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A Philosophical Justification for Self-Care

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Abstract

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Self-care is an action commonly associated with pleasure, relaxation, and self-regarding intent. Yet it is often found under threat in the face of other commitments because it is not commonly considered a significant or evaluative practice of life. This thesis aims to look at how we can define and appreciate the general concept of self-care to better go about an individualized practice of this sort. I first detail three conditions for self-care, specifying the need to discover and value oneself, then understand one's ownership over existence in a manner that creates pleasure and confidence in oneself. This then alludes to the value of self-care in creating a valuing self, meaning we see ourselves as generating cogent value through the process of care. The valuing self then justifies further acts of care and shapes our persona through the fruition of characteristics with personal value and the integrity of actions. To achieve self-care, one can engage in an established practice of independent reflection, social engagement, or bodily care. Ultimately, the path one takes should reflect authentic desires found from self-knowledge which can be morally evaluated for maturity in the context of other commitments. The importance for self-care is undermined by conditions such as narcissism and self-abnegation, which respectively represent fixation and deficiency of the self. Despite social influence towards such conditions, they are ultimately harmful by preventing an accurate knowledge of oneself to develop which would justify the need for sufficient care and regard. In general, the importance of self-care is necessitated in discovering oneself-guiding an individual to initiate and maintain interactions with oneself and the world in a reflective, authentic way.

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Introduction

“If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now,
when?”

Rabbi Hillel

As a soon-to-be graduating senior coming out of the height of a global pandemic and entering into the healthcare field, the needs of others in my greater community have always been emphasized to me. A significant part of my college experience has been dedicated to learn how to meet those needs. In general, I find it increasingly more common that conversations and commitments as to how to make an impact for others are initiated on college campuses. The entire application process for higher education prioritizes those who have a marked impact on communities, such as the need for extensive volunteerism and mentorship. Emory, resultantly, cultivates a rich community of scholars driven towards community service, global health, and activism. Even outside of college campuses, there have been social movements advocating for service to others across the nation- Effective Altruism has become wildly popular with young professionals. The pandemic has made its impression on everyone, specifically making students sensitive to the relative privilege we often find ourselves in health and safety or access to opportunity and wealth. As my fellow peers make plans to graduate and start their careers, it is clear that many of us will be prioritizing our regard for others for the prominent next steps of our lives.

In light of such commitment towards altruism, I found it necessary to slow down and consider whether my own interests were justly represented in my decisions- and whether they

deserve to take precedence over care for others. College is an influential time in broadening our perspective beyond our own through exposure to different people, places, and ideas- which correspondingly makes it quite easy to disregard the importance of our own. As evidence of this, you see a majority of college students struggling with major decisions such as what job they want to go into or what to do after college- I believe this has a lot to do with balancing our commitment to others versus our own interests and desires. Further, the focus on approaching major issues or topics of study that are beyond ourselves make it easy to neglect what it means to care for oneself sufficiently. Apart from my personal experience, it seems like many individuals in social positions that emphasize the importance of others before themselves (for example, in stereotypical feminine roles or implicit racialized attitudes taken towards minority men and women), the space to engage in self-care is rarely found.

In noticing these barriers to self-care, I took interest in finding what sources of influences are present for individuals to engage with the concept. We often find self-care mentioned in relation to mental health or therapy sessions, or associated with self-help books and lifestyle influencers. We turn to those in need of guidance when we feel lost or unhappy with ourselves- but it is rare you find someone who engages in self-care as an evaluative practice of their lives. Thus, the importance and regularity of such an activity is diminished.

A reason for the limited spaces for self-care is because of the lack of advocacy for self-care in major schools of thought. I began to ask myself how self-regarding acts would manifest in philosophical or ethical reasoning. If there was a way we could justify self-care using the language of the academic material we were studying, it would not be seen as a secondary part of our lives but rather present and impacting everything we do. As a philosophy major I found

the most promise in attempting to incorporate self-care in a normatively-guided interpretation of self-flourishing, which I make further reference to in the body of the thesis.

This interest and the need for further inclusion of self-care has inspired this work, which is based on four fundamental questions I used to guide my research. After reflecting on different opinions and philosophies on self-care, pulling from thinkers such as Foucault in *Technologies of Self* and Hampton for feminist contractarianism, I synthesized general principles surrounding self-care that I believe best express its intricacies and importance. I first sought to define self-care to generally understand its features and sort out which acts were authentically caring versus those that were not. I then asked why we undergo self-care to articulate a value that proceeds from its definition. In order to achieve this valued act, I considered how we undergo self-care most effectively and whether we could sort our morally mature versus immature acts of this sort. Finally, returning to my original motivations for this topic, I considered how one falls prey to neglecting or misinterpreting sufficient regard, knowledge, and care for oneself.

This thesis compiles my interpretations and remaining thoughts regarding some important perspectives towards (or against) self-care I have come across during an extensive literature review. In addition, I include some remaining questions or inconsistencies that arose with this philosophical approach to self-care- some that, perhaps, don't have clear answers due to the variable and intangible nature of self-care from person to person. In engaging with this writing, I recommend the reader to interpret with the perspective of their own discipline by asking questions such as, "as a philosopher, how would I interpret this justification for a self-regarding action if this definition of self-care is true?". I hope to also have the reader engage

with this work with personal intent, for further guidance in the application of caring for oneself. By developing a robust understanding and value attached to self-care and distinguishing the potential harmful effects of self-abnegation or self-centeredness, this work is personally intended to advocate for self-care especially in the lives of those dedicated to helping others.

Chapter 1: A Fundamental Understanding of Self-Care

When asked to describe what taking care of oneself means, one automatically thinks of actions. There is a long list of activities (treating yourself to a slice of cake, going out to see a movie with a friend, taking a warm bubble bath) that sound familiar and reminiscent of self-care. These are, of course, culturally-defined and prone to change throughout time- but the existence of such a list persists nonetheless. When picking up a self-help book or looking at archetypal lifestyle mentors care for themselves, one finds a focus on actions without a consideration for the reasons for undergoing them. That underlying connection between the various activities of self-care is unclear to us; it is difficult to articulate the general theory or idea these activities are motivated by. Beyond the question of *how* these activities amount to self-care, there is the greater problem of evaluating their relative importance when faced with other demands on our time and energy.

Some might attempt to characterize self-care by the feeling that similarly proceeds from these actions- feelings of happiness, satisfaction and comfort which keep us returning to the same activities and prioritizing them when needed. I cannot deny that the affirmative feeling following an act of self-care contributes to its value, but what constitutes the action is not dependent on the proceeding feeling but rather specific, defined aspects of a practice that lead to a transitive change in the individual. This change brings about the happiness and satisfaction that is so reminiscent and identifiable of self-care. With this, we then return to the original problem: what is involved in self-care is not immediately apparent to us, despite how prominent it is as a feature of daily life.

In this thesis, I aim to conceive of self-care as an evaluative practice, or a way of living. This led me to identify three aspects involving conditions that must be met to qualify an action as both an act of care and a self-regarding act. I will first discuss how self care incorporates some form of self-awareness, and at minimum an affirmation of one's existence. Then, I move on to consider self-authorship as a key aspect of determining which acts define one's own self. Finally, I address the emotive motivation for engaging in self-care, referencing how comfort and happiness arises from such actions.

The three aspects set conditions for a self-performing act that allows the actor to see oneself with certain value- that value, then, justifies further care onto oneself. This understanding of self-care was conceptualized by defining specific aspects which allow one to feel cared for, and then reasoning through why each of these are essential and non-negotiable for attending to oneself. I will attempt to render these conditions to allow for a generalized definition applicable to all possible activities derived from self-care. In addition, I will connect these conditions to popular attitudes or practices of self-care which help recognize this as a morally praiseworthy way of living.

(1) I exist and I count.

In *Intrinsic Worth of Persons*, Jean Hampton discusses the authenticity of one's own desires, or concerns, reflected in our actions and interests. She describes how moral philosophy is preoccupied with defending the rationality of desires that underlie actions, rather than considering to what degree we satisfy or manage the set of authentic desires we hold. To this point, Hampton divides the set of desires plainly into two categories: other-regarding and self-

regarding. With this, she claims that each category is no less authentic than the other, but the problem arises when acting upon one type of desire precludes further action in the other. In other words, the challenge is to sufficiently balance between our other-regarding and self-regarding desires.

An act of self-care has the possibility to qualify as an authentic desire. When we engage in self-care, we are recognizing and acting upon one type of self-regarding desire. To do this appropriately requires a fundamental shift in perspective to include ourselves as a person of concern among actors. In other words, our own concern for ourselves becomes legitimized and radically acknowledged through self-care, which then allows us to satisfy the newly discovered sense for what we desire. It is an active proclamation of being in the world- a way to come to terms with and authenticate our internal needs and wants.

This interpretation focusing on a self-regarding perspective as diametrically opposed to an other-regarding perspective may risk being associated with isolation of self, or absolutism. To be self-regarding does not necessitate that an act of self-care is initiated, experienced, and witnessed only by oneself. Rather, engaging in concepts of oneself can involve other people as long as it also has some connection to yourself. This allows us to expand the concept with the possibility of others contributing to an act which fulfills a self-expressed need. With their involvement comes no discount on the care felt from the act, nor does it imply that your own needs become a primary interest that subsumes all concern of others. Rather, the intent of a self-regarding perspective is to make your presence and value known to yourself among the other influences in your life. On the other hand, to take care of oneself does not mean that one does so at the expense of ignoring other-regarding commitments that exists simultaneously but

don't focus on oneself. For example, the desire to become artistic by spending time learning how to draw does not detract from your ability to follow-up with your friends about a personal challenge they are facing or spend time with your family. To have needs involving your concepts of self is as valid as tending to and supporting those that surround you, and the question is how to navigate choices between two sets of commitments. In order to maintain acts of self-care in a permissible way that doesn't impede on other aspects of our life, it is necessary to first understand what self-care is beyond a self-regarding act.

The implications of identifying self-care as self-regarding means that we do the important work of noticing ourselves and our unique characteristics, often for the first time. In order to act on oneself, it is necessary to first construct a subjective representation of who we are in the mind. Michel Foucault describes two popular Ancient Greek sayings in *Technologies of the Self*: the first being *epimelesthai sautou* ("to take care of yourself", "the concern with self", "to be concerned, to take care of yourself"), while the much more popular being the Delphic principle *gnothi sautou* ("Know yourself") (Foucault, 1988, *Technologies of the Self, A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, p 19). Moral tradition tends to focus on the importance of knowing over caring for the self, but Foucault goes beyond comparing the differences by connecting that "the injunction of having to know yourself was always associated with the other principle of having to take care of yourself, and it was that need to care for oneself that brought the Delphic maxim into operation" (Foucault, 1988, *Technologies of the Self, A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, p 20). To care for oneself- or broadly, to even be self-regarding in the first place- requires one to have a firm sense of who you are as a person. One must inherently have a basic concept of self-identity to be effectively self-regarding; furthermore, it is through the

process of getting to know oneself that pushes for additional acts of care because your perspective begins to accommodate yourself. Put simply, if you have a better grasp on who you are, you will most likely notice and react to a greater field of experiences that have the possibility to qualify as self-care. By engaging with this practice and prioritizing self-knowledge, you can begin to work with that self-image in an intimate manner not possible before- thus opening yourself up to increased possibilities for acts of self-care.

Due to its relationship with self-knowledge, there is no doubt that acts of self-care are impacted by what we believe is constitutive of our own identity. When asked to describe ourselves, we start with introducing our name or age, then maybe occupation or field of study next. When probed further, it is not uncommon to hear a life story or a recap of major events and experiences that shape who one is in the present. Indeed, Foucault describes this processing of self-realization as “the field of historical reflection on ourselves” (Foucault, 1988, *Technologies of the Self, A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, p 4). The aggregate self-identity that comes to fruition doesn’t just reflect one instance of your personality or an instant replica of who you presently are at the moment, but rather encompasses the multidimensional aspects of being constructed through time. We come to know ourselves as someone who has changed and grown throughout time, still retaining aspects of our past but existing distinctly from moment to moment. To affirm own existence in acts of self-care allows for greater continuity as an existing, changing, unique individual throughout time; self-care is thus differentiated from other acts in that it addresses the past leading up to the present and the potentialities for your future. This specific condition for self-care requires a particular intimacy of self which is discovered in a way that only you, who has fully experienced the continuity of yourself through

time, can come to realize. No one can articulate your experiences- from your early memories of childhood to how you process the present- better than you are able to, requiring yourself to take some responsibility in engaging in this process of self-reflection.

It could be argued that some use self-care as a vehicle to move away from the past. In other words, through successive acts of self-care we can reconstruct the self or notice our faults or the things we desire to improve as we move towards a new version of self. While this can be taken to contradict a historical self-reflection, I want to use this example to clarify that historical continuity should not be taken to mean plain acceptance and incorporation of all the experiences one has lived through. A rejection of one's past is a form of inclusion: in order to truly care for oneself by moving away from experiences or characteristics that one does not desire, one must recognize and understand the past before taking such action. Even through negation we can come to see self-care as an act that makes use of historical self-continuity.

Even if a temporal account of one's own being can be reproduced, the aspects of our own self still might not be easily discernible. It takes time and deliberate attention to be able to clearly define the folds of one's own complex being and practice integrating your self-image within one's perspective. You can't simply recount what you have gone through as entirely constitutive of yourself- you are more than simply what you have experienced. To be interested in the self and to remain true to that with acts of self-care, we need to reflect on the "central dispositions of thoughts, emotions, or actions constituted by a person's fundamental values" (Badhwar, 1993, *Altruism versus Self-Interest: Sometimes a False Dichotomy*, p 104). These fundamental aspects might be altered as a result of certain experiences but often do not originate from them- instead, our central tendencies and values usually derive from something

deeply personal that cannot be followed by reason. Mere inspection of our life would only reveal the external dispositions one expresses and does not allocate for the intangible processes which equally contribute- if not more- to a person's central concept of self. Rather, central dispositions can only be felt, acknowledged, and celebrated when one sits with ideas of self for a long time. In specific, to discover and then affirm your own existence is a practice of forming a relationship with yourself. Your conscience begins to meet and interact with a self-formed image of yourself. Through reflection and time spent, you become familiarized with unique quirks and personality traits, hopes and fears, and the type of person you believe yourself to be. This intensification of the relationship to yourself is then demonstrable with the activity you carry out later on.

In another perspective, noticing ourselves can be classified into different aspects, or modes of being, that are made clear to us when we engage in self-care. In the evidence-based psychological model for well-being called the "Wheel of Wellness", Jane E. Myers and Thomas J Sweeney identify five second-order factors that comprise the indivisible self. These factors describe different 'selves' that emerge when engaging in certain activities believed to positively correlate with healthy living, quality of life, and longevity. Briefly described, the factors include the essential, creative, coping, social, and physical self. The essential self consists of a personal spirituality incorporating one's sense of meaning and purpose, gender and cultural identity as filters of our life experiences, and self-care. The creative self originates from the uniqueness of characteristics that define one's space in the world, and the coping self describes the way in which we respond to life's events with the mechanisms of self-maintenance we practice. The social self encompasses the influence of close friends and families on our self-perception, and

the physical self corresponds to an awareness over our corporal body as influencing our existence in the world.

Myers and Sweeneys' work adds to the different perspectives on self-constitution and the multiple aspects one considers as important in describing oneself. Each factor contributes a unique but essential aspect in that one cannot depend solely on the physical self or the coping self as descriptive of who you are. In addition, many of these different selves are often only perceivable to oneself. For example, comparing your social self with that of your close friends or family might show differences despite being in similar social circles because processing external experiences is contingent on the unique aspects of self-constitution. Thus, self-care should and must acknowledge our central concepts which guide our actions and beliefs rather than relying on a one-dimensional understanding of who we externally appear to be. The multitude of selves depict the complexity of sources that make our presence known (our physical body, the friends and family that care and pay attention to us, and the intangible characteristics that originate internally) which all add to a firm sense of what it means to be yourself. To simply say that one exists and one knows oneself is not an easy task, yet once you start to grasp a sense of who you are, you become self-regarding in the process. Self-knowledge directly facilitates self-care.

As referred to in the second part of the condition, an act of self-care is not only an explicit interpretation of one's own existence, but it also signifies a clear sense of worth attached to that interpretation. One would not walk your dog every day or arrange vacations with your partner if you did not believe they have sufficient enough value to allocate time and energy towards them; similarly, an act of self-care implicitly declares that you have value

realizable to yourself. In other words, when we care for ourselves, we show that we are a being among many others that counts. In part, it is a personal responsibility to acknowledge worth since you are the only person that can access a historical understanding of yourself. Reiterating the metaphor of re-starting a relationship with yourself through self-care, most of us can testify from personal experience that the most genuine relationships begin when we believe the other person counts. It is because the other person has value to us that we justify the time and consideration given to them, which then builds the relationship further. It is with this same attitude that we should regard ourselves when beginning to care for the self.

To fully address how self- knowledge can be incorporated into our relationships both with ourselves and others, we can adopt another moral theory utilizing self-flourishing through social connections. Hampton notes herself as believing in contractarianism- specifically, feminist contract theory that combines Hobbesian and Kantian influences. This arose in response to criticisms on the seeming unfeelingness of proposing all relationships as contractual. She bases her beliefs on a set of concepts derived from John Rawls' "conception of a person". Ultimately, the foundational contract of a relationship is based on the conception of the people involved, and injustices are pronounced as failing one's commitments to said people. Hampton has a common test derived from this theory, a question of "Given the fact that we are in this relationship, could both of us reasonably accept the distribution of costs and benefits (that is, the costs and benefits that are not themselves side effects of any affective or duty-based tie between us) if it were the subject of an informed, unforced agreement in which we think of ourselves as motivated solely by self-interest?"(Hampton and Farnham, 2007, *The Intrinsic Worth of Persons Contractarianism in Moral and Political Philosophy*, p 21). Hampton

believes a relationship to temper one's actions and place with a self-regarding recognition, but also an appraisal of what is both good and bad for the other person. While some might appeal that identifying the influence of self-interest seems off-putting in describing relationships of great care, such as a mother caring for a child or a pair of best friends, Hampton emphasizes that praiseworthy relationships are constructed in a way which doesn't include injurious harms taken on oneself. In other words, we proceed freely in the relationship by making choices we desire regardless of duty or societal obligation. In order to act on behalf of the costs and benefits between two people, Hampton discusses two concepts that are essential to "understanding how we are to respond to a person: namely, a conception of human worth and a conception of a person's legitimate interests" ((Hampton and Farnham, 2007, *The Intrinsic Worth of Persons Contractarianism in Moral and Political Philosophy*, p 22). Hampton's contractual perspective on a relationship only works when the two people involved have a common perception on human worth- and, more importantly, whether that belief of human worth applies to the relationship at hand.

Regardless of whether one supports the merits of contractarianism or believes it captures the intricacies of a relationship, I'd like to use Hampton's theory to show how we recognize an integral belief in human value that we see in another person when we establish a relationship. Because we recognize the other person's desires that warrants respect and (often) weighs just as heavily as our own, a morally praiseworthy relationship is one that does due diligence to both people involved. This often has a focus on the other person as making sure we don't manipulate the benefits of the relationship for our own good- philosophers are often interested in how we morally respond to desires outside of ours. But, in the interest of my

discussion on concepts of self, I'd like to point out how this theory shapes our own presence in a relationship. The contractual nature of a relationship with a common factor of human worth means that such worth (and the ability to recognize and affirm that value) must be seen with yourself as equally as it does the other person. A relationship is two-sided and in engaging with another, you must realize your own value to contribute and impact the shared interests between the two of you. Thus, you affirm yourself with cogent force and ability when engaging in relationships with other people, representing your assumption of human worth and authentic desires which, in turn, reveal how you feel about your own worth and desires. Hampton refers to this as perceiving our own presence as an "ends in ourselves" (Hampton and Farnham, 2007, *The Intrinsic Worth of Persons Contractarianism in Moral and Political Philosophy*, p 23), meaning that contract theory is so fundamentally ingrained in celebrating human worth that your own importance cannot be ignored in establishing correspondence to the other person. With this, we can consider relationship building to be a fundamental example of proclaiming that "I exist and I count".

Contractarianism can even be considered in its relevance to forming a relationship with oneself. This analogy for self-care sets up an intentional meaning to the sides to this relationship: one, the existential image or conception of yourself, has the challenge of establishing authorized rights of benefits and doubts, while your experiencing self needs to realize its role or ability in recognizing those rights as a reflection of your own self-regard. This, ultimately, culminates in an act and sustaining relationship of self-care. An understanding of being an "ends-in-themselves" is emphasized through this paradigm as one realizes the ultimate value and force that can be achieved as being themselves, for themselves. This,

perhaps, is the purest form of noticing yourself and respecting who one discovers through the process. To see oneself as a fundamental equal that 'counts' in your eyes establishes a value of self-worth that shapes how you regard yourself moving forward.

(2) I have a say in the terms of my own self-authorship.

When we consider someone who succeeds in taking care of themselves, perhaps the first thing we attest to is the difference in how they carry themselves compared to someone who noticeably neglects the importance of self-care. We might see someone carry themselves with confidence and more certainty in themselves, enhancing the activities they engage in by bringing a fuller sense of self. Regardless of the variability in its manifestation, self-care is a dynamic form of engagement with yourself that changes the person from the instance that the act is instated.

When reasoning through what about self-care allows such an enhancement to proceed, I settled on the term self-authorship as used often by Hampton. I believe that taking care of oneself makes it possible for you to influence the future construction of your own being in the world. Your presence is made vulnerable through the act of caring for yourself- regardless of how one chooses to engage in self-care, constitutive in the act is an intimate understanding of who you are (referring to condition #1) and a recognition of your ability to define one's existence. Foucault described these activities in which one develops conceptions of the self as a technology "whereby individuals, by their own means or with the help of others, acted on their own bodies, souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being in order to transform themselves and attain a certain stage of perfection or happiness" (Foucault, 1988, *Technologies of the Self, A*

Seminar with Michel Foucault, p 4). Similarly, Hampton describes how self-authorship is demonstrable in acts of self-care when “morality involves self-regard: namely, it requires us to ensure that we have the time, the resources, and the capacity to develop the characteristics, skills, plans and projects that make us unique individual selves” (Hampton and Farnham, 2007, *The Intrinsic Worth of Persons Contractarianism in Moral and Political Philosophy*, p 55). Self-authorship is associated with a diverse range of activities that allow one to take charge of our unique, changing attributes. We are responsible for the change experienced through self-care, making the very ability to author ourselves constructive to our own belief of who we are.

Because of the possibilities for re-definition, our being returns on the other side of an act of self-care increasingly more pertinent to our own desire the more frequently we revisit it. The transformation proceeding from self-care is facilitated by adopting self-narration as the origin for future identity. A narrative interpretation of identity means recounting your own development and transforming that with a forward-looking outset to dictate how you process your own experiences- specifically, with the ability for you to control your own path for that narration. Self-authorship is important and valuable in allowing us to shape how we interact with the world and internalize experiences so that it is in accordance with our values and interests. Self-care not only allows us to realize these values and interests, but also take ownership of them so that self-authorship is possible. This, then, makes such an ability a fundamental part of our identity.

Martin Heidegger re-interprets the function of self-authorship in *Being and Time* to consider how care is instrumental to the authenticity of existence. He states that “Care is not the activity of a substantial self-subject; rather, the self, individual identity, is an after effect of

care, something that is constituted when one's existence is a multidimensional but unitary and cohesive temporal configuration of dimensions" (Heidegger, 1996, *Being and Time: A Translation of Sein und Zeit*). Again, we return to the thematic complexity of individual existence in self-care, but Heidegger's considers this to be a direct effect of care. In other words, he considers care to not be a possibility but a necessity for effective living, making self-authorship the defining point of the conditions for existence one comes to inhabit. In relation to my argument, Heidegger re-emphasizes the connection between self-authorship and care and further considers how this authorship impacts our existence in itself. Self-care is aptly named because it implicitly induces personal interest and concern for all related instances of self that we come to notice. As Heidegger summarizes, the act of care allows us to comprehend and synthesize our existence into an individual, presenting identity. The moment of re-definition is hard to isolate in this continuity of constant being-in-the-world, making it impossible to separate our beliefs about ourselves that are authored when reflecting on previous instances of being. However, the mechanism of narrative power is very much present and impactful to the process of regarding and taking care of oneself.

There are a couple of criticisms I anticipate arising from this condition. First, some might try to argue that all acts under your own discretion are ultimately self-authoring, regardless of if they count as self-care or not. For example, a variety of other-regarding acts can be valid contributors to how one proceeds to view themselves: one who buys many gifts for their friends authors themselves as being a generous individual, or one who is quick to introduce themselves to new people authors themselves to be outgoing. There is, in fact, an element of self-authorship in every action you identify with, whether it's self-regarding, other-regarding, or

devoid of any regard at all. However, I believe that the extent to which self-authorship is the intent of these actions is necessary to identify acts of self-care. There is a valid claim of inauthenticity when one engages in other-regarding acts because they aim to achieve something for themselves and their own character. On the other hand, an act of self-care is when you intentionally are both the recipient and the initiator of the action, allowing you to construct your own self for the sake of purely yourself.

Another criticism that Hampton considers regards the content of the self-authorship- namely, that the direction we choose to author ourselves is itself authentic and morally praiseworthy. Based purely on the two conditions previously outlined, one could use this to potentially defend masochistic acts or acts of self-harm as self-care. Hampton, using her own example, describes self-loathing that motivates an act which later only increases the same feelings. She points to a consistent autonomy with the person beliefs in a self-loathing 'value' and congruous actions, which is similar to more traditional acts of self-care that reflects a recognition of self-worth. To this point, Hampton pulls from Aristotle: "We believe that subjectively defined preferences are authentic only if their content is consistent with what we take to be the objectively defined needs of human persons *qua* human persons"(Hampton and Farnham, 2007, *The Intrinsic Worth of Persons Contractarianism in Moral and Political Philosophy*, p 58). The Aristotelian perspective counters with the claim that self-regarding acts are vulnerable to the judgment of certain qualities of normativity. Accepted standards of respect and concern for one's own body or extreme harm to others make one feel uncomfortable when witnessing actions that violate them- and this could apply equally to acts performed voluntarily on themselves. While one can argue that self-authorship is applicable in

representing a wide range of diverse personalities and unique interests, this argument should not aim to justify the ability to interpret harmful acts on one's own body and mental capacity as identifiable with self-care.

The last criticism I'd like to consider is one that argues the presence of others diminishes the feasibility of owning your self-authorship. Indisputably, the social tendencies of the human condition influences how we view and value ourselves, as well as the direction to which we author ourselves. Certain individuals have the autonomy to determine the conditions of their existence- but that right is not afforded to everyone. For some, the ease to which self-authorship is possible is a naive reality, and the process of internally grappling and processing their own existence is inconsequential to how they are presented to the world.

Perhaps the best way to depict this is with Sara Ahmed's work in *A Phenomenology of Whiteness*, specifically her phenomenology of the spatial orientation of white bodies versus non-white. For Ahmed, orientation is distinctly tied to one's own presence in the world. She is less concerned about the conceptual perceptions of self-image but rather the unfolding of physical presence as it spatially contends with the external world and interacts with other bodies. The simple movement of the body to pick up a pencil, or shake a hand, is a significant instance of expression; she describes our intent for action as "an orientation towards the future, insofar as the action is also the expression of a wish or intention" (Ahmed, 2007, *A Phenomenology of Whiteness*, p 153). Spatial autonomy can be made comparable to self-authorship- both initiated through intent performed on oneself and furthering oneself through the world. However, Ahmed recreates the spatial field considering how bodies are pre-arranged in relation to other bodies, specifically in regard to the historicity which manipulates the

normative scope of vision to which we view others. She pulls on Frantz Fanon's work to demonstrate the effect of a "historic-racial schema. The elements that I used had been provided for me not by 'residual sensations and perceptions primarily of a tactile, vestibular, kinaesthetic, and visual character,' but by the other, the white man, who had woven me out of a thousand details" (Ahmed, 2007, *A Phenomenology of Whiteness*, p 153). The proximity to which the world responds to one's authorship is limited by the interference of whiteness functioning. Ahmed then clarifies the extent to which whiteness predetermines spatiality, "including not just physical objects, but also styles, capacities, aspirations, techniques, habits. Race becomes, in this model, a question of what is within reach, what is available to perceive and to do 'things' with" ((Ahmed, 2007, *A Phenomenology of Whiteness*, p 154). In other words, the positioning of one's own presence moves out of your control. To those that whiteness targets, value defined for oneself and desire for certain areas of growth is merely an after-thought to the spaces that your being is already predisposed to inherit. Thus, the capacity for self-authorship is naive against a narrative that is already gifted to you, against your will.

There is little that I can say to refute Ahmed's claims, nor do I believe that there is a space in present day and age which allows for her claims to be challenged. I believe the way in which history thwarts present possibilities for self-expression and flourishing is a legitimate challenge against self-care. Self-authorship becomes nearly impossible to realize because of the restrictions offered on the conditions of self- however, understanding who one is and discovering the self still presents as available to oneself despite such barriers. For example, a black woman has her own presence pre-disposed according to Ahmed's theory- while this impairs the process of self-narration, I believe this enables one to come to terms with their own

self (even if this own self is processed as an afterthought to historical conditions of being). Self-knowledge presents an opportunity to discover the restrictions on phenomenology of one's being- there is a possibility then, with the help of others, for one to craft a response that is oriented towards care.

(3) I will become happier and more comfortable in my own skin.

The previous two conditions dealt heavily with concepts of self and the resulting activity associated with those conceptions. This third condition emphasizes the emotions, or feelings, associated with an act of self-care. I've attempted to demonstrate the mechanism common to acts of self-care: getting to know oneself, evaluating a value or desire associated with that image of oneself, and then acting upon that image to realize the value. Implicit in these specific steps are emotions. To establish oneself as a presence that 'counts' annotates a positive respect towards yourself, and the ambition to engage in self-authorship indicates an increasingly renewed sense of ownership and desire in shaping who you become. Taken together, this process culminates as an incredibly positive force for an individual. Not only do we begin to view ourselves as important to consider, but through the act itself we begin to delight in the person that we are becoming as a product of our own values and capable of change and growth. In defining your relationship with oneself, Foucault describes it as "a concrete relationship enabling one to delight in oneself, as in a thing one both possesses and has before one's eyes. If to convert to oneself is to turn away from the preoccupations of the external world, from the concerns of ambition, from fear of the future, then one can turn back to one's own past, recall it to mind, have it unfold as one pleases before one's own eyes, and

have a relationship with it that nothing can disturb” (Foucault, 1986, *The Care of The Self*, p 65).

The immediacy and the authenticity of our relationship with ourselves results in a pleasure, unique in its intimacy and relevance to who we want ourselves to become. As we begin to be made aware of the ability to relate to oneself, the desire to which we view activities of care will increase as we mature alongside it.

I briefly want to point out the longstanding impact of finding pleasure associated with self-care. It is sustaining to effectively undergo self-care because happiness becomes dependent solely on the awareness of our own existence. For example, if one previously depended on a partner to solve one’s problems or feels obligated to fill weekends with social engagements for enjoyment, understanding how to take care of oneself might allow this person to realize a sense of joy simply in the thought of being who one is. Pleasure arises from within and is in a certain sense limitless in conjunction with the ability to move freely with your future. In other words, because self-care has no true ‘end goal’, the happiness that results from it is enduring. Although self-care isn’t necessarily an isolating act and can be shared with others, the ability to successfully care for oneself means that you are able to access a certain independence; one is pleased with a life spent enjoying your own presence, and there is no need to depend on others or material things for a sense of worth.

Chapter 2: The Underlying Value of Self-Care

An evaluation of self-care reveals that one must incorporate specific qualities to qualify it as such an act: it must affirm knowledge of one's own existence and the right to self-value that existence (saying "I count and I exist"), while also recognizing one's ability to define the conditions for existing-in-the-world. Finally, implicitly arising from this process of self-recognition and action taken on the self should be a form of pleasure, or joy, that you find in being in the presence of oneself. What arises from these conditions amounts to defining self-care as entirely personal and intangible to compare from person to person. This description conveys how elusive of a topic it is- at this level, I can only provide general features that should be enacted individually. By extension, the value of this act is elusive and will look different in practice from person to person.

The value of self-care derives from its features; its cyclic nature allows us to discover personal values and then work to meet derived desires or expectations, resulting in a valued self. Thus, we can establish value in self-care in relation to other, normatively motivated values we discover have personal meaning for us. For example, let's say one discovers a value of productivity that is meaningful to them and something they wish to identify with. Successive acts of self-care develop such a value: one works with oneself to discover what times of day they are most productive, what motivates them towards completing tasks and how getting sufficient sleep drives them towards productivity. Self-care is a mechanism that allows us to satisfy recognized values important for our well-being. The process of merging such values with our conception of self allows something valued to become part of how we see ourselves- to become a valued self fortifies our self-image.

Foucault's work discusses how different philosophers or political thinkers incorporated self-care for personal flourishing. When referencing Seneca or Epictetus, Foucault identifies a common goal of an "entirely general principle of conversion to self" (Foucault, 1986, *The Care of The Self*, p 64). Thus, the self-construction functioning in an act of self-care results in a value that is found within the self. In other words, because the process of self-care both constructs the new reformed self but also allows you to find pleasure with the autonomy of creation you proceed with, you are creating value yourself. Foucault continues to discuss the value that one discovers as "understood first of all as a change of activity: not that one must cease all other forms of occupation and devote oneself entirely and exclusively to oneself; but in the activities that one ought to engage in, one had best keep in mind that the chief objective one should set for oneself is to be sought within oneself, in the relation of oneself to oneself... This relation to self that constitutes the end of the conversation and the final goal of all practices of the self still belongs to an ethics of control" (Foucault, 1986, *The Care of The Self*, p 64-65). The goal of self-care, as Foucault summarizes, is to be found within oneself and through the relationship formed by the self-regarding action. We become aware of this value the closer one gets to identifying with your self-image and is realized by what he calls a 'change of activity', or a reorientation of perspective. Thus, we become valuable when we re-organize our attention to engage ourselves to satisfy our realized personal values. As Foucault points out, this is not maximized when we focus solely on activity that concerns only ourselves- but indicates a quality of life where our priorities are reordered to include ourselves as a person of concern and take note of that concern in the choices we make in the future. The realized value is the

end goal of self-care which is found within the act itself; you begin to recognize and receive the value of yourself that starts to be built from the initial action of self-care.

The abstractness of this value is clear from the synopsis above; it is dependent on yourself and the type of relationship you choose to build with yourself. It is hard to articulate value solely based on personal self-image and further understand what this truly manifests for the individual at stake. However, the difference between a distinct value applied to oneself and a self made to be valued in and of itself is found in whether the value is either applied or generated through the act of self-care: a person who values productivity as a value will strive to become more productive through self-care, but someone who begins to value themselves generates such a value by seeing themselves as productive.

To attempt to be more specific in describing the value of this, we can identify changes exclusive to self-care which present as a distinguishable difference in the way someone conducts themselves due to this 'conversion to self'. For example, Susan Wolf finds value in a sarcastic wit, or an appreciation for high fashion or interior design, which all conceptually have nonmoral significance but are primarily unique, identifying, and important to the development and cultivation of one's own personality. Harry Frankfurt adds to this list of characteristics with examples such as being loyal to family traditions or pursuing the truths of math. Wolf describes these sets of diverse characteristics as arising from "the 'point of view of individual perfection,'...concerned [with] not the good of anyone or any group other than the individual itself" (Wolf, 1982, *Moral Saints*, p 437). We can appreciate and develop these traits only with concern and respect for ourselves as individuals capable of personal flourishing. Moreover, these become authentic only when it is deeply reflective towards our understanding of self and

one's own desires and interests. Self-care allows us to discover the possibilities for authentic characteristics we value and work towards them simply for the purpose of being happier with ourselves.

The connection between personal characteristics and self-care can be further considered with individuals that have a deficit of these traits. What comes to mind in recalling the defining features of someone's personality are traits that one is passionate about, or certain experiences or accomplishments that one identifies with. To find someone incredibly creative that bakes as a hobby, or is devotedly athletic and runs marathons for fun, are the characteristics that precisely make us stand in awe of them and respect their identity. This awe and respect arise not because of the impact these traits bring to the surrounding community (although these often have positive effects on their surroundings), but because they have value for the person initiating them. On the other hand, when we struggle to find something substantial about someone's personality or life outside of work or school, we notice that they often consider themselves to not deserve care or attention- I describe this as self-abnegation in later chapters. Wolf denotes this lack of self as a "life strangely barren" (Wolf, 1982, *Moral Saints*, p 421)- this opposes the description of self-care as animating the personal value of life beyond normative moral obligations. Most of these characteristics are associated with aspects of life we are personally fond of and in turn, they serve as reminders of ourselves; this reiterates previous points on self-care's integral connection to formations of identity.

We are intrinsically drawn to certain unique traits as a marker of individuality, yet it is unclear how the process of discovering such traits is initiated. In order to discover an authentic tendency for humor or a natural green thumb, one needs to recognize the "'moral permission'

to develop a variety of the talents, skills, traits of personality, and vocations that make each of us an interesting and well-rounded person” (Hampton and Farnham, 2007, *The Intrinsic Worth of Persons Contractarianism in Moral and Political Philosophy*, p 48). This permission can only be found if one authenticates the need for self-care and cultivates the possibility to develop oneself through such acts. Yet this permission is also what licenses one to initiate a lifestyle prioritizing self-care, demonstrating an interdependent relationship. The significance Hampton weighs on moral permissivity displays a key consideration in discussions of self-care- how does one recognize potential value for personal development to motivate self-care if permission to engage with oneself and self-worth originate from acts of care? Reiterating Heidegger’s phenomenology, care is equated to being-in-itself- there is no human existence without care and care arises out of existence. It could be argued that the care from others give us the beginnings of a general conception for self-worth: through the regard from others, we begin to view ourselves with the permission to discover talents and traits with personal significance. This would make moral permissivity for personal flourishing dependent on the actions of others, which raises the question of whether the realization of self through acts of care could be accomplished independently. Despite such uncertainty, it is indisputable that value can be realized for oneself as demonstrated in the many real-life cases of self-care.

However, it is not just authentic characteristics with personal significance that give self-care its value. The fundamental benefit proceeding from an act of self-care can be morally significant beyond oneself; this can be summarized with the term ‘integrity’. We become able to live with integrity through self-care, which sets the foundational basis for this characteristic. While understandings of integrity as a value are varied, I will approach this topic

by understanding its connection to self-care and what appreciable benefits can be attributed to values of integrity realized through care.

Merriam-Webster defines integrity in three different ways, reflecting the diversity in which this characteristic is thought of:

1. *Firm adherence to a code of especially moral or artistic values*

With this definition, we note the connection of integrity to morality. There is an underlying moral appraisal when we say that someone is acting with integrity, making it a normative characteristic that is different from the deeply personal, often nonmoral characteristics discussed previously.

2. *Unimpaired condition*

3. *Quality or state of being complete or undivided*

These two conditions connect the idea of integrity and self-care- specifically, the function of self-image to integrity. There is a holistic sense of being identified with behavior characterized by integrity, qualifying it as a value that is deeply personal at the same time as it is normatively appraised.

The definition from Merriam-Webster demonstrates the multifaceted nature of integrity with its integration of normatively facing morality and personal authenticity. Like the dictionary definition, philosophers' understandings of integrity are varied and often taken in tandem with each other to demonstrate how integrity is important in the multiple aspects of one's lives. To maintain this discussion's relevance to self-care, I will discuss a few theories on integrity with the aim to identify its defining aspects and understand how they arise from acts of self-care.

Perhaps the most immediate connection that can be seen between the value of integrity and self-care is through the relevance of self-image to both. It is known that self-care depends on and produces an internal representation of oneself that is under one's own discretion and compliant in response to change throughout time. It is through self-care that we start to build a relationship to ourselves: first noticing a duality between the experiencing self and the self we believe ourselves to be, and then convening these two through acts of care. Self-care can be thus described as constitutive: an act that works on a prior conception of self and then forms an immediate new construction through an ability that is identified with both versions of selves. Integrity, as noted above, arises from the condition of being undivided or unimpaired. This invokes a portrayal of one with integrity taking steps to harmonize aspects of existence. We describe someone with integrity as moving through the world with confidence- Harry Frankfurt concisely describes this term as wholeheartedness. You ameliorate the discrepancies between what you desire and the responsibilities you inherit to reach a quality of integrity- resultantly, you feel justified to commit and identify with a holistic sense of being. Self-care is a pre-condition to come to terms with the conditions of one's own being. The act allows for the individual self to come into play when one builds upon integrity and leads to the possibility of integrating a holistic sense of self-image with how we carry ourselves towards the future- culminating in a state of wholeheartedness.

The value of integrity represents a different caliber of understanding oneself, which then modifies the actions one takes. This wholeheartedness can be visibly recognized specifically with the actions one decides to take and the way one carries themselves through such actions. There is a genuine nature, or ease of confidence, when one brings their whole self

to a certain act. Frankfurt identifies the evidence of integrity as holistic self-integration applied to the actions one decides to take. Holistic self-integration, as explained in *Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person*, is being able to recognize one's differing levels of volition (otherwise known as will for certain actions) and levels of desire (for certain goods or objects) and integrate them- thus acting with full desire and volition when one brings themselves to an action. Conflicting desires and opposing responsibilities are taken at face value with integrity and accepted as equally important with self-care. Through repeated acts of care, one converges different levels of volition and desire- there is a praiseworthy quality in being able to say that an action one desires is also one that is genuinely believed in and in line with one's responsibilities. With this change in how one views themselves, the intentions of entering into actions shifts to represent yourself to a greater extent.

Bernard Williams similarly believes that integrity arises from a personal connection with yourself. He writes that "one who displays integrity acts from those dispositions and motives which are most deeply his, and has also the virtues that enable him to do that" (Williams, 1981 *Moral Luck*, p 49). His view focuses on similar holistic integration as posed by Frankfurt; your personal commitments are represented in every action you take. Integration is not equivalent to just a continuation of your past, although it doesn't preclude such a continuation. In fact, to understand integrity as a state of undivided-ness is to see how an understanding of self can function to further inevitable change throughout time while still maintaining a commitment to internal 'dispositions and motivations'. When someone acts with integrity, it is praiseworthy because their motives, interests, commitments, and most significantly their characteristics and sense of being, are clear from the movements they decide to take. Self-care is essential in the

process of discovering said motives, interests, and commitments, which are sometimes not immediately discernible to us if we do not practice paying attention to them. Moreover, self-care nurtures and builds upon these essential aspects, allowing them to be made identifiable in acts considered to be integrous.

The other equally important perspective in the definition of integrity recognizes moral value. Some might believe this disconnects self-care from integrity because self-care is traditionally seen as non-moral due to its concern primarily with the self, and not a normative moral community. Despite this, I believe there is a distinct connection that can be related to the value of self-care when understanding a morally guided interpretation of actions of integrity.

A prevailing philosophical view regards integrity as a value allowing one to stand for something- in other words, not only does one act with a firm belief in their own principles and commitments, but one advocates for them for recognition in a community of others. You are considered a representative of personal values as someone willing to make a firm claim to others who discern and pass a judgment on the things that you care about. Cheshire Calhoun describes the sociality of this by discussing how actions impact the surrounding actors to which integrity is perceived and named: "Persons of integrity treat their own endorsements as ones that matter, or ought to matter, to fellow deliberators" (Calhoun, 1995 *Standing for Something*, p 258). The things one believes in- your commitments, values, desires, and interests- are not only present in the actions one takes but are a central matter in your concerns with the world. Sharing of genuine interests contributes to a greater community, allowing for greater diversity of experiences and an opportunity for praiseworthy collaboration through relationships with others. The function of self-care presents in the process of realizing oneself as having a valuable

enough perspective to voice endorsements that others should pay attention to. One should nurture self-interest and develop a respect for oneself in order to realize the potential for these personal endorsements to be worthy of external appreciation. A person acting with integrity possesses a belief of self that operates with as much moral potential as any other actor, and this can only be affirmed if one cares for themselves. This understanding of self enables us to act as social beings with the ability to contribute to care for others and bring things of value in a social community.

These two aspects of integrity demonstrate its extensive value when understanding what draws someone towards self-care. Acting with integrity not only denotes the praiseworthy relationship one forms with the self, but also denotes the actions one takes in a social community with the possibility to impact other actors. To have integrity, in itself, is what makes someone praiseworthy. I have demonstrated that integrity is dependent on successful acts of self-care, as care is a primary source of discovering oneself and regarding oneself as important. Thus, the value of self-care is its role in transforming us into a more comfortable sense of being, leading to positive repercussions for ourselves and our larger community. And while it would be inauthentic to engage in self-care only to become better in helping other people (indicating a neglect of importance for the self), Ayn Rand points out that “the virtue involved in helping those one loves is not selflessness or sacrifice, but integrity” (Rand and Branden, 1964, *The Virtue of Selfishness/A New Concept of Egoism*, p 32). Integrity allows us to engage in morally fulfilling and rewarding acts socially, and self-care is necessitated to reach a possibility for integrous acts. But further, integrity allows us to act with fulfillment- Butler describes this as the “goodness of an action depends on whether it is in accordance with our nature and the

nature of the case” (Badhwar, 1993, *Altruism versus Self-Interest: Sometimes a False Dichotomy*, p 92). Self-care enables us to understand our holistic nature and practice integrating it as such into our resulting perspective in life, qualifying us for acting with integrity. Butler further elucidates that integrity arises from a certain evaluative state of goodness that corresponds to the proximity of your actions to your fundamental values and beliefs. In this interpretation, we find the point of why we undergo integrity: to reach this potential for goodness that doesn’t just impact ourselves but the greater community you find yourself in.

Chapter 3: An Effective Path to Self-Care

Both its definition and value depict self-care as a well-established concept. Self-care has been shown to heavily depend on self-knowledge and the resulting sentiment attached to this understanding of ourselves. Specifically, I define self-care through three criteria: first an affirmation of one's existence and its worth, then a realization of one's ability to direct such existence, and a positive sense of regard towards the self-image that is fortified through self-care. To better articulate the reason why we are drawn to acts of self-care, I discussed the value inherent in such an act. In the process of getting to know oneself, we discover certain aspects which have personal importance or generate pleasure for us. Self-care allows us to actively incorporate such values as a part of our life. More significantly, self-care allows us to generate value from ourselves because we come to recognize and build self-worth through increased care towards ourselves. This ultimately develops integrity as a direct outcome of being able to utilize our self-image and worth to inform our life choices.

Our focus on self-care has been fairly conceptual- yet in reality, we regard self-care as a set of discrete actions derived from a general concept. Additionally, because self-care is dependent on a number of criteria and the manifestation of an image of existence to ourselves, there are a variety of enabling and dis-enabling conditions that can impact self-care. This present chapter addresses the various ways one can go about self-care and evaluates them with the conditions for the act itself. In doing so, I hope to provide clarity on what is important to consider in orienting care of the self.

The literature provides a multitude of diverse practices of self-care, each emphasizing a different activity or mindset that claims to arrive at the intent of self-care most effectively.

Learning about oneself, especially aspects of ourselves that are not immediately discernible, is an integral part of self-care. Thus, we are often drawn to guided practices as a source of ease in an unfamiliar engagement with the self. Foucault constructs one of the most comprehensive historical records on perspectives of self-care, reflecting political and normative trends which correspond to the different 'formulas' for care. Volume 3 in the *History of Sexuality* is almost entirely dedicated to documenting the fluctuating beliefs in severity or care attributed to the self in ethical thought. Foucault asks about the influences that brought these individuals to such a belief, and the effect on individualism in self-care or abnegation. He utilizes a range of perspectives on what is argued to be the most effective ways of incorporating self-regard into a practice of life. I've classified these practices into three main dimensions: inward turns allowing one to directly interact with oneself, social practices which invoke your immediate community and orient your place within it, and a focus on physical self-care through care of the body.

The first category of practice is a natural extension from our understanding of self-care as building a relationship with yourself. There is an abundance of metaphors that further clarify the type of relationship this should manifest to be. Epictetus "asks that one adopt, vis-a-vis oneself, the role and posture of a 'night watchman' who checks the entries at the gates of cities or houses; or further, he suggests that one exercises on oneself the functions of a 'tester of coinage', an 'assayer', one of those money-changers who won't accept any coin without having made sure of its worth" (Foucault, 1986, *The Care of The Self*, p 63). This describes an expectation of scrutiny applied towards oneself. For Epictetus, self-care emphasizes a judgment of self-worth: when one assumes the attitude of a watchman or assayer, you are described as perceptive in respect to a valuation of the things that pass through your perspective. Thus, as

you begin to notice yourself more and hold yourself as an object of your intent, your own value becomes determined to yourself. Epictetus's metaphor takes note of the essential connection between self-regard and self-appraisal, which allows one to find value in the understanding of self that results from self-care.

Marcus Aurelius takes a somewhat different perspective with the metaphors he utilizes to describe the relationship to oneself. While Epictetus necessitates forms of judgment, Aurelius advocates for less scrutinizing of a perspective. He describes self-care as "a retreat within oneself": it is a sustained effort in which general principles are reactivated and arguments are adduced that persuade one not to let oneself become angry at others, at providence, or at things" (Foucault, 1986, *The Care of The Self*, p 51). Thus, his formula for self-care is more flexible; re-discovering oneself has a friendlier connotation than judging and valuing oneself. There is less of an emphasis on worth that guides this perspective; you rather genuinely enjoy the time spent with oneself as a safe haven or space of comfort one can retreat to. Aurelius also recommends a variety of specific practices that encourages this retreat: "there are the meditations, the readings, the notes that one takes on books or on the conversations one has heard, notes that one reads again later, the recollection of truths that one knows already but that need to be more fully adapted to one's own life" (Foucault, 1986, *The Care of The Self*, p 51). A majority of the practices described here would not be considered in line with Epictetus's perspective- specifically, there is no element of interrogation or surveillance present in the activities in this list. Instead, this encourages a different perspective for the normal activities one participates in, generally conducted with oneself. For example, in reading books and reminiscing on conversations, one can notice unique identifiers of one own's personal

character that shape the experience to inform how you regard yourself. Utilizing Aurelius's retreat, we connect with these experiences and enjoy their value as relating to us.

These activities, such as inward meditations or recollections of the self, are echoed throughout Foucault's work collectively as actions allowing one to care for the self. The formula for self-care, in this case, can be concisely described as solitary experiences with the self. Foucault discusses the practical value of the relationship one takes towards themselves: "they enable one to commune with oneself, to recollect one's bygone days, to place the whole of one's past lives before one's eyes, to get to know oneself, through reading, through the precepts and examples that will provide inspiration, and, by contemplating a life reduced to its essentials, to rediscover the basic principles of a rational conduct" (Foucault, 1986, *The Care of The Self*, p 50-51). The result of these tasks is rediscovery and recollection of the self, allowing one to achieve a sufficient interpretation of self-knowledge in acts of care. The recommendations given by Aurelius and Epictetus, or the possible other attitudes taken towards ourselves, all function to encourage a discourse with ourselves that begin a relationship. The effect of doing so, as Foucault notes, is to better understand what essential aspects of our life are important to us so we can centralize them in acts of self-care.

Although Aurelius and Epictetus's approaches differ with the position one assumes towards themselves, the result is largely the same: one puts effort and time towards oneself to derive value for who you find yourself to be. This justifies experience of self-care, rather than making it feel forced. Epictetus and Aurelius simply represent a few of many perspectives that detail possible activities which allows one to become familiar with themselves. With so many options, how can one choose to go about internal practices of self-care? It takes trial and error

to learn how to work best with oneself so that unique peculiarities become familiar and valued- ultimately, it requires less reliance on guidance contributed by others such as Epictetus and Aurelius, and a better understanding of how to work with yourself. One person might respond to a stern, evaluative attitude towards the parts of themselves that are hard to face- while another might open up through a gentle noticing of one's unique character by spending time conversing in one's head or learning how you respond to books. Foucault cites the Greek word 'epimeleia' to describe how self-care becomes a labor requiring lengthy time and effort. He expands with saying "the term epimeleia designates not just a preoccupation but a whole set of occupations; it is epimeleia that is employed in speaking of the activities of the master of a household, the tasks of the ruler who looks after his subjects, the care that must be given to a sick or wounded patient, or the honors that must be paid to the gods or to the dead"(Foucault, 1986, *The Care of The Self*, p 50). Foucault shows how epimeleia, or the labor one endeavors to discover oneself, can take different forms and incorporate a variety of perspectives. The way one treats their household as a master or the respect one pays as a follower of a religious deity are different in all dimensions of stringency, time, or proximity. However, there is a certain level of importance allocated to both parties in all these examples- and the greater that one invests in these relationships, the more one gets to know the other side they are regarding. In the same way, the relationship to oneself in self-care can take a varied presence, but it is the result of respect and increased familiarity that should orient one through this task.

The second category of self-care is, at surface-level, in opposition to the first dimension just discussed. Many recommendations emphasize the social aspect involved in caring for oneself- communicating with and involving others in the experience allows you to extend and

understanding of who you are to a greater capacity. The benefits of mentorship is a clear example: when entering a new field of study or picking up a hobby, you are often encouraged to find an experienced mentor who can guide you in your desires or interests. A good mentor-mentee relationship is not transactional, but rather simply one where you have each other's best interests in mind. Beyond mentorship, the effective methods to go about this second category of practice are more disciplinary than the first. While there is not an outright wrong way of meditation or reconciliation with oneself, one can easily go about social relationships in a way that doesn't allow for self-care. Thus, the conversations we engage in, and even the people we decide to turn to, are of prime importance in a social act of caring for the self. However, this type of care is uniquely commendable by allowing for greater of an impact. The advice and new perspectives we receive from someone else could allow for much greater insight to who we are, especially with something that might not be easily noticeable about ourselves to ourselves. We can often find that another person- especially our close friends and family- might know certain aspects of ourselves better than we expect.

To include another individual when attempting to take care of oneself indicates respect for the other person involved. You have chosen a specific person to share something you value yourself. It also indicates respect for yourself in that you believe the subject of your own being deserves time and attention from someone other than you. These two attitudes implicit in a social act of care makes it clear how integral the choice of person is to the experience altogether. Galen "advises anyone who wishes to take proper care of himself to seek the aid of another; he does not, however, recommend a technician known for his competence and learning, but simply a man of good reputation, whose uncompromising frankness one can have

the opportunity of experiencing” (Foucault, 1986, *The Care of The Self*, p 53). Self-care for a social being is fulfilled when we indulge in an honest and open conversation with someone who has a genuine interest in the quality of our own being and the progress we intend to make. Galen’s wording is significant here- he first clarifies he does not gravitate towards someone that simply knows the most or is highly esteemed. While learning from someone with greater competence might be a positive or fulfilling experience, it is insignificant for self-care if the experience has no applicability to yourself. Galen then identifies an ideal person to contribute towards care of the self; he specifically praises the characteristic of uncompromising frankness. These conversations that involve concepts of being emerge as ones of intimacy and deep truths. If one truly wants to care for the self with someone else, steady frankness allows a genuine interpretation of how someone is viewed in social scenarios. What results is an uninfluenced interpretation of one's own character that can be worked on and nurtured in a relationship that prioritizes care.

The social conversations involved in self-care have as much flexibility and customization as solitary acts. With genuine, full involvement of your own being, and a recognition of that from the other party, one can take care of themselves in a variety of intended or unintended ways. Social activities with a connection to personal beliefs holds potential for self-care: having your best friend join you in an activity you enjoy, your partner learn a new language with you, or even simply talking about your day or discussing a topic of intimate meaning are all examples of acts that can qualify as care. Even without an explicit mention of self-care, you can nurture yourself as you encounter aspects of what you feel is important to your own development. The majority of behaviors described in the first category of care involve a rediscovery or recollection

of yourself- but this is not applicable only to acts involving just yourself. Moreover, involving another person broadens the scope of what you rediscover as relevant to yourself- you are not limited to what is immediately present but become open-minded to contributions from others that have the potential to become important aspects of your personality. In the process of establishing the fundamental aspects that make you who you are through successive acts of self-care, you are simultaneously influenced and further developed by the positive influences which surround you.

The final type of practice for self-care is somewhat unique compared to the prior dimensions in its involvement of a physical manifestation for care, rather than mental processes for internal or social connection. There is a significant connection between the body and mind prevalent in Ancient Grecian philosophy; with this, a problem of the mind would directly correspond to a noticeable (and treatable) problem with the physical body. Foucault describes that “the ills of the body and those of the soul can communicate with one another and exchange their distresses: where the bad habits of the soul can entail physical miseries, while the excesses of the body can manifest and maintain the failings of the soul” (Foucault, 1986, *The Care of The Self*, p 56). There is a check between the body and the soul to which one can monitor the status of the soul through the body, and vice versa. In relation to self-care, this interpretation indicates that a specialized attention to the body enables one to take care of themselves. Paying attention to how your body feels after you eat your favorite meal or getting a massage after a stressful day are all possible acts of care; uniquely, it focuses on something less abstract than a conceptual sense of self. By extending this to focus on the body, care modifies into something more tangible and measurable.

Illness is an area of focus within this type of practice: self-care is equated to a special attention to weaknesses or disturbances on your physical self. Thus, careful attention to the pains and ills of your body should give you an attuned understanding of your mental state, so that a good deal of health concerns is a good sign one needs to take better care of themselves. This interprets the connection between the body and self-care as reactive: it shows when care is needed or what situations warrants increased attention to physical presence. Contributing a Stoic perspective, Seneca categorizes most medical illnesses with this connection to a mental state- he distinguishes between “sick persons who are cured of all or part of their vices and those who are rid of their ills but not yet rid of their affections; and those who have recovered their health but are still frail because their predispositions have not been corrected” (Foucault, 1986, *The Care of The Self*, p 55). Health, in this case, is integrally connected to mental well-being as much as it is dependent on wellness of the body. This in turn can validate concerns for self-care: it is not simply for peace in one’s mind and confidence in our self-image that encourages one towards self-care, but it is necessitated for bodily well-being and health.

This connection between the body and mind does not only diagnose insufficient self-care but extends to guiding treatment as well. By dedicating time and energy towards meeting our physical pleasures, we care for a specific aspect of how you view yourself- namely, the aspect pertaining to your bodily presence. We can thus amend the definition of self-care to incorporate the needs of the body and physical awareness. In other words, we do not come to see ourselves as an isolated presence, but our self-image also recognizes the body we inhabit. Thus, the most effective instances of self-care attends to both. Seneca continues this schema between the body and mind; he opens the possibility to “apply the same type of theoretical

analysis to physical troubles and moral disorders alike, but also to use the same kind of approach in attending to them, treating them, and if possible, curing them” (Foucault, 1986, *The Care of The Self*, p 55). Common medical practice such as getting an annual check-up, receiving treatment for a disease, or even going to the local pharmacy for flu medicine, is a form of self-care and expands the possibilities of ways we can take care of ourselves for personal self-flourishing. Care for one’s body is often seen as a given today. For example, when one neglects or harms their own body, it is typically diagnosed as a mental illness. By interpreting the body and mind as interconnected, we can validate self-care as equally important as concern for one’s own body. At the same time, this connection demonstrates how personal flourishing is contingent on acknowledging the physical importance of the body in connecting your being to the world.

These three broad categories- internal processes, concern for the physical body, and activities involving others- encompass the majority of recommendations for an effective path to self-care. Most seem to derive from Ancient Greece- thus, their applicability to modern concerns of self-care naturally comes into question. It is also unclear how we are supposed to interpret three widely different types of activities for care of the self- is it necessary to go about all three equally at all times, or is there a unique balance that needs to be achieved?

Foucault leaves these questions largely unanswered; he cultivates these examples not to justify a specific way of living that resonates best with self-care, but rather to paint a picture of how notions of oneself arise from social influences and political pressures associated with each time period. However, their applicability can be understood as relevant to the definition of self-care as previously discussed. While they function as stand-alone concepts with each having

their own path to satisfy just needs for oneself, their realistic value comes by interpreting these three dimensions as interconnected and dependent on each other. These, in reality, are not meant to stand alone: can you sufficiently take care of yourself if you only rely on appealing to other people for their regard? Or, does extreme scrutiny towards the physical needs of your own body meet the needs for your holistic concept of being? There is a deficiency in these paths to self-care by themselves- you cannot fully develop a concept of the self with a focus only on the social circle that surrounds you, or an emphasis only on your corporal body. Furthermore, to ignore these influences and focus internally, only considering meditations or solitary readings, paints an incomplete picture of the self. These three practices are all important contributors to a holistic picture of self-care; while an equal split between the three might not be necessary, engaging with all three categories allows one to understand and nourish a sense of self that is realistic. Furthermore, the different practices of self-care demonstrate Foucault's beliefs on what is significant in contributing to self-image and what deserves further attention. The social surroundings, our physical bodies, and the mind which interacts are key constructs of self, and these recommendations establish such constructs as integral aspects of oneself that we are justified to pay attention to and take care of.

Foucault's work provides a wide range of recommendations on activities and methods to engage with self-care in relation to various priorities. However, each instance of self-care is unique and demonstrates a keen understanding of one's own character and what they desire. For example, we might find that a friend's activity for care- let's say, training to run a marathon- might work very well for them but prove to be the opposite of care for ourselves. These discrepancies indicate that something further than a recommended list of activities is needed

to guide self-care- simply fitting a practice into one of the three categories is not sufficient to predict their impact on us. While Foucault's range of philosophers provide us with a starting point to assess the breadth of possibility with self-care, it fails in building a sufficient test to make sure we can evaluate how to effectively take care of ourselves.

A potential solution in evaluating practices of self-care is to borrow from moral evaluations, typically enacted in situations involving other-regarding desires. In *The Intrinsic Worth of Persons*, Hampton cites Lawrence Kohlberg's moral maturity scales as a test used by philosopher Carol Gilligan to differentiate between two voices commonly associated with men or women facing an ethical dilemma. Lawrence Kohlberg is a psychologist that built upon Piaget's study of child development in handling moral challenges to develop successive scales, or stages, of early development for moral reasoning. There are six stages divided up into three levels: pre-conventional focuses on self-interest and immediate consequences, conventional reasoning proceeds from a discrete understanding of normative expectations, and post-conventional allows for abstract moral reasoning with a separation between societal expectations, the self, and moral values. In response to Kohlberg's famous moral dilemma in which a man steals a cancer drug for his wife from a pharmacist who was overcharging him, someone who is in the pre-conventional stage might argue this was right because the man doesn't want to lose his wife, while conventional thinkers might disagree because of laws and regulations which prohibit stealing. Alternatively, someone in the post-conventional stage will argue for an answer based on unique, personal ethical values which they believe to apply to universal well-being.

Hampton utilizes Kohlberg's stages in reference to two interviews conducted by Gilligan demonstrating the incongruencies between marks on this scale and the reality of moral maturity between men and women. One example was from an 11-year-old boy who prioritized responsibility to himself while still having others in consideration (he resolves all disputes by allocating three-fourths to himself and one-fourth to others). The other was from a girl the same age, who responded with a much greater concern for the well-being of others, often at the expense of her own needs. In reference to the stages of moral development, the boy's responses were considered more morally advanced than the girl's- although, as Hampton points out, neither of these two responses seem to be commendable. The boy does what he wants provided he doesn't hurt or harm anyone else, while the girl will never take care of what she justly deserves. Hampton points out how Kohlberg's stages are insufficient at taking account of diverse normative perspectives of the self, specifically referring to the traditionally feminine and masculine perspective on self-image, in judging moral maturity.

The two responses in Gilligan's interviews diverge with the attitude taken towards themselves- one is self-abnegating, with no importance or recognition for herself, while the other is borderline narcissistic with a dominating prioritization of his own needs. Thus, it follows that moral maturity derives from a healthy relationship towards oneself which can be initiated through self-care. The way in which children approach moral situations is shaped by the way one regards their presence in the world and respects themselves; a greater consideration taken towards the self might lead to greater moral maturity as indicated on Kohlberg's scales.

With this interpretation, perhaps the problem (and a potential amendment) to Kohlberg's scales is the focus on resolving our conflicts with another person rather than a moral

appraisal of how we view ourselves in relation to how we view the other person. When we hear a conflict such as Kohlberg's pharmacy dilemma, we commonly put ourselves in the position of the actors in this conflict, understanding ourselves as them in how we should justly proceed. More often than not, I believe we exercise empathy and genuinely weigh the risks and benefits for others by approaching their issues as if those were our own personal issues and challenges. Thus, our approach to moral dilemma has much to do with our attitude and regard for ourselves as it does with other people. Kohlberg's tests don't adequately account for this and hence cannot accurately evaluate how our image of ourselves effects personal discipline and other-regarding commitments, as demonstrated by the discrepancies between the two responses in Gilligan's interviews.

To address the discrepancies in Kohlberg's stages and the need for a test for effectiveness in undergoing self-care, I believe a promising step forward would be to amend such moral maturity scales to include our commitment to ourselves. To categorize whether responses to actions demonstrate an immature self-regard or a justly developed sense of how to respect yourself would allow one to evaluate the effectiveness in taking care of yourself while also assessing your interactions with other-regarding demands. Speaking in Kohlberg's language, a well-developed, advanced form of self-regard would be one in which we care for ourselves in a way that reflects our own personal morality and authentic values. This is directly reminiscent of the unique acts of self-care discussed earlier in that we define what counts as care in discovering who we are. It is undoubted that moral maturity is dependent on our relationships with others, but the relationship we have to ourselves is of prime consideration too. The formulation of such a test which indicates the maturity of the commitment to yourself

in context to your impact in society would effectively guide one towards skillfully engaging in self-care.

Chapter 4: The Excesses and Deficiencies Associated with Taking Care of Yourself

Our present discussion of self-care has elucidated what it is in essence, but also justified why it should matter for us and some sound ways to pursue it. Self-care, in its definition, incorporates an understanding of self-knowledge and a recognition of the ability to self-author who you bring yourself to identify with. There is a certain pleasure that results from this, which ties to the motivation for self-care in generating value directly from our understanding of ourselves. There are three common practices associated with self-care that allow us to reach said value- involving the mind, social connections, and the body. Realistically, care is undertaken by incorporating a holistic interpretation of oneself towards a practice of moral maturity, where your proficiency in undergoing self-care reflects onto how you view yourself, others, and the greater community.

To truly understand the reality of self-care at present, one must not think of it as an isolated concept attainable through a certain list of actions but rather a practice of life existing on a spectrum of excesses and deficiencies. I previously alluded to both self-abnegation and narcissism as conditions comparable to those who care for the self; the two interviews from Gilligan demonstrate instances of such attitudes. In general, the excess and deficiency of regard for the self leads one to neglect caring for it. This results in conditions where on one hand, you cannot escape from a dominating fixation on yourself, while on the other, you refuse to recognize the self and the importance it justly plays within one's life. By discussing the extremes and why certain people are driven towards or away from sufficient care, we can better understand the environment to which self-care can arise and elucidate the reasons which prevent one from engaging in it.

An excess of self-care can culminate in narcissism. Narcissism is otherwise described as self-obsession; in this case, a self-regarding outlook is not taken to be just an important consideration but rather the most important, subsuming all other interests. We have discussed the value of self-care for shaping perspective on our own being- but this is not a virtue in that the amount one engages in it is reciprocal to the value that it brings. Self-care morphs into something it is not (self-obsession) when the perspective towards oneself becomes narrowing rather than broadening; the effect of exploring the relationship to yourself as a narcissist doesn't lead to a greater capacity for engagement with the world. Opposingly, self-abnegation indicates a complete loss of self, or a rejection of the existence or importance of your own needs and desires. In this condition, we act in consideration of self-regarding vs. other-regarding desire where no weight is given to your own desires and all regard is for others. Self-care is seen as selfish or unjustified in the face of other concerns for the self-abnegating altruist- thus preventing a sufficient care for oneself to ever be realized.

An investigation of narcissism and self-abnegation serves to frame self-care as a mean. This elucidates a deeper understanding of self-care as not achieved through a checklist but an ongoing exercise of virtue requiring attention to specific contexts and open to evolution. This chapter discusses how self-care risks devolving into extremes, and why they ultimately harm, rather than nurture, the self. In situations where one does risk trending towards neglectful self-recognition, a justification is needed as to why one should not ignore the importance of self-care.

Narcissism's relation to self-care can be sufficiently demonstrated using the famous Greek myth of Narcissus. As the story goes, Narcissus was a man of extreme beauty who

entranced nearly everyone he met- yet he rarely, if ever, reciprocated. Narcissus was born under a prophecy that he would live until old age only if he never got to know himself. Well into his life, he meets a nymph, Echo, who had fallen in love with Narcissus. Echo was cursed to only speak the last few words of what she heard- quite literally taking the meaning of 'echo' to heart. Her attempts to impress Narcissus were fruitless since he immediately rejected her and sent her away. Narcissus's reaction to Echo resulted in deep sadness and a loss of her physical body, as she now only exists through her voice. Narcissus's story ends with his eventual demise- he finds the one person he falls in love with as his reflection in the water. He becomes entranced with this image and never strays from the water, studying the features of this newly discovered love. The key to this fixation is that Narcissus does not recognize who it is- split by the distortion of the lake's surface, there is a separation between Narcissus and the reflection functioning as two distinct identities. Once Narcissus realizes the true identity of the person and how he can never truly reunite with this love as an independent equal to himself, he drowns himself in the water of the lake.

A simple reading of Narcissus's story shows a cautionary tale of self-obsession, as well as a cool backstory on the words narcissism and echo. However, the intentional aspects of events and personification of the characters demonstrate how narcissism affects ourselves and those around us, and further how it contrasts self-care with a differently functioning perception of self.

The first part of the story centers around the prophecy Narcissus receives. His fate rests on never knowing himself- with self-knowledge as instrumental in characterizing self-care, this prophecy seems counterintuitive. In Narcissus's case, discovering more about himself was

harmful- even fatal- to the conditions of his existence. The prophecy states that self-knowledge for a narcissist functions differently: there is a dynamism between care and being-for-itself in that the discovery of who you are feeds into care which returns a self-authored construction of someone new. To satisfy the need for self-knowledge in acts of care, one needs to be able to see themselves as indefinite with the potential for more- and with the ability to reach that potential through care performed on oneself. Narcissus comes to know himself through a static reflection of his present image, which fails to provide anything more to him than an abstract concept to fixate on. Notice how immediate the “knowing oneself” that the prophecy alludes to actually occurs for Narcissus: it is an immediate transformation grasped simply from a reflection in the water. Self-knowledge is constricted to an unchanging physical characteristic which constitutes his entire existence- there is nothing more to Narcissus for him than the physical features of his face. This breaks the integral connection between self-knowledge and self-care when one cannot interpret themselves with the potential for change and growth.

The prophecy demonstrates how self-knowledge prevents self-care for a narcissist. Exercising self-care is challenging because the intimacy of who we are and are becoming is often not immediately apparent to us. The act builds value gradually by recognizing yourself as vulnerable to being re-written under your own discretion. Contrastingly, a narcissistic person will see themselves as final- for example, as ultimately perfect (positive fixation) or consistently falling short (negative fixation). To take the prophecy quite literally, to believe you have already exhausted all possibilities for yourself and decided your fate signifies an end to the future unfolding of one’s life. In other words, to know oneself as nothing more or less than the person immediately present is equated to accepting the meaningless of the future of one’s life. This

has the potential to lead to a lack of interest for the care or cultivation for the person you have the potential to become through time, as demonstrated in Narcissus's fulfilling of the prophecy.

The second part of the Greek myth describes Narcissus's relationship with Echo. It seems intentional that of all names, a woman named Echo is made to fall in love with Narcissus. This emphasizes the echoing characteristic of narcissistic acts; one goes about their interactions only to produce a reiterative impact onto others. A narcissist propagates through the world only by fixating on a certain state of self-existence which subsumes all other interests. Conversations with a narcissist could look like one where they are only interested in talking about themselves, or anything mentioned must be ultimately compared back to themselves. This condition results in a missed opportunity for social relations, which has been previously established as a potential source for self-care. It is intentional that Echo's devotion to Narcissus renders her ultimately bodiless- there is nothing fruitful that comes out of narcissism's use of an echo. It culminates in actions with no virtue or capacity for growth, serving to repeat a static fixation. Echo, in this case, is equated to a lack of change. One's interactions with the world only serve as a reminder of one's concept of self-existence where there is no value to the presence of others in a narcissist's life.

The final arc of the myth describes Narcissus's first (and last) encounter with himself as his eventual demise. We see how a narcissist ultimately does come to view themself- and how this proves to be deconstructive for self-worth. Narcissus meets himself as an unchanging reflection in the water. Importantly, Narcissus views his reflection as existing completely independent. Through self-care, we regard our self-image as an independent entity in some ways when forming a relationship with ourselves- but there is also dependency in this image

with how we decide to author who we become in the future. In Narcissus's case, this separation angers him; the difference between the ideal he sees and his existing self represents an unattainable medium of detachment. Narcissus becomes frustrated beyond repair when he realizes that the reflection of himself is not something separate from him that he can correspond with or express his love to. Perhaps Narcissus hoped that his reflection was someone else so that he didn't have to come to terms with his own being- or perhaps, Narcissus couldn't reconcile with his self-image as represented by the separated distortion of the water. In either scenario, there is a fundamental disruption with the relationship one builds to themselves that is made possible through self-care.

One thing to note is the conditions of his death- Narcissus drowns in the image of himself, both metaphorically and quite literally. We can model narcissism as a drowning-like condition in which self-image controls all aspects of your life. Contrastingly, self-care indicates a sufficient regard for oneself in balance with your other-regarding desires. Ultimately, narcissism is unsustainable as a harm to your mode of being. The death of Narcissus is not just a cautionary tale but a forewarning for excesses of self-regard, which can manifest as consuming for an individual.

Narcissus's story is a good reminder to pay careful attention to the extent and the nature of the self you focus on. It is clear that Narcissus has a deficiency of effective self-regard; the narcissist severs the connection between self-knowledge and self-care so they don't have a concept of the self that is allowed to be regarded or cared for in an appropriate way. Self-centeredness (to a point) is in itself not a bad thing, as some might interpret after this fable. In fact, it is important to remember that it is the value you find in this created image of yourself

which leads to effective self-care. Thus, to love and celebrate yourself is not harmful- but it is what you love, how you express it and how it affects the other commitments of one's life which distinguishes between narcissism and self-care. Narcissus fixated on the unchanging aspects of himself that occupied his attention. This constructed image of himself was so deterministic of his value but seen as integrally separate from him, leading to anger and hopelessness at the inability to discover and recognize that beauty in himself over time. The lack of self-relation forced him to desert any meaningful connections or experiences which could've manifested throughout his life- self-knowledge stood in the way of enjoying himself and sharing that with others. Accordingly, it is not only the extent to which one regards themselves that constitutes narcissism as an excess, but it is the manner to which it impedes all parts of your life and restricts future change that establishes it as a harm.

The opposing end of the spectrum of self-care is the neglecting, or abnegating self. This describes someone who continuously denies or ignores their own needs and desires. The reality of self-abnegation can manifest in different ways: one is a complete loss of interest, or investment, in anything in the world including yourself. A true nihilist is someone who is also self-denying: a loss of personal value found in the world means there is no underlying purpose orienting or even motivating your self-regarding and other-regarding actions. Another more commonly found attitude that inconspicuously necessitates self-abnegation can be termed altruistic, emblematic of the 'moral saint' as depicted in Susan Wolf's work. The altruist who goes out of their way to care for others has superfluous concern for their other-regarding desires- so much so that to even regard the self would be met with shame or regret. This form of self-abnegation is interesting because of its dependence on the balance of other-regarding

versus self-regarding desires. I aim to understand the self-denying aspect of certain altruistic lifestyles and the reasons for their attractiveness; then, I will demonstrate the harms associated with this behavior and how it culminates to a failure of self.

It is rare that altruism is mentioned in philosophy in a negative light- and I do not wish to support beliefs focusing only on selfish desires, or claim helping others is a futile act. What I do wish to emphasize is that helping others to the extent of neglecting care for oneself becomes incredibly harmful not only to the person partaking in these acts, but also to those that one wishes to help. Because of such an extreme denial of self, the motivations for such actions are unclear- is altruism driven by certain religious or societal pressures, or perhaps a deeper disdain with oneself that drives someone away from focusing on anything remotely self-related? The needs of the receiving side of an act are often not considered in a life of exceeding altruism, as this attitude is solely intended for self-denial. Thus, a question I aim to discuss is what truly presents in such a case of self-abnegating altruism- is there anything that distinguishes it from a simple other-regarding desire?

The basis of an altruistic lifestyle is prioritizing service towards others. Ayn Rand describes altruism as an action where “the beneficiary of an action is the only criterion for moral value- and so long as that beneficiary is anybody other than oneself” (Rand and Branden, 1964, *The Virtue of Selfishness/A New Concept of Egoism*, p 5). In other words, Rand points out that altruism only concerns who the intent of an action is directed towards. This opens possibilities for inauthentic acts of altruism in which the altruistic character arises from sources other than an understanding of self. In application, an act that appears to be directed towards others is justified based on its altruistic character, regardless of whether or not it is morally

praiseworthy in reality. Rand shows how altruism precludes the possibility for acts which have positive impact for yourself and another- nor does it allow justification for any act directed towards yourself. Regardless of its self-abnegating aspect, I don't doubt the ability for some altruistic behaviors to make a meaningful impact for others. However, this positive change should be possible with your own desires and interests reflected in the act; altruism can be carried out with integrity when we affirm our interest in helping someone that holds personal value for us.

Hampton describes self-damaging altruistic acts as indicative of "a poor sense of self-worth and a poor grip on what they owe to themselves in order to meet their objective needs, but also a dearth of plans, projects, and goals that are uniquely their own" (Hampton and Farnham, 2007, *The Intrinsic Worth of Persons Contractarianism in Moral and Political Philosophy*, p 54). While self-care encompasses both objective and subjective needs, self-denying behavior fails to recognize any need in yourself- yet claims to prioritize that for others. To fall short on our own objective needs of security, comfort, and happiness indicates a lack of understanding for human value- you are unable to care for what deserves care. Altruism, in this case, does not truly involve collective flourishing. This reiterates Rand's description of altruism as falling short to provide traffic rules that prevent an abnegating complex to develop. Hampton further shows what results for someone who believes the beneficiary of an action is principally decisive for moral judgment. The first half of her description denotes a belief in which you view yourself as lesser than any other- this negating self-regard is used to justify restriction for what you believe is the benefit of others. While this might be defended using a

justification for acts of altruism, it conversely indicates a dearth of self-worth and respect that have value in itself.

Hampton also discusses the unoriginality of self-abnegation in the second half of her description. With such an absent, or restrained self, one cannot rely on unique characteristics to motivate and guide one's life. In other words, there is no possibility that authentic integrity can be brought to actions. The lack of self forces one towards outside influences to guide morality or make decisions. Thus, the pressure to act altruistically reflects a belief of what one *should* be choosing to do, rather than firmly believing in their choice itself as a reflection of one's own knowledge and respect for self. This differentiates abnegation from self-care with the impact of self-knowledge on your perspective and the susceptibility to outside influence that stands contrary to your own. Self-care allows you to balance the influence of one's own personality with the social experiences that are impactful, while self-abnegation depends on such outside influences due to a lack of internal guidance.

Oftentimes, such altruistic philosophies are necessitated by a set of actions towards oneself which motivate a self-abnegating mindset. Foucault describes such an environment of "a mistrust of pleasures, an emphasis on the consequences of their abuse for the body and the soul... a whole attitude of severity" (Foucault, 1986, *The Care of The Self*, p 39). The coupling of helping others and sacrificing ourselves explains why altruism and self-abnegation often appear indistinguishable from each other. For example, while helping someone carry their groceries to the car is commendable, the self-abnegating altruist finds more commendable of an example in helping carry groceries at the expense of missing the last bus back home- although both actions have the same effect, because the second scenario necessitates a denial of your self-interest it

is intrinsically more praiseworthy. Positive benefit towards others is undermined by the focus on restricting self-desire. In fact, the attitude of severity is taken to be necessary and dependent to serve others most effectively. Some might even go as far as to say that our human desires are made to be mistrusted. The need to take care of the body for health or confidence and self-love, or the desire to travel and see the world and experience new books or movies, are measured against the needs of others. Desiring to attend to our just desires or recognize the validity of individuality is painted to be selfish as it detracts from our ability to bring more good into the world. Thus, a self-abnegating altruist can be identified from a lifestyle that doesn't exhibit characteristics or practices which authentically represent the self.

As noted above, there are opportunities for personal development that seem missing in a life of fulfilling the needs of others. Susan Wolf describes the hesitations that prevent her from being quick to support or praise the moral saint: “[I]f the moral saint is devoting all his time to feeding the hungry or healing the sick or raising money for Oxfam, then necessarily he is not reading Victorian novels, playing the oboe, or improving his backhand. Although no one of the interests or tastes in the category containing these latter activities could be claimed to be a necessary element in a life well lived, a life in which none of these possible aspects of character are developed may seem to be a life strangely barren”(Wolf, 1982, *Moral Saints*, p 421). The value of acts we enjoy or which challenge ourselves seem normatively weak against the value of acts which provide for people in need. In fact, there is no established argument in today's literature advocating for the latter activities over the former. However, as Wolf points out, there is something essential missing from our life when we don't prioritize 'selfish' needs. Our normative ideal does not include someone who has a fake personality or no confidence in their

own abilities- yet those are all aspects that result from a lack of direct work with oneself. Individuality, such as the potential for one to be an amazing baker or have a funny personality, are lost when one succumbs under the pressure to be increasingly more altruistic; this individuality is what guides decision-making and moral reasoning, and further advances it beyond its current stage. Thus, despite the amount of good you do for others, existence for oneself and in interactions with others is deficient without a consideration of yourself.

Analyzing the reality of altruism reveals how well-developed the encouragement for self-abnegation is, even without a logical justification between abnegation and care for others. This has prompted me to consider what influences us towards acting in such a way. In other words, I aim to investigate why one would feel the need to provide for others at such an expense of taking care of oneself. This is especially of interest when considering the numerous medical studies citing the biological predisposition for selfish acts (with altruism being noted for close family members or friends, but rarely for strangers or those seen as different). There seems to be another reason beyond personal interest which drives one towards self-abnegating altruism. Nietzsche investigates selflessness as a perspective which doesn't seem to be what it immediately presents as, citing "the value of the "unegoistic", the instinct of pity, self-abnegation, self-sacrifice, which Schopenhauer had gilded, deified, and projected into a beyond for so long that at last they became for him "value-in-itself"... But it was against precisely these instincts that there spoke from me an ever more fundamental mistrust" (Reginster, 2000, *Nietzsche on Selflessness and the Value of Altruism*, p 185). To Nietzsche's point, when we look at sacrifice for some distant other group or being, there is no justification we can find for the value in doing such an action at expense of harming ourselves. Some might claim that the value

of supererogatory, altruistic acts are done from a place of respect for the value of human life and desire to help others, regardless of personal relation- but this becomes contradictory with the lack of respect offered on part of one's own body. Thus, the overriding value for such self-abnegating acts cannot be articulated against the inconsistencies with one's self-regard- leaving us to question, alongside Nietzsche, the reason as to why people begin to devote themselves to such acts in the first place.

We can turn to Foucault's research for clarity on questions of motivation in voluntary self-abnegation. Seneca advocates for such self-abnegating behavior as proof of one's self-control. Allowing only the minimum for oneself indicates an extraordinary sense of discipline, a way to disengage with the superfluous necessities and shallow desires we are tempted with. Seneca praises such a withdrawal and believes "We shall be rich with all the more comfort, if we once learn how far poverty is from being a burden" (Foucault, 1986, *The Care of The Self*, p 60). In a society driven towards excess, this encourages an appreciation of less; a denial of self and a sacrificing mindset allows us to practice against the vice of greed.

Indeed, there is some element of control exercised when one denies the self and learns to temper excess needs. It is also inarguable how extreme selfishness and gluttony proves to be a vice, negatively impacting yourself and those around you by detracting our ability to participate in matters outside of our own benefit. However, this reasoning wrongly claims that the only way to disengage with such vices is done at the expense of understanding and taking care of oneself. If one discovers and authentically identifies with values such as discipline and simplicity, those, first, must be discovered with an authentic understanding of one's own character. Authentic, in this case, refers to doing yourself due diligence by respecting your

personal interests rather than what externally appears to be most commendable. Self-control does not mean one must restrict the self unjustly, but you instead learn what you prioritize or who you want to live your life as. After discovering more about who you are, you can then labor to bring more of that authentic sentiment towards your actions instead of restricting yourself from consideration. While Seneca's intentions might be more aligned with what I propose, I believe there are common misinterpretations of how we go about avoiding excess- one is driven to the extreme of assuming one possesses a consistent drive towards greed which must be strictly restricted. However, in reality, one avoids being tempted by greed by understanding what we truly want and the extent to which we desire it. In that sense, self-reflection requires no change of discipline or sacrifice, but rather thoughtful understanding of oneself and respect for what presents in self-discovery.

Another thing to consider is the influences which sustain such a motivation towards discipline and restriction. While discipline is a just virtue in itself, it seems oddly emphasized amongst the host of other values which can bring equal, if not more, self-flourishing. There is a noticeable universality in the pressure to fight against personal desire for proof of discipline that cannot be explained by human nature alone. Indeed, it seems like such an attitude has been indoctrinated into us from a young age- for example, learning how to stay humble with others even though one believes otherwise. Returning to Nietzsche, we see that there is a certain tone designed on Schopenhauer's projections- specifically, Nietzsche uses the words 'gilded' and 'deified'. I propose a serious external influence which explains such a common motivation towards self-abnegation, especially in connection with altruistic acts. In large social organizations with cogent influence in values and judgments, we can often find a recurrent

encouragement of self-abstinence, or self-denial. Nietzsche's specific locution points us towards institutions such as the church as an instigator of such values.

Due to certain influences, modernity has internalized that the ideal version of ourselves would be achieved through ideals of frugality, abstinence, and submission- devoting everything to a practice of supporting others outside of oneself. Tracing the origins of these traits identifies certain groups or demographics targeted into such doctrines: we see in scriptures and theological traditions the practice to resist temptation and deny the self in favor of supporting the religious community. To a greater extreme this disciplinary value is imposed onto minorities, especially previously enslaved groups, for the benefit of those in power. To call back Gilligan's interviews with different types of moral maturity, some might argue that this characteristic is intrinsically gendered, with femininity typically associated with obedience and passivity in favor of supporting the (typically) maculating power. Charlotte Bronte describes such an impulse in *Shirley*: "certain sets of human beings are very apt to maintain that other sets should give up their lives to them and their service, and then they requite them by praise; they call them devoted and virtuous... Does virtue lie in abnegation of the self?" (Hampton and Farnham, 2007, *The Intrinsic Worth of Persons Contractarianism in Moral and Political Philosophy*, p 6). In the context of Shirley's work, these conversations which demand the importance of abnegation are often initiated and to a greater extent with people in social positions associated with greater service or support towards others. These roles are maintained by emphasizing the duty of serving others before the self; society's differential treatment on the basis of sex, race, or wealth reflect the belief that stereotypes determine who has a right to self-care.

A simple look into religious dialogue, specifically Christianity as an example, demonstrates the diction surrounding self-abnegation. Frankfurt notes that “the suggestion that a person may be liberated through acceding to a power which is not subject to his immediate voluntary control is the most persistent themes of our moral and religious tradition” (Frankfurt, 1998, *The Importance of What We Care About*, p 266). In other words, the need to be concerned with an idea or person outside of oneself is a testament to religious tradition—precisely because this is behavior defines who you are. A likely result from this is to devote all concept of being towards service of others; religious ideology advocates for devotion to an external being that overpowers your own ability to discover who you are and author who you decide to become. Ultimately, the argument engenders the extreme opposite of self-care through demonstrating the worthlessness of attending to the self.

To develop the example, we can identify certain aspects of Christianity that implicitly (or explicitly, depending on perspective) advocate for building a morality adverse to self-care. The two balancing aspects of virtue and sin in Christianity are equivocated to the balance of other-regarding versus self-regarding actions. Foucault maps out this connection in recognizing that “Christianity requires another form of truth obligation different from faith. Each person has the duty to know who he is, that is, to try to know what is happening inside him, to acknowledge faults, to recognize temptations, to locate desires, and everyone is obliged to disclose these things either to God or to others in the community and hence to bear public or private witness against oneself” (Foucault, 1988, *Technologies of the Self, A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, p 40). Self-care and self-abnegation exist on a spectrum; Foucault demonstrates their connection as an effect of religiously motivated self-regulation being dependent on self-knowledge. The

key difference in this interpretation comparing care and abnegation is the intentions in such effort for self-knowledge. Christianity proposes that knowing oneself is to be done for making yourself discernible in the eyes of others- for a cycle of judgment, and later retribution. Thus, nurturing oneself, or taking oneself to be made noticed and then vulnerable for positive change, is not located within one's desires (which would occur in a process of self-care) but rather with the desires of others. Disclosure initiates the transfer of ownership over your own volition, and Christianity capitalizes on such disclosure to direct one away from personal interest and towards the benefit of the greater organization.

The definition of virtuous living and requital of sin can also be interpreted as dependent on self-denial. Foucault re-establishes the connection between religion and self-abnegation when he utilizes Christianity to identify social technologies which impact self-perspective. He points out that "the acts by which he [the penitent] punishes himself are indistinguishable from the acts by which he reveals himself. Self-punishment and the voluntary expression of the self are bound together" (Foucault, 1988, *Technologies of the Self, A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, p 42). Along the same lines, "Penitence of sin doesn't have as its target the establishing of an identity but serves instead to mark the refusal of the self, the breaking away from self: *Ego non sum, ego*" (Foucault, 1988, *Technologies of the Self, A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, p 43). Because retribution of sin is primarily focused on revealing the self for others to judge, it follows that the sin itself is located within you while savior from sin must be external- an integral wrong is located within your character, and the solution for such a wrong must be taught to you. The mechanism for a greater being determining self-worth is revealed here: only if we choose to seek external guidance and apply it as such to our lives are we 'saved' from

internal wrongdoings. This encourages a break away from the self whose existence is regarded as a disability within a greater community. The religious attitude of 'fixing' our wrongs within ourselves and doing so only for the betterment of others dislocates self-care as a just act.

With such a well-established organization advocating obedience in a practice of self-abnegation and deficiency of positive self-regard, it is hard to reach an uninfluenced attitude towards a life defined by supererogatory acts. Our role models to the likes of Mother Theresa or Ghandi are exemplary standards of self-denial for the greater good of others; it is worth asking, in light of this discussion on self-care, whether these are people we strive to be due to normative education and social conditioning, or whether the ease as to which they deny the self actually make us uneasy or at awe? Susan Wolf considers a similar question, and specifically notes the discomfort to which we view moral saints and their devotion to others- whether its due to their unattainability or maybe a fundamental discrepancy between their actions and our own desires.

In talking about such actions that constitute the life of a moral saint, Wolf uses the description of a "life strangely barren": it is this description I wish to call back when considering how to approach a strong motivation towards altruistic self-denial. There is too much potential value of personal growth and self-flourishing at risk when we focus on denying individuality and following someone else's beliefs, even if it might stand contrary to your own. Self-care, as previously discussed, develops the ability for one to discover and engage with oneself in a way that allows us carve out a valuable life under our own discretion. This value defies such a morality which only accounts for our relationships with others- Christianity does not address the importance of a relationship with ourselves for the sake of just ourselves. These schools of

influence need to be examined and re-thought in application to self-care, so that our own being can amass enough importance even in a doctrine that defines value based on a higher being.

This criticism of self-abnegation is not meant to imply that altruism and concern for others stands in direct opposition to self-regard, or that anyone who follows Christianity is necessarily self-abnegating. I merely mean to point out prevailing moral sources to determine how the belief developed that self-denial became necessary to act altruistically. Contrastingly, I believe that authentically engaging in acts of altruism, whether it is done within a religious organization or beyond, first requires us to understand and take care of ourselves. Through self-knowledge and self-care, we can begin to realize such personal significance to altruism or interest in others and in the world. Only then will we have enough confidence to go about advocating for these virtues in a way that's intrinsically authentic rather than due to passive acceptance in ideology. Nietzsche believed that "even if it is possible for human beings to act selflessly, it might well remain the case that the value of their benevolence, their love, or their compassion does not derive from their selflessness" (Reginster, 2000, *Nietzsche on Selflessness and the Value of Altruism*, p 185). Virtues- love for friends or compassion for those suffering around the world- does and should not originate from a denial of ourselves as present and meaningful forces. Instead, realizing those personal virtues can be made possible only through the recognition of them within oneself, and authentically practicing those virtues needs to be done to oneself as one does to others. As mentioned before, Archbishop Joseph Butler says that the "goodness of an action depends on whether it is in accordance with our own nature and the nature of the case" (Badhwar, 1993, *Altruism versus Self-Interest: Sometimes a False Dichotomy*, p 92). Butler justifies self-care for virtuous action: in order to do good in the world,

one must know, understand, and take care of the person initiating such an action. Thus, while it is for ourselves that we engage in self-care, the effects are ultimately realized far beyond us when our personal values impact the community around us. Self-care is a practice that has value proceeding both directly and indirectly from it; as such, the threats to self-care must be recognized and made vulnerable to ensure that everyone, across social spaces and diverse ideologies, believes in the moral permission to take care of themselves.

Conclusion

This study aims to answer four fundamental questions on self-care: its definition, the proceeding value, how to go about it most effectively, and what threatens or undermines it. In doing so, I hope to contribute to a justification for self-care in academic spaces. The demonstration of unmet need for self-care clarifies potential steps forward to modify philosophical theories and psychological evaluations of self in order to reflect individualized self-discovery and enhanced self-worth.

The first concern for this work focuses on a basic understanding of what self-care is. Specifically, I define general principles that would qualify an act as self-care while also articulate what about those acts inherently make one feel cared for. The first condition for self-care concerns self-knowledge; to successfully care for oneself indicates you have reflected on your existence and consider that existence important enough to act upon. This condition highlights the importance of self-care in facilitating discovery into who you are- or, rather, confirming the aspects of your own being you feel attached to or distant from. This ensures that self-care is personal to your own character rather than normatively influenced. The second condition involves ownership over oneself through acts of care. Self-care is unique among other-regarding acts in that the intent in which we enter the act is reflected in the outcome. In other words, we author ourselves by deciding how to proceed with care. Finally, the act of care brings positive feelings of comfort in one's own skin. This condition predates the first two in that happiness in oneself is found through the process of understanding oneself and then utilizing discretion to define oneself through care. This culminates in a self-regarding outlook which reflects one's own desires and a self-sustaining pleasure due to this outlook.

The value for self-care can be derived from this general definition, which refers to my second interest of why we go about self-care. Self-care allows us to personally identify with values we discover to be important for us through application. More notably, however, is the way self-care allows you to create value seen within yourself so that self-care becomes valuable in itself. In other words, self-worth justifies care because you see yourself as something worthy of it. The resulting acts of care, in turn, generates a greater sense of self-worth. This culminates in a mechanism in which you generate value as a function of yourself which motivates self-care; this can be noticed with the permission one gives themselves to cultivate characteristics of personal significance and the integrity one brings to moral considerations. We participate in self-care because it exposes us to the possibility for a life reflecting personal meaning and a quality of acting with integrity, all possible because of the initial discovery of seeing ourselves with value.

With established value and an understanding of what it is, a remaining concern surrounding self-care is how to best go about it. Although most have either practiced self-care or heard examples of activities previously, this present work begets the need for a more general practice of self-care that reflects its established conditions and values. I first assessed recommendations in the literature to go about self-care. The majority could be summarized by three major categories of practice which involve inward reflections, social practices, and bodily well-being. These consist of diverse elements that can be woven into a unique practice of self reflecting personalized interests, and I further explore the possibility of using moral maturity scales to evaluate an individualized practice of self-care.

My last question addresses the spectrum of self-care beyond the mean: what can we make of situations in which self-care is neglected or misunderstood, and how does this threaten the value we previously justified? I discuss narcissism in comparison to self-care to illustrate its detached relationship between self-knowledge and activity; a narcissist will fixate on their understanding of self, which prevents potential growth or a constructive feeling in oneself to come to fruition. I use the Greek myth of Narcissus to demonstrate the inability of narcissists to contribute to social scenarios or conceive of themselves as anything more than an unchanging reflection through time. Alternatively, self-abnegation represents the deficiency of self- specifically in which the desires and interests of the self are taken to be less important than other actors. This neglect often leads to an attitude of severity and loss of individuality- a life, simply, not well-lived. I discuss what draws someone to such a consequence taken on themselves and consider potential influences which motivate self-denial.

This research demonstrates how a practice of the self stands not just as something important for mental health, but as a fundamental practice of life. Self-care shapes how we bring ourselves to the world: this is noticed not only in the way we build a relationship to ourselves, but the way in which we decide to interact with abstract materials (literature, social media) or the manner to which we go about social connections. Some questions remain regarding the inequities in ability for self-care and the logical uncertainties for initiating self-care. Specifically, it seems as if self-image is predetermined due to society's perception- is there a way, potentially, for acts of self-care to annul negative stereotypes associated with certain individuals, or do these stereotypes overrule the ability for self-authorship through self-care? Moreover, what is the initiating factor that brings one to care, and does this preclude certain

individuals (perhaps, such as those mentioned with negative societal stereotypes) in realizing the value of such an act? As phenomenology, psychology, ethics, and other schools of thought have been called upon recently to be re-thought in regard to existence or development across diverse identities, a further study of self-care would have to be refined in articulating the difficulties in its generalizability as well.

Ultimately, self-care demonstrates a lifestyle in which our perspective reflects self-worth and the authentic abilities we believe ourselves to have. We can then evaluate the way in which we regard ourselves and others as a direct measure of how mature we go about care. It is virtuous for us to pay attention to the needs of the self and nourish possibilities to grow, as we have the right to understand and take care of ourselves to become better people, for ourselves.

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