not render *prakriti* passive – quite the contrary. This is because, as Eliade notes, the feminine is the active principle in Sāmkhyan metaphysics – the force that works, engenders, and nourishes (*Immortality* 203). Without it, *purusha* is impotent. The same is true in tantrism which, as Mookerjee and Khanna observe, endows Shakti with all the kinetic functions of the world from the creative to dissolutive, sensual to sublime, benign to horrific (*Tantric* 16).¹¹³ Indeed, in both Sāmkhyan and tantric metaphysics ‘She’ is the *power* or the personified *will* of the Absolute.

Although the real-world feminist import of goddess worship or tantrism is debatable,¹¹⁴ the mere presence of ‘pro-woman’ sentiments within the Hindu tradition

¹¹² See Monier-Williams (*Dictionary* 637, 654). Like many European languages, Sanskrit has masculine, feminine, and neuter nouns.

¹¹³ A notable exception is found in the Buddhist tantras where the male principle is rendered as active and the female static.

¹¹⁴ The deplorable status of women in India, especially among the lower castes, speaks volumes in this regard.

imbues its discourses with an inbuilt capacity for interrogating and perhaps overcoming gender bias – a capacity generally absent in other major religions and philosophies. The nondual features of these discourses also give them the potential for transcending the types of biases found in dualistic discourses of the self. Yoga's *telos* of union is, after all, nothing if not a call to transcend dualism and eradicate the suffering that attends this mode of existence. This observation aligns well with the work of feminists like Grosz, Bordo, and McWhorter who believe that positive change for women requires a turning away from dualism and a turning toward nondualist or anti-dualist philosophies and practices of the body.

Because the *Gītā* incorporates Sāṃkhyan metaphysics, the more common, dualistic rendering of the feminine principle as active and masculine as static can be assumed in the text. Nonetheless, because the poem also displays Vedāntic or nondual philosophical characteristics and establishes a nondual *telos*, a certain amount of slippage is apparent. In fact, a close reading of the poem reveals Krishna's essence as both *prakṛiti* and *puruṣa*. In stanzas 9.17 and 9.18, for example, Krishna declares he is both father and mother of the universe and then adds: 'I am the beginning and the end, / origin and dissolution, / refuge, home, true lover, / womb and imperishable seed' (116). This conceptualisation of Krishna as encompassing powers and essences generally understood as feminine, even though he is the Self (*puruṣa*), is also not unlike the aforementioned description of Maha Devi's omnipotence.

The blending of the masculine and feminine in the person of Krishna also becomes apparent in more subtle ways including a passage in Chapter 10 where Krishna lists the feminine virtues of 'fame, wealth, speech, memory, intelligence,

loyalty, and forgiveness’ amongst his many qualities and forms (10.34/128).¹¹⁵ This is a notable departure from the other qualities and forms on the list, which otherwise are almost categorically masculine. Another slippage occurs in Chapter 11 during Arjuna’s ‘theophanic vision’ or where he sees the whole universe enfolded in Krishna’s body. What is particularly significant about this vision is its *activity*. In stanzas 11.26-30, for example, Arjuna says he sees multitudes of warriors ‘rushing headlong’ into Krishna’s jaws, as ‘rivers in many torrents / rush toward the ocean’ or ‘as moths rush into a flame’ (137).¹¹⁶ This is not a vision of *purusha* which is inactive, timeless, and utterly devoid of change; it is a vision of *prakriti* or the ceaseless flux of material reality. Krishna may be the calm, immovable, and timeless Being (2.24/50); but he is also perpetual Becoming, the shatterer of worlds, the annihilator of all things (11.32/138). All of these blendings and slippages between the feminine and the masculine lend themselves to a more nondual and therefore less gender-biased interpretation of the nature of Krishna and the cosmos as a whole. Hence, even though *prakriti* is feminine and associated with ‘negative’ things like corporeality, change, and suffering; it is just as divine as its counterpart *purusha* and thus equally worthy of veneration.

Moreover, from a Nietzschean standpoint, the yogic equivalent of will to power is the feminine *prakriti* not the masculine *purusha*. As such, everything Nietzsche deems worth venerating in the world – will to power, flux, and even suffering – is feminine in the yogic schema. In fact, the philosophical assumptions

¹¹⁵ As a side note, ‘gender bending’ is fairly commonplace in Hindu sacred texts as are Sanskrit words denoting such behaviours including *stripumān* (a woman who has become a man) (*Dictionary* 1261). In the *Mahābhārata*, for example, there is an account of Arjuna living in disguise as an impotent transvestite dancing master named Brihannala. See Meera Uberoi’s translation (219). Wendy Doniger also offers an interesting commentary on this anecdote (*Spider* 15-16).

¹¹⁶ The similarity between this passage and Nietzsche’s description of the will to power as ‘a sea of forces following and rushing together, eternally changing, eternally flooding back’ is remarkable. See *The Will to Power* (1067/550).

that underlie Nietzsche's notion of the world as 'will to power and nothing besides' align well with the yogic idea that material reality is composed of *prakriti*. Nietzsche's valorisation of the world of Becoming is, therefore, akin to Hinduism's worship of the Great Goddess as a representation of everything that 'incomprehensibly becomes and dies and is reborn'. On the other hand, the yogic call to realise *purusha*, or timeless Being, indulges an opposing impulse – the will to nothingness.

Although the preceding analysis of the gender biases apparent in yogic discourse suggests the gender dualism pervading yogic philosophy exhibits certain similarities to the gendered mind/body dualism found in Western philosophies, it also displays important differences. For instance, although linkages between the mind (or, perhaps more precisely, meta-consciousness) and the masculine are apparent in yogic philosophy, as are complementary linkages between the body and the feminine; these associations assume more variable meanings within yogic discourse. As discussed throughout this chapter, for example, in tantrism the body is considered to be a divine abode or bridge to transcendence. Tantrism's veneration of the body is a philosophical reflection of its tradition of goddess worship, or as Mookerjee and Khanna note, its tendency to understand the masculine and feminine as interdependent because although they are distinct, they are essentially two aspects of one principle (*Tantric* 16). Tantric texts like the *Hathayoga Pradīpikā* also stress the essential unity of body and mind (and spirit), as Swami Muktibodhananda's commentary attests: 'You should always keep in mind that the body, the mind and the spirit are not three, they are one' (9). Yoga's problematisation of the three facets of consciousness and, in particular, its nomination of the ego (*asmitā*) and the intellect (*buddhi*) as just as problematic as the desiring mind (*manas*), also interrogate the typical elevation of the

‘masculine’ mind over the ‘feminine’ body that one commonly finds in Western philosophy.¹¹⁷ The mind is just as problematic as the body, if not more so, because as the *Maitrāyana-Brāhmaṇa Upanishad* asserts, the mind alone is the cause of both our bondage and our liberty.¹¹⁸

To summarise, yogic philosophy exhibits a gender bias not unlike the biases that frequently occur in mainstream Western philosophy. This gender bias manifests in a number of ways, ranging from a preference for masculine pronouns to outright misogyny. Just like the feminist who chooses to engage in a fitness practice informed by sexist discourses of the body, therefore, the female yogin will also routinely encounter a wide range of sexism and bias – a fact which leaves her with little choice but to employ a range of auxiliary or compensatory practices to minimise the uncomfortable or oppressive effects of a practice based upon deeply androcentric philosophical discourses. Nevertheless, the sheer size and diversity of the archive of yogic discourses makes addressing the problem of gender bias somewhat easier than it might otherwise be. Female practitioners can, for example, ground their practices in the vast corpus of tantric and nondual philosophies (e.g., Vedānta) rather than relying upon more dualistic discourses like those of Sāṃkhya. By choosing a nondual basis of and *telos* for practice, women are engaging in a contemporary feminist version of an ancient yogic practice called *viveka* or discernment. Thus, like most philosophies yoga may not be completely free of dualism or the gender biases typically associated with a dualistic worldview but, in certain important ways, it is perhaps freer than most. By developing a critical awareness of the biases present in the discourse and becoming a more conscientious consumer of yogic texts in general, female yogins can

¹¹⁷ It is interesting to note that none of the three words used to connote aspects of the mind is masculine nouns in Sanskrit. *Asmitā* and *buddhi* are feminine nouns and *manas* is neuter. See Monier-Williams (*Dictionary* 123, 733, 783).

¹¹⁸ *Upanishads II* (6.35.11/334).

situate their practices in such a way that they will minimise oppression and maximise liberty.

Female yogins also need to be aware that the yoga now practiced in the West has, more often than not, been reinterpreted through the lens of indigenous philosophies and discourses of the body that favour a dualistic worldview. In addition, yoga's typical contemporary Western formulation as a fitness practice complicates efforts to situate it as an unequivocal practice of freedom. As the feminist critiques of fitness practices discussed in Chapter Three illustrate, asceticism-based bodily disciplines like yoga are situated in a complex and highly ambivalent web of discourses and practices of feminine embodiment. One might observe, for example, how contemporary yogic discourse simultaneously positions yoga as a practice of freedom and a practice of docility and utility in the Foucauldian mode. For certainly, if there ever was a docile-useful body, it is that of the yogin: fit, controlled, probably committed to ideas of compassion (*karuna*) and non-violence (*ahimsā*), and quite possibly, vegetarian. Iyengar's assertion that practice results in poise, control of the passions, harmony, and bliss lends support to the idea that yoga fashions docile bodies (*Light* 21-22). Baron Baptiste, another well-known contemporary yoga teacher, finishes Foucault's dictum when he declares that his power yoga system 'empowers you to purposefully use and train your body the way you do in real life' (*Journey* 49).

In short, like its sister discipline of aerobics, yoga is now the object of multiple and sometimes competing or contradictory Western discourses of embodiment including those associated with the fitness industry and the academic disciplines of sports science, health, medicine, religion, and philosophy. De Michelis's study of the history of modern yoga is helpful here; highlighting how the West's twentieth century appropriation and acculturation of yoga as a 'secular, pragmatic, and rationalistic'

practice affected its original discursive formulation as a religious or philosophical practice and led to its association with the institutional realms of health, fitness, and alternative medicine (*History* 15). The strength of these newer institutional linkages is abundantly clear in Western practice rooms and throughout the popular discourse where the fitness and health benefits of practice are routinely touted while yoga's religious or philosophical import attracts significantly less attention.¹¹⁹ The upshot of the Western appropriation of yoga is even nondual yogas such as those based upon tantric scriptures or Vedāntic texts like the *Gītā* may have acquired dualistic tendencies as they moved westward and were reinterpreted for a contemporary audience. Responding to yoga's call to nonduality thus requires practitioners to find ways to silence or otherwise resist competing or contradictory discourses and practices of the self, whether they originate in the East or the West. It requires, as Deleuze and Guattari suggest, finding discourses and practices of the in-between, the intermezzo (*Thousand* 277).

11

In her discussion of self-overcoming through ascetic pleasures, McWhorter meditates on the existential ramifications of engaging in bodily disciplines 'for the purpose of development itself' and the wonders what sorts of pleasures one might experience from 'practice for its own sake' rather than practicing to achieve a certain *telos* (*Bodies* 182).¹²⁰ What if, McWhorter asks, the goal of discipline was simply that of 'being able to continue to change, to engage in new behaviors, to try new things, to let new things happen without our sovereign determination laid down in advance'?

¹¹⁹ Many gyms and fitness centres now teach yoga classes alongside their other offerings; a fact that further strengthens yoga's association with the fitness industry.

¹²⁰ Collins also discusses the significance of pleasure in her study of feminist aerobics practitioners ("Working" 89-92).

McWhorter's question is, of course, in keeping with the critique of sovereignty advanced by her muse, Foucault, and his precursor, Nietzsche. 'Practice for practice's sake' is also arguably one of the chief motivating principles behind a dynamism-based will to power ethics in the Nietzschean-Foucauldian mode. As such, this dictum is essentially a more homespun reiteration of Foucault's advice to pursue freedom and the pleasures it connotes through an aesthetics of existence (*Beyond* 245).

In light of the myriad discursive associations between yoga and 'ecstasy', one wonders if the bodily discipline of yoga might represent a privileged vehicle for a new practice of the self centred upon bodily pleasures.¹²¹ A more detailed discussion of the pleasures associated with yoga, which can assume various physical and metaphysical forms, sheds light upon this possibility. As one might expect, yoga can produce a range of pleasurable physical and mental effects including those associated with stress release and improved self-esteem.¹²² Practitioners may also obtain enjoyment from mastering the physical skills yoga requires of its adherents or from cultivating certain bodily or mental capacities including endurance, flexibility, strength, and concentration. Simply caring for the self is another possible source of great pleasure, particularly for those practitioners who would normally express their care ethic only by serving others.

Of course, the iconic form of pleasure associated with yoga is the ecstatic *samādhi* experience of subject-object dissolution and total unity described above.¹²³

Although the chief pleasure of this experience comes from entering into a primordial,

¹²¹ Perhaps the most succinct statement of this notion is, as Feuerstein notes, found in the *Yoga-Bhāṣya* (1.1) which declares 'Yoga is ecstasy' (*Tradition* 3). Eliade offers an interesting discussion of yoga's roots in 'ascetic disciplines and "ecstatic" ideologies' (*Immortality* 101-105). Whicher's discussion of 'cognitive *samādhi*' is also useful here (*Integrity* 201-257).

¹²² For a related discussion of the various psychophysiological effects of ascetico-meditational discipline, see William Bushnell ("Psychophysiological" 553-575). A. Chakrabarti's "Is Liberation (moksa) Pleasant?" is also informative.

¹²³ As Whicher notes, some yogic texts theorise various stages of *samādhi* (*Integrity* 201-257). Of these stages, only the lower phases are associated with bliss because in a fully unified state, there is nothing 'other' to enjoy (202-203).

fully unified state; the *samādhi* experience also holds other pleasures. According to Eliade, while the *samādhi* experience does involve a return to unity, this return is accompanied by the *knowledge* of unity or the *consciousness* of freedom (*Immortality* 99-100). Gaston Bachelard's analysis of poetic impressions and images of immensity – the creative products of daydreams and other forms of contemplation – is useful for elucidating this somewhat obscure yet crucial point. According to Bachelard, who is speaking from a Western phenomenological and poetic perspective, it is through contemplative practices that we realise:

Immensity is within ourselves. It is attached to a sort of expansion of being that life curbs and caution arrests, but which starts again when we are alone. As soon as we become motionless, we are elsewhere; we are dreaming in a world that is immense. Indeed, immensity is the movement of the motionless man. It is one of the dynamic characteristics of quiet daydreaming (*Poetics* 184).

Although Bachelard is not discussing yoga *per se*, he is discussing the existential ramifications of meditation, yoga's primary technique of liberation. Bachelard's analysis of Baudelaire's *L'Art romantique*, which includes a description of the various affective states he associates with the 'impression of immensity', puts a finer point on the discussion.¹²⁴ Baudelaire describes these affective states as a 'plunging into infinite space', 'yielding to increasing bliss', and 'sinking into ecstatic adoration as though the whole world had suddenly disappeared' (194). Although neither Baudelaire nor Bachelard represent this experience in yogic terms, it seems clear they are describing something akin to *samādhi* – that ultimate state where 'immensity that is born intimately, in a feeling of ecstasy, dissolves and absorbs, as it were, the perceptible world'. For Bachelard, these experiences of 'intimate immensity' hold great emancipatory power for '[w]hen the dreamer really experiences the word

¹²⁴ Baudelaire is specifically commenting upon the sensations felt when listening to Richard Wagner's Prelude to *Lohengrin*. The Nietzschean connection is, of course, noted.

immense, he sees himself liberated from his cares and thoughts, even from his dreams. He is no longer shut up in his weight, the prisoner of his own being' (195). There is also something uncannily Nietzschean about this experience, something evocative of Zarathustra's declaration of the weightlessness he feels when contemplating life, happiness, and the sight of 'light, foolish, delicate, [and] mobile little beings on the wing'.¹²⁵ Foucault's account of his own, albeit limited, experience with meditation is also evocative of this sensation of 'intimate immensity' and the expansion of existential possibility it connotes:

If I have been able to feel something through the body's posture in Zen meditation [...] then that something has been new relationships which can exist between the mind and the body and, moreover, new relationships between the body and the external world (*Religion* 112-113).

If experiencing *samādhi* or other states of nonduality can help individuals become more conscious of freedom or, as Foucault suggests, they can evoke new intra- or interpersonal relationships or even simply show people are 'much freer than they feel',¹²⁶ then the practices which engender these experiences are practices of freedom in the truest sense.

Luce Irigaray's account of her experiences with yogic breathing practices (*prāṇāyāma*) also speaks of the freedoms and pleasures engendered by practice. Irigaray writes that learning to 'breathe by herself' helped her realise her self-sufficiency and allowed her to 'move away from a socio-cultural placenta' and 'glimpse the existence of another life, not in the beyond but here below' (*Between* 5-

¹²⁵ Part I, "Of Reading and Writing" (33). The similarities between Baudelaire's 1869 text, which Nietzsche may have read, and certain themes in *Zarathustra* (e.g., sleep, solitude, gravity, and heights) are uncanny:

... [I had] one of those impressions of happiness that nearly all imaginative men have experienced in their sleeping dreams. I felt freed from *the powers of gravity*, and, through memory, succeeded in recapturing the extraordinary *voluptuousness* that pervades *high places*. Involuntarily, I pictured to myself the delightful state of a man in the grip of a long daydream, in absolute solitude, but a solitude with an *immense horizon* and widely diffused light; in other words, immensity with no other setting than itself (*Poetics* 194-195).

¹²⁶ See *Technologies* (10).

6). Irigaray, who is a trained psychoanalyst,¹²⁷ does not understand her experiences in terms of a ‘discovery of some unconscious’ but as a reconstitution of the mind-body connection (6-7). In other words, both Foucault and Irigaray view yogic practices of the self as technologies for transforming all manner of relationships, whether they are with the self, other people, or the greater world. Irigaray also notes how yoga taught her to cultivate her body and to respect the bodies of others as ‘divine temples’ (61).¹²⁸ As noted previously, this sentiment pervades yogic discourses and particularly, tantric texts like the *Hathayoga Pradīpikā*. Moreover, ‘developing one’s divinity’ can be, but need not be, a religious enterprise. If, as Krishna declares, the divine permeates existence (*Gītā* 9.4/114), then everything in existence is divine. From this perspective, venerating the divine becomes nothing more than affirming life in all of its brilliant diversity – a sentiment that, as noted in Chapter One, also pervades Nietzsche’s corpus.

In stanza 2.45 of the *Gītā*, Krishna urges Arjuna to ‘be beyond all opposites [...] anchored in the real, and free’ and assures him yoga is the way to achieve this end (54). As simple as Krishna’s advice sounds, heeding it is no easy task in contemporary Western society where individuals and women in particular are subject to a complex web of competing discourses and practices of embodiment. Some of these discourses and practices represent obvious delimitations on the individual freedoms and pleasures one can experience through self-cultivation. Nonetheless, yoga is a form of self-cultivation with a difference – a ‘blissful’ discipline which uses

¹²⁷ Foucault also studied psychology at university and completed a diploma course in psychopathology. See Macey’s *Lives* (47).

¹²⁸ Notably, Irigaray critiques yoga for its lack of ‘a practice of sexual difference’ that might help ‘women and men constitute a world proper to their sex or their gender’ (*Beyond* 64). Although Irigaray’s point seems accurate, at least with regard to nondual forms of yoga, it also seems somewhat nonsensical in light of yoga’s belief in the wholly ‘feminine’ (*prakṛiti*) character of material reality. The yogic world is already constituted as feminine – a view that differs markedly from Irigaray’s Lacanian perspective where the feminine is ‘constituted’ as an absence and the symbolic realm is viewed as masculine.

practices of nonduality to engender new and less restrictive relationships between body and mind, self and world.

If, as many feminist philosophers have convincingly argued, dualistic discourses and practices of embodiment are the bedrock of androcentric power relations, then practicing nonduality may help individuals resist or perhaps even transform these oppressive apparatuses and minimise the suffering they produce. Practices of nonduality can also be understood as the key tools of the paradoxical or transformative ascetic; individuals who, through personal renunciatory practices, reconstitute their Being in the world in more socially conscious ways. The paradoxical ascetic is not only renouncing selfish desires and endeavours; she is learning to act as *karma-yogin* or *bodhisattva*, as someone who prioritises the wellbeing of the world (*lokasangraha*) over egoistic concerns.

In a world perhaps irrevocably marred by the selfishness of prior generations and forever changed by whole cultures leading untimely, unsustainable, frequently deeply injurious lifestyles, heeding Krishna's call has never been more important.

Epilogue

Writing is a question of becoming, always incomplete, always in the midst of being formed, and goes beyond the matter of any livable or lived experience. It is a process, that is, a passage of Life that traverses both the livable and the lived. Writing is inseparable from becoming: in writing, one becomes-woman [...].

—Gilles Deleuze¹

Nietzsche and Foucault offer numerous insights into the structure and practice of ethics in a late modern world. One of their most essential insights, if not the most misunderstood, is encapsulated in Nietzsche's command to 'revaluate all values' (*Anti-Christ* 62/187). To the extent Nietzsche and Foucault heed this directive in their own work, it is accurate to assert their methodological approach helps promote the popular idea of their philosophies as being just as pessimistic or nihilistic as the philosophies they endeavour to critique and transcend. Nonetheless, the import of Nietzschean-Foucauldian philosophy is much more multifarious than a simple nihilistic evacuation of all intrinsic meaning from the world. Indeed, by practicing a form of active and complete nihilism, Nietzsche and Foucault not only expose the truth of existence as beyond good and evil and lay bare the constructed nature of all moralities, they also clear the way for the conscious formulation of a new ethics. Revaluating all values is not just about critiquing existing ideals; therefore, it is also about assuming responsibility or, if you will, *authorship* for the creation and maintenance of new values and practices which uphold a particular vision of the world.

Nietzsche's positive philosophy, which is perhaps best explained through his Zarathustra, and Foucault's late work on ethics assume this responsibility by

¹ "Literature and Life" (*Essays* 1).

establishing a new set of values, values grounded in Nietzsche's Heraclitean vision of the world as ever-mutable will to power. Nearly a century later Foucault would adopt this worldview and, like his precursor, look to ancient Greece and Rome in an effort to rediscover an archetypical form of will to power ethics. For this reason, critiques of Foucault's late works on ethics can be understood as critiques of a will to power ethics in the Nietzschean mode. These critiques expose the dangers and advantages of one historically specific manifestation of this approach to ethics; a manifestation which relies heavily upon Nietzsche's idea of will to power as domination. On the other hand, critiques focusing upon the moral ramifications of Nietzsche's less prominent notion of will to power as dynamism reveal another very different set of problems that stem from an aesthetics-oriented ethics of open-ended self-realisation. Nevertheless, as feminist critiques of Foucault's late works demonstrate, an ethics revolving around a core relational dynamic of domination offers no real alternative to the status quo so if a feminist ethics is to be salvaged from Nietzsche and Foucault; it must embrace will to power as dynamism.

Finding historical examples of such an ethics represents a major challenge to feminism in light of humanity's proclivity for adopting dualistic, Being-centred philosophies which tend to promote will to power as domination. As Foucault's late work demonstrates, Western history presents few examples of moralities constructed around a central premise of dynamic self-production or crafting one's existence as art. Perhaps more importantly, history offers no real guidance on how such an ethical system might be constructed and implemented across a society as a whole. Inasmuch as late modernity has witnessed the failure of domination-based ethical constructs and has revalorised a flux-based view of self and world, however, it may be time to consider these matters in greater depth. Indeed, the need for an ethics that does not

attempt to assert will to power over the world or its inhabitants in an egotistical or unconscious attempt to impose stability, predictability, and order upon a reality which is *by definition* unstable, unpredictable, and messy has never been more acute.

In his *Genealogy*, Nietzsche declares there is no “being” behind doing, effecting, becoming; “the doer” is merely a fiction added to the deed – the deed is everything’ (I.13/45). In his middle and late works, Foucault adopts this idea that deeds alone lend substance and form to the self and goes on to demonstrate how bodily disciplinary practices can be used by societies and individuals to mould particular forms of subjectivity. If Nietzsche and Foucault are correct and what we currently are (or someday might be) is chiefly a function of our deeds, it is important to establish practices which are consciously designed to manifest a specific form of existence, whatever that might be. As Heidegger’s work suggests, the final form of our existence may be mutable but is inevitably predicated upon one simple fact – the pre-ethical condition of *Sorge* or care or concern for the world. As Ram notes, *Sorge* can manifest in any number of ways ranging from solicitude to indifference to disdain (“Temporality” 204). Given the myriad negative consequences of adopting a contemptuous or apathetic attitude toward the fellow inhabitants and shared site of our existence, however, one wonders if an ethics of care (in the nurturing sense of the word) is not also an essential component of a late modern ethics. Moreover, there is no reason why an ethics of care must be antithetical to a will to power ethics if that ethics is structured around a core relational dynamic of creative dynamism. In fact, one could argue by asserting that we are ‘will to power and nothing besides’ Nietzsche reaffirms our unity (or at least interconnectedness) with the world or, as Heidegger might characterise it, reveals the pre-ethical condition of *Sorge*. Although Nietzsche tends to advance an ethics of domination as the best approach to living with

the knowledge of our essence as will to power, other more creative-dynamic ethical responses are also possible. To the extent that Foucault's final works, feminist extensions and critiques of these works, and the separate discipline of feminist moral theory engage with and promote these ideas, they offer important insights into the construction of a will to power ethics for a late modern world. As Chapter Four discusses at length, yoga also holds promise as an appropriate discursive and practical platform for a will to power ethics centred on care.

In Hinduism, the three-fold nature of the labour behind material reality is typically symbolised by a trio of gods (*tri-mūrti*) – Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva – who (with their consorts) attend to the business of creating, upholding, and destroying the world.² In a post-Nietzschean era where the gods who were once held responsible for performing these tasks have been declared dead or dying, these duties now must become our own, the responsibilities of a species that has reached a critical phase of its ethical-spiritual development. Through his foil, Zarathustra, Nietzsche calls us to attend to this work, choosing to love life despite her burdens and her sorrows, to find happiness amidst the ephemeral world of 'butterflies, soap-bubbles, and whatsoever is of their nature amongst men'.³ Zarathustra's appeal culminates in his declaration that having realised his own weightlessness and ability to fly *sans* any outward impetus or support, he would believe only in a god who knew how to dance. In the ancient Greek paradigm, Dionysus is the god who dances, the god who urges his followers to embrace their fluctuating nature and ecstatically re-experience their primordial oneness with everything that is. In the Nietzschean worldview, 'everything that is' is will to power. Dionysus thus rules over Nietzschean (and arguably, Foucauldian) reality; bidding us to realise our flux-natures, our essence as will to power.

² See Feuerstein (*Tradition* 185).

³ *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Part I, "Of Reading and Writing" (33).

In India, it is Shiva the Destroyer (in his aspect as Natarāja) who is known as the Lord of Dance.⁴ As noted in Chapter Four, Shiva is also the Lord of Yoga, an erotic ascetic who in conjunction with his consort, Shakti (Prakriti), is progenitor of the world. Shiva's dance is not just an act of annihilation; therefore, it is also a dance of creation made possible through ascetic acts and the yogic equivalent of will to power. The contemporary significance of the co-presence of these disparate roles in one deity is clarified by an observation Foucault makes in his essay, "What Is Enlightenment?" In this text, Foucault (citing Baudelaire) characterises the modern ethos as one of 'ironic heroization of the present' where the transfiguring play of freedom within reality is intimately bound up in the ascetic elaboration of the self (*Reader* 41-42). One wonders if Shiva's multiple roles as destroyer, creator, and Lord of Yoga do not render him, along with his consort Shakti, the most appropriate ruling deities for the late modern era. For despite Nietzsche's century-old declaration that god is dead and we have killed him, the necessity of deities is still open to debate; a situation Nietzsche himself intuited by following up his assertion with the declaration that his message of god's death was premature (*Gay* 125/181-182). Perhaps in this twilight hour, as Nietzsche further suggests, it is our destiny to become gods ourselves if only to live up to the greatness of our murderous deed.⁵

Be this as it may, the continuing value of a fictive-enchanted interpretation of the world goes well beyond any perceived need for gods, as a passage from one of Nietzsche's notebooks implies. In this fragment, Nietzsche reflects on the centuries of moral interpretation which have led us to this moment where it seems we prefer to face life armed with untruth rather than truth, by denying rather than esteeming what we really know of existence (*Will* 5/10). In the next fragment, Nietzsche then

⁴ See Powell (*Windows* 57).

⁵ Complete atheism is, of course, the corollary proposition to Nietzsche's suggestion.

declares that insofar as we believe in morality, which is based upon untruth, we pass sentence on existence (*Will* 6/10). For Nietzsche and his devotee Foucault, one of the key untruths we have been taught to accept is a philosophical interpretation of the world as a realm of stable Being rather than the subjugated Heraclitean perspective of the world as endless Becoming. We hold fast to this untruth, devising discourses and practices to disseminate and uphold it, despite an embodied experience which constantly urges us to believe existence is something altogether otherwise than what we have been taught. Inasmuch as a will to power ethics upholds this latter vision of self and world, it is not only a more truthful approach to living; it also represents a more harmonious lifestyle, a way to work with nature rather than against her, to synchronise her continual activity of *telos*-free self-actualisation with our own.

Jane Bennett brilliantly summarises the moral import of this worldview by suggesting that the key ethical dilemma of the late modern era is deciding how we should act in conjunction with knowledge of the world as not only a ‘web of lively and mobile matter-forms of varying degrees of complexity’ but utterly without *telos* (*Enchantment* 131). Bennett further advises cultivating enchantment or inhabiting ‘a state of openness to the disturbing-captivating elements in everyday experience’ as a way to ground a late modern ethics. For her, it is our enchantment with the world which renders us more open to entering into ‘productive assemblages’ with it and its inhabitants and fosters a sensibility of ‘presumptive generosity’ that makes ethical living possible. The exaltation-heartbreak we feel in the presence of a butterfly – a creature of such obvious beauty, temporality, and fragility – is a material manifestation of this attitude. Enchantment thus becomes an affective modality for cultivating a sense of continuity and concern for all creatures, including ourselves, who live in a state of interminable change.

Bennett, quoting Nietzsche, further argues the self-contentment and joy we generate through self-styling may make us more predisposed toward generosity (149).⁶ Like Nietzsche and Foucault, therefore, Bennett views self-cultivation as the essential work of ethics and freedom; a way to situate oneself upon the ‘outer edges of the current regime of subjectivity’ and explore the possibility of ‘new configurations of identity’ along that frontier (146-147). Accordingly, self-cultivation is not seen as an exit door from the realm of will to power but is instead viewed as a technology for glimpsing the infinite (Self) within the finite (self), for harnessing the creative-dynamic potential of will to power to reveal and possibly expand the freedom which is already always there. Unlike Nietzsche and Foucault, however, Bennett consciously attempts to yoke the work of self-cultivation to a broader socio-cultural project of maximising freedom for all. As noted previously, commitment to this emancipatory agenda is a central tenet of feminism; a goal which many would argue is at odds with the will to power philosophies of Nietzsche and Foucault. Both Nietzsche and Foucault suggest that by recognising our essence as ‘will to power and nothing besides’ and then attending to the open-ended work of Becoming we imbue meaning, shape, and direction to a world which is inherently meaningless, constantly reforming, and utterly without *telos*. But neither Nietzsche nor Foucault explains just how acts of self-cultivation might contribute to an ethos of expanded freedom for everyone. Stated otherwise, as Soper and other critics of Foucault’s final works have noted, it remains unclear how the ‘very private’ and ‘masculine’ affair of self-mastery and authorial creation becomes a salient force for affecting widespread social change (“Productive” 41).

⁶ Bennett is quoting *The Gay Science* (290/232-233).

Moreover, looking for an unambiguous answer to this question in Nietzsche's corpus, apart from the one Bennett has already identified, is probably a futile enterprise considering the depth and pervasiveness of his elitist, sexist, and anti-democratic views. In addition, although Foucault's works are suffused with a profound concern for humanity in all its forms, as McNay and others have noted, it remains unclear how the ethics described in his final works might compel the self to situate itself upon a plane of generality where it is reminded of its social responsibilities (*Foucault* 8). Hence, as the discussion in Chapter Two suggests, practices of the self may be a 'true social practice' but simply acknowledging their social foundation is not the same thing as asserting they produce identifiable benefits for a culture. Perhaps the main benefit is just as Nietzsche and Bennett suggest – self-satisfaction lends itself to a more generous attitude toward others and the world at large. Connolly identifies something akin to this idea in Foucault's works when he observes that developing a generous attitude toward questions of identity is a key component of Foucault's 'ethical sensibility' ("Beyond" 110).

Attitudes like these or Bennett's sense of enchantment are nonetheless fragile in a world marked by the violent and oppressive consequences of less generous worldviews and moralities, some of which have inbuilt missionary-evangelical components. In such an environment, it becomes essential for individuals to adopt practices that will constantly reinforce a generous attitude toward the self and others – practices that will help them attain a state of self-satisfaction and avoid the resentment and negativity associated with an abiding dissatisfaction with one's existence. To the extent that practices of nonduality, including those found in yoga, can help individuals cultivate pleasurable feelings of connectivity or other existential states amenable to

attitudes of enchantment or generosity, they represent an essential component of this endeavour.

As diverse cultures with different lifestyles and moralities increasingly come into contact with one another, the possibility for conflict also increases but, as we sometimes forget, this possibility is only one outcome among many since cultural encounters also regularly foster alliances, exchanges, and other forms of reciprocity and mutual concern. In his book *Serendipities*, Umberto Eco discusses the various reactions which typically occur when one culture encounters another including acts of conquest, cultural pillage, exchange, idealisation, interpretation, and so forth (70). Part of the process of living in a culture is submitting to various forms of indoctrination aimed at establishing the righteousness of that cultural formation and the utility of its values, institutions, rules, and other common practices for upholding that vision of truth. Although none of this is wrong on its face, as Eco suggests, it can become problematic when we start believing *these* rules, *our* rules are golden (75). Yet, as Nietzsche and Foucault demonstrate, there is no right way to live; there are only ways that increase the possibility for certain forms of existence to manifest within an ever-mutable reality.

Nevertheless, there is also ample historical evidence supporting the conclusion that cultures of fear, domination, and control are more likely to produce oppression and suffering; whereas, cultures of love, creative dynamism, and care may be more likely to avoid these existential possibilities. Predicting the form and actual characteristics of a culture where the core relational dynamic is something like creative dynamism or care is a highly speculative endeavour, however, because although some of us have experienced microcosmic expressions of such a culture in

our families or immediate communities, few (if any) have experienced such an existence on a broader scale.

In an era of pervasive and acutely discernable change, where conflict and violence appears just as commonplace as it was before the world became ‘civilised’, where nearly every system we have devised for living has failed spectacularly with dire consequences for all, where unconsciousness and selfishness may represent the attitudes which seal our fate as a species, it is time to embrace our essence as will to power and to revel in our mutability rather than denying it or making it a cause for despair. If there is something irrefutable about our current existence it is only this – our mutual dependence and interconnectedness with one another and the world we inhabit. Becoming an ethical being in this reality thus requires something much more profound than self-actualising; it necessitates practices of s/Self-actualisation or renunciatory activities which simultaneously craft the self and assure our personal wellbeing while manifesting and upholding the wellbeing of the world (*lokasangraha*). The socially conscious practice of austerities aimed at fortifying and empowering the self thus becomes a means for ensuring the good life for all. Inasmuch as practicing nonduality through yoga or other means can assist in this venture, it can also be understood as an essential, if not central, practice of a late modern ethics.

Chronology of Selected Works

Friedrich Nietzsche

1872	<i>The Birth of Tragedy</i>
1881	<i>Daybreak</i>
1882	<i>The Gay Science</i>
1883-1885	<i>Thus Spake Zarathustra</i>
1886	<i>Beyond Good and Evil</i>
1887	<i>The Genealogy of Morals</i>
1889	<i>Twilight of the Idols</i>
1895	<i>The Anti-Christ</i>
1901	<i>The Will to Power</i>
1908	<i>Ecce Homo</i>

Michel Foucault

1961	<i>Madness and Civilisation</i>
1966	<i>The Order of Things</i>
1969	<i>The Archaeology of Knowledge</i>
1975	<i>Discipline and Punish</i>
1976	<i>The History of Sexuality, Volume 1 (The Will to Knowledge)</i>
1984	<i>The History of Sexuality, Volume 2 (The Use of Pleasure)</i>
1984	<i>The History of Sexuality, Volume 3 (The Care of the Self)</i>

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