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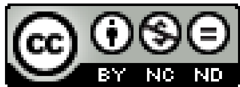

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CHAPTER ONE

A SOUND MIND IN A HEALTHY BODY

In *The Use of Pleasure* and in his lectures at the Collège de France on the *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, Foucault studied different practices associated with the care of the self. For the intellectual male elite of Greek and Roman Antiquity, to know oneself was founded upon the pragmatic commitment to take care of oneself.[1] The Platonic dialogues mark a pivotal moment since the care of the self became inseparable from the Delphic imperative of knowing oneself: in order to take care of oneself properly, Socrates tells his interlocutor, one must know oneself, that is one must know how to take care of oneself. Therefore, Foucault argues that the "self" was experienced through a plurality of experiences, activities, and practices which infused one's relations with the world, with others, and with oneself. These practices included, among others, techniques of thought and concentration, physical exercises, and attention to one's diet. Regardless of their varieties, all of them required a form of self-control and attention to oneself. Texts on the regulation of bodily activities did not just offer precise rules for good health but developed an overall art of existence. Ancient dietetics' primary goal, for instance, was not the prolongation of life but its quality: the search for pleasurable health within natural bounds and in harmony with the cosmos. "The care for self was in the Greco-Roman world the manner in which individual—and civic liberty, up to a certain point—considered itself ethical," Foucault observes.[2] By *ethos* he means "the deportment and the way to behave," the "subject's mode of being and a certain manner of acting visible to others."[3]

Foucault never took into account the "aging factor" when it comes to the care of one's health. My goal is to see how Petrarch's and Montaigne's contemporaries appropriated and adapted views on the care of the self from the classical and Hellenistic periods in this respect.

[1] M. Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 101.
[2] M. Foucault, "The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom", p. 4.
[3] Ibid., p. 6.

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Indeed, is aging a natural process, as Galen contended, or is it a disease, as Aristotle argued?[4] Both views persisted in Renaissance texts, as we will see. Today the word "health" usually suggests "absence of illness," yet this complex and subjective notion does not exclude the presence of latent risk factors or possible medical interventions. The preamble to the 1948 Constitution of the World Health Organization defines health in somewhat vague terms, as "a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity."[5] But for centuries, health was a matter of balance or "proportion." Hippocratic-Galenic medicine explained all processes of life as the interaction of four basic qualities (hot, cold, dry, and moist). Human life involved a continuous combustion of the body's innate heat and radical moisture, the latter fueling the former, analogous to the flame fed by the burning wick and oil in a lamp. Health depended on a balanced proportion of innate heat (*calor naturalis*) and radical moisture (*humidum radicale*) as well as an appropriate mixture of the humors (body fluids)—phlegm, blood, choler or yellow bile, and melancholy or black bile—each of which was linked to a specific temperament or *complexio*. Many factors, including age and health, affected the temperaments, which constituted "an extremely intricate and far-reaching system of explanation that underpinned much of physiology, pathology, and therapy."[6] Senescence was a progressive cooling and drying of the body, with a rise in the melancholic humor, and ultimately in the phlegmatic one. Natural death was the result of these unavoidable physical developments, when all that was left of the body's heat and moisture was no longer capable of being transformed into fuel for maintaining a person alive.[7]

In what follows we will investigate stories of later life ranging from Ficino's and Zerbi's health regimens to personal accounts by Petrarch, Erasmus, Cornaro, and Montaigne. These stories appear in private letters, poems, literary essays, and paradoxical monologues such as Erasmus's *Praise of Folly*. These writers all shared a renewed interest in the care of

[4] Galen, *On Hygiene. De Sanitate tuenda*, ed. and trans. R. M. Green. (Springfield, Il.: Thomas, 1951). I, 2. All further references come from this edition and are incorporated into the text. Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, ed. and trans. G. P. Goold. The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), V, 5, 784b, 32–34, pp. 530–31.

[5] See http://www.who.int/about/definition/en/print.html. Accessed March 14, 2013. The definition is dated April 7, 1948. On a historical perspective on health, see Klaus Bergdolt, *Wellbeing. A Cultural History of Healthy Living*, Trans. J. Dewhurst (London: Polity, 2008).

[6] Siraisi, *The Clock and the Mirror*, p. 64.

[7] Ibid., p. 75.

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the aging self and in pragmatic ways of minimizing the effects of time on human physical and cognitive capacities. Although their interest was linked to the development of certain forms of experimental medicine, Hippocrates's texts and Galen's observations on the process of aging were the bases of Western medicine for more than 1,500 years, and thus deserve our scrutiny. Galen's fifth book of *De Sanitate tuenda*, in particular, influenced all subsequent discourses on the preservation of health in old age, and on the prolongation of life.

Galen

Galen reinforced the humoral theory of the Hippocratic treatise *De Natura humana*. According to this view, the four humors in the human body correspond to, and sympathetically interact with, the four elements that constitute the sublunary world (air, fire, earth, water) and the elementary qualities of which both sets are made. In this cosmic perspective, blood is connected with air and the qualities warm and moist; yellow bile is connected with fire as warm and dry; black bile relates to earth as cold and dry; phlegm corresponds to water as cold and moist. The metaphor of the seasons to characterize the ages of life embodies the dynamic unity between the human microcosm and the world. By relocating human existence within the universal laws of the world, this analogy conveyed an image of life as a perpetual metamorphosis. Following this scheme, the *adolescens* is impulsive for he is hot and moist like spring; the *juventus* who has lost part of his former energy is like the summer, hot and dry. Fall is associated with *senectus* (old age) because both are cold, damp, and inclined to melancholy. As the years go by, the bile increases in the elder's body and the volume of blood decreases. Finally, the decrepit man (*senium*) is cold and dry like winter, because of a surplus of phlegm; he has exhausted almost all the warmth and hydration required for staying alive.

These medical views on old age were widely accepted by Petrarch's and Montaigne's contemporaries, but opinions varied on the chronological onset of old age. Even Hippocrates and Galen have markedly different views on this question. Of Hippocrates's Seven Ages of Man, the sixth (age forty-five to fifty-six) is called *presbutes* ("seniority"), and the seventh (from age fifty-six on) is termed *geron* ("old age"). Galen's fourfold division of life, in which old age (*geron*) begins at around sixty, prevailed as part of the fourfold humoral scheme, although some fluctuations persisted even beyond the Renaissance. In addition, Galen's treatise *On Hygiene*

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(*De Sanitate tuenda*) distinguishes three phases within old age according to the degree of moisture and heat of the human body; each phase refers to different capacities and experiences. The first stage—"green old age"—which is a time of fitness and activity, with perhaps some failing powers, does not prevent the elder from pursuing his activities and fulfilling his civic duties. The second one—"old age"—signals a significant decrease of moisture and heat, hence another lifestyle, which Galen describes with two lines of Homer's *Odyssey*:

> When he [the old man] has bathed and eaten, let him sleep
> Softly: this is the privilege of age. (V, 3, p. 195)

Finally, during "decrepitude"—the ultimate stage—the body's excessive coldness and dryness leads to natural death. Galen does not specify the chronological limits of each of these three periods since he sees the process of aging in qualitative terms of dryness and coldness. He observes that as the body ages, digestion (a matter of combustion) becomes difficult; other physiological symptoms appear, such as anorexia, emaciation, limited movement and impaired perceptions. As the skin becomes drier and colder it wrinkles; the teeth fall out, the corneas degenerate, and the pulse beats more slowly. Not all the body's parts age at the same rate, however, and Galen does not exclude some individual variations in the general process he outlines. He contends that every human being falls into one of the following medical categories: health, illness, and an intermediary state that includes people in weakened physical condition, such as convalescents and the elderly. Medicine has therefore a dual goal: to fight illness, and to preserve human intellectual and physical capacities. My discussion of health issues in old age will focus on the second task. I should add that Galen's advice on this issue only applies to the first two phases of old age, not to decrepitude.

Galen never believed in eternal youth, but he was concerned about preventing the process of aging from accelerating. His treatise *De Sanitate tuenda* (*On Hygiene*) reports the case of two old men, Antiochus and Telephus, whose daily practices and habits were most conducive to the prolongation of life and the conservation of health (V, 4, pp. 201–3). When the physician Antiochus was in his eighties he used to walk every day to attend civic meetings at the forum, or even further to visit the sick. During the winter he kept one room of his house warm; and in the summer he kept it cool. "Here he spent his mornings and was massaged winter and summer, after his toilet" (V, 4, p. 202). Antiochus ate small amounts of food three times a day: at about the fourth hour, "bread with

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Attic honey, generally toasted, but more rarely raw;" at lunch he took first laxative fruits (plums, or figs) and then ate chiefly fish. At dinner he ate "barley with honey-wine", which was soft and "not prone to ferment" or "a game-bird with a simple sauce." Every day Antiochus spent some time in social conversations and often read by himself; he was then massaged in the public bath and performed physical exercises appropriate to his age. "So, caring for himself in this way," Galen concluded, "Antiochus continued until the last day, unimpaired in all his senses and with all his members intact" (V, 4, p. 202). Telephus, the grammarian, grew even older and nearly became a centenarian. He bathed regularly according to the seasons (twice a month in winter, once a week in summer, three times a month in spring and fall). On the days he did not bathe he was anointed with a brief massage. His eating habits were even more austere than those of Antiochus: "barley boiled in water mixed with the best raw honey" at the third hour; vegetables, fish or game at the seventh hour. In the evening he ate only "bread moistened in diluted wine" (V, 4, p. 203).

Nineteen centuries later these practices still make perfect sense. One area of research that today's scientists are excited about is the potential progress in understanding how lifestyle choices (diet, exercise, stress management are among the top factors mentioned) influence the pace of the aging process.[8] Likewise, Antiochus and Telephus had a lifestyle adapted to their respective physiological conditions, they had a regular schedule of activities, and moderation was at the center of their daily habits. Antiochus had intellectual and social activities that stimulated his mind. Telephus, who was older, took some rest during the day but was still physically active. Both men were sexually continent to preserve their limited strength. The emphasis on their dietary habits is striking since digestion (a matter of combustion of food in Hippocratic-Galenic medicine) was at the center of the conservation of health, and old stomachs need special attention, as we shall see. Any present-day dietitian would applaud the regimen of these old men: Telephus and Antiochus had reduced their food intake; their carefully planned meals were low in fat and easy to digest. They drank a moderate amount of wine every day, which brought warmth to their bodies. For Galen as for today's scientists, the goal is to

[8] Alison Kadlec and Ana Maria Arumi, *The Science of Aging Gracefully. Scientists and the Public Talk About Aging Research.* American Federation for Aging Research and The Alliance for Aging Research (no publication place: Public Agenda, 2005), p. 13. See also chapter 4, section 1 of this work.

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extend the quality of the elders' lives: the issue is not just to live longer, but rather to keep people healthier and productive in their later years.

Although Antiochus's and Telephus's daily habits were remarkably similar to the recommendations of today's gerontologists, the medical and physiological assumptions underlying their lifestyle differ fundamentally from those of the modern world. In Galen's perspective, a doctor's main concern is old age's dryness with coldness: the man who "learns the moistening and warming materials of the curative agents, would be a good gerontologist," he observes in *De Sanitate tuenda* (V, 10, p. 219). *On Hygiene* offers the reader a combination of bookish knowledge and experience. Galen makes use of eclectic written sources; in addition, proven recipes (*experimenta*) and advice (*consilia*) to individual patients coexist with historical and illustrative anecdotes (or *exempla*, such as the cases of Telephus and Antiochus) and personal observations. General principles do not preclude attention to individual cases, quite the opposite. The aim of medical dietetics is a physiological equilibrium, but this equilibrium can only be found empirically because disparate "forces" are at work in each person. Moreover, individuals often have different reactions to the same regimen. Claiming to have "kept patients completely free from illness for many years," Galen notes:

> But I should not have accomplished any of this, if I had not understood the physical differences of their bodies, and the hygienic regime suited to each (V, 1, p. 188).

The collaboration between patient and doctor is crucial since the former's experience complements the latter's scientific knowledge of the human body. In fact, an older patient's habits should take precedence over the physician's general medical advice, for as Hippocrates already noted in his *Aphorisms*, "The things to which one has been used for a long time are usually less harmful even if they are not as good as the things to which one is not used."[9] The implication is that one should adopt a proper lifestyle as early as possible.

Doctors often did not have a good reputation and were widely mistrusted; therefore, Galen's *De Sanitate tuenda* was a program of self-help rather than the aesthetic stylization of life that Foucault sees in ancient health regimens. Like any author of such a work, Galen intended his

[9] Hippocrates, *Aphorisms*, ed. E. Littré (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1962), vol. 4, p. 485, aphorism 50. My translation.

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observations to be tested out and even to constitute the framework of daily regimens. In the first chapter of *De Sanitate tuenda*'s book V, he reports following his own precepts from age twenty-eight on, and adds: "It is possible for anyone to guard his own health, who has a free life [...] if one is willing to apply his mind to it" (V, 1, pp. 188–9). In another work, he notes that "those of my friends whom I convinced to exercise, and to lead a regular life are all perfectly healthy, some for over twenty-five years, others for a shorter yet relatively long period."[10] In addition, *De Sanitate tuenda* points out the moral implications of the care of the self: how shameful that a man with a perfect constitution should ruin his health in banquets and then need someone else to put the food into his mouth (V, 1, p. 189).

Galen's lasting reputation was partly due to the number of his texts that survived and to the similarities of his views to those of Aristotle. From the tenth century on, Latin and Arab interpreters (including Avicenna) elaborated on his observations; some of them incorporated his theories into astrology and occult systems of thought. Social, cultural, geographic, and economic factors influenced their considerations, yet the content of medieval and Renaissance health regimens remained largely rooted in Hippocratic-Galenic medicine.[11] The growing success of health regimens and diet books was largely due to their accessible presentation. These were "practical" texts, which were themselves objects of a "practice."[12] They allowed the reader to take care of his own health without consulting a doctor, and to understand the factors affecting his well-being. Dietetics, in particular, did not require the specialized knowledge of the other branches of medicine (anatomy, pharmacology, and surgery) and was embedded in the literary, philosophical, social, and moral culture of the day.

The interest in pragmatic ways to live a long and healthy life downplayed the religious connections between old age and the afterlife; indeed, the discourse on the care of the self, along with its emphasis on the *here and now*, had unmistakable Epicurean and Stoic overtones.[13]

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10 *De probis pravisque alimentorum sucis*, in Galen, *Opera omnia*, vol. 5, pp. 755, 757. My translation.

11 Cf. Siraisi, *The Clock and the Mirror*, pp. 70–89.

12 Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 12.

13 See chapter 4, section 3.

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Petrarch

Well before the second half of the fourteenth century, elder members of the wealthy classes in Europe were concerned with preserving their health. Following classical models, Avicenna had included age among the dominant factors of health; likewise, the organization of some diet books around the ages of life took on a more formal structure.[14] Some authors focused more on medical ways to prevent the process of aging from accelerating. One needs only to think of Roger Bacon's *Libellus de retardandis senectutis accidentibus* (circa 1236) paraphrased in Arnaldo Villanova's *De conservanda juventute et retardanda senectute* (ca. 1309–11),[15] of Bernard de Gordon's *Tractatus de conservatione vitae humanae* (1308) that integrated old age into the management of health,[16] or of Guido da Vigevano's *Liber conservationis sanitatis senis* (1335) written for older men going on pilgrimage to the Holy Land.[17]

In contrast to these medical works, Petrarch's remarks on his health and diet in his *Letters of Old Age* (*Rerum Senilium Libri*, conceived in 1361, at age fifty-seven) cross the boundaries between medicine, moral philosophy, religion, history, and literature. In his correspondence (*Sen.* III, 5; V, 3) and his *Invective contra medicum*,[18] he often criticizes doctors' corruption and ignorance, and pokes fun at their pretentious jargon, but his attacks target bad practitioners and never question the value of medicine. In fact, he held Hippocrates and Galen in as much esteem as Cicero. As he grew old, he portrayed himself as physically fragile, but morally tougher at bearing ills, as if time had opposite impacts on his body and his mind.

Book XII of the *Letters of Old Age* contains only two letters to the Paduan physician Giovanni Dondi, dated July and November 1370, which constitute Petrarch's most elaborate comments on his health in his later years. In the first letter, the sixty-six-year-old writer focuses on ways to recover from a yearlong illness that so affected him that he had not been able to move around for many days. In his own words, he felt like "a sad weight,

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[14] See Marilyn Nicoud, *Les Régimes de santé au Moyen Age. Naissance et diffusion d'une écriture médicale* (Rome: Ecole française de Rome, 2007), vol. 1, pp. 193–99.

[15] On these books, see Michael Goodich, *From Birth to Old Age. The Human Life Cycle in Medieval Thought, 1250–1350* (New York: University Press of America, 1989), pp. 159–61.

[16] See Nicoud, *Les Régimes de santé au Moyen Age*, vol. 1, pp. 185–238.

[17] Guido da Vigevano's *Liber conservationis sanitatis senis* (1335), Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, fonds latin 11015.

[18] *Invective contra medicum*, in *Opere latine di Francesco Petrarca*, A. Bufano, ed., vol. 2 (Turin: Unione tipografica-editrice Torinese, 1975).

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burdensome to others, hateful to myself" (*Sen.* XII, 1, p. 442).[19] Two conceptions of health are at stake: a medical perspective aiming at healing an aging body, and a holistic notion of spiritual wellness. Both views are linked to Petrarch's eating and drinking habits: whereas Dondi's prescriptions are about *dietetics*, Petrarch promotes a *diet ethics*: he sees his diet as a spiritual exercise "captured live" by which, in Foucault's words,

> men not only set themselves rules of conduct, but also seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make their life into an *oeuvre* that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria.[20]

For Petrarch, these "aesthetic values" go along with ethical and religious concerns. Book XII's two letters focus on three of Dondi's prescriptions. First, the doctor forbids his patient to drink water, and instead recommends wine. Second, he finds Petrarch not strong enough to fast on a regular basis. Third, Dondi recommends abstaining from fruits that are dangerous at any age. Several centuries later, this last prescription strikes a strange note, but most Renaissance diet books contended that fruits putrefy in the stomach, generating phlegm; as a result the blood is unable to absorb their moisture. At first glance, Dondi's three prescriptions seem disparate, but from a medical perspective they are, in fact, totally coherent since they epitomize the three types of elements ingested by the body according to the Hippocratic-Galenic tradition: air (represented by Petrarch's words), food (mentioned *in absentia* by the discussion on fasting), and liquid (suggested by water and wine).[21] Dondi's prescriptions convey his medical knowledge of nutrition, but Petrarch complains that they focus mostly on his patient's age, rather than his overall condition (*Sen.* XII, 1, p. 467/ *Lettres*, vol. 4, p. 37). His objection makes perfect sense. Any learned contemporary would have immediately understood the reason for the physician's first advice, since wine warms up a body that is becoming colder in the winter of life. Moreover, wine has strong digestive powers, well indicated for an older (weaker) stomach. In Galen's *De Sanitate tuenda*, the daily meals of Antiochus and Telephus included wine. Isidore of Seville's widespread *Etymologiae* added a linguistic confirmation of wine's beneficial effect. *Vinum* is so named, Isidore notes, because

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[19] "pondus mestum, grave aliis, odiosum michi." (*Lettres*, vol. 4, p. 21).
[20] Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, pp. 10–11.
[21] Galen, *De placitis Hippocratis et Platonis*, in *Opera omnia*, vol. 5, p. 605. See also Galen's comments on Hippocrates's *De humoribus* 3, 3 in *Opera omnia*, vol. 16, pp. 357–63.

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when it is drunk it fills the veins (*venas*) quickly with blood. Furthermore, in true Galenic spirit, Dondi believes that water and fruit are cool; consequently both are detrimental to an old man with a cold body. As for the second of Dondi's prescriptions, old men are frail and cannot endure prolonged hunger.

In contrast to Dondi's theoretical knowledge, Petrarch relies largely on self-observation. He concedes that his body has grown old and has consumed some of its natural heat, yet it is still warm. Fasting is not dangerous for him because he is used to it; moreover, it stimulates his mind and is a healthy, useful, and holy practice. One needs only to think of the Church fathers who lived in the desert, fasting on a regular basis; some became centenarians. Turning to Dondi's second prohibition—fruit—Petrarch provides Dondi with a few historical examples of their beneficial effects. Finally, why should he drink wine, which "produces the gout, maintains it, and makes it recur by the mere smell of it, so to speak?" (*Sen.* XII, 1, p. 447/ *Lettres*, vol. 4, p. 35). Other letters of the *Seniles* similarly stress the dangers of alcohol, and Petrarch's "addiction" to water, in old age.[22] Alcohol is often blamed for shortening life; in addition, any Christian reader would have been sensitive to Petrarch's criticism of wine since the letter reminds Dondi of the disastrous moral consequences of alcohol on Noah, who reportedly first made wine. The letter also points out that, according to Saint Paul, wine can provoke sin (*Sen* XII, 1, pp. 448–9/ *Lettres*, vol. 4, p. 37).

Foucault saw the care for the self in Greco-Roman Antiquity as a practice of freedom, yet he did not take into account the ways in which medical judgments are integrated into systems of action in relation to pathology. This would require an investigation of the different justificatory mechanisms whereby medical truth claims are sustained according to certain criteria. Too often, as Petrarch notes, doctors eagerly control the slightest details of their patient's daily life. His remarks on his diet strike a classical note of practical wisdom and sobriety, while also conveying his Christian devotion. His austere meals, he contends, fortify his spirit and render him capable of coping with illness.

Petrarch's second letter to Dondi focuses on a process of reconciliation:

> we both have wanted the same thing, however differently, you from doctors and I from God, namely that whatever remains of life I spend in good health,

[22] See *Sen.* III, 9; III, 13; V, 3.

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> so that life itself be happier and longer—even though when we defer it for long, if anything here is long, we must still die. (*Sen.* XII, 2, p. 475)[23]

Since Plato's *Symposium*, banquets are traditionally associated with conviviality, but in Petrarch's letter, a discussion on a sober diet proves to be the best recipe for friendship. "I see you in a twofold role," he writes to Dondi, "the friend and the doctor. With a friend I so agree on everything that there can be nothing you think or like that I do not think and like immediately." With doctors, however, he was more cautious; his reservations on important matters came from "prolonged experience and close observation." (*Sen.* XII, 2, p. 453/ *Lettres*, vol. 4, p. 47). Cicero—a major model of the *Letters of Old Age*—stressed the natural connection between old age and friendship.[24] In the same spirit, Petrarch's second letter to Dondi in book XII conveys the harmony of the protagonists' respective views: it is true that wine disturbs the mind and plagues the body with illness, yet it may give some comfort if drunk with moderation, Petrarch concedes. Likewise water may be harmful to an old stomach but can also be part of a healthy regimen at any age of life since Hippocrates praises it. For food as for drink, the crucial point is to avoid excess. In the end, the writer's defense of sobriety and his emphasis on personal habits fully comply not only with a Stoic ideal of life but also with the medical principles of his time.

The reconciliation of the doctor's and the humanist's views takes its full meaning in the intellectual context of the day. Medicine and the liberal arts had institutional relations in universities such as Bologna, Padua, and Florence, since both fields had therapeutic goals and ethical concerns. On the one hand, Hippocratic treatises argued that physicians should be philosophers since they are concerned with both the body's and the mind's well-being. On the other hand, Plato and Aristotle contended that philosophers are doctors because they aim at healing spiritual and moral illnesses.[25] During Petrarch's youth, Peter of Abano, then a prominent teacher at Padua, stated that medicine and philosophy were sisters, and that medicine was superior to philosophy because of its usefulness.[26] The

[23] "Licet enim aliter atque aliter a medicis ego a Deo; ambo tamen unum volumus, ut quodcunque scilicet vite restat sanus degam quo vita ipsa sit letior longiorque, quanquam, cum diu, siquid est hic diu, distulerimus, moriendum sit." (*Lettres*, vol. 4, p. 103).

[24] See the opening remarks of Cicero's *De Amicitia*.

[25] See Plutarch, *Préceptes de santé*, in *Traités 10–14*, ed. J. Defradas, J. Hani, and R. Klaert (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1985), vol. 2, pp. 93–135.

[26] N. Siraisi, *Arts and Sciences at Padua. The Studium of Padua before 1350* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1973), pp. 152–55.

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universities of Padua and Bologna had put medicine at the top of the curriculum, above metaphysics, rhetoric, and grammar, but Petrarch had obviously another view on this question. His objections to Dondi's prescriptions proved so persuasive that two further letters dated 1371 and 1372 report that the doctor had found inspiration in his patient's moral and religious concerns (*Sen.* XIII, 15 and 16). Ironically, Petrarch's reactions to standard medical treatment improved the doctor's health of mind.

For Foucault, the care for the self "implies a certain manner of acting visible to others," that is a "relationship to the other to the extent that . . . one must listen to the teachings of a master."[27] In Petrarch's letters, it is the patient rather than the doctor who takes on this pedagogical role. In some way, book XII's two letters remind physicians of their professional duties as defined by Plato's *Laws* (IV, 720b–e): a conscientious doctor does not limit himself to writing prescriptions, but enters into conversation with the patient, listens to his observations and daily habits, and leads him to the right kind of life. An effective health regimen acts upon an individual's body *and* soul, trains the will, enhances moral firmness, and implies a way to reform one's self. In a later letter dated August 28, 1371, Petrarch informed Dondi that he no longer suffered from the fever, but still felt weak, and would wait for God's help since Jesus is the only doctor able to make us healthy (*Sen.* XIII, 15).

The aging humanist saw health as a form of spiritual well-being founded on medicine. Commenting on the contentions of Aristotle and Terence that "old age is a disease," he observes in yet another letter: "nor do I reject this maxim, provided that one point is added to it: that old age is a disease of the body but the health of the mind." (*Sen.* XVII, 2, p. 646). He distinguishes the ages in terms of opinions rather than physical condition, as did Galen and Dondi:

> not that I would call old age wretched in itself, but rather happy unless deluded by the errors of earlier ages. Nor even so is it wretched if only it rises up, and, shaking off the vanities, it gains wisdom and true opinions, albeit at the end of life, as Plato puts it. If this is what philosophers thought, what ought we to think, to whom has been granted the attainment of wisdom, virtue, and salvation . . . (*Sen.* XII, 1, p. 441/ *Lettres*, vol. 4, p. 17).

His *Letters of Old Age* represent him as a Christian Ancient that old age has set "right," in his own words (*Sen.* XVIII, 1, p. 672). Old age adds a feeling of urgency to the preparation for the afterlife, while also inviting consid-

[27] Foucault, "The Ethic of Care of the Self as a Practice of Freedom", pp. 4, 7.

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erations on the care of the self. Following Cicero's and Seneca's examples, his later letters praise a life in a peaceful, rustic retreat, away from the worries and tensions of the city, in the company of a circle of friends and books. His dual concern for literary immortality and salvation allowed him no time for laziness or daydreaming; likewise, he considered sleep as a waste of time that distracted him from praying and writing. Yet the pleasure he took in exchanges and conversations increased over the years, as evidenced by his intense epistolary activity. Such pleasure involved a "conversion to oneself . . . thanks to which, escaping all dependency and enslavement,"[28] Petrarch could return to himself in order to reach God. In addition, his emphasis on his age served his literary reputation well. In the words of Seneca (a major source of inspiration of the *Seniles*), he felt "that age ha[d] done no damage to [his] mind, though he [felt] its effects on [his] constitution." For the aging Petrarch, as for Seneca, the "mind [was] strong and rejoice[d] that it ha[d] but slight connection with the body" (*Ad Lucilium* XXVI, 2, p. 187).[29] In some ways, growing old was Petrarch's way of becoming ageless in the eyes of posterity.

His *Letters of Old Age* elevate him to a status similar to illustrious elders ranging from Cicero's Cato the Elder in *De Senectute*, to Seneca, and Gartius—Petrarch's own paternal great-grandfather—who peacefully passed away in "the one hundred and fourth year of life," with "no suffering either of body or mind, and speaking of nothing except God and goodness."[30] Gartius's faith had protected him from the woes of old age; he epitomized Petrarch's own Christian and classical ideal since he died on his birthday (as did Plato, but twenty-three years shy of Gartius's age), and uttering David's last words. He was a "very holy man and of considerable ability," Petrarch commented, equally consulted about affairs of the state and private matters because of his expertise, fair judgment, and wisdom. Such was also the image of himself that Petrarch tried to convey in his *Letters of Old Age*.

[28] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 3, *The Care of the Self*, trans. R. Hurley (New York: Vintage Book, 1986), p. 57.

[29] Seneca, *Ad Lucilium. Epitulae Morales* ed. and trans. R. Gunmere (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1953), vol. 1, pp. 186–87. All further references are to this edition and are incorporated into the text.

[30] To Giovanni Colonna in *Letters on Familiar Matters, (Rerum Familiarium Libri)*, ed. and trans. Aldo Bernardo, vol. 1, VI, 3, pp. 301–302. "quarto ac centesimo etatis anno . . . nulla corporis aut animi molestia, nil nisi de Deo et de virtutibus loquens . . . ," *Le Familiari*, vol. 2, p. 66. In Rossi's Latin edition, the name of Petrarch's great-grandfather is Gartius, but in Bernardo's English translation his name is "Gattius."

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Ficino and Zerbi

For Petrarch, the care for the self is a strategic game, it is part of a process of self-representation through a number of daily practices closely linked to intellectual and religious concerns. From the end of the fifteenth century on, however, the increasing number of elderly men from the wealthy classes created a market for issues related to longevity. Indeed, Gabriele Zerbi and Marsilio Ficino were consciously responding to a need when they each published health regimens for the elderly in 1489. Although they were not the first to write such books, they were aware that keeping a sound mind in a healthy body in the winter of life was a pressing concern for a large number of contemporary learned men and members of the upper classes. Both acknowledge their debt to earlier medical authorities (including Galen and Hippocrates) while stressing their originality. In the dedication of his *Gerontocomia* (*On the Care of the Aged*), Zerbi says he undertook his work because "few of our recent physicians have attempted the task" of speaking of the care of the elder, and those who did "have touched rather lightly upon the subject within narrow limits and with excerpts merely."[31] A famous professor of anatomy and a practicing physician in Padua, Rome, Venice, and Bologna, Zerbi had excellent reasons to boast about his competence. Ficino adopts a similar self-congratulatory tone in his *De Vita libri tres*: "I am the first to attend as a physician sick and invalid scholars," he claims in book I's first chapter (I, 1, p. 109).[32] *De Vita*'s lasting success is evidenced by its thirty editions between 1489 and 1647. Book I focuses on the health of the intellectual, book II on longevity, and book III elaborates on the conservation of life in the perspective of Platonic astral magic.

Zerbi's and Ficino's treatises combine literary quotations and commonplaces with medical, biblical, historical, and philosophical references. Both authors target readers well beyond the narrow circle of physicians—humanists, members of the Church, and people from the

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[31] Gabriele Zerbi, *Gerontocomia: On the Care of the Aged.* ed. and trans. R. Lind (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1988), pp. 20–21. All further references are to this edition and are incorporated into the text. For the Latin edition (Rome: Eucharius Silber, 1489), see the Bibliothèque Nationale de France's Gallica website: http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k584977

[32] Marsilio Ficino, *Three Books on Life*, ed. and trans. C. Kaske and J. Clark (Binghamton: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1989). All further references are to this edition and are incorporated into the text. The Roman number indicates the book number, the second number refers to the chapter number, and the third one to the page number.

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liberal professions—and provide their learned but somehow uninformed audience with accessible explanations of medical notions. Obviously, their readers had the financial means and the leisure to take care of their health, yet neither Ficino nor Zerbi had any desire to impart their instructions to "lazy and indolent" people. "For why should we wish those people to live long who do not even live, as if we were nourishing drones and not bees?" Ficino asks:

> Nor do I wish them to be divulged to people who are dissolute through their corrupt passion for pleasures, fools who far prefer the brief pleasure that lasts only a day; nor disclosed to the wicked and unjust whose life is the death of good men; but only to prudent and temperate people of sophisticated intelligence who will benefit mankind, whether in the private or the public sphere. (II, 1, p. 167)

As Ficino's and Zerbi's respective dedications make clear, people who hold important positions in the public sphere have an obligation to pay attention to their health. In Plato's *Phaedrus*, Socrates says that the care for the self is the precondition for being involved in the affairs of the *polis*. For Foucault, this means that only men who can exercise self-control are capable of governing others and of having a successful political career. To his view I would like to add that Socrates's observation also reminds us that the well-ordered soul and the well-ordered *polis* have similar structures. Likewise, Ficino dedicates book I: *On a Healthy Life* to Lorenzo de Medici, and book II: *On a Long Life* to Filippo Valori, "Florence's most upright and noblest citizen" (p. 165) who bore the expenses of publishing *De Vita*. Book III: *On Obtaining Life from the Heavens* is dedicated to Matthias Corvinus, King of Hungary. For these powerful patrons, Ficino defines the motivations for a long and healthy life: first, praising God as long as possible; second, studying, for as Hippocrates's first aphorism points out, "*Ars longa, vita brevis*"; Ficino concurs that "Art is long, and we can only attain it by a long life" (II, 1, p. 167). As he is quick to point out, such lifelong efforts should contribute to the collective welfare. In a similar way, Zerbi dedicates *Gerontocomia* to his patron, Pope Innocent VIII, because a long life with a sound mind in a healthy body is a prerequisite for his important spiritual mission.[33]

[33] Zerbi never alluded to religion in the course of his discussion on health. Whether his silence was a matter of prudence or simply a will to focus on a medical perspective is open to debate.

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De Vita libri tres has been called the first treatise "to reason medically at any length about the paradoxically positive intellectual value of melancholy" (p. 23). People neglect health because of ignorance and carelessness, Ficino contends, yet intellectuals have special medical needs since they are the most prone to "black bile" or melancholy. The treatise's syncretism has attracted a wide range of comments,[34] but its discussion of longevity has been neglected, although it is the focus of *De Vita*'s book II. To be productive, a scholar should be in good health (book I), Ficino argues; moreover, a long life gives him the opportunity to perfect his knowledge and acquire sufficient experience (book II).

Throughout book I *On a Healthy Life* (*De Vita sana*), psychology mingles with hygiene and pharmacology, while astrology comes in incidentally. Book I presents melancholy as the physical basis of intelligence and genius; yet when excessive, it "vexes the mind with continual care and frequent absurdities"; it "unsettles judgment," and drives scholars to "depression and even sometimes to folly." In addition, learned people are prone to suffer from a surplus of phlegm, which "suffocates the intelligence" (I, 3, p. 113). Along with phlegm and black bile, Ficino warns the reader of three major life threats: incontinence in sexual matters that weakens the brain; satiety in food that "dulls the mind"; and large amounts of wine which fills the head with "bad fumes." A good digestion is especially important to keep a clear mind (I, 11, p. 137). The book also dwells on occupational hazards of scholars such as sleeping after sunrise, a habit that adversely affects the mind (I, 7, p. 125); headaches and insomnia (I, 16; I, 24, p. 143, 157); dimness of vision (I, 16, p. 143); and dullness and forgetfulness (I, 25, p. 159). *De Vita sana* ends with a statement similar to Petrarch's book XII of the *Senilium*: medicine takes care of the body, moral discipline teaches appropriate behavior and is the basis of a serene mind, but only religion can lead the scholar to spiritual well-being and true joy (p. I, 26, pp. 161–63).

Book II *On Longevity* (*De Vita longa*) combines ancient theology with medical, Christian, and occult comments.[35] Longevity is not "something the fates promise once for all from the beginning," Ficino contends, but is "procured by our effort" (II, 1, p. 167). He dwells on the foods that help

[34] See the introduction of the edition of Ficino's *De Vita*, pp. 2–23.

[35] Ficino wrote book II mostly to please a Christian audience that found book III's Platonic astral magic suspicious. See Brian Copenhaver, "Scholastic Philosophy and Renaissance Magic in the *De Vita* of Marsilio Ficino," *Renaissance Quarterly* 87, 4 (1984), pp. 523–54 on Ficino's magical, astrological, and Christian perspectives as well as on the Church's criticism of this syncretism.

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sustain the aged scholar's vital heat and maintain the quality of his blood. Since digestion is, as Galen contends, the "root of life," and longevity is a matter of a balanced proportion of innate heat and moisture, Ficino applies the standard medical principles of moderation and cure by the opposites. Endorsing Galen's division of old age into three phases, Ficino observes that people in their fifties should have a diet different from those in their seventies; likewise, decrepit intellectuals need a regimen adapted to their condition. In addition, "pleasant and somewhat hot" odors can extend the life span (II, 7, p. 185). Ficino might have read in the *Book of the Apple and of Death* (*Liber de Pomo et Morte*) that Aristotle's life was prolonged by the odor of an apple.[36] Moreover, he was certainly familiar with Diogenes Laertius's story about Democritus who was about to die at the time of a festival in his hometown. When the citizens asked the philosopher not to die until they had completed the celebration and the banquets, Democritus remained alive for four days, by smelling Attic honey in a cup, as if he were still making fun of humankind. Other accounts say that he survived on the smell of baking bread.[37] Isidore of Seville's etymological dictionary gave Ficino's learned readers a linguistic confirmation of the need for sensual pleasures in old age: according to this source, the Latin *senectus* (old age) comes from *sensus* (the sense), because human blood becomes colder as the years go by, and there is a general waning of sensual acuity.[38] Like other Renaissance authors of health regimens for the elderly, however, Ficino recommends continence in sexual matters. Moreover, for the aged, he finds the color green especially pleasing (II, 14, pp. 203–5). Music, an important element in Pythagorean therapeutics, is also most effective for the conservation of health and the prolongation of life.

Book II also contains occult recipes for the revitalization of aging scholars, some of which come directly from Roger Bacon's *Libellus de retardandis senectutis accidentibus* (ca. 1236). Food made of potable gold is highly recommended because this metal is the "most safe from decay" (II, 10, pp. 195–97); the mixture should be prepared "when the Moon enters Leo, Aries or Sagittarius and aspects the Sun or Jupiter," along with "the whitest sugar dissolved in rose-water" (II, 10, p. 195). Other recipes include

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[36] *Liber de Pomo et Morte*, ed. D. S. Margoliouth in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1892, pp. 187–252.

[37] Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, ed. and trans. R. D. Hicks (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958–59), Book 9, pp. 39–43.

[38] Isidore of Seville, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, ed. and trans. S. Barney (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), XI, 2.

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sucking the milk of a "healthy, beautiful, cheerful, and temperate" young girl. The blood of a "willing, healthy, happy, and temperate" youth can also invigorate a man who is over seventy years old, or at the climacteric age of sixty-three (II, 11, p. 197).

Book II's final remarks on longevity epitomize Ficino's syncretism. Summing up his observations on this issue, the author concludes that Bacchus preserves youth by offering humankind three presents: the "hills exposed to the Sun"; on these hills, "the sweetest wine; and in wine "perpetual freedom from care." Bacchus's brother Phoebus also makes human beings three gifts to preserve youth: "daylight; then herbs sweetly smelling with the warmth of daylight," and the "lyre and perennial song." To these divine presents, Ficino adds his own ones: frugality (*parcitas*) and moderation (*temperantia*) in every necessity of life. The constant care of the body and mind is essential to keep far off "that imbalance of humors that is the cause of quick old age and untimely death," yet only God will help the aged scholar to live a long life for the sake of "the human race" and God himself (II, 20, p. 235).

The third and final book of Ficino's treatise belongs to a climate of religious and social anxiety that turned to astrology to explain human destiny in relation to the laws of the universe. Since a long and healthy life is a matter of harmony with oneself (based on a good proportion of heat and moisture) and with the heavenly bodies, book III discusses ways to tap into the cosmic forces that govern the world so as to prolong his readers' days beyond their predicted term. The wise scholar thinks and acts with a view to the cosmos, and does not let himself become detached from a totality of which he is a part. Although Jesus is at the center of his prayers, studies, and manner of life, he knows that the pagan gods and the celestial bodies affect his body and mind. As he grows old, he follows his "natural bent" to find the lifestyle most suitable to him (III, 24, p. 377). He should therefore "investigate exactly what region [his] star and [his] daemon initially designated [him] to dwell in and cultivate, because there they will favor [him] more" (III, 23, pp. 371–73). In addition, readers should imitate the celestial bodies, and since they "were engendered" by their movements, they should make similar motions to be preserved (III, 23, p. 373).[39]

[39] This kind of exercise recalls a passage of Plato's *Timaeus* in which the soul brings its inner movements into accord with the movements and harmony of the world.

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The publication of Gabriele Zerbi's *Gerontocomia* in 1489—the same year as Ficino's treatise—marks another milestone in establishing the elderly as an object of medical research. The work has the same two-fold objectives as Ficino's *De Vita* (first, to slow down the ravages of old age, and second, to comfort and maintain the elder's current condition of tolerable health), but offers a much more systematic and meticulous discussion of the care of the aging self.

From the start, Zerbi prepares his reader to confront senescence without any value judgment. Old age begins sometime between the thirtieth and fortieth year of human life, he notes, and extends to the fiftieth or sixtieth year. Following Galen, he distinguishes three periods in old age. In the first phase, the individual keeps some qualities from the previous age of his life (beauty, flowering, constancy) since his body is still hot and dry. In the second stage, however, he already sees a few signs of his future decrepitude, because his body becomes colder and drier (and accidentally humid). This period is "something like a middle equidistant" between the first and the third phases in terms of heat and moisture. Men in this phase of old age exhibit "constancy, strong understanding, and wisdom;" they have lost their previous playfulness and sexual desire since they are colder and drier than in their youth. The planet Jupiter dominates this second period, "providing the person with guidance for about twelve years" (I, p. 30). After this time of peace and religious good works comes decrepitude, along with illnesses, infirmities, and sadness. This melancholic and final phase of old age is placed under the sign of Saturn. The decrepit man's understanding dwindles away, and his memory decreases because cold and dryness now predominate in his body. In Latin, old men are called *senes*, Zerbi notes, because they "know not" (*nesciant*). Moreover, they are decrepit, because "they can neither move nor make any creaking (*crepitum*)" (I, pp. 31–32). He carefully lists the physical weaknesses associated to decrepitude: the teeth fall, the vision dims, hearing becomes bad, and the taste dulls; the skin wrinkles, and movements are more difficult. The greatest of all these woes is senile dementia (I, p. 31).

Throughout the treatise, empirical observations complement standard Hippocratic-Galenic principles. There are, for instance, early signs of longevity: a young man in good physical condition, and not overweight, has a good chance of living a long life. Other signs are less visible: those who have many teeth, "especially more than thirty-two," are said to be longer-lived (VII, p. 63). One should also take into account the influence of the planets when discussing longevity.

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At the center of every Galenic treatise on the conservation of health—whether in old age or earlier—is the regimen or governance by the so-called six “non-naturals.” Most of them date back to the Hippocratic treatise, *Air, Water and Place*; some were attributed to Galen, and later reworked by his Latin and Arab interpreters. Let’s look briefly at these principles. The non-naturals are factors that are partly psychological, partly physiological and environmental; yet they are neither part of our nature (the “naturals” being temperament, humors, age, region, climate, etc.), nor disease-causing (the “contra-naturals” being illness, hereditary factors, etc.), but are necessary to life and health.[40] For Zerbi and his contemporaries, the six *res non naturales* comprise, in this specific order: air, food and drink, motion and rest, sleep and wakefulness, retentions and excretions, the passions and emotions. The second “non-natural” factor—food and drink—comprises the most important part of Renaissance regimens. The substances ingested by the body were endowed with elementary qualities; relatively stable conventions attributed particular qualities to certain foodstuffs. Hippocratic and Galenic treatises therefore provided instructions for selecting foods with the appropriate qualities. Broadly speaking, health resulted from a proper balance of the substances ingested by the body, all of which were themselves endowed with elementary qualities. Health was maintained by a diet of foods whose “complexion” was similar to the individual’s own; health was restored via foods with qualities suited to the invalid, or the elderly. Nutritional advice was usually rooted in a conservative tradition, yet the details of the geriatric diet as well as the qualities attributed to specific food were a matter of ongoing discussion.

Zerbi’s attention to detail is striking. He meticulously examines the best time for the elder’s meals, the selection of wine, and the quality of meat. He reviews the parts of birds, fish, and mammals most easy to digest, and enumerates the types of milk, vegetables, bread, and spices that will help restore the aged body’s heat and moisture. His discussion of the other five non-naturals has the same precision. Closely following Hippocratic and Galenic principles, he describes the best orientation for the elder’s house, recommends a bright room that should be kept warm in winter, fresh in the summer (first non-natural). For the third non-natural (rest and motion), *Gerontocomia* prescribes light physical exercises such as massages and hot baths. The treatise also pays careful attention to the elder’s clothing, the quality of his bed, and the number of hours of sleep.

[40] See Nicoud, *Les Régimes de santé au Moyen Age*, vol. 1, pp. 1–11.

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In discussing the fifth non-natural (retentions and excretions), Zerbi, like other contemporary doctors, bans sexual intercourse. His discussion of the sixth one (passions and emotions) warns of the dangers of anger and anxiety, because passions and strong emotions accelerate the negative effects of aging. The old man should actually avoid any type of excess—physical and intellectual—given his overall frail condition. Zerbi also recommends the constant presence of a qualified and carefully trained caregiver (the *gerontocomos*) at the elder's side (15–40, pp. 87–247).

Zerbi's further advice also follows the Galenic model: he advocates respecting the elder's habits, for instance, and the need for social and intellectual stimulation. Some recommendations are similar to Ficino's in this respect: music and activities enhancing sensual and mental pleasures are beneficial to a healthy old age since they bring joy, serenity, and hope (42, pp. 265–67). Finally, like Ficino, Zerbi had read Roger Bacon and suggests potable gold, human milk, and human blood to strengthen the old man. He is, however, more skeptical than Ficino as to the effectiveness of these recipes.

To what extent did Ficino's and Zerbi's elder contemporaries follow the advice dispensed here? We cannot say, given the absence of documents. Moreover, in contrast to Galen's frequent remarks on his daily habits, neither Ficino nor Zerbi tell us whether they personally followed their own medical advice. Ficino had a long life by the standards of his time and passed away a few weeks before his sixty-sixth birthday. Zerbi's violent end, on the other hand, was the indirect result of the gap between medical prescriptions and practice. In October 1504, the Venetian ambassador at the court of the Sultan pressed Zerbi to cure the pasha Zander at the Ottoman court of Bosnia. One month later, his mission accomplished, Zerbi was heading back to Italy with his son, loaded with precious stones as a token of the pasha's gratitude, but his patient immediately resumed his lavish style of life and died. The pasha's sons stopped Zerbi at the Dalmatian border, robbed the two travelers, and sawed them. Although it is difficult today to assess the impact of health treatises on Renaissance people's daily regimens, the popularity of these works confirms a broad interest in the care of the self. Ficino's *De Vita libri tres* went through enough editions to earn him a place in Sarton's list of seventy-seven best-selling authors of scientific incunabula.[41]

[41] Ficino, *De Vita,* p. 3.

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Like Petrarch's letters to Dondi in book XII of the *Letters of Old Age*, Zerbi's *Gerontocomia* belongs to a presentation of the self in what Foucault calls "the unfolding of everyday life," thereby "attesting not the importance of an activity but the quality of a mode of being."[42] Foucault's characterization of the care of the self in Hellenistic and Roman texts corresponds to Zerbi's discussion of old age: *Gerontocomia*'s health regimen is a matter of exercise and continuous vigilance that closely links the ethical question of how an aging man should behave to the medical question of what old age truly is. Zerbi's detailed advice recalls Lucilius's request to Seneca to recount his day, hour by hour. Seneca accepts because it forces him to live "under the scrutiny of the other," recounting the day just past, "the most common day possible, whose value lies precisely in the fact that nothing happened that could divert him from the only important thing for him: to care for himself."[43] Just like Seneca's account, Zerbi's advice on the care of the aging self is a way of cultivating some kind of relationship of oneself to oneself. Far from being a narcissistic activity, these practices fashion the aging self, guide him in the process of becoming capable of governing himself and others. Moreover, they take their full meaning once questions related to health and longevity are replaced in their cosmic context.

Cornaro

Books on health care submit the body to daily scrutiny and control. As such, Zerbi's and Ficino's treatises participate in a process of secularization that downplays old age's connection with death and the afterlife. As both authors made clear, a regimen is a pragmatic device to mold behavior; it opens up a path to a new way of being and transforms our vision of the world. No writer went further in this direction than the Venetian patrician Luigi Cornaro (1467 or 1475 to 1566?) in his *Trattato della vita sobria*, first published in 1558.[44] Staying healthy is the goal of his daily life and his philosophy. Pointing to his age at the opening of each revised edition of his treatise, he claimed to be the living proof of the success of

[42] Michel Foucault, *Dits et écrits*, vol. 2 (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), p. 1247. My translation.
[43] Ibid., p. 1247.
[44] Luigi Cornaro, *Trattato della vita sobria* (Venice: no publisher's name, 1558). See also *Discorsi della vita sobria* (Venice: Brogiollo, 1620). *Discourses on the Sober Life (Discorsi Della Vita Sobria) Being the Personal Narrative of Luigi Cornaro (1467–1566, A.D.)*, no translator's name (New York: Crowell, no date). Further references are to this last edition and are incorporated into the text.

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his method. But how old was Cornaro at the time of his death? Was he in his seventies, as some critics suggest; in his late nineties, as he claimed; or over one hundred years old, as his admirers proclaimed? He was quick to boast about his longevity, probably attributing to himself a few extra years. He became a legendary figure and his elevated social status promoted favorable responses to his self-portrait as a sober senior.

Cornaro seemed immune to the negative effects of senescence. At age ninety-one he reports that he writes eight hours a day and goes out frequently on foot or on horseback. He sings with as much strength and delight as in his twenties. (Singing was considered a physical exercise that improved breathing.) Four years later Cornaro published the fourth and last revised edition of his treatise. His lifestyle is similar to Antiochus in Galen's *De Sanitate tuenda*, but he also spends time with his eleven grandchildren, and sees his offspring as a form of immortality. His property in the Venetian countryside is in his likeness: prosperous, friendly, and harmonious. The older Cornaro grows, the healthier he feels, physically and mentally. His memory is excellent, his dynamism and cheerfulness are outstanding. Nothing can alter his mood, not even the prospect of death. *Della vita sobria* was "in everybody's hand," according to Girolamo Cardano. As Nancy Siraisi observes, "its appeal, no doubt lay in a moralizing tone appropriate to midcentury taste and in the universality and simplicity of the regimen prescribed."[45] Cornaro's treatise is a pragmatic and accessible guide, with few technical medical explanations; the astrological and occult considerations that appear in Zerbi's and Ficino's discussions are conspicuously absent.

Cornaro's secret for staying forever young is simple and straightforward: a sober diet and a regular life. The treatise reinforces contemporary dietary practices through strict discipline and control. In language suited to a conversion experience, Cornaro recounts his decision to change his daily habits. As a young man he had indulged in rich food and luxuries, but having reached the age of thirty-five, the effects of his intemperate life began to show themselves: colic, gout, a continual fever, an upset stomach, and a perpetual thirst threatened his life. His case was far from exceptional. Lavish banquets had grown out of hand in mid-sixteenth-century Italy, sumptuary laws were enacted to regulate their excessive expenses and to limit the number of guests. Cornaro sought medical help and found sound physicians who insisted that his only cure lay in reforming his way

[45] N. Siraisi, *The Clock and the Mirror*, p. 79.

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of life. On former occasions he had rejected such advice, but this was no longer an option, unless he was resigned to an early death. This was the turning point. He abandoned strong wines, meats served with rich sauces, and fruits. Interestingly, Cornaro changed his way of life at exactly the same age the poet of the *Divina Commedia* underwent his religious conversion. The thirty-fifth year is the middle of a human life span, as the first line of Dante's poem put it. The reference is to Psalm 90:10, which offers the simplest scheme of the division of life into two parts: youth, up to age thirty-five or forty, old age up to age seventy or eighty.[46]

The physicians urged Cornaro to restrict his diet, both solid and liquid, to twelve ounces of food and fourteen ounces of wine per day. This would add up to about one thousand calories.[47] Recent research has shown that a low-calorie diet slows down the aging process, but Cornaro had of course other sources of reference: the Bible speaks of patriarchs who lived hundreds of years and were continent in their diet; they knew no sauces, rich food, or similar culinary extravagances. In a few days, Cornaro began to see that his shattered health was improving. After less than one year of sober eating and drinking, he found himself totally free from his ailments. The change was not only physical but also psychological; he recovered his serenity and good humor, and secured such a complete mastery over his body and mind that he won the respect of his peers. He was quick to point out, however, that his regimen was no recipe for immortality, for all things do end; his point was rather to pass away naturally, without pain and sickness.

His diet is similar to Antiochus's and Telephus's simple and digestible meals in Galen's *De Sanitate tuenda*: he eats bread, *panado*, eggs (the yolk), and soups. For meat, he has kid and mutton, poultry of any kind, and fish (p. 46). When he was about eighty years old, a slight variation in the amount of food and wine proved nearly fatal. His friends and relatives had urged him to increase his daily allowance to support his declining strength; to please them, and by way of experiment, he complied with their request, but the effect was dramatic. In a week's time, from being cheerful and energetic, he became melancholic and depressed. On the twelfth day, he had a violent pain in his side, followed by a fever that continued for thirty-five days, and looked like a man about to die. He

[46] The division of life into two halves also underlies the late-medieval nomenclature for the four ages of man. In this originally Arabic scheme, widely diffused since its introduction into the Latin West in the eleventh century, the autumn of life was said to begin at either age thirty-five or forty and was called *senectus*, "old age."

[47] N. Siraisi, *The Clock and the Mirror*, p. 79.

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recovered by resuming his beloved diet. Old people have less heat and consume less moisture, therefore they fast with ease, Hippocrates's *Aphorisms* observes (I, 13). As a medical commonplace put it, the flame uses oil for fuel, but if too much is added to it, it will be more quickly extinguished by it than nourished. Cornaro later reduced his diet with unprecedented austerity and discipline to as little protein as one egg per day. He did not lose his vitality—quite the opposite. As a proverb of his time put it, "What we leave after making a hearty meal does us more good than what we have eaten" (p. 24).

For Cornaro, we are literally what we eat. A sober life is so virtuous and profitable that it ought to be universal (p. 29). Rather than urging everyone to follow his example of strict abstinence, he invites the reader to find the regimen that best suits his condition. Anyone can live to age eighty and beyond by living temperately and soberly, he contends. Social and financial distinctions are of no concern to him; the treatise gives a list of healthy and inexpensive food for those who cannot afford meat (p. 46). Since, as Hippocrates and Galen observed, each individual knows more about the diet and lifestyle that suit him than anyone else, Cornaro concludes that "no man should be a perfect physician to any but himself" (p. 25). By repeated trials, deliberate reflection, and self-examination, he acquired a perfect knowledge of his constitution, and of the food and beverage that agreed with his temperament and personal habits. He discovered, for instance, that new wine suited him better than old wine, although it could be harmful to others. Regardless of individual variations, however, the quantity of food and drink allowed should invariably be small. A regular and sober life preserves our physical and mental health, cheers us up, and helps us live a long life with a sound mind. Moreover, it makes us realize that only the healthy man truly belongs to himself.

By his way of life, Cornaro had, as he put it, "shut up all other avenues of death" and knew he would only die by "mere dissolution" (p. 35). He often expresses the conviction that he would pass away with no sickness and pain, and this belief proved justified, according to contemporary sources. He drew up his will, set all his affairs in order, received the last sacrament, and quietly awaited death in his chair. His end totally fitted the laconic comment of a twentieth-century doctor on his patient's sudden death: "Went to bed healthy. Woke up dead."[48]

[48] Quoted by Harry R. Moody, "Productive Aging and the Ideology of Old Age", in *Productive Aging. Concepts and Challenges*, ed. N. Morrow-Howell, J. Hinterlong, and M. Sherraden (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 2001), p. 179.

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Prayers to God and preparation for the soul's salvation are part of Cornaro's daily activities, yet *Della vita sobria* sees no incompatibility between the Christian perspective of old age as a sign of human finitude and the care of the self. "I cannot believe that the Deity desires that man, his favorite creature, should be infirm and melancholy, but rather, that he should enjoy good health and be happy," Cornaro contends (p. 63). Throughout his treatise, sobriety is almost a cult-like aim. In addition, old age has an aesthetic dimension that is very different from the Renaissance norms of proportion and ideal forms. Cornaro's treatise describes the old man's beauty in terms of ripeness. Likewise, ripe figs and olives had prompted Marcus Aurelius's meditation on time: it is when figs are "at their ripest that they burst open," the emperor noted. "In the case of very ripe olives, it is precisely their proximity to decay which adds to them a certain beauty."[49] In a similar way, rather than view the aged body in terms of decline and decay, Cornaro sees it as a stage of development in which his physical and intellectual strengths reach fruition and consolidation.

Along with Stoic sources, Cornaro's sober diet bears the imprint of an Epicurean discipline of reduction of desires. Throughout his work, the author advocates the suppression of superfluous pleasure that has negative consequences, and praises the pleasure of being, since health is the essence of life and our most precious treasure. *Della vita sobria* identifies three perceived plagues of the time: hypocrisy, gluttony, and Lutheranism (which allegedly corrupts the word of Christ). Cornaro focuses on gluttony, but his discussion of sobriety takes its full meaning in the broader context of all three issues since he is concerned with a moral therapy of body and mind. He contends that asceticism (in the modern sense of restriction in the use of food and drink) influences our thoughts and our will. A sober diet makes us better by raising us from an inauthentic condition of life, darkened by physical woes and harassed by passions, to an authentic state of freedom, peace, and joy. Like Petrarch, Ficino, Zerbi, or Montaigne, Cornaro could have found this notion in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Aristotle's treatise was widely read in intellectual circles from the fourteenth through the sixteenth centuries. In his discussion of virtue, Aristotle argues that true happiness is a form of contemplation. "But being a man, one will also need external prosperity; for our nature is not self-sufficient for the purpose of contemplation, but our body also

[49] Marcus Aurelius, *The Meditations*, ed. and trans. A. Farqhuarson and R. Rutherford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 3, 2. I have slightly modified the translation.

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must be healthy and must have food and other attention" (X, 8, p. 268);[50] moreover, some virtuous acts "seem even to arise from the body" (X, 8, p. 266). In some way, Aristotle's conception of moral virtue is not that different from Galen's definition of health: both notions depend on proportion and balance. For Aristotle, moral virtue is a disposition to choose the mean between two extremes; for Galen, health is a matter of maintaining an equal amount of elementary qualities in the body. Moderation and vigilance are the master-words of Aristotle's virtuous man and of Galen's healthy individual. Interestingly, the *Nicomachean Ethics* associates self-indulgence and wickedness (evidence of a lack of self-mastery) with disease (VII, 8, p. 178).

For Cornaro, health was not a means to an end, but an end in itself. Foucault's characterization of the care of the self in the Hellenistic period as an aesthetic of existence has been seen as a distortion of the Greek and Roman texts he was studying;[51] his view, however, corresponds well to Cornaro's perspective. In Cornaro's treatise, dietetics is the ground of all authentic interaction between the self and others. Cornaro's health regimen expresses spiritual and moral priorities; moreover, it is the predicate for any reasoned and constructive engagement with the political institution.[52] For Foucault, the self-control that is at the heart of an individual's health practices makes this person able to govern others. For the patrician Cornaro, this statement would have struck a familiar note, since beginning in the 1350s the Republic of Venice was a gerontocracy, and remained so until the eighteenth century. Between 1400 and 1600, the average age of the doges elected from the Procurators of San Marco was seventy-two.[53] There was no fixed retirement age for many elite positions, and appointments could be made at advanced ages. Only a healthy individual can keep up regularly with the affairs of state and public matters; those who make crucial political decisions cannot afford to take repeated sick leaves; they must either put off such affairs until a

[50] Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. and trans. D. Ross (Oxford: University Press, 1980). See also Aristotle's following remark: "In everything that is continuous and divisible it is possible to take more, less, or an equal amount, and that either in terms of the thing itself or relatively to us; and the equal is an intermediate between excess and defect" (II, 6, p. 37). All further references are to this edition and are incorporated into the text.

[51] See Wolfgang Detel, *Foucault and Classical Antiquity. Power, Ethics and Knowledge*, trans. D. Wigg-Wolf (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 93–117.

[52] Foucault, *L'Herméneutique du sujet*, pp. 241–42.

[53] Robert Finlay, "The Venetian Republic as a Gerontocracy: Age and Politics in the Renaissance", *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 8, 2 (1978), p. 157.

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later time, or delegate their responsibilities to others. Both avenues are prejudicial to their fellow citizens, and to the state. Such was precisely the problem in Cornaro's Venice. A law granted the patricians aged seventy and older permission to leave the Senate before the end of extremely long debates. A contemporary observer noted that many decrepit Venetians were unable to fulfill their political duties; other accounts blame the senility of Doge Antonio Grimani, who refused to abdicate at age ninety. Antonio Tron was elected to the *Collegio* in January 1524, but declined, stating that his joints were frozen. He passed away a week later, at age ninety-four.[54] No wonder then, that Cornaro praises the healthy longevity of Venetians Pietro Lando and Pietro Bembo. Lando was a doge from 1538 to 1548, and became *Podestà* of Padua at age seventy-three; Cardinal Bembo died at age seventy-seven. To these names, Cornaro proudly added his own one. His treatise reported that he continued his work of draining and improving uncultivated pieces of Venice's ground well into his nineties—a respectable age even by his fellow patricians' standards.

Della Vita sobria was the pragmatic solution to the darkest sides of senescence. The author's contention that old age is a highly desirable stage of life instead of a period fraught with difficulties was part of his campaign for—or marketing of—longevity. For Cornaro, since we control our bodies and minds, health should be our major goal; every individual is responsible for caring for himself in an appropriate way. This simple and universal statement was the foundation of his art of aging gracefully and virtuously, and came with full proof of its efficiency, in the form of a personal narrative. Cornaro's everyday life was, indeed, his masterpiece.

Yet as Erasmus and Montaigne respectively point out, to what extent does any portrait of the "forever young old man" suggest that a person has managed to put on a happy face for the rest of the world? Old men like Cornaro may well project an image of vigor, happiness, and intellectual well-being; but in reality their bones are surely aching, and their mind has lost its acuity.

Erasmus

Anachronism is often seen as an inability to think in historical terms, or as a type of scholarly error. For the historian, it is a preposterous failure

[54] See Robert Finlay, "The Venetian Republic as a Gerontocracy", pp. 157–78.

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to understand the past. Yet preposterous thinking can be a creative way of reading a text in anticipation of another. About fifty years before *Della vita sobria*, Erasmus's *Praise of Folly* (1511) had already turned upside down the philosophical foundations of Cornaro's views on aging successfully.[55] Of course, this was not a matter of prescience, but of reference to the same classical tradition. Whereas the Galenic tradition discussed aging in relation to the appearance and the functioning of the body, Erasmus's monologue praises the loss of control of the self that is associated with dementia. In this sense, senility represents the ultimate failure of what Norbert Elias terms the "civilized body." The behaviors most associated with the care of the self (looking after oneself, controling bodily functions and modulating the expression of emotions, all behaviors which Elias described as central to the civilizing process) become eroded. A body the mind has lost control of becomes a *de-civilized* body.[56] In this respect, dementia is the public failure of an individual's claim to self-mastery and self-control.

For Erasmus's Folly, old men are natural fools, and therefore are among the happiest of men, since senile dementia provides them with the means to render life enjoyable: "Clearly, no mortal could tolerate the pains of age if I did not take pity on them and offer my help," she claims (p. 20). In Cicero's *De Senectute*, old age is the crowning of Cato the Elder's existence; it opens up a whole way of being that frees him from his youth's imperfections, and brings him serenity, wisdom, and experience.[57] Erasmus turns Cicero's apology upside down to praise the elder's loss of physical and cognitive capacities. In an extraordinary *tour de force*, Folly presents senility as the embodiment of Epicurean, Stoic, and Skeptic ideals. She argues that senility is the perfect state of Stoic and Epicurean *ataraxia* and *apatheia* because the man who suffers from dementia has no passions and no emotions; he is indifferent to opinions and events. He has no changes of mood and is unaffected by the physical discomforts of old age because he is not even aware of them. Senility means neither depression, nor boredom (contrary to the humoral theory's views on decrepitude), but rather peace of mind since it brings disengagement. Like the Epicurean

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[55] Erasmus, *The Praise of Folly*, ed. and trans. C. H. Miller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979). All further references are to this edition and are incorporated into the text. For the Latin text, see *Moriae Encomium* (Basel: Froben, 1540). http://openlibrary.org/books/OL24970664M/Moriae_encomium_id_est_Stulticiae_laudatio_ludicra_declamatione_tractata.

[56] Norbert Elias, *The History of Manners. The Civilizing Process*, vol. 1, trans. E. Jephcott (New York: Urizen, 1978).

[57] See chapter 2 on Cicero's *De Senectute.*

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moralist, the senile man has no superfluous needs and no aspirations, but focuses instead on the essential pleasures of life: the satisfaction of his body's basic functions—eating, drinking, and sleeping. Like the perfect Stoic or Epicurean philosopher, he has no worries about the future, and no regrets about the past, for he has no memory. He lives in the present moment, since his mind has lost its grip on reality. Consequently, he has no reason to prepare for death and the afterlife because he cannot conceptualize them. His freedom from care is admirable and unassailable. An accomplished Stoic and Epicurean philosopher, he is also an exemplary Pyrrhonian skeptic: everything is literally *indifferent* to him since he is unable to differentiate one thing from another.

Vigilance, self-control, and discipline are the master-words of Stoicism and the foundation of Cicero's apology of old age in *De Senectute*. These notions are also at the heart of health regimens, especially those for the elders whose frail condition requires more attention. Yet in Erasmus's mock encomium, the elder's inaptitude of caring for himself secures his well-being. Drawing from Plato's *Republic* and Cicero's *De Senectute*, authors such as Cornaro, Ficino, and Zerbi stress the civic purpose of a healthy longevity. In contrast, Folly praises the elder's uselessness. Throughout her discourse, old age's losses become its most valuable assets. Wasting time rather than saving it is an old man's healthiest habit, according to Folly. Rather than training and stimulating his mind as doctors and philosophers urge the senior to do, Folly contends that he should let his intellectual strengths fade, in order to maintain his serenity. Furthermore, senile dementia makes an old man the merriest companion of all. Cato the Elder in Cicero's *De Senectute*, along with Petrarch and Cornaro, felt that they had a better knowledge of themselves and more serenity in their later years; they were convinced that they also had a better understanding of their lives as a whole. In Erasmus's paradoxical praise, by contrast, the lack of direction of the senile man's life is the very sign of wisdom.

Folly's paradoxes take their full meaning in a time when problems related to old age were gaining momentum. The growing number of editions and translations of Cicero's *De Senectute*, and the rise in written health advice and regimens for the elderly were among the many signs of this concern. Longevity was definitely on the agenda of Folly's targeted audience, yet the strength of Erasmus's masterpiece was not only the timeliness of the issues addressed, but also their perennial truth. The author's long interest in commonplaces is especially relevant; his *Praise of Folly* is full of proverbs that broaden the scope of the protagonist's views while contributing to the creation of an oral and familiar style. Time

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destroys everything except human folly. Folly describes general aspects of old age, irrespective of social function or financial situation. Human life's comedy is entertaining as long as one can keep its basic illusions; to strip them away is to despair or to commit suicide. The reader is poised between seemingly contradictory reactions: with a laugh, a smile, and a rueful sigh, he has to admit that there is truth in Folly's irony. She reminds us of the provisional and fragmentary nature of any perspective on the human life cycle, and stresses that multiple interpretations can be woven around the same basic set of facts. Folly's strength is in her understanding of human beings' contradictions, in her tolerance of their paradoxes and ambiguities, in her awareness of the inconsistency of abstract and theoretical systems of knowledge in the light of human experience. She forces us to take an affectionate distance from ourselves, and urges us not to be taken in by the various characters we play, since none of them totally represents us. Montaigne's comments on old age elaborate on similar games of self-reflection, as we shall see.

When it comes to the alleged wisdom of old age, Folly's judgment is straightforward:

> Who would want any contact or association with an old man who added to his wealth of experience a corresponding vigor of mind and sharpness of judgment? And so through my favor, an old man loses contact with reality. But at the same time he is relieved of all those wretched worries that torment the wise man. (p. 21)

She finds the stereotyped oppositions between young and old to be irrelevant since the human life cycle is fundamentally circular. Building on the widespread notion of old age as a "second childhood" (an expression by Lucian quoted in Erasmus's *Adagia* 436), Folly stresses the similarities between babies and old men: "whitish hair, toothless gums, a small bodily frame, and a liking for milk; both stutter and babble and engage in tomfoolery; both are forgetful and thoughtless" (p. 22). From her paradoxical perspective, old age along with its failing senses, fading strength, and dementia, is the absolute fountain of youth.

Yet this is not Folly's last word. She is Youth's daughter, and as such she worships the sculptural beauty of the young virile athlete. Playfully contradicting herself, she is quick to turn her own statements upside down. She now finds the "toothless, white-haired, bald" old man "filthy, crook-backed wretched, shriveled;" and reminds us that it is impossible to negate the effects of time on the human body and mind, as Cicero's *De Senectute* and Cornaro's *Della Vita sobria* did. She even contends that elders are "men

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who no longer even look like men" (p. 48), and cruelly mocks their obstinacy in clinging to life. "The less cause they have to remain in this life, they more they want to stay alive," she says (p. 48).

Folly's remarks are part of Erasmus's broader meditation on man's folly in the eyes of God. In addition, the question of aging was close to the humanist's heart. He wrote his *Praise of Folly* when he was on his way to England, suffering from a kidney ailment, and considered himself old well before the publication of this best-selling book. From his thirties on, his frail health and his age were a matter of concern in numerous letters, including one to Servatius Rogerus, the prior of the monastery of Steyn on April 1, 1506.[58] This question is also at the center of *Carmen Alpestre*, Erasmus's most famous poem.[59] The text (also called *Carmen De Senectute*), dated August 1506, was written when the humanist—then in his thirties—was crossing the Alps on his way to Turin to receive a doctorate in theology.[60] The poem is dedicated to Erasmus's physician, the famous Guillaume Cop of Basel. Despite his erudition and skills, Cop is unable to cure the worst of all evils: old age. It ravages Erasmus's mind and body to such an extent that he does not recognize himself. In the poem, he describes his symptoms by referring to a standard literary and medical catalog of the woes of old age, and concludes that it is none other than a slow death. He finds himself thinking nostalgically of the vigor of his earlier years, but nothing can bring youth back, certainly not occult and magical practices. He realizes too late that he has wasted his life in futile undertakings, and that his existence was a kind of *death in life*. He concludes that since he is only at the onset of old age, he still has time to change his way of life.

The poem gives an allegorical interpretation of Aristotle's view of old age as a disease, and points out human finitude and the preciousness of time. The point of the conversion is to give up "useless" knowledge. The goal is not to disengage one from external reality but to change one's manner of knowing things. Erasmus bids farewell to the vain pleasures of his youth, and realizes that his existence has no meaning except through

[58] Erasmus, *Opus Epistolarum Desiderii Erasmi*, ed. P. S. Allen (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906–58), vol. 1, pp. 420–21. English translation in *Collected Works of Erasmus*, vol. 2, *The Correspondence of Erasmus 1501– 1514*, trans. R. A. B. Mynors and D. F. S. Thomson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), pp. 110–11.

[59] Further references are to the bilingual edition of the poem in Erasmus, *Collected Works of Erasmus*, trans. C. H. Miller, ed. H. Vredeveld (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), vol. 85, pp. 13–25.

[60] Erasmus's birth date is unknown. Scholars often suggest 1476. He died in 1536.

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Christ. From now on, he will seek to purify and rectify his intentions at every instant; he will also be on the lookout for signs within himself of any motive for action other than the will of God. His conversion associates old age with a time of self-reflection, virtue, faith, and the preparation of the afterlife. Such will be the exclusive focus of this new phase of the protagonist's existence.

As a pedagogical story, *Carmen Alpestre* aims to facilitate a reading through identification with the author's persona. The poem's biographical fiction (partly inspired by classical literary and philosophical references) teaches the reader to consider God as the guiding principle of his life and represents the infirmities of old age as the effects of sin and the embodiment of human finitude. Echoing Erasmus's *Enchiridion militis Christiani*, *Carmen Alpestre* advocates vigilance and self-control. Attention to the present situates man in his genuine being, which is in relation to God. For Cornaro, health is the focus of daily life; for writers such as Erasmus and Petrarch, on the other hand, health transcends daily practices, and is a gift from God. The person who pursues virtue and devotes his life to God has the power to separate his soul from the woes and the needs of his body.

Montaigne

Although Erasmus had no particular expertise in medicine, it is no surprise that he edited three Galenic treatises in Latin in 1526. The works of Galen and his followers were part of the humanist culture. Medical humanism (a major Renaissance innovation) reflected a broader philological concern for classical texts. Galen himself was a model of such scholarship, having written commentaries on texts attributed to Hippocrates. The Renaissance proliferation of editions and translations brought greater attention to ancient Greek medical works, especially to Galen's treatises. In Venice, the librarian and printer Aldus Manutius published the first edition of Galen's complete works in 1525. In France, Galen's treatise *On Hygiene* (*De Sanitate tuenda*) was published eight times in Paris and Lyon between 1525 and 1559; five of these editions were Thomas Linacre's Latin version.[61] In addition, Canappe translated Galen's complete works into French. Hippocratic treatises enjoyed a similar reputation. Aldus Manutius published Hippocrates's complete works in 1526. His *Aphorisms* were particularly

[61] Richard J. Durling, "A Chronological Census of Renaissance Editions and Translations of Galen," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 24, 3–4 (1961), pp. 239–305.

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popular because of their concise and accessible formulation; they had fifteen editions in Lyon and Paris during Montaigne's time, and were translated into French by Jean Bresche.[62]

Petrarch, Cornaro, and Erasmus see old age as a transformative stage of life. Montaigne, on the other hand, is obsessed with the process of aging. This ongoing experience is constitutive of who he is at every point in the *Essais*: a being rooted in history, yet open to his own future as part of a narrative whose further unfolding will only be interrupted by death. Referring to the Aristotelian view of old age as a disease, he notes at the end of the chapter "Of Repentance":

> Quelles Metamorphoses lui voy-je faire tous les jours en plusieurs de mes cognoissans! C'est une puissante maladie, et qui se coule naturellement et imperceptiblement. Il y faut grande provision d'estude et grande precaution pour eviter les imperfections qu'elle nous charge, ou aumoins affoiblir leur progrets. Je sens que, nonobstant tous mes retranchemens, elle gaigne pied à pied sur moy. Je soustien tant que je puis. Mais je ne sçay en fin où elle me menera moy-mesme. A toutes avantures, je suis content qu'on sçache d'où je seray tombé. (III, 2, p. 817)[63]

> What metamorphoses I see old age producing every day in many of my acquaintances! It is a powerful malady, and it creeps up on us naturally and imperceptibly. We need a great provision of study, and great precaution, to avoid the imperfections it loads upon us, or at least to slow up their progress. I feel that, notwithstanding all my retrenchments, it gains on me foot by foot. I stand fast as well as I can. But I do not know where it will lead even me in the end. In any event, I am glad to have people know whence I shall have fallen. (p. 753)

As the word "metamorphoses" suggests, aging opens up diverse and sometimes contradictory meanings tied to persistent, malleable features of the construction of Montaigne's authorial identity over the years. His comments go back and forth between positive and negative views of aging. As the years go by, his mood varies between the "jovial and the melancholy" ("entre le jovial et le melancholique," II, 17, p. 641/p. 590) as a 1588 addition to the chapter "Of Presumption" puts it, and often superimposes both states of mind. Each of Montaigne's comments takes its full meaning when situated in its specific context. Yet whether he sees old age as a dis-

[62] Ibid., pp. 239–305.

[63] Page numbers for Montaigne's *Essais* refer first to the standard edition, edited by Pierre Villey and Verdun-L. Saulnier (Paris: PUF, 2004), and then to Donald Frame's translation *The Complete Works of Montaigne* (New York: Knopf, 2003).

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ease, as in "Of Repentance" (III, 2, p. 817/p. 753), or as a natural process, does not make much difference: in either case, he stresses the irreversible effects of time on human beings, and never asks for an extension of life. He even praises the seventy-year-old Socrates, who to some extent invited his death sentence, thereby avoiding the dimming of his mind's "accustomed brightness"("clairté accoustumée," III, 2, p. 817/p. 753). In the same way, the chapter "Of Experience" pokes fun at old men who foolishly dream of preserving their youthful vigor:

> Voyez un vieillart, qui demande à Dieu qu'il luy maintienne sa santé entiere et vigoreuse, c'est à dire qu'il le remette en jeunesse. . . . N'est-ce pas folie? Sa condition ne le porte pas. . . . Mon bon homme, c'est faict: on ne vous sçauroit redresser; on vous plastrera pour le plus et estançonnera un peu, et allongera on de quelques heures vostre misere. (III, 13, p. 1089)

> Look at an old man praying God to keep him in entire and vigorous health, that is to say, to restore his youth. . . . Is it not madness? His condition does not allow it. . . . My good man, it is all over. No one can put you on your feet again; at most they will plaster and prop you up a bit, and prolong your misery an hour or so. (p. 1017)

He was nevertheless concerned about finding ways to adjust to such negative effects and compensate for the losses. The chapter "Of Experience" (*Essais*, III, 13) provides a fruitful way to examine his confrontation with his aging and ailing body. Throughout these pages, the essayist's ironic lucidity signals his will to cope with an irreversible biological phenomenon, while attempting to slow it down. Rejecting passive resignation, he tries out various strategies to adjust to the effects of time, and offers the humorous story of his imaginative—yet somehow inconclusive—attempts to compensate for his losses, and even capitalize on them.

I do not suggest that there is an overarching architecture in Montaigne's *Essais*, yet it is impossible not to notice the connections between the Latin quotations placed at the end of books I and III. The last paragraphs of the chapter "Of Age" (I, 57) quote Lucretius's vivid image of the destructive effects of time on the human body and mind:

> Ubi jam validis, quassatum est viribus aevi
> Corpus, et obtusis ceciderunt viribus artus,
> Claudicat ingenium, delirat linguaque mensque. (I, 57, p. 328)

> When age has crushed the body with its might,
> The limbs collapse with weakness and decay,
> The judgment limps, and mind and speech give way. (p. 289)

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Compared to Lucretius's representation of decay at the end of book I, the Latin prayer that appears in the final words of book III strikes a more hopeful tone. Borrowing the words of an ode by Horace, Montaigne begs Apollo, the god of medicine and poetry, to allow him to keep a sound mind in a healthy body in old age, along with his creative energy:

> Frui paratis et valido mihi,
> Latoe, dones, et, precor, integra
> Cum mente, nec turpem senectam
> Degere, nec cythara carentem. ("Of Experience" III, 13, p. 1116)
>
> Grant me but health, Latona's son,
> And to enjoy the wealth I've won,
> And honored age, with mind entire
> And not unsolaced by the lyre. (p. 1045)

Only death could put an end to Montaigne's literary endeavor, yet these last words remained untouched. Without waiting for Apollo's eventual intervention on his behalf, he had actually taken care of his wishes as best as he could. The first step in this direction was self-observation.

At first glance, self-observation seems a highly intimate and personal activity, but as Foucault notes, this notion has its own historicity and is embedded in the systems of knowledge (medical, philosophical, cultural, and social, etc.) of the day. Montaigne's comment on his health regimen in the chapter "Of Experience" makes perfect sense in this respect since regimens are ways of looking at the human subject at grips with experience. When the essayist wages war on medical dogmatism in this chapter, he does not challenge medicine's practical aspects. Eclectic and idiosyncratic as his remarks on his health care are, they comply with the basic tenets of the Hippocratic-Galenic humoral physiology of the day. Montaigne seemed to have used a broad range of sources. Health regimens and diet books had an obvious interest for him. First, their practical goals and accessible presentation stood in sharp contrast to the hermetic and pretentious jargon used by those medical authorities whom Montaigne criticized as ignorant and incompetent. Second, health regimens were part of the development of empirical sciences, and Montaigne's interest in this field is obvious. Third, they included a wide variety of remarks—personal anecdotes, clinical observations, proverbs, borrowings, or quotations from the Ancients, and so on. The diversity of their references and their flexible organization had many similarities with the informal genre of the essay. In addition, from Galen on, some health regimens contained personal accounts and were written in the first person. Contemporary books

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such as Girolamo Cardano's *De Sanitate tuenda* (1570) and Cornaro's best-selling treatise *Della Vita Sobria* (translated into several languages including French) exemplify this trend.

Whether Montaigne was familiar with the works of Cornaro and Cardano is a matter of speculation, but he had certainly read Laurent Joubert's widely circulating two books of *Erreurs populaires au fait de la médecine et régime de santé* (1578–1579). Joubert, the Chancellor of the University of Montpellier, had the same publishers as Montaigne: Millanges and L'Angelier. In the second chapter of *The First Part of the Popular Errors*, Joubert wonders if it is possible for medicine to prolong human life, and notes that such speculation has always been intense and has excited the greatest minds. He concludes that it is possible to elongate the terms of all ages, and thus of all life, by medicine, even further than is ordered by Nature, but does not suggest a method for achieving this goal.[64]

Montaigne's comments on his health offer a reflection on contemporary advice from the perspective of a particularly acute observer. What matters is not what a health regimen *does* for Montaigne, but how a set of self-regulated practices participates in the representation of a self who carefully watches the effects of aging on his body and mind. Despite the essayist's skepticism and independence, he remains faithful to the foundations of humoral physiology. As Jean Starobinski noted, the description of Montaigne's care of himself in the chapter "Of Experience" follows the standard "catalog" of the six non-naturals (air, food and drink, motion and rest, sleep and wakefulness, retentions and excretions, emotions and passions).[65] Building on Starobinski's findings, I examine these six aspects in relation to the essayist's emphasis on his age in "Of Experience." In this chapter Montaigne reports his age (fifty-six), and takes a lucid look at the signs of his physical decline. These include the loss of a tooth, a blurring of vision at night, an increasingly melancholic mood, and a greater sensitivity to cold. Montaigne first attends to air quality, and "fear[s] a stuffy atmosphere," as well as smoke and the heat of the summer (first non-natural, pp. 1104–5/p. 1033). Given his age, he notes a decrease in his body's inner heat. He then describes his clothes, a detail that often appears in health regimens (in Zerbi's *Gerontocomia*, for instance, or, closer to Montaigne, in Laurent Joubert's outline of his regimen in the

[64] Laurent Joubert, *The First Part of the Popular Errors*, ed. and trans. Gregory de Rocher (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1989), pp. 38–43.
[65] Starobinski, *Montaigne en mouvement*, p. 87.

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projected *Third Part of the Popular Errors*).[66] The essayist also notices an increase in his hours of sleep (pp. 1095–96/p. 1024), a typical feature of old age according to contemporary physicians. His moderate physical exercises include walking (p. 1096/p. 1024), an activity that Galen already found particularly apt to elders (third non-natural). Moreover, following the general prohibition of sexual activities that weaken the old man's frail condition, he sleeps alone. Excretion, along with sex, is part of the fifth non-natural, and Montaigne subsequently reports that he does not suffer from constipation, a frequent problem of old age, according to Galen's *De Sanitate tuenda*. Finally, the essayist is aware of the destructive effects of passions and emotions (sixth non-natural), and had retired from the Parliament of Bordeaux at age thirty-eight, when he considered himself old. He values his freedom from care, and is convinced that excessive professional worries hastened his father's death.

As in most contemporary health regimens, diet is central in the essayist's account of his daily care (second non-natural). His eating and drinking habits depend partly on economic constraints (the circulation of foodstuffs in his geographical area) and social conditions (the lifestyle of an aristocrat, the particularities of his specific milieu, etc.).[67] But regardless of these questions, Montaigne largely follows the Galenic prescriptions for the elderly. In contrast to the lavish banquets of his wealthy contemporaries, his meals are sober. He does not fast, but occasionally skips a meal to whet his appetite. "Of Experience" emphasizes the essayist's anti-court culinary tastes. His impatience with endless meals, his increasing moderation in sauces, and his lack of taste for spices and for sweets contradict the fashionable menus of the French aristocracy and coincide with the recommendations of diet books such as those of Cornaro or Cardano. He eats only one substantial meal a day (p. 1084/p. 1012), and his diet is not very different from that of Antiochus and Telephus in Galen's *De Sanitate tuenda*. His food is easy to digest, and includes fish and bread (p. 1103/p. 1031), since age has weakened his stomach. He drinks wine mixed with water (p. 1104/p. 1033) for it quenches thirst better, is more refreshing, and moistens the body more thoroughly than water alone, as Laurent Joubert's *Second Part of the Popular Errors* observed. Following Galen's *De Sanitate*

[66] Laurent Joubert, *The Second Part of the Popular Errors*, ed. and trans. G. de Rocher (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1995), p. XII.

[67] Classes were increasingly differentiated by their specific styles of eating. Montaigne rejects snails, which are suitable only for one of his servants. He also thereby follows Galen's warning that snails' thick juice was dangerous for the elderly.

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tuenda, Joubert noted that wine was both food and drink, and worked like medicine by warming and moistening, cheering up, restoring the blood, and aiding sleep and digestion (p. 29).

Since body and mind are connected, faulty digestion or inappropriate food cloud the thoughts and the intellect. Nevertheless, Montaigne prefers medium-cooked meat, although it is less digestible than stewed meat, and thus not advisable for the elderly. A diet based on preferences is, of course, highly appropriate to a chapter focusing on personal experience and observation. Moreover, for authors such as Joubert, Cornaro, and Cardano, a regimen should take into account individual habits, since frequent use creates a "second nature," as Hippocrates and Galen had noted. Montaigne was clearly attacking contemporary physicians who had reduced Galenism to a set of rigid principles, with no latitude for personal habits and individual experience.[68] His contemporary, Jacques Du Laurens, Joubert's successor as Chancellor of the University of Montpellier, epitomized this tendency; he was a famous anatomist who later became Henri IV's doctor. Du Laurens's *Discours de la conservation de la veue des maladies melancholiques des catarrhes et de la vieillesse* appeared in 1594, two years after Montaigne's death, but his views were known in the essayist's intellectual circle. Du Laurens's fourth discourse is the first French health treatise for the elderly. His *Quatrième discours auquel est traicté de la vieillesse et comme il la faut entretenir (et non guérir)* closely follows Galen, but speaks of the elderly as a homogeneous group with the same characteristics and the same reactions. For Du Laurens, everyone should follow the same practices when it comes to the conservation of health in old age.[69]

As expected, Montaigne's dietary practices in "Of Experience" strike a much more personal note. He openly transgresses some basic Galenic advice: he expresses guilt over eating too greedily, although he knows the importance of eating slowly and chewing for digesting (p. 1105/p. 1032).

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[68] See Montaigne's remark: "Tibere disoit que quiconque avoit vescu vingt ans se debvoit respondre des choses qui lui estoyent nuisibles ou salutaires, et se sçavoir conduire sans medecine" (III, 13, p. 1079).

[69] André Du Laurens, (1558–1609). *Discours de la conservation de la veue: des maladies melancholiques, des catarrhes et de la vieillesse*, Paris: Mettayer, 1597. The book was written at the Duchesse d'Uzès's request, but addresses a male audience. Most of the advice, however, is relevant for male and female patients. The duchess, who was in her fifties, suffered from all four problems mentioned in the title of Du Laurens's treatise. From his first edition in 1594 to 1630, the treatise was published about ten times; in addition, it was translated into Italian and English.

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According to Galen, the senior (whose body is cold and dry) should eat well-prepared, easily-digested foods that warm the body and maintain its moisture (eggs, oil, milk, certain meat), and avoid fruit and most vegetables. Montaigne, for his part, indulges in food that is difficult to digest, and acknowledges his taste for melons, believed to rot in the intestine (p. 1102/p. 1031).

The notes taken during his voyage to Italy when he was forty-seven give further information on his dietary habits.[70] He treats his guests with poultry and veal, well suited to stomachs weakened by age. Like Cornaro, he follows Galen's advice to eat bread in old age. The simplicity of Montaigne's meals is striking; the only lavish meal he enthusiastically describes takes place in Lindau, Germany, and includes a variety of soups, fish, and venison, with fruits and spices (p. 1146/p. 1086). During his travels he enjoys regional foods and wines, and laments that he did not take his cook along to note down the recipes. Throughout the *Voyage en Italie*, temperance is the moderator, not the adversary, of pleasure. Health and pleasure reinforce each other; Montaigne's diet meets his body's daily requirements without austerity. He limits himself to one substantial meal a day, but the older he grows the more he enjoys the taste of food and wine.

In Montaigne's "Of Experience," the Galenic principles for conserving health in old age are compatible with *voluptas*, and are part of the celebration of a broader ideal of moderation. Interestingly, the essayist's praise of the *juste milieu* immediately follows his comments on his daily health care. For Montaigne, health and life are a matter of balance, and he brings moral philosophy down "on the table," noting that "the consciousness of having spent the other hours well is a proper and savory sauce for the dinner table" ("la conscience d'avoir bien dispensé les autres heures est un juste et savoureux condimant des tables," pp. 1108–9/p. 1037).

Finally, the aged Montaigne's concern for his health is also obvious in his ideal of retreat. Critics usually comment on his lifestyle in philosophical terms, but this perspective does not exclude a medical one—quite the opposite in fact. From Antiquity on, medicine and philosophy intertwine. Montaigne's favorite activities as described in the chapter "De trois commerces" (III, 10) echo Stoic sources, but do not differ much from Galenic advice to the elderly: the essayist avoids the tensions of the city, and lives

[70] Montaigne, *Voyage en Italie*, in Montaigne, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. A. Thibaudet and M. Rat (Paris: Gallimard, 1962). English translations refer to Frame's edition of Montaigne's *Complete Works*. References to both works are incorporated into the text. The first page number refers to the French edition, the second one to the English translation.

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in his castle surrounded by a circle of close friends and books. Along with intellectual exchanges, he enjoys the company of women whose beauty is a feast for the eyes. Physicians such as Marsilio Ficino, whose work Montaigne had read, stressed the importance of sensual pleasures for combating learned men's propensity to senile melancholy. Joy, hope, and good mood have a long philosophical history, but one is prone to forget that from the Ancients on, doctors have stressed the therapeutic effects of a positive state of mind. Montaigne could have read a confirmation of this theory in Laurent Joubert's *Treatise on Laughter*.[71] These effects were especially important in the case of elderly men prone to melancholy; consequently, Zerbi and Ficino had put old age under the sign of the planet Saturn. Among the great blessings in this respect are health and good humor, which are interdependent.

The long *prosopopoeia*[72] that appears in "Of Experience" gives a suggestive example of Montaigne's ironic and humorous representation of his aging self. Commentators have studied the rhetorical aspect of this discourse, but have largely put aside Montaigne's meditation on the effects of time on his body and mind. Yet the essayist's kidney ailment—the most painful symptom of his physical decline—is the pretext for this fictitious address to the self. In some ways, Montaigne describes a condition similar to Erasmus in *Carmen Alpestre*:[73] for both writers old age appears as an incurable and powerful process of decline ("Of Repentance," III, 2, p. 817/p. 753). In contrast to Erasmus, however, Montaigne does not interpret the woes of old age in a religious perspective; he does not pursue the notion that bodily afflictions bring man closer to God, but acknowledges human finitude with a smile.

The *prosopopoeia* is a montage of literary, biblical, and philosophical references that focus on the relationship between Montaigne's body and mind. In an attempt to overcome his physical sufferings and his melancholic mood, Montaigne imagines that his own mind comforts him and persuades him to accept his limitations. The "mind" reminds the essayist that his kidney ailment appeared late in his life and that aging is part of life. To live means aging and dying; it is because Montaigne is alive that

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[71] Laurent Joubert, *Treatise on Laughter*, ed. and trans. Gregory de Rocher (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1980).

[72] I use Quintilian's spelling in his *Institutio oratoria. The Orator's Education*, ed. and trans. D. A. Russell, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001).

[73] See above.

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his health is a matter of concern to him. His kidney stones may be painful, but they have nevertheless some advantages since he has received many compliments for his courage. The "mind" also finds it reassuring that Montaigne already knows the cause of his death; his ailment helps him to get used to the idea of death. Moreover, he has no reason to wish to live longer because an extension would mean more days of physical suffering. On the brighter side, the "mind" observes that Montaigne is fortunate to have an active social life and a sound mind. By the end of this long discourse of consolation, Montaigne's efforts to overcome his senile melancholy and his physical sufferings become the object of an ironic and lucid comment:

> Par tels argumens, et forts et foibles, comme Cicero le mal de sa vieillesse, j'essaye d'endormir et amuser mon imagination, et gresser ses playes. Si elles s'empirent demain, demain nous y pourvoyerons d'autres eschapatoires. (III, 13, p. 1095)

> By such arguments, both strong and weak, I try to lull and beguile my imagination and salve its wounds, as Cicero did his disease of old age. If they get worse tomorrow, tomorrow we shall provide other ways of escape. (p. 1023)

Montaigne's comment stresses the alternation of pain and joy, their inextricable blending, their mutual conditioning. The essayist describes a condition of age in which, in contrast to the aged and sick body, the mind continues to be flexible in its own manner and in pursuit of its own aims. One of the fundamental paradoxes of this discourse is that the rational subject (epitomized by "the mind") in Montaigne wants to control his experience of growing old but remains, nevertheless, part of it, and consequently gets caught in his own actions. As his last comment makes clear, he confronts the woes of old age not through abstract planning and reasoning, but with a smile. Montaigne was rereading Cicero's *De Senectute* at the time he was writing the last chapters of the *Essais*'s book III. Sometimes his "mind" puts forward arguments borrowed from Cicero's apology of old age, but any praise of old age proves to be a masquerade.

One might be tempted to stop here, but Montaigne goes further, noting that the consoling discourse uttered by his "mind" is ultimately a tactical maneuver. Instead of giving in to Cicero's platitudes and negating the woes of old age, the essayist understands that an honest look at his pains is the precondition to coping with the physical weaknesses of his later years. His final remark signals his affectionate distancing from himself; he is not taken in by a performance in which he is simultaneously

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the observer, the participant, and the stage director. Rather than think of Montaigne's "self" as an entity, the *prosopopoeia* invites us to think of it as the "kind of awareness in process" that Paul John Eakin sees as a central aspect of autobiographical narratives: "there is always a gap or rupture that divides us from the knowledge we seek,"

> We do better, I think, to speak of "registers of self and self-experiences", for there are many stories of self to tell, and more than one self to tell them.[74]

Although the arguments put forward by Montaigne's "mind" should not be accepted at face value, in the end this fictitious discourse of consolation proves to be an entertaining way to pass the time: it was a way to divert the gloom of old age for a while. Such reaction conveys a feeling of acceptance of physical decline over time, rather than resignation to it; it draws strength and courage from a lived experience, however daunting. Montaigne complains elsewhere of the decline of his aging mind;[75] this is certainly not the case of his imagination which he "treat[s] as gently as [he] can" ("je trete mon imagination le plus doucement que je puis," III, 13, pp. 1090/1018).[76] The *prosopopoeia* is part of a series of modest and ongoing proposals to divert temporarily the gloom of old age. In the end, Montaigne realizes that what matters is the effort not the result. The chapter "On some verses of Virgil" (III, 5) will give us another way to examine this strategy later on.[77]

In the *prosopopoeia* Montaigne challenges Plato's contention in *Phaedo* that the body should not rule over the mind. He does not simply invert this power relation but acknowledges the impossibility of dissociating the body from the mind. This process of narration leads Montaigne toward this insight, and opens up the possibility of intercommunion among distinct "selves" with alternative perspectives. The "mind" is a mask, and the writer's comment on his fictitious address to himself is another mask that creates an "inner space" from which Montaigne is able to present a stable identity. This representation does not alter the function or condition of identity itself, but rather dissolves facades of wholeness and stability. Aging emerges as a process of increasing multiple identities, and dialogue with one's self. Paradoxically, this process engenders a rounded

74 John Paul Eakin, *Our Lives Become Stories. Making Selves* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), pp. x–xi. On this issue, see also chapter 4, section 3 of this study.

75 "l'esprit se constipe et croupit en vieillissant" (III, 2, p. 815/p. 752).

76 On this issue, see also chapter 4, section 3 of this study.

77 See chapter 3, the section on Montaigne, and chapter 4, section 3 of this study.

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sense of self, along with an understanding of the contradictions within the human being. As anthropologist Sharon Kaufman observes, within each aging person's life narrative there is an "ageless self."[78] For Montaigne, the conflict that arises among these competing stories of selves tells him that accounts of old age are often artificial stories—poses and performances. As a good actor, Montaigne is able to perform the standard repertoire of characters epitomizing the wise and exemplary old man: stoic courage, heroism, patience, and resignation all have a role in consoling the mind. Yet the essayist's last comment relates these attitudes to distorted representations of what old age really means to him. He humorously demystifies the ready-made scenarios offered by his mind, and which readers expected to find in his self-portrait. In an ironic and vertiginous game of self-reflections reminiscent of Erasmus's *Praise of Folly*, he shows himself being aware of his being aware of himself.

Conclusion

In the introduction of *The Use of Pleasure*, Foucault outlines his thesis: to identify the historical forms taken by the self as a subject of desire, to analyze the practices through which this "problematization" was effected, and to examine different modes of articulating self-knowledge. Foucault did not conceive this hermeneutics of desire in the Greco-Roman Antiquity and in early Christianity in terms of continuity or evolution. Likewise, it would be a mistake to try to put together a general "history of the medical gaze" from the texts discussed in this chapter, or to present the story of a progressive "medicalization" of the aging male body and mind during the Renaissance. Far from trying to provide a linear perspective on this issue, I have emphasized the heterogeneity of interventions carried out in the name of health in later life. Building on Foucault's analyses of practices of self-reflection from the Hellenistic and Roman periods, this chapter has expanded the framing notion of care of the self in time and in scope. As more people from the upper classes of both sides of the Alps grew old during the Renaissance, longevity went along with an interest in practices associated with the care of the aging self. All the writers considered here strove to maintain optimal well-being in the face of age-related losses. Some, such as Petrarch and Erasmus, focus on an increasing spiritual

[78] Sharon Kaufman, *The Ageless Self. Sources and Meaning in Later Life* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), pp. 10–20. See also chapter 4, section 3 of this work.

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awareness in later life. Their faith served as a buffer against physical losses; consequently, their experience of growing old epitomized a move from earthly values to a higher level of consciousness of human finitude and God's perfection. In fact, both writers' self-portraits challenge Foucault's distinction between the Greek ethics of self-constitution on the one hand and, on the other hand, the Christian forms of morality requiring submission to a divine law: both aspects go hand in hand.

Yet, as Erasmus's *Praise of Folly* ironically observes, the old man may perhaps enjoy the benefits of long experience, but what is the nature of his wisdom? Age decreases his cognitive capacities and brings changes in his personality, undermining the vision of life as a progressive improvement. There is no guarantee that extended life will bring any gain, unless supportive conditions promote this goal. The care of the self is one of these basic conditions. The elder became the object of a medical gaze in Zerbi's and Ficino's treatises, and the care of the self became part of a broader work of self-fashioning that combined bookish knowledge with experience.

In Erasmus's *Praise of Folly*, as in Montaigne's chapter "Of Experience" in the *Essais*, there is an increasing integration of divergent elements—rational, physical, and emotional—when referring to the process of aging. Erasmus describes such integration paradoxically as a way to maintain critical engagement with the self, others, and the world. Montaigne, on the other hand, confronts the negative aspects of his experience of growing old and tries to embrace them in a pragmatic way. His ailing and aging body fills him with despair, yet this also stimulates his imagination and his irony. Both Erasmus and Montaigne cope with the woes of old age instead of denying them. By different means, Petrarch, Erasmus, and Montaigne attain new levels of growth in later life, and a better understanding of the mind-body relationship. Their physical health may be poor, but nevertheless they rejoice in the self-knowledge gained from it.

In some way, the authors discussed in this chapter portray themselves as active participants in the process of aging. No one went further in this direction than Cornaro who saw old age as a mode of being based on strict self-regulatory practices. His regimen shapes his individual behavior and mood. As he notes, the food we eat, the physical and intellectual exercises we perform are part of what Foucault calls a "*culture de soi*." Cornaro is more categorical than Ficino and Zerbi in his claim that old age is a work of art. Echoing Galen and Hippocrates, all three writers contend that each person bears full responsibility for his later life. Like Petrarch, Ficino, Zerbi, and Montaigne, Cornaro's moral stylization of existence depends on

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pragmatic ways to delay the decline of physical and cognitive capacities. To some extent, however, salvation seems to take on the secular meaning of "health" in Cornaro's treatise.

Attention to self, physical and intellectual self-mastery, and moderation are essential philosophical attitudes. Habits in eating, drinking, sleeping, and similar basic daily functions not only establish a "lifestyle"; they also require a sharp focus on the present moment. In this respect, the vogue of health regimens from the fifteenth century on capitalized on the Stoic and Epicurean urge to find happiness in the here and now.[79] In *De Brevitate Vitae*, Seneca noted that instead of complaining about human existence's brevity, one should use time efficiently to extend life. Freedom from care is the essence of any regimen to prolong life. Yet the personal aspect of health care is not the whole story of old age. In Petrarch's and Montaigne's time of wars and moral disarray, attention was directed again toward the connection between good government of both the human body and the body politic, as we shall see in the next chapter.

[79] See chapter 4, section 3 of this study.

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