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Abigail Johanna Sanders 4/8/2014

A Good Death: Human Mortality and the Care of the Self

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Abstract

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In modern society, death is hidden away and shunned by the living, even though it is an inevitable element of life. However, philosophers throughout history have argued that accepting death is necessary to develop a sense of self, to make meaning during life, and to die a good death. This paper will examine the different arguments for the care of the self drawn from the ancient Greeks, Michel de Montaigne, Martin Heidegger, and Michel Foucault. From this synthesis, an account of how individuals may live a meaningful life in order to die a good death in modern society will be developed. In this account, if individuals live fully, without regret, and are secure in a sense of self—in other words, if they embrace a philosophy of life—death will no longer be an event that cuts life short. Rather, death will be the final act that completes the individual's existence. Adopting this view of death would drastically change modern society's approach to death and dying by shaping our fundamental attitude towards death itself. In turn, this could help modern individuals to live more meaningful lives with the notion that death is not necessarily a negative event. By embracing a philosophy of life, it is posited that the individual will no longer see death as an event that cuts life short. Instead, death can be seen as a final act that completes the individual's existence. It is only after we have made this change to our culture that we will be able to view death as just another part of life, which, in turn, will drastically change our approach to death and dying.

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Introduction

Death is the most universal human experience, yet in our modern society, we live in denial that this is an inevitable part of life. Death and dying have been pushed out of our common experience and sequestered to places like hospitals so that we need not think about it. This does not serve us well, if one looks at the history of philosophical analysis on living and death, and should be remedied if society is to promote the development of a meaningful sense of self in each individual. It will be argued here that if we take a more accepting approach to confronting death and dying, where death is an accepted part of life, we will be able to live in a way that promotes meaning-making, and therefore fashion a life that is worth living. In turn, living well helps the individual to die a good death. If such steps towards accepting death are not taken, quantity of days instead of quality of life will continue to be the highest value, and death will continue to be an event that merely ends life instead of bringing it to a finish and completion. This fate is not inevitable though, as philosophy will show, and there are many different tools available that can be used in order to reverse this denial of death and live a meaningful life.

The history of philosophy, starting with the ancient Greeks and continuing on to Montaigne, Heidegger, and Foucault, can illustrate how this attitude towards death has been promoted throughout the ages. It can be seen through these texts that in order to live a meaningful life, one must accept death, and will therefore be able to die a good death. The circular nature of this approach suggests that each of the elements are interdependent, a notion that raises the question of how one should approach the act of living life in order to both develop meaning and die a good death. As will be shown in this thesis, if one observes the development of philosophical thought on this subject, there

are many similarities that reappear in the history of philosophy. These theories all posit that one must accept death in order to live well, yet each went on to describe their own unique tools for living well.

By delving into this branch of philosophy, one can explore the underlying attitudes toward mortality. In a seemingly contradictory way, mortality is what provides the impetus to develop meaning through the tools provided by each of these philosophies. According to this outlook, it is not just desire for life itself that promotes meaning, but it is also the finitude of death that pushes us on. The ancient Greeks proposed that one must follow a "telos," or valuable and truth-seeking goal in life, in order to live in a way that is true and just. This is seen in the texts of *Phaedo*, *Alcestis*, and explored in *The Greek Way of Death*. Through an analysis of their philosophical teachings, entertainment, and historical background, the reader will be guided through an account of the ancient Greek life that displays their desire to follow the "True" in order to live well and develop a sense of self during life that is worthy of recognition in death. The historical analysis will show that funeral practices were of vital importance to the ancient Greeks because they comforted both the dying and the mourning survivors as well. This was a culture that, on the whole, accepted death as an everyday part of existence, and it therefore held no power to undermine and destroy their existence because it was seen as part of a larger whole. Death was not something other than life that simply destroyed their existence. By adapting to this outlook on death, the ancient Greeks were able to die deaths that were considered to be good in their culture because they incorporated the individual's beliefs and actions held during life.

Continuing on in the history of philosophy, Montaigne poses the idea of a "voluptuous" life, one that embraces the pleasures of living while always turning inwards in order to confront the true self and prepare for death. The essay by Montaigne "To Philosophize is to Learn How to Die," and *Death and the Plowman* by Johannes von Saaz provide primary sources that speak to the attitude towards death that individuals held at the time. Montaigne takes an approach to death that is akin to the Stoics. His general philosophy is one of embracing the fullness of life while still remembering death, and using one to heighten the experience of the other. Such an intermingling, Montaigne proposes, will allow the individual to experience life to its fullest while also preparing for death. This complementary aspect of a meaningful life and good death is essential to this philosophy because, as has been stated previously, one cannot be found without the other.

Next comes an argument made by Martin Heidegger, as proposed in the text *Being and Time*. Heidegger states that one should always live "towards" death, and therefore focus on the quality of life instead of the quantity of days granted. By doing this, "Dasein" may ease its anxiety over the unknown aspect of death, and therefore live a life that is free. It is only with this freedom that the self may be truly discovered and developed. By experiencing the true inner self, one may then develop meaning and the quality in life that Heidegger emphasizes. Without meaning and a developed self, Dasein falls into the everydayness of the "They." These terms are used in order to define a Dasein that is free from death because it can exhibit care of the self and for the other. Without freedom, Dasein is just another part of a disengaged society, as is described in the "They." By breaking free of the anxious bondage that the idea of death inspires in us,

the individual is able to have a meaningful existence that is fully engaged with the world around.

Lastly in this analysis, Foucault provides another concept of how to live life, one that emphasizes creating a "work of art" through the actions taken while living. These theories are found in *Technologies of the Self*, *The History of Sexuality*, and *The Foucault Reader*, an interview conducted with Foucault himself. This concept of molding, shaping, and recreating life is important as a tool for the reader as it shows the malleability of this philosophy. Life is in a state of perpetual change, and the individual must adjust accordingly. Even if Foucault emphasis this new approach to viewing life, the essential acceptance of death is still an element.

Each of these philosophies, regardless of when they were developed, have the underlying theme of accepting death in order to utilize the tools that each considers necessary for living a good life. The variability in these arguments, and the interest for the modern reader, lies in the different tools that the philosophers propose. Even if there is a difference in the specific ways in which these philosophers propose one should live, the reason why one should use these tools is similar. Generally, these are theories that suggest that being engaged and successful in meaningful activities that incorporate death as part of the meaning will lead to a more fulfilling life that finds its completion in death. Death may destroy such a life, but it cannot destroy its meaning. This thesis proposes that if one is able to accept death and no longer fear mortality, many tools for living well will become readily available. By utilizing these techniques for making a meaning both for life and for dying a good death, the individual will be able to engage in a meaningful life, which is free from the overwhelming fear of death.

Chapter 1: The Ancient Greeks

Three pivotal aspects of a culture are the philosophy, literary works, and practices common to that society. Each of these building blocks is essential because they provide the outsider with a different perspective, through the use of different media, on the historical culture itself. Taken together, these creations establish the concepts pertinent to the culture, which were widely accepted at the time. Several texts will be presented as a way to begin scrutinizing the underpinning upon which our practices surrounding death and dying have been built: the philosophy presented in Plato's *Phaedo*, the tragedy of *Alcestis* by Euripides, and the cultural analysis by Robert Garland in his work *The Greek Way of Death* will all aid in the endeavor to understand the ancient Greeks. By undertaking such an analysis, we will not only be able to see the origin of our own practices, but the way in which the ancient Greeks answered the question of how to live in order to die well. These techniques offer another way in which to approach death by emphasizing meaning-making during life, which is something we must all endeavor to do. As shall soon become apparent, each of these texts and cultural aspects will show the reader that the underlying theme of living a full life in order to die a good death is the development of meaning. Through the acceptance of death, one may approach finitude with the habits established in life, and therefore create a complete Being in death. There is nothing to fear when death is seen in this way, only a sense of meaning.

1.) Greek Philosophy

The *Phaedo*, written by Plato, presents the reader with the Greek philosopher Socrates when he must immanently confront death, a time when many would assume that

he would be filled with sorrow, trepidation, and regret. Yet, instead of unfolding a morbid analysis of death that convolutes what he must face into a terrifying fate, Socrates is comforting those around him in this retelling of the dialogue that took place. Socrates is in fact ready to embrace death, because to put off death would be "to make [himself] a laughingstock in [his] own eyes" (Plato, *Phaedo* 100). If we take it as such, the learned of the ancient Greeks were being taught by texts such as this and *The Crito* to approach death without fear. As we shall see later in this discussion, this arises out of the contrary nature of life and death. This argument of contraries unites life with death, completing each state of being by connecting it with the other. Verbose Socrates does not leave the reader wanting in his analysis of death. As we shall see, he lets his frightened followers lead the discussion as is common in the Socratic style of teaching through dialogue. In doing so, the questions common to mankind when approaching the concept of death and act of dying come to the surface, and Socrates responds accordingly.

The teller of this story, Phaedo, who is speaking to Echecrates, is struck by how Socrates approached his death "fearlessly and nobly… [and] for these reasons no pity at all overcame [him]" (Plato, *Phaedo* 28). By example, Socrates is showing his disciples how to die a good death because he is not afraid of what awaits him. The reader learns that "'those who philosophize are genuinely ripe for death,'" and therefore Socrates has nothing to fear as he has spent his time wisely by challenging his interlocutors (Plato, *Phaedo* 35). This is so because philosophy exposes the individual to death, through their analyses of life and death, which allows death to be experienced as a secondhand observer. With this initial experience, the individual has the time to process what is to come. Taking a step back and detaching oneself from death can put finitude into a new

perspective within philosophical thought. The good death may now be reached because philosophy allows the individual to accept death in this way, making him or her ripe for death.

Socrates has achieved this goal and fulfilled his telos, or overall aim in life that is conducive to authenticity and truth, by following this habit of philosophy. In order to live a good life, and therefore die a good death, one must have a direction for the self that one is developing through life. Without such a goal to literally live for, the individual will be left in meaninglessness. This state of merely existing is not compatible with dying a good death because the soul is not prepared for death if it does not have meaning. Meaning is what shapes our development and gives us a sense of self. Even in his final hours before death, as we read, Socrates was debating his philosophy of death and dying. Socrates lives his final hours to their fullest by continuing to develop this meaning he found in life, and this is key to achieving a good death. In this way, philosophy is what teaches us to develop meaning in our lives by allowing us to overcome the fear of death. Such an expansion of being, as seen with this acceptance, is able to initiate meaning-making because it allows for freedom. The individual is no longer put under the pressure of having a particular number of days. Instead, the urgency to live well comes from a state of well being established in this autonomy. Socrates is giving the audience a clear incentive to develop a telos for the meaning-making of their lives. The individual must develop a habit of existence, which is there to act as a guide in that it aims for this overarching “Truth” that he is describing. Again, such a goal for living is essential to the good death because this is what raises the soul out of the state of merely being in the world. A directionless soul will shy away from the thought of death because a clear sense

of self and development has not been established during life. It is this development of self that allows the soul to find peace in death because its work in life has been completed.

This sense of completion would not be possible without death; the fact that we are finite is what allows us to cultivate and then complete a self. Death has been overcome in order to develop meaning, but, in turn, death must still be present in order for the habits of life to be brought to completion as one Being. Like any manmade work, there must be a clear beginning and end to the self that we create. Without an end, the soul would not be able to leave the body in peace because the work would never be complete.

Not only does philosophy give the soul direction and completion, for we all practice our own philosophy whether we are conscious of it or not, but it also helps to free the soul. This is the essential first step to overcoming the fear of death in order to live a good life. Unlike religion, philosophy aims to detach the soul from the worldly in order to confront death, not for acceptance into the afterlife. While philosophy may acknowledge that such life after death may exist, that is not the purpose of this practice. Philosophy itself works to make one ready for death because "'philosophy, when it takes over their soul in this condition, gently persuades her and attempts to release her'" (Plato *Phaedo* 59). In this way, Socrates argues that when the soul is not entrapped within the body, there is nothing to fear in death because the soul is immortal. The corpse is nothing but a case for the soul, and it is only this material body that must eventually be put to death. Such thoughts can be supported through the use of logic and can also be comforting to the philosopher, as Socrates will go on to prove, if one can accept these assumptions whole-heartedly. By using his gift of reason, Socrates has overcome the mortal fear of death by "'releasing the soul from communion with the body as much as

possible'" (Plato, *Phaedo* 36). He believes this to be true because death itself is "the freeing of the soul from the body," and so, by philosophizing and disconnecting from the body, one is almost practicing death through this release. One must turn away from the temporal, because a man of philosophy "stands apart from [the body] and keeps turned toward the soul as much as he can" in order to prepare for death (Plato, *Phaedo* 35). One should be more concerned with "'the True'" and "'what *is*'" instead of what is bodily and therefore temporary (Plato, *Phaedo* 38, 36).

To practice philosophy is to practice dying, as we are beginning to learn. We find in Phaedo that "thinking and philosophizing are a metaphorical death because they assume a separation from the corruptible nature of the body and an exit from time into the intemporality of the idea" (Dastur 21). The body with "'each pleasure and pain… nails the soul to the body, pins her and makes her body-like, so she opines to be true exactly whatever things the body says are true'" (Plato, *Phaedo* 60). In this way, the body leads the soul away from its search for the true, unless one can engage in philosophy to set it free of these worldly spikes of sensation. These feelings of attachment to the sensory, paradoxically, cloud perception itself. Even if the event being experienced has nothing to do with the fear of death, our preconception of the world as mortals will morph it into such an occurrence.

An example of this is given in the example of how swans sing when they feel that death is upon them. Humans are so attached to their physical nature that "because of their fear of death, tell lies against the swans and say they sing out of pain, wailing for their death'" (Plato, *Phaedo* 62). If one believes that there should be pain and suffering in the swans' song because of the preconceived human fear of death, then it will be easily

heard, regardless of its actuality. Socrates claims that, in actuality, they sing "in joy that they're about to go off to the very god whose servants they are," and not out of sorrow (Plato, *Phaedo* 62). Even if mortals may be pulled into thinking in such terms, there is no benefit to the soul in staying within the confines of the physical. Such an obsession with the transient nature of sensation is a flaw in the mentality of the mortal. There is no benefit in such a philosophy because it will forever doom the soul to long for a place that is only temporary. Instead, the "philosophical strategy here consists entirely in replacing with a fear of life the 'common' fear of death. For what the philosopher is really afraid of is not death but a life too attached to the body and the senses. The true danger for him, then, consists in conferring too much power upon death" (Dastur 24). Here is where the importance of philosophy becomes paramount to the state of being of the individual. Fear of the unknown will plague the individual if the philosophy of death is not fully embraced and accepted. This call to philosophize and let go of the temporal is the first step in the argument Socrates uses in order to comfort the individuals surrounding him as he waits for his dose of poison. By methodically working through the steps leading to such a conclusion, and therefore persuading the listeners to approach this foreign concept of death and dying in a philosophical way, Socrates is ready to start his meticulous analysis of death in order to prove that there is nothing to fear.

Even if philosophy allows for this untwining of the soul from the body, there must be an argument to substantiate this claim. The answer to how philosophy is essential to this process is found in one of the fundamental claims that Socrates makes by saying that "'a *contrary thing* comes to be out of a contrary thing'" (Plato, *Phaedo* 84). The argument of contraries, while it may at first seem unrelated to death, takes a pivotal role.

Socrates must go through a long discussion of examples and proofs in order to establish this point, but it turns out to be a worthy endeavor. According to the logic that Socrates is using, death must come from life and vice versa, and returning to life would come "'from the dead and into the living'" (Plato, *Phaedo* 45). There is a continuation of life in the process of death in this way, and therefore death is not seen as a decisive end to life. In this manner as well, death is always in life. The contraries have become a state of being through this argument. This is fundamental to philosophy as it initiates the idea that it is not a matter of a particular amount of time that is essential to our being but, instead, the way in which the days are approached. By looking at finitude in this way, death is "the absolute other of being," and yet, "in its 'non-actuality' it is more 'present' than things in actual life will ever be, with a presence so insistent and obsessive that when we are not learning how to tame it in that 'repetition' of death known as philosophy, we occupy ourselves trying to find a way of escaping its clutches in *divertissement*" (Dastur 41). With death and life being concurrent in this way, the works of one's life can and should be continued in death. Such a freeing thought releases the tension of life because the limit of mortality that is imposed by death, while providing an incentive to find "'the Truths'" in life during the time granted, does not signal a destruction of the soul (Plato, *Phaedo* 38). Death is merely another chapter for each individual to experience, as Socrates seems to be implying, and the number of days granted to us is of no great importance if they are utilized to their fullest. In order to support this claim, he must go one step further with the logic of contraries and apply this to the composition and nature of the soul itself and its fate in death.

There is a deep worry, as is made obvious by the questions presented to Socrates, that the soul will be scattered as the body dies, and therefore the individual will be no more. According to Socrates, this is not so. Again, through the use of dialogue and repeated examples, he teaches that the "'Soul is most similar to what's divine and deathless and intelligible and single-formed and indissoluble and always keeps to the self-same condition with itself'" (Plato, *Phaedo* 56). He comes to this conclusion because "whenever soul and body are in the same place, nature ordains the body to be a slave and to be ruled and the soul to rule and be master," just like the divine gods who rule over the death bound mortals (Plato, *Phaedo* 56). The body is left to rot and be scattered for it is not indissoluble, single-formed, or self-same. The soul, meanwhile, flutters off to Hades where it is "her lot to be happy, since she's been freed from wandering and mindlessness and terrors and savage loves and other human evils, and, as is said of the initiates, truly spends the rest of time in the company of gods" (Plato, *Phaedo* 57). He uses the argument based on contraries to posit that the soul will not be scattered when released from the body, that it will not submit to death, and that there is a continued life for the soul even in death. Each of these proofs give solace to the ancient Greeks because there is support for his previous claim that there can be continuation in death. Further comfort comes when Socrates goes on to describe "Tartarus," the destination of the soul in death, as a reason "'to partake of virtue and thoughtfulness in life. For beautiful is the prize, and the hope great'" (Plato, *Phaedo* 97). One must live a life of truth and philosophy in order to die a good death and gain access to the desirable afterlife. This concluding story of what he believes could be in store for his soul in death is the final balm. He concludes his argument by example, downing the poison "with great readiness and relish" (Plato,

Phaedo 100). There can be no doubt in the minds of his followers, including Phaedo himself, and later the ancient Greeks who read this text as to how he approached the concept of death and the process of dying. For Socrates, there was no need to worry when the poison touched his lips because he knew that his soul was about to be released from the mortal shackles that held it down for so long.

Phaedo, a story of one man discoursing with a group of friends and students on the subject of death, would have been read as perhaps philosophy should be, as a tool for living. To the ancient Greeks, this was a contemporary text that delineated what prominent thinkers were positing about how one should understand death and dying. Readers would have been exposed to the theory of embracing death with this clear argument that used logic and examples to guide them through the reasoning used, as set down by Socrates, which gained fame along with its author. Texts such as this allow the modern reader a glimpse into what was likely to be commonly believed by many in the time of the ancient Greeks because one can assume this was a widely known philosophical text, based on the fame of its main character. By doing so, an ancient philosophical text can be re-analyzed as a historical document, which can elucidate the beliefs of the people who would have read it.

There are several over-arching themes present in this text that the modern reader can glean in order to form an insight into the assumptions of at least some of the ancient Greeks. Perhaps the most important of these is the desire for the soul to be freed from the body. Instead of seeing the soul and body as inseparable, the ancient Greeks held them apart and granted immortality to the soul and death to the body. Such a separation keeps what they believed to be the essential essence of a person away from the doom of death.

The ancient Greeks were able to overcome their fear of death by claiming the soul had a higher destiny away from the physical world, and it was the job of each individual to philosophize so that the soul may make this journey without being held back by worldly concerns. It is beneficial to the individual, not a morbid practice, to meditate on death because it is only then that the individual will be able to truly see how insubstantial death is in comparison with the promising future of the soul. As Socrates so elegantly lead the reader through his argument, he cites proof through the concrete use of contraries, gently guiding his worrying followers to the safe conclusion that there is nothing to fear in dying. This style of dialogue and comparison with normal experiences helps the common reader to understand what he is describing, which is essential to his argument as the concept of death and dying is one that is so intangible and intimidating to us as mortals. The logic in *Phaedo* serves a purpose: to provide reassurance.

The idea of a fulfilling death is also brought up in *Crito*, a dialogue between Socrates and Crito, which is held previous to the discussion found in *Phaedo*. Even if Socrates may not address the concept of death in a direct way, as in *Phaedo*, he is still discussing the reason why his death is just, and therefore good. Socrates defends this notion of a good death by guiding Crito through an argument about why his death is just, and therefore a continuation of his life, because he is standing by his love for Athens. During their discussion, it was said that Socrates "'left Athens less often than the lame, the blind, or anyone similarly disabled. That's how much [his] liking for the city exceeded that of other Athenians'" (Plato, *Phaedo* 79). As a proud citizen of Athens, Socrates has agreed to abide by the laws of the city, and therefore cannot break them or he would sacrifice his love for the place. If he were to do as Crito urges and use the

money of his followers or to go into exile, he would be denying his lifelong pattern of being a faithful citizen. This act of not completing his life and doing something that is unjust would be more detrimental to his soul than death. Without developing a self during life, there is no meaning or purpose to existence, and the individual is left in a state of merely being in the world. This disengagement leaves the individual without the techniques with which to approach death. There is no purpose in the completion of life because there was no tenacity to the act of living in the first place. This would be in direct contrast with the philosophy that we have seen presented in the argument of Socrates, who emphasizes the need to philosophize and develop meaning during life. By using these techniques for death, Socrates is able to approach death in a very different manner. As we have seen in the previous argument, Socrates was already unafraid of death, unlike Crito, so the decision to die instead of trying to escape the law was a natural decision for him to make. Yet even though he is clear on his values, Socrates takes the time to explain to Crito, and therefore the ancient Greeks who read the text, why there is no need to worry about him confronting death.

The idea that death is a continuation of life is fundamental to the argument that Socrates is presenting to Crito in *Phaedo*. It is the thread that connects the two seeming contraries of life and death and ties them together with meaning and values. By continuing his pattern of faithfulness to his city in death, Socrates is not "'upset at having to die, choosing death before exile'" (Plato, *Phaedo* 79). The value that he held in being a citizen of Athens during his life is continued by the act of accepting his death because it follows the law of the city. Socrates has nothing to fear in dying this way, and moreover, if he were to escape from prison he would be breaking his "'own agreements and

contracts made with [the laws], and doing harm to those [he] should have hurt least'" (Plato, *Phaedo* 81). The laws themselves go on to threaten Socrates that "'if [he did] do all this, then we shall be angry with you while you're alive, and our brothers the laws in Hades will not receive you in a kindly spirit because they'll know that you've attempted to destroy us'" (Plato, *Phaedo* 81). The consequences of not dying a good and just death are dire; one will be cursed in life and in death as well. There is no other choice for Socrates if he is to do what he believes is good and just, and therefore he must act according to law. The defining characteristic in this submission is that he does it out of goodwill and according to what he finds meaningful, and not with a sense of morose doom. Even if it is human nature to want to skirt penalties and death itself, the unjust aspect of these actions will be reprimanded much more severely later on. It is much wiser to accept fate with good grace, and embrace death when it is time.

2.) Greek Literature

Similar to the text of *Phaedo*, the play *Alcestis*, by Euripides, gives the modern reader another example of how the ancient Greeks were being taught to approach death and dying. Famed for the origin and use of tragedy in their playwriting, the ancient Greeks were very familiar with lead characters sacrificing themselves for what they value. In this way, the ancient Greeks were having the good death demonstrated to them on a regular basis whenever they saw such plays. Because viewing plays was such a widespread form of entertainment at the time, it is clear that this way of teaching a large number of people through theater was a pivotal aspect of ancient Greek culture. *Alcestis* further contributes to this analysis because it guides the reader through many different

customs and reactions to death, all of which point to what the essentially meaningful practices were at the time. These habits of the culture and of the characters in the play allow the reader to see, specifically, what constituted a meaningful life which, in turn, lead to a good death.

The play opens, and the audience is informed that the ruler Admetos was fated to die, but Apollo "outwitted the Fates and won him a reprieve" (Euripides 34). In order for him to avoid death, Admetos would have to find another who would act as a sacrifice in order to repay the debt. Admetos searched among friends and family for one willing to do this, but no one would volunteer. That is, until he turned to his own wife. Alcestis is the brave wife of Admetos; "only she would volunteer to leave the sweet light of the sun and take his place below" (Euripides 34). She courageously accepts to die in his stead, for she is "incomparably a queen. For courage and love Alcestis has no rival among all women on this earth" (Euripides 41). Standing by her values, Alcestis' choice was clear. She would be dying for the man she loved and protecting her polis at the same time because he was ruler over the city. Alcestis valued family and city, two traits highly valued in ancient Greece.

Alcestis performs the funeral rite of cleansing by bathing "her white body in fresh running water from the river… and dressed herself in all her loveliness" (Euripides 42). Approaching her fate with a mix of tears for her children and a "sweet face… composed and calm, oh, as though no evil thing could ever touch her," Alcestis is a true model for her fellow Greeks (Euripides 42). There is beauty in her death; it is good because it completes her life. She is dying for the man that she loves with honor and self-sacrifice. Pheres applauds her by saying that "by her bravery in death, she has been a credit—no, a

glory—to her sex" (Euripides 64). This sentiment is repeated when Admetos regretfully admits that "my wife in death is happier than I am now. No pain, no hurt, will touch her anymore. She rests in peace, free at last from all the endless agony of life. And fame is hers forever" (Euripides 81). Instead of imagining the horrors that Alcestis may or may not have had to endure in death, the other characters are praising her for the way in which she gracefully accepted her fate. Alcestis is showing the other characters, and therefore the audience, how to die a good death. She loved her husband in life, and so dying for him willingly shows that her character is complete. Alcestis realizes the values of this because his death and life have been changed accordingly.

By being a coward and not accepting his fate to die, Admetos will always "have that taste of pain and loss—a bitterness that lasts" (Euripides 43). His mortal time was supposed to have ended, but he cheated himself into a miserable life by dodging fate, and the other characters constantly remind him of this. The leader of the chorus remarks, "as long as he lives, his life will taste of death, all he will have is hell" (Euripides 46). The leader also tried to remind Admetos how he should be reacting in this time of grief. Instead of wallowing in self-pity and seeking revenge, Admetos should accept his decision bear "his loss with dignity" (Euripides 80). Admetos, unfortunately, does not seem to be capable of such a feat. Instead, he laments: "As for me, I should not be alive. I should be dead. The life I have is not worth living. I know it now. Too late" (Euripides 81). The message Admetos is conveying to the audience is clear by the end of the play. If one does not accept death, and instead clings to life in a way that betrays the values one holds dear, there will be no more joy in life and no sense of completion in death. Alcestis died a good death while Admetos is left to live a terrible life, that is until Heracles

"fought with the god who had her in his power" and returns her back to Admetos (Euripides 93). Admetos is not the tragic hero of the play; he is the fool who must be saved. Again, Alcestis is dying for her love of family and city, two traits she had acted on while living. Her death was a sacrifice to these two loves, and was therefore gladly made..

Luckily, Admetos' father, Pheres, soon reprimands him for these threats. For the accusations that he should have died for Admetos, Pheres replies that "there is no law, no precedent, in Greece that children have a claim upon their fathers' lives" (Euripides 68). Therefore, he is not at fault in his desire to live, he has broken no law and it is not his time yet. He quickly goes on to rebuke Admetos for living beyond his "destined time" essentially by murdering his own wife (Euripides 68). This is a much greater crime than any Pheres has committed against Admetos.

One striking point that Pheres makes is about the fight that Admetos puts up in order to continue living. Pheres says, "As for fighting, boy, you fought all right. You fought like hell to live—life at any price!—beyond your destined time. You only live because you took her life" (Euripides 68). This is an interesting dig because it parallels what would have been counted as an honorable death in ancient Greek society. To die for one's polis, defending justice in the face of the enemy; that would have been a good death. The death in the battlefield is marked with honor because it shows the individual's love for their home, a love that should have played an active part during their life. In this way, a death for country was a completion of life because it provided evidence for the love of country that they cherished during their life. In this way, death was not an ending or limiting factor. In fact, the way in which one died was a way to prove oneself. To

bring up this aspect of societal views on death during their argument, Pheres is drawing a clear distinction.

Pheres also emphasizes the opposing virtues of bravery and cowardice in his diatribe against Admetos. While Alcestis outdoes Admetos in bravery, Admetos is now a "cheap coward," surely a trait one would not hope to see in a ruler (Euripides 68). Instead of being virtuous, Pheres accuses Admetos of being "clever," which, in certain circumstances, could be viewed as a backhanded compliment if the cleverness had positive results. As it is, in the case of Admetos, this cannot be mistaken for a compliment of any sort. Instead, he is made out to by sly and backstabbing, using his abilities to "wheedle [his] latest wife into dying in [his] place" (Euripides 68). He is also "greedy" in his desperate attempt to keep living, deserting his position as the responsible and virtuous ruler (Euripides 69). These are not the epithets one would wish to be known for, but such is the consequence of not being able to meet fate in an honorable way.

Admetos is not displaying bravery, love of city, or completion of life by avoiding death and living a longer period of time. He is still "fighting," as Pheres said, but it is not the right battle. In order to prove his worth, Admetos should have accepted his fate with grace when he was originally confronted with the shadowy figure of Death. This would have been a beautiful death because he would be laying down his weapon, the bargain of Apollo, in order to save the ones he loves. Instead, he fights the other fight, the fight for his life, but in doing so, he is essentially giving up the meaning that makes life worth living. Without knowing that Heracles would bring back Alcestis, Admetos is not completing the love he developed in life when he accepts her sacrifice. He is suddenly without honor, love, or purpose because the meaning he has created in his love for

Alcestis during life cannot be completed. Admetos' desperate reactions are evidence that he is aware of how grave his doom is. Even if he was a soldier, just like all the others on the battlefield, he failed in battle. He fled the field and deserted the troops in order to protect himself. Just as with any deserter, he must pay the consequences.

Luckily for Admetos, *Alcestis* reads almost like a comedy in the final act when Heracles returns Alcestis to the world of the living. Admetos is put through many different kinds of abuse, both internally and externally, throughout the course of the play. It is because of his bad decision to cling to life, no matter the consequence, that we find him badly bruised and alone. He gave up his chance to die a good death, and therefore could only live a shunned and scorned existence. With this lesson in mind, Admetos has a new appreciation of his love for Alcestis when she is returned to him. In a way, he has been given a second chance at life when Alcestis was brought back from the dead. Admetos will have another opportunity to die, hopefully in a way that is good and just, and is therefore no longer doomed. In this way, Alcestis did a greater job at saving Admetos by coming back from the dead than she did by dying in the first place.

As in *Alcestis*, the play *Antigone* has the main character battling to complete their life in order to die a good death. This play is a prime example of how the ancient Greeks viewed a good death because it exemplifies the idea that death should be approached as continuation of life. The habits that Antigone stood by during her life were continued in her death, and she died without fear, and therefore she died a good death with honor. Both show this essential characteristic, yet, unlike Admetos, Antigone is fighting and dying for what is just. By dying for the right to bury her brother, Antigone is completing her love for family and respect to the gods, since their law is higher than that of Creon.

Her death is good, and she is praised accordingly. The chorus compares her to a soldier, one that is "not struck down by diseases that waste one away, not having earned the deadly wages of the sword, but answering only to the law of yourself" (Sophocles 90). Like a hero in battle, she has submitted her life to a noble cause, even if it means she will die young. In a way, she is the antithesis of Admetos: she is the willing sacrifice, and therein lies her greatness and tragedy, while Admetos is merely pathetic in that he refuses to submit to fate. As we shall see, the outcome of this opposite reaction to death, as compared to Admetos, leads to very different reactions from the chorus and other actors in the play. By drawing this distinction, there is an obvious lesson woven between the two plays, which taught the ancient Greeks how one should approach death as a way to gain honor and dignity.

The way in which Antigone conducted herself when approaching death is markedly different than Admetos' reaction; she acted with bravery. Even in the face of soldiers, "she was not afraid" and when they accused her of the unlawful acts she had committed, "she did not at all deny it" (Sophocles 72). Even to the ones making these accusations, her willingness to stand up for what she believed was just "brought both satisfaction and pain" to the guards "because to flee bad things yourself feels good, but it is painful to lead one of your own to something bad" (Sophocles 72). By accepting her fate, she is submitting herself to the guards, meaning that they did not have to further the allegations. The decision to act in such a way, keeping the justice of the gods, was for her an easy decision. Unlike the laws of man, "the laws of the gods… are unwritten and unfailing" (Sophocles 73). She even confesses to Creon himself "I knew that I will die—how can I not? —even without your proclamation. But if I die before my time, I count

that as my profit…[for] if I let the son of my own mother lie dead and unburied, that would give me pain. This gives me none" (Sophocles 73). She sees no "greater glory" than that which she will gain by burying her brother (Sophocles 75). Creon is not so fortunate in his ending though, because he did not act in a just way according to the gods. Instead, he overstepped his limits of power as a mortal.

Creon, like Admetos before Alcestis was brought back to life, is doomed to lead an unforgiven and cursed life. The death of Antigone is quickly followed by the deaths of Haimon, his son, and his wife as well. These actions that he performed in life leads Teiresias to predict that "the devastating late-destroying ones, the Furies, who avenge Hades and the gods, lie in wait" (Sophocles 103). Creon and Admetos must bear the wrath of the gods, and the fate that they impose, in retribution for the wrongs that they have committed. This burden of fate is not to be underestimated, according to the ancient Greeks, because it "fills us with terror and awe. Neither wealth nor weapons nor high walls nor sea-battered ships can escape it" (Sophocles 97). Instead, the ancient Greeks who would have watched this play were being told to accept their fate as it is given to them. A messenger even wishes that the mother of Haimon, Eurydike, will "not wail her cries in public in the city, but in the shelter of her own house" once she hears of the death of her son (Sophocles 110). Mourning, a way of reacting to the fate of others must also be done in a particular way. All of these lessons are part of the overall culture around death and dying as seen in the ancient Greeks. Now that these plays have been analyzed to show the underlying need to establish meaning in life in order to die a good death without fear, several cultural practices of the ancient Greeks will be introduced in order to show how these ideas permeated this society.

3.) Cultural Practices

This idea of completing the drama of one's life for the benefit of an audience is also essential for understanding the burial and death practices of the ancient Greeks. In that culture, burial and attaining a clear sense of self were vital because they allowed for "the process of interiorizing remembrance comprised by mourning" (Dastur 16). The living can continue to recall the dead individual, and this allows the soul to move on. In this way, our mortality, which at first may seem like a curse, in fact is seen as a blessing. Being finite means that we must live with urgency during the time granted to us, and in order to complete our "self," we must live according to a telos in order to direct our meaning-making. It is because of this that the quantity of life allotted to each individual does not matter, it is only the quality of life that is judged. As Dastur argues in support of the Greeks, "one thing that is certain is that this end consisting in one's own death presents itself as the privileged object of thought, in the sense of representation, as soon as there is any, to the point where it is arguable that humanity does not achieve consciousness of itself except through confrontation with death" (Dastur 6). This consciousness, put into terms of the ancient Greeks, is analogous to the telos because it is the realization of the purpose of the self. Thus, we must live "a life that includes in itself a relationship with the world of the dead" in order for the self to be realized (Dastur 15). In order to live life well, death is a necessary element of existence, and in order to live well, one must philosophize as a practice of death. This circularity is build upon the acceptance of death, which is only possible through the practice of philosophy because it allows the soul to become detached and have this priming for death. Meaning-making is

soon a byproduct of this new sense of self, which is completed through the acceptance of death.

Many of the cultural practices of the ancient Greeks embodied the beliefs that were set down through their philosophy and tragic plays in the everyday life of their society. Popular beliefs about the nature of the soul and how it is changed in death, what must be done in order to prepare for death, and the funeral practices themselves enforced an attitude towards death, culminating in a united approach to death and dying. In modern society, there are many debates about the moment of death and when it occurs, unlike in ancient Greece. To the ancient Greeks, "death was not seen so much as an event as a process; a process moreover, requiring strenuous action on the part of the survivors in order to be successfully terminated" (Garland, 13). In fact, there were three distinct stages of death, which the individual had to pass through with the help of the living and grieving: "dying," "being dead but uninterred," and finally "being dead and interred" (Garland 13). From the time that death begins to draw near, the dying individual must successfully complete several necessary rites in order to pass peacefully. It was desirous to have family and friends surrounding you as you passed, as can be seen when Socrates gathered his followers around him in the final scenes of *Phaedo* (Garland 17). Even if one were not among loved ones, like "the poet Aristeas [who] dropped dead in a fuller's shop," this would be remedied (Garland 17). In the case of Aristeas, "the fuller locked up and went in search of the relatives, who returned with the requisite items for burial" (Garland 17). Because the ancient Greeks viewed the soul having to undergo a process in death, the family and friends were a vital part of the act of dying.

When it became clear that death was near and that the soul must soon depart, several rites had to be observed. These rituals included "the ritual bath," "the committal of one's children to the safe care of others," "the settling of one's affairs," "the prayer to Hestia," "the prayer for safe passage to Hades," and "the farewell to family and friends" (Garland 16). Each of these acts worked in the hope that the individual would "possess 'as clean a bill of spiritual health as it may be possible for a human being to earn'" (Garland 16). The body, family, and friends were all taken care of in these final moments. There was no mention of a final will being made as this "could be accomplished at any time in a person's life" (Garland 16). Death was a time to connect to loved ones one last time, to prepare for what was to come, and to die in peace with the knowledge that these things had been accomplished. Without these last observations being made, death would have taken the individual without a trace, without being able to perform the duties most essential to their soul, much like it is commonly done today. As we will see in what follows in the discussion on dying in modern society, this is very different from common practice today. Many doctors don't want to tell patients they are dying, family and friends are not supposed to show too much remorse, and wills are sometimes not even completed because the individual was in such deep denial that they were going to die. The Greeks were much more accepting of their finitude, as these practices show us.

In ancient Greece, there was a "strong conviction that each individual possessed an allotted span of life and that the day of one's departure was fixed in advance" (Garland 19). With this approach to death, it is in the hands of fate, and humans and gods can only exert a small amount of control over when death will occur. If one can accept death, this limited amount of time is no longer an imposing fact of existence, as has been

demonstrated in this analysis. There is peace in believing in fate. Ideally, "the idea of the painless onset of death was epitomized by the image of silver-bowed Apollo striking men down with his gentle arrows," allowing them to die gracefully (Garland 19). Such an image enforces the idea that one should embrace death with dignity and purpose, completing the acts made in life by embodying them in death as well. It is even maintained that "there is little evidence to support the claim that the majority of Greeks spent their declining years consumed with guilty foreboding at the prospect of making a reckoning in the hereafter" (Garland 17). Again, because these individuals were able to live a good life and accept death, finitude was not a thing to avoid. Instead, death was seen as just another part of life.

It is thought that there was a systematic approach to desensitizing the citizen of ancient Greece to the concept of death and dying in this way. "Plutarch says that the lawgiver Lykourgos put an end to superstition in Sparta by permitting people to bury their dead inside the city and to erect grave-monuments near sacred places. In this way he familiarized young people with the sight of death 'so that it did not trouble or frighten them'" (Garland 42). This relaxed attitude, so different from our own, is also seen in *Alcestis*. Heracles has no qualms about staying in a house where someone has recently died, until he discovers that it was Alcestis who was the victim. Such an insight into ancient attitudes supports the idea that there was an ability to accept the inevitability of death in this culture.

The act of dying itself elucidates how the ancient Greeks viewed the soul. In the texts written by Homer, "the most characteristic notion is that death is ushered in by the departure of the *psychê* 'lamenting its fate' either out of the mouth or from a gaping

wound" (Garland 18). Yet, the *psychê* should not be thought of as "the life-instinct, consciousness or activity" for in fact it "only makes an appearance in the body when death is imminent" (Garland 18). The practice of closing the eyes and mouth of the dead is thought to have been a way to ensure that the *psychê* could be properly released from the body (Garland 23). The other ancient Greek who theorized on the nature of death was Aristotle. He believed that "death is the result of a process of drying up or loss of vital heat," but "whether popular opinion widely upheld these sorts of theories we cannot know" (Garland 18-19). Such an outlook on the soul and its fate informed the practices that the ancient Greeks developed around death and dying. By viewing the soul in such a way, the ancient Greeks were again acknowledging its importance and its separation from the body.

The act of dying was not one-sided, with participation only coming in the form of grief for the living. Once the soul had departed the body, it was thought to be "elevated to a higher plane of consciousness, thereby enabling the dying person to prophesy with foreknowledge" (Garland 20). An example of this can be seen when "Patroklos in his dying breath predicts the death of Hektor at the hands of Achilles, and Hektor, as he in turn expires, predicts the death of Achilles at the hands of Paris" (Garland 20). In this way, the dying individual was given one last insight into life, which is a beautiful gift. In the culture of the ancient Greeks, there was "an expectation that the words of the dying would be memorable" (Garland 20). Coupled with the power of foreknowledge, the dying individual was therefore able to provide one last service for the living. Such an opportunity again allows the newly dead to practice the habits established in life. By

giving the dead this power, the ancient Greeks made way for yet another opportunity for a person to die a good death.

The process of mourning and the funeral rituals cannot be underemphasized because they were what allowed the living to acknowledge the death of a loved one and then move on. This, in turn, was what allowed the individual to pass through the limbo of the process of dying and into Hades where their death was completed. In fact, "the ritual lament seems… to have rivaled, if not to have equaled, that of burial itself" in importance to the ancient Greeks (Garland 30). The funeral itself took place in three parts: "the laying of the body (*prothesis*), its conveyance to the place of interment (*ekphora*), and finally the deposition of its cremated or inhumed remains" (Garland 21). The mourning process and funeral were so important to the ancient Greeks that laws had to be implemented to limit the grieving process (Garland 21).

There are many reasons why laws to enforce funeral and mourning practices were promulgated. The main outcome, however, was "to set a maximum limit on all forms of ostentation that could be practiced in connection with the interment of one's dead kin" (Garland 22). Such an aim was set in order to curb the attitude, as described by Plato, "'to be rich, healthy, honoured by the Greeks, reach old age, and, after burying one's parents well, to be laid out well by one's own children and buried magnificently'" (Garland 22). The lavish practices of the ancient Greeks were done out of respect for the dead and in order to prove their love through displays of wealth, even in death. There were many rituals in ancient Greece that had to be observed in order to allow the dead to lie in peace and give the living solace. These rites were so significant that "in Gortyn on Crete

relatives of the deceased were liable to prosecution if they failed to perform the ritual" (Garland 26).

One aspect of these rituals was the time limit put on the mourning process, which gives one insight into how these people as a society approached death and dying. The number of days devoted to the *prothesis* varied, "seventeen days are devoted to the obsequies for Achilles, nine for Hektor, and two for Patroklos, their duration being apparently determined either by the social standing of the deceased or by the grief felt by his survivors" (Garland 26). There are also reports that later in history "the ceremony lasted a mere twenty-four hours and took place on the day after decease" (Garland 26). It is not the amount of time granted to mourning that is important to note, but the fact that there was a limit to these rituals at all. The *prothesis* functioned to "enable the mourners to sing a funeral dirge in honor of the dead in order to satisfy the claims of duty and to appease the soul of the departed." (Garland 30). Living friends and family were given a period of time to lament the loved one, sending the dead soul on.

A period of transition then commenced for the soul as the next part of the process was performed. This period could continue "until the performing of the thirtieth-day rites called *triakostia*… the ritual which concluded mourning held approximately one month after decease" (Garland 39). The length of time granted to this period of mourning varied across different parts of Greece and based on the level of kinship. For example, "at Gambreion in Asia Minor, the law prescribed that mourning should not exceed thee months for men and four for women, whereas at Sparta only eleven days were allowed" (Garland 40). According to van Gennep, whom Garland cites, the level of kinship was

also "'systematized by each people according to their special ways of [calculation]'" (Garland 40).

Again, the mere fact that there was a set period for mourning meant that the living only had a certain amount of time in which to grieve, which, in turn, allowed them to move on afterwards. The soul of the dead individual was celebrated and their deeds in life were acknowledged, but then it was time for the living to continue to live. One of the rituals that promoted this was a post-funerary meal, which served "'to reunite all the surviving members of the group with each other, and sometimes also the deceased, in the same way that a chain which has been broken by the disappearance of one of its links must be rejoined'" (Garland 39). This feast was called the *perideipnon*, and even "the dead himself was believed to be present in the capacity of host" (Garland 39). In this way, the living were allowed to reconnect with the dead one last time by remembering them through shared stories and songs. It is only though the collective memory that the "*geras thanonton* (dead man's honor)" can be bestowed through the "funeral ritual and interment" (Mirto 27). By remaining in the collective memory, the individual can, "'as much as it is humanly possible… [escape] the destruction of death'" (Mirto 29). It is now clear why the funeral and mourning processes were so elaborately planned, timed, and executed. By giving respect to the soul at the time of death and during the period of mourning, the dead individual would be able to move through the stages of dying in order to rest in peace, knowing that they would be remembered. It was the responsibility of the living to ensure that the dying were aware of this comfort, for it was the key to a good death. The good death, in this way, also extended to the living, because they knew that the loved one would go with grace. Given a set time for mourning, the living could

express their emotion freely for the benefit of all, and then continue to live, as was right and just.

This analysis has allowed us as modern readers to see what a culture that accepts death could look like. In contrast to our own society, the ancient Greeks incorporated death into everyday life through these practices. This presence of death, the idea of following a purpose in seeking the "True" to guide actions while living, and seeing death as a way to complete life are all techniques the ancient Greeks used in order to overcome their fear of death. These approaches to life and death answer the need we have as mortals to know how we should live by giving us the sense of urgency to live well during the time allotted. This is a fundamental need because we are finite, and therefore we must live in a way that creates meaning during the time that we are given in order to die a good death. This same question continues to be one of the most vital concepts in philosophy because death is such a defining moment in life that it must be confronted. We will see how the answer to this same question develops throughout the ages in the following chapters as philosophical thought changes with Montaigne, Heidegger, and Foucault.

Chapter 2: Michel de Montaigne

The philosopher Michel de Montaigne reflects the philosophy of many of the ancient civilizations, such as the ancient Greeks and Romans, throughout his essays on death and dying. As has been shown, these cultures focused heavily on how to approach death and dying and had extremely regulated practices around the rituals of death, burial, and mourning. Although the two parties, the ancients and Montaigne, may both believe that one should approach death without fear, the way in which they propose this to occur is very different, and this, in turn, reflects the philosophy of life each of these two parties held. By observing this contrast, readers will be able to have a clearer view of what each desired for their followers to do in everyday life in order to live towards a good and beautiful death. The fact that there is a contrast between these two methods of living is in itself curious; one might think that there could be only one telos or goal to life that is common to all mankind because we all want to live well, one way or another. Even so, it appears that there are at least two very different ways in which to approach this if we look at these two philosophies, and each have their own techniques for living the good life.

The tools to living that one must develop are derived from the goal one has in living. The tools for existence will inform the end product in this way. It is because of this necessity that from the general need for a goal in life we continue the analysis to the type of goal one should aim for, again looking at Montaigne and the Greeks. The specific direction in which one should conduct their development of self must be expounded in order to have a foundation on which to build an understanding of the tools these philosophies give the reader for living.

Montaigne opens his essay, “To Philosophize is to Learn How to Die,” with a nod to the ancients, quoting Cicero in saying that “to philosophize is nothing else but to prepare for death” (Montaigne 56). The reader is presented with many claims and quotes such as this by Montaigne that were previously seen in the philosophy of the ancient Greeks. In this way, Montaigne is taking some of the essential concepts of living and dying and how the two are related from this earlier philosophy, which has already been presented. Such a continuation in thinking on how to live and die well speaks to the importance of this topic and the essential attitudes on the subject. Montaigne continues the philosophy of the ancient Greeks in many ways, such as promoting the concept that “to philosophize is to consider death in advance and to rehearse for it. To do this requires that first we assure ourselves of its nature by a look at its preeminent position: death is of all emergencies the only unavoidable one” (Friedrich 266). Such an abstract concept must be put into practice though in order for it to be valuable to the reader because, if it is “recognized in death an essence that is inherent in life, it detects in the mastery of one’s natural fear of death man’s greatest chance of preserving his freedom” (Friedrich 261). So, from the Greeks to Montaigne, the reader may glean the need to accept death in order to have the freedom to create meaning in life. Such an enormous consequence, one’s very freedom, lies in the process of living towards death because it allows the individual to create meaning during life.

In addition to exploring Montaigne’s views on living towards death, we will also be able to delve into the techniques he presents for dying a good death, which will give the reader another set of tools with which to cultivate and shape the self. These ideas will

be developed through a discussion of 1.) voluptuousness, 2.) the acceptance of death, 3.) the freedom to choose to live a meaningful life, and 4.) death in literature.

1.) The concept of "voluptuousness"

Both Montaigne and the Greeks are similar is that they both believed that life should have a purpose of some sort. For the ancient Greeks, the telos was the overall aim or goal for an individual's life, but Montaigne rethinks the idea of telos in his concept of "voluptuousness" (Montaigne 56). For Montaigne, a life is voluptuous if it is pleasant, but only if one also uses this same pleasure as a time for reflection. It is this reflection that brings one to turn inwards in order to find meaning in a life that is finite. The ideas that "pleasure is our goal" and "the attempt is made fragrant by the quality of the thing it aims at" are what guide the business of living for Montaigne because they enhance living (Montaigne 56, 57).

By looking at the theme of voluptuousness in contrast with the ancient Greek philosophy, it seems that in order to have a good death one must have a direction while living. Even if the direction is different in the two philosophies, the essential aspect of this comparison is that for both a direction is necessary. However, the Greeks argue against voluptuousness because it makes the soul cling more fiercely to life and not embrace death. If one is attached to the material, the soul will not form the intangible meaning that is necessary for a sense of self. Montaigne has moved slightly away from this philosophy in his concept of voluptuousness but he still acknowledges the need to accept and live towards death. The defining characteristic of voluptuousness is that it allows the individual to enjoy life, but it is also an essential aid in turning the soul away

from life. The pleasures in life must be embraced or else there is no flavor to existence, but they must not be held close enough for them to distract the individual from thinking about death. The balance is possible, and this is what Montaigne is proposing in his concept of voluptuousness.

One of the issues some of the ancients like Socrates, might have with Montaigne's philosophy is that the "loosening" of the soul from the body and world is made more difficult by enjoying the temporal. However, the very direction that Montaigne advocates, towards a voluptuousness that gives us substance to life, also gives us "disdain for death" because, as Montaigne quotes Cicero, "'death always hangs over us, like the stone over Tantalus'" (Montaigne 57). There is so much on offer in life, but death is always one horse cart away, and so, like Tantalus, we may never truly taste the fruit. For Montaigne, the only way in which to overcome this and enjoy the sweet voluptuousness of life is to accept the finitude that comes with being mortal. Here is where the two seeming opposites, enjoyment of life and acceptance of death, come to complement each other. It is seen that "the irrevocable contradiction between death and life opens up into a paradoxical unity that can be tolerated from a deep layer of the self for which one who has been reconciled no longer asks. A familiarity with death has developed, almost a tenderness, which encompasses the threatener of life as well as life itself" (Friedrich 280). According to this philosophy, one cannot fully enjoy life without death and, similarly, one cannot die well without having first enjoyed life.

As the reader may now see, even if Montaigne inserts quotes from the ancients and seems to uphold basic ideas of their philosophy, Socrates proposes a very different way of life from that which Montaigne delineated. To Socrates, one should be more

concerned with "'the True'" and "'what *is*'" instead of what is bodily and therefore temporary (Plato, *Phaedo* 38, 36). The body with "'each pleasure and pain… nails the soul to the body, pins her and makes her body-like, so she opines to be true exactly whatever things the body says are true'" (Plato, *Phaedo* 60). In this way, the body leads the soul away from its search for the true, unless one can engage in philosophy to set it free of these worldly sensations. There is no benefit to the soul in staying within the confines of the physical. Such an obsession with the transient nature of sensation is a flaw in the mentality of the mortal, and there is no advantage in such a philosophy because it will forever doom the soul to long for meaning that is only temporary. Because of this, the theory of the ancient Greeks seems to be contrasting with what Montaigne is approaching in his philosophy of death, and therefore life. The exact techniques to achieving the balance that Montaigne advocates act as the fulcrum to both of these arguments, and they are what define how one should live. A philosophy of life, something so abstract when on paper, will not be useful to the reader without such tools with which to enact these concepts in reality.

The bodily satisfaction that Montaigne seems to support will let us "live well and at our ease," unperturbed in inner tranquility (Montaigne 56). Yet Montaigne wants to live in this way with "the goal of our career" being death itself, which may initially seem contradictory (Montaigne 57). In order for these two ways of living to be molded into a coherent philosophy of life, one must have death continually present in mind, so that there is nothing to fear because death has become just another part of life. If death is always present in the mundane, there is no need to elevate the fear of death to undue levels. This is not to say that one should consign oneself to death and give up on the

cultivation of self, though. To Montaigne, a man must act, and "prolong the functions of life as long as he can," and so return with vigor to the journey towards death (Montaigne 62). Whether you are planting cabbages or feasting, as Montaigne might say, these two sides of life must be fully embraced in order to confront death without fear when the end comes. It is this self-awareness that is so closely tied to death, and, in turn, is what helps to develop meaning. For Montaigne, "individuality only really becomes aware of its fullness when it includes mortality in its conception, something that is qualitatively different from an event that touches it from the outside, and when one's individuality has perceived how it feels in the thorough sensing of this mortality" (Friedrich 258). Yet, Montaigne's philosophy is not a matter of eating and being merry to forget strife. Instead, this is a way of living that remembers death, even as the feast carries on, in order to grow with composure towards the goal set before mankind.

Even if pleasure is a good thing, Montaigne proposes the opposite of a primal hedonism. This was true to such an extent that "even in the most licentious season of [his] life, 'When blooming youth enjoyed a gladsome spring,' amid ladies and games, someone would think [him] involved in digesting some jealousy" (Montaigne 60). This would result because, in fact, he would be meditating on a recent death instead of fully losing himself in the festivities. He is using the hedonism around him in order to detach from the scene and turn towards the larger presence of death. So, essentially, the key to fearlessness for Montaigne is this premeditation and nothing else. The hedonism, which celebrates life, may now be accepted and then turned from, as it does not pursue this mode of living towards death. Yet, even as one turns away, there must still be pleasure in life in order to derive meaning from our experiences. By upholding this practice, it is

claimed of this philosophy that "the fear of death is not a fear of what it will be like for me when I am dead—that is a silly, incoherent feeling: it will be *nothing* for me when I am dead" (Nehamas 120). There is no additional need to search for any kind of truth, as with the Greeks, because this contemplation is enough. The differences between the two philosophies, which, at first glance, may seem to be identical in many ways, are now becoming more apparent.

Montaigne advocates for a different kind of telos, one that is more akin to the Stoics in that he is seeking voluptuousness, but is doing it through maintaining composure. Attend the feasts, care for your garden, because, as Jean Starobinski states, "*veracity* remains [Montaigne's] undying standard of judgment,'" but always be aware of death (Nehamas 122). Use the activity around you to turn inwards and discover the state of your dying and embrace it. Nehamas quotes Montaigne as saying that "life should be an aim unto itself, a purpose unto itself; its rightful study is to regulate, conduct, and suffer itself'" (Nehamas 115). Further, "the point is to capture death in one's own inwardness, which will 'taste' its quality" (Friedrich 277).

If Montaigne is right in his argument, then there is absolutely nothing to fear. There is no "Truth" or "meaning" in any clear-cut way that he believes one should seek. In this way, the external is less important than the internal to Montaigne, even if some of his statements about the voluptuousness of life may make it seem otherwise. It may be because of the internal nature of this state of being that "'there is nothing so beautiful and legitimate as to *play* the man well and properly, no knowledge so hard to *acquire* as the knowledge of how to live this life well *and natural"*" (Nehamas 124). Our internal self is elusive if we do not take the time to pause and cultivate it. Ignored, it can grow

haphazardly into an unruly and ugly state of being that lacks inner peace and virtue. To Montaigne, "'virtue is a pleasant and gay quality,'" which gives this secondary meaning to the voluptuousness he is citing (Nehamas 117). Coming from within, voluptuousness can be understood to be inner composure and a complete sense of self. Even if his theory is different than that of the Greeks, the purpose is the same: find meaning in life.

2.) The acceptance of death

Turning to this interpretation of voluptuousness as an aid in living towards death that Montaigne presents, the reader must put aside all practical concerns of mortality in order to truly accept what he is saying. Montaigne states, "premeditation of death is premeditation of freedom. He who has learned how to die has unlearned how to be a slave" (Montaigne 60). One can fully live only if finitude has been accepted as an inevitable part of life and something that is not worthy of fear. The contrasting elements of our existence, living and dying, must come together in order to form a synchronized and meaningful life. Montaigne wishes to lead the "common herd" who have gone "blind" from such "brutish stupidity" to a way of living that is unhindered by the fear of death in order to prove this point (Montaigne 57, 58). If one can accept death, one will be granted the tools for living well, and these tools are the essential topic at hand.

Whereas death is normally viewed as an occurrence where the individual is a passive observer, Montaigne is giving the reader the choice to become an active participant. By doing so, he is continuing life into the process of death and dying, just as the ancient Greeks did. Montaigne wished to divorce "death from its mere negativity. This takes place through the insight that it is something universally necessary, thus it

represents an order… it becomes an aid to man's behavior vis-à-vis death" (Friedrich 264). With death as just another part of the process of living, the fear of death that can finally be overcome. Yet, "the person who reflects upon the ordering character of death will change his behavior into an attitude, his fear into freedom which will that which must unavoidably be" (Friedrich 265).

This change of attitude becomes possible is true because "death" is a possessive term, it becomes "'my death'… it is death, just as I most wish it to be" (Friedrich 284). One has the responsibility of possession when it comes to death, as it is an essential element of one's life. This concept in itself is extremely empowering as it allows for continued participation on the part of the individual. Even if the individual is uncertain as to how one should die, Montaigne reassures that "'if you don't know how to die, don't worry; Nature will tell you what to d o on the spot, fully and adequately. She will do this job perfectly for you; don't bother your head about it'" (Friedrich 294). By analyzing the word choice that Montaigne uses in consoling the reader, it is still apparent that the individual must do the real "work." Nature will guide and instruct, but dying and death will not be done completely for you.

This is the essential work of every human being: to die. This job is given to everyone, but it is up to each individual whether to see this as a burden or not, and this is where mankind obtains power. The choice to die well and therefore live well can be made when a different attitude towards death is adopted. This chain of effects is what can either define or doom the individual in the way they will live their life. To summarize, "man and death are thus also understood not as two alien elements that collide, but rather as a part of each other, wedded from the beginning before any factual, external encounter

occurs" (Friedrich 296). Given this insight into how one should approach the topic of death and how death is an essential part of life, we may now learn how the technique of living a life filled with pleasure must be complemented by an equal appreciation and meditation of death.

Montaigne's approach to making the argument to live toward death in order not to fear it is to present numerous examples. He brings up the discussion of writing wills, a subject in which no one wants to participate in, even today. Montaigne then cites the Egyptians next as being very open to the concept of death, going so far as to welcome a skeleton to dine amongst them. This mode of argument, by presenting the concrete in order to make death less foreign to the reader, was also utilized in the culture of the ancient Greeks. Similarly, the ancient Greeks embraced death as much as possible when they were alive by having it continually present. As a society, they were already practicing this technique that Montaigne is proposing. By presenting the reader with this historical analysis, his ideas may not seem so far fetched. There was an underlying methodology that was developed through this passage in time, which was then cited by Montaigne. Similarly, the reader may now see how Montaigne falls into this same continuum of analysis. So, in this way, we can see another similarity between the two philosophies that warrants further analysis.

To put death constantly before you, whether enjoying a play or sitting down to eat, is the technique of living a good life, which both Montaigne and the ancient Greeks believed. Like the ancient Greeks, Montaigne holds that if we are able to live in this way, we will "draw our soul out of us to some extent and keep it busy outside the body; which is a sort of apprenticeship and semblance of death" (Montaigne 56). He has overcome the

problem of holding on to the temporal in this manner, an issue the Greeks would have had with his philosophy. So, it now seems that Montaigne has found a way to release the soul from worldly things with this technique of meditation on death. Montaigne continues to mirror the ancient Greeks, even citing Lycurgus, an ancient Greek, with the idea that "we plant cemeteries next to churches, and in the most frequented parts of town, in order to accustom the common people, women and children, not to grow panicky at the sight of a dead man" (Montaigne 62). Montaigne even brags that with his philosophy of life and death, "never did a man prepare to leave the world more utterly and completely, nor detach himself from it more universally, than [he proposed] to do" (Montaigne 61). For Montaigne, death is "'ordinary'… because it is the destiny of all living beings and death is inherent in them along with life itself; its monstrousness does not represent an exception, it is no catastrophe of the existing order, but is the order itself: an ordinary monstrousness" (Friedrich 259). Again, he is using that which is around him to detach from death, which no longer is something to be afraid of because it is just another part of life. Montaigne is not getting lost in the festivities and forgetting about death, no matter how others may perceive it. By doing so, he is keeping with the goal of voluptuousness by embracing the celebration around him, but then returning back to his essential direction of living towards death.

By seeing how this concept of voluptuousness pertains to death and how Montaigne has developed it, it is becoming apparent that death gives life a defined goal to live towards. This development of thought is akin to the stoic philosophy in that there is less attachment to the occurrences of the world, which can sometimes be disturbing and wrest inner composure away from us. As Montaigne puts it, "life is neither good nor evil

in itself: it is the scene of good and evil according as you give them room" (Montaigne 65). So, because we are "equally divided between death and life," we must accept our death in order to enjoy the voluptuousness of life unhindered by these events, which are out of our control anyway (Montaigne 65). Our lives are framed by our birth and death, the very facts of our finitude. We must live with true urgency because of this fact, as we have not the same pleasure of the gods in being immortal. And yet, because of this urgency, life becomes more fulfilling. Alexander Nehamas proposes that Montaigne reflects the theory held by Platonic Socrates that "self-knowledge is the awareness of one's limitations. But these are not simply the universal limitations of human wisdom…they are the moral and psychological limitations of each particular individual" (Nehamas 107). Montaigne was also quoted claiming that "'according to one's power,' that was the refrain and favorite saying of Socrates, a saying of great substance'" (Nehamas 107). It is only through the acknowledgement of these limits of finitude that one can truly know the inner self. The interlinking of these two philosophies has appeared again in this concept of limitations. We must see life within the context of these parameters, according to this philosophy of life. Accordingly, Montaigne seems to see a balance between these two poles of living well and embracing death. Montaigne says "If you did not have death, you would curse me incessantly for having deprived you of it. I have deliberately mixed with it a little bitterness to keep you, seeing that convenience of it, from embracing it too greedily and intemperately. To lodge you in that moderate state that I ask of you, of neither fleeing life nor fleeing back from death, I have tempered both of them between sweetness and bitterness" (Montaigne 67). The voluptuousness of life must have the taste of death in it in order for it to be enjoyable. Without the finitude we

all must confront, life could meander on without the ambition to create the meaning, which will fulfill the individual's personal telos. On the other hand, if death is accepted and lived towards, the direction one takes in life will have a new drive and importance. It is only through death that the voluptuousness of existence may be appreciated. In the extreme of hedonism, there is no flavor to complement the sweetness of indulgence. The larger question for the reader, once the fear of death has been put aside, is how to continue to live and develop a meaningful life.

3.) Gaining freedom through finitude

We are back to the original question of the essay, which is how to practice this philosophy of death and, therefore, of life. For both the ancient Greeks and Montaigne, one cannot simply meander through life and expect to die well: there must be meaning. As individuals, we are all practicing our own philosophy on a daily basis, whether we are intentional about it or not. We have made a contrast between the approach to life that Montaigne believes to be sound and the way that the ancient Greeks answered this same question. In this way, they have both answered the universal question of death by answering the question of how to live. The two seeming opposites of life and death are complementary, just as Socrates argued. Maybe instead, or complementary to, the universality of death, there is the question of meaning in life and our intrinsic need to answer this for ourselves.

The uniting factor between the two appears to be a need to make meaning out of life, which is something that can easily become overwhelmingly vast, even within the horizon of finitude. However, we can turn this philosophy of death on its head and

instead see it as a philosophy of meaning-making in life; it is the guiding torch in the looming gloom of death. There is now a purpose to every action and thought during existence instead merely being in the world. Given this, finitude is a blessing because it gives urgency to our actions; we must prove who we essentially are at every moment. Accordingly, as Montaigne quotes Horace, a poet of ancient Rome, "'Look on each day as if it were your last, and each unlooked-for hour will seem a boon'" (Montaigne 60). The way in which we "carpe diem" now seems to be the ultimate question, once the issue of the fear of death has been dispelled. Death, following this twisted path of philosophy, has now, in a way, become the telos. Death is what defines life because it gives us urgency; it makes us create meaning and gives us a way to complete the actions we perform in life. Without death, there would be no reason to disengage from the feast in order to develop composure and a sense of the self. By impressing upon us this need to define oneself, death is helping the living to develop by themselves by imposing the finitude that is necessary to form a complete self. Although this is done in a seemingly circuitous way, death is the underlying, essential factor in this self-development.

Based on what we can glean from the texts and cultural practices discussed in the previous chapter, it seems that the ancient Greeks were well aware of this hidden gift in finitude. They believed that if one had completed the cycle of life by following a clear set of beliefs, death could be glorious because it was just another part of life. Death could be seen as the capstone and completion of life, not something that brought fear to the individual. The truth-seeking that Socrates is presenting in the *Phaedo* is his own answer to the question of meaning-making, just as Montaigne, as presented in this analysis, is delineating his own concept of voluptuousness in life. According to the Greeks, to follow

truth in life would guarantee a good death, no matter if it were on the battlefield or quietly at home. This is because Truth would provide a path on which to approach death, and, in this way, a meaningful life builds upon the acceptance of death just as a good death results from a meaningful life.

Again, death itself is guiding this telos for both the Greeks and Montaigne, urging it on to seek and grow, because finitude gives us the blessing of an end. Without death, life would have no sting with which to press us on. If one views life based on its quality instead of the number of days granted, there is still the urgency to live well. Instead of death itself being the limiting factor because it imposes finitude, the push to develop meaning is what drives the self to live life fully. One must create a sense of self during life, which is only achieved through the acceptance of death, in order to live and die well. Again, as is being demonstrated in this analysis, this is because living and dying go hand in hand. Meaning-making and the sense of self that results from a concrete telos cannot develop if death is not accepted. The individual must be free of fear in order to press towards their telos. Pressing the individual on, death gives a vision of what a completed life would look like. There is the opportunity to "finish" the self by continuing the habits of life into the act of dying and death itself. This circular development, a meaningful life coming from the acceptance OF death while dying a good death comes from living an accepting and full life, is found in both the Greeks and Montaigne. To have this concept reappear after thousands of years signals how vital it is to living well. Yet, even if this foundational architecture of theory is similar, many of the details have developed to conform to the philosophical thought to which they belong.

With death guiding our telos of life, we finally come to an end. One must question if the end itself could have some meaning inherent to it because, as has been presented previously, death is just another element of life. Otherwise, the development of self would cease when our last day comes to a close. As we have seen with the ancient Greeks and Montaigne, this is not necessarily so. By completing acts that perpetuated the ideas, values, and honor that they held in life, individuals like Alcestis and Antigone were able to die a death that brought their lives full circle. The act of dying and death itself became a completion of life, not an abrupt end. The self is like any other man-made creation: there must be an end. We develop our self through life, and in death, we can leave this world knowing that we made a piece that is all our own. Again, the quality of life is what is significant in this analysis, not the number of days each individual may live. It is not enough to live just a little longer than expected, as we must all confront death, in order to create a beautiful life.

There must be meaning-making during life in order for there to be a good death, as we have seen in both of the philosophies of the Greeks and Montaigne. Nehamas says of Montaigne's philosophical analysis of living and dying that "one does not start as a natural being; that is something one becomes…one grows inevitably through and into artifice, nature is reached through the gradual acculturation of one's tendencies, ones 'powers,' into mutual respect and compatibility" (Nehamas 123). By living according to one's power, one can garden their development of self in accordance with their natural telos. Montaigne and the ancient Greeks call us to this task of building-up and breaking-down, cultivating and cutting back, in their philosophies, for it is the human condition to do so. If this editing, this sculpting of life is not approached whole-heartedly, the

individual has no hope of dying a good death. It is seen in this philosophy that "with birth, your life, and your death as well, begin. You lessen life in the process of living, and the work of your life is building death. While you are living, you are already in death, and death is already behind you when you are no longer alive" (Friedrich 269).

This process of living towards death, with the dying being a part of the living, is what allows for any of this completion of meaning. Voluptuousness functions as a tool that the reader can use to increase awareness of both the world and their inner self, all while preparing for death. In death, Montaigne wishes "to be alone with himself undisturbed, and to be with death, remaining true to his own nature, which, however it may be, should not falsify itself… 'Dying is not a role for society; it is an act for one single character.' He fears nothing as much as alienation from himself" (Friedrich 283). Taking this tranquility into account, a full life is a subtle signal that one has accepted death, and can therefore approach it with peace. One cannot be found without the other, and dying is just a wanted completion of this meaning-making.

4.) Death in literature

Death and the Plowman, by Johannes von Saaz, is another example of attitudes towards death that were present in popular culture around the time of Montaigne. Written in the year 1400, the piece is a dialogue between "The Plaintiff" and "Death," that presents the reader with a more concrete vision of a similar philosophy. As with the plays *Alcestis* and *Antigone*, there is much to be gleaned about cultural mindset and specific practices from texts that appear around the same period in time as the philosophy that is being analyzed. Without such texts as this, there would not be the underlying context

through which the analysis must be read. Philosophy, in many ways, refers back to the culture it is informing, just as the society is being educated by the philosophy that is being produced.

The dialogue between death and the plowman opens with sounds of distress as the man's wife has recently died and left him alone. The plowman curses death, exclaiming that death has "taken her from me, the charming jewel of mine eyes," and shouting "curses" at death (Saaz 3). The plowman goes so far in his accusation of Death to claim that "were there a thread of good in Thee, Thou wouldst Thyself have pity! I shall turn my face from Thee, say no good of Thee, with all my strength be hostile to Thee evermore: the whole of God's creation shall be my help-meet to work against Thee; mayest Thou be hated and envied by all that dwelleth in heaven, on earth, and in hell" (Saaz 6). Death, in reprimanding tones, soon admonishes the plowman for his false sense of entitlement. If Death were to disappear, to be banished from all that is good as the plowman wishes, the world would crumble from the sheer number of living beings. Death reprimands the plowman by saying that "a fool he, who would lament then what is mortal. Let be as desist! The living to the living, the dead to the dead as it hath always been. Bethink thyself better, foolish man, whereof thou wouldst complain!" (Saaz 7). And so, even in the opening exchanges made by these two opposing sides, death is proving himself as necessary to life. Just as was seen in the philosophy of Montaigne, death is a complement to life.

Death later continues his explanation of the need for finitude. According to Death, the complementary opposite is needed for each element of life. Because of this, "wife, child, riches and every earthly good must bring a little joy at first, but greater sorrow in

the end. All love on earth must turn to sorrow… learn to know it better, if thou wouldst be clever of speech" (Saaz 10). The idea that is being reframed in this particular situation is that of contraries. The argument for contraries as seen in Plato's philosophy and that of Montaigne's voluptuousness in order to prepare for death are both applicable to this description. Without the finitude of death, life and its many experiences would not longer have the same fullness of experience. Again, this is because death allows for the completion of being and the urgency to live well. Living towards death is not a matter of time so much as it is an enjoyment of the contrary aspects of life which are found through the fact of finitude. In this way, the contrast becomes dialectic in the interaction between the two poles of life and death. In this complementation, meaning-making is created that, as has been shown, is so essential to living well in order to die a good death.

Death continues in his attempts to convince the plowman that he and the finitude he brings are necessary to life. Yet, ignoring the argument unfolding before him, the plowman insists on denouncing Death. This is all because he blames Death of being "the evil-doer. Therefore, I would fain know who Thou art, what Thou art, where Thou dwellest, whence Thou comest and for what Thou mightiest be of use" (Saaz 13). The plowman is unaware that this very rejection of death is what makes him feel tortured by death. He goes on to claim that Death has "challenged me so cruelly without forewarning of hostility, to have laid waste my joy-filled green, undermined the tower of my strength and caused its downfall" (Saaz 13). If, instead, the plowman had listened to Death and accepted his argument, these feelings of betrayal would not hurt to such a great extent. It is only because of his denial of death, a fault that both the Greeks and Montaigne denounce as being detrimental to life, that he is hurling these curses at death. With the

acceptance of death comes the calming of the individual when death must be confronted, whether it is the process of dying and death or the death of another. The plowman could have mourned his wife appropriately if he had accepted death before it arrived at his doorstep. As it is, the poor plowman must struggle on with his denial and the feelings of despair that accompany it.

Death retaliates again as these accusations are made by the plowman. Death grandly claims that "We are the hand of God, the Lord Death, an honest working reaper" (Saaz 14). It is because of this need for Death, holy or not, that "We do not spare the violet for its beautiful color, its rich fragrance, nor its delicious juice. Behold, that We call justice. Romans and poets have adjudicated this to Us according to Our rights and just dues because they knew Us better than thou dost" (Saaz 14). Death is now seen in terms of bringing justice to the world by keeping it in balance. Without Death, there would be no complementary counterpoint to life. Yet, instead of putting this in terms of finality, Death states that it is the "beginning of non-being" (Saaz 14). By framing finality in this way, Death is allowing for continuation in the non-being of death, and, in this way, there is the reappearance of life. Just as was seen in this philosophical analysis, the complements come together to form a more complete whole. Life itself could not have the same urgency of meaning-making if it was not paired so well with death. Death demands for the plowman to listen to the argument and "let it enter thy brain and lend an ear: Life is created for the sake of dying; were there no life, We would not be, Our Office would have no meaning;—but there would also be no ordered world" (Saaz 20). Yet again, the plowman must put aside his grief if he wants to overcome his fear and hatred towards Death.

Mourning practices, something that was so vital to the ancient Greeks, reappears in this text as well. Similar to these ancient attitudes, in the Middle Ages "the signs most often mentioned to indicate imminent death…were signs that today we would call natural: an obvious, routine observation of the common and familiar facts of everyday life" (Aries 7). In the same way, "death is governed by a familiar ritual that is willingly described" through the use of mourning and burial practices, which make death less foreign to the living. Following the same concept of embracing feelings of sadness and abandonment in order to purge them, Death presents a similar concept to the plowman. Death claims that "he who doth not desire to drive all love out of his heart must, for all time, bear present sufferings: Banish, therefore, from thy mind, thy head and heart all thought of love and, instanter, thou wilt be relieved of sorrow" (Saaz 21). According to Death, there is no valid reason to continue this cycle of grief. Instead, because "after each of thy children's death thou wilt encounter heartbreak: after thy death, heartbreak will be their lot, thine and theirs, whenever ye must part. Canst bring back the years that have passed, words spoken, maidenhood deflowered, then thou art also able to bring back the mother to thy children" (Saaz 21). Through this speech, Death is attempting to show the plowman that, just like anything that passes away in life, death is another inevitable step. One does not proclaim the same outraged sorrow as the plowman is doing because each day must come to an end. This is reflected in Montaigne's philosophy because he proposes the idea that "man is continuously in the process of change, the child 'dies' in the youth, the youth in the man, the man in the old man, and all this is the gentle prelude to what in one's final dying intensifies only in degree, thus dying essentially signifies no more than that change in life itself" (Friedrich 268). Therefore, it is strange to have this

magnified reaction to death because it is just another part of life. In his experience of death, Montaigne describes the process, and he says that he "took pleasure; free from distress; sweet feeling; very pleasant and peaceful; without any pain; so gently, so gradually and easily" (Friedrich 278). Montaigne further claims that in death there is "no desire, no fear or doubt to disturb the air for her, no difficulty, past, present or future, over which her imagination may not pass without hurt'" (Friedrich 299). All of these examples are presented in an attempt to dispel the fear that surrounds death, a fear that is deeply ingrained but is not necessarily permanent according to Montaigne.

Even when illness and dying is painful, "in the pain, perfect joy is born: to be initiated into the totality of the human essence" (Friedrich 298). No matter the mode of dying, and Montaigne presents several ways through which this would come about, there is a calming reason as to why one should not be afraid of death. If dying truly takes over life in this way, there does not seem to even be pain in the occurrence of death. Montaigne is presenting all of these ideas, which would have supported the advice give by Death, in order to indicate to his readers that there is nothing to be afraid of. It is the downfall of the plowman that he is not able to accept this simple fact of existence, and, because of this, he will be doomed to always feel such heightened levels of remorse for each and every death he and his children will be forced to experience.

Contrary to what one might assume about the attitude of Death towards these mortal feelings of betrayal, Death expresses remorse for the doomed future for the man who cannot accept death. Death sighs, "alas, mortal mankind liveth evermore in fear, in misery and grief, in sorrow and care, in anxiety and shuddering, in days of woe and sickness, in mourning, affliction, wailing and sadness and in adversities of sundry kind"

(Saaz 33). Death takes the attitude of an understanding interlocutor when it comes to the affliction of man, which is why he is attempting to sooth the plowman's woe over the death of his wife. Such a positive portrayal of death, as a counselor as opposed to a leering demon, is essential to the message of this text. While death is shown as being helpful in his argument and analysis of death and dying, the reader is not holding onto the feeling of fear for this new death character. Instead, the text helps the reader to follow the same path that is being lain out for the plowman. Whether the reader or the plowman takes this path is secondary to the fact that it exists at all.

The text, which appears much later in time after the ancient Greeks, draws from the same idea of letting go of the worldly. Both Montaigne and the Greeks agreed on this point, that one must let go of the material in order to develop the self, and so this text allows the reader to see this concept in a work that was most likely more widely available than philosophical texts. Death states that "the more a man is possessed of earthly goods, the more the adversities compound to which he is heir" (Saaz 33). By clinging to the material, the soul is not "loosened" and ready for death, as was the case for the Greeks and Montaigne. Indeed, it is only through the acceptance of death that knowledge of death no longer becomes an additional burned. By letting go of the temporary world, the burned of death is lifted, because "the heaviest burden is, that no man knoweth when, where and how, We shall pounce on him with one fell stroke and drive him along the way of all flesh" (Saaz 33). The only way to prepare and ride oneself of this weight is by accepting death during life. This historical text, like *Antigone* and *Alcestis* before it, marks an interesting insight into the cultural attitudes towards death that were held during this time. Even if it was written around the time of Montaigne, and therefore reflects

many of the insights he shared, it also presents the same concepts that were found in the time of the ancient Greeks. Such a continuation in not only philosophy but popular texts as well allows the reader to truly see how pervasive these concepts were throughout the ages.

Through an analysis of contrasts between the ancient Greeks and Montaigne, we have come to see that one must live towards death in order to develop a meaningful life and therefore die well. As Hugo Friedrich so eloquently said of Montaigne's philosophy, "love of life and love of death are joined. In such a dual love for the antagonists, which cannot be denied in their opposition, Montaigne brings his human essence into balance" (Friedrich 299). One must embrace death as being just another part of life, have an overall goal in life in order to give it meaning, and constantly have death in mind in order to lose the fear of it. Instead of throwing us into a morbid abyss, meditation on death gives us the urgency to live life fully and the knowledge that we have the freedom to do so. The fact that these two different philosophies came to the same conclusion can tell us a lot about our condition as finite mortals, if we let it. We need to be reassured that we can make a difference in life and be able to enjoy it. We need to know that what we do has meaning. We need to know that death is not a limit to existence, but, instead, it is the flavor of existence. All of us must come to our last day, and we must philosophize like the ancient Greeks and Montaigne both said in order to get there with acceptance and fearlessness.

Chapter 3: Martin Heidegger and Michel Foucault

Continuing on from the theories of Montaigne, one comes to the philosophy of Martin Heidegger, who echoes many of the thoughts presented by Montaigne in his work on death and dying. As will soon become apparent, Heidegger agreed with the theory that one must accept death in order to live a good life, one full of meaning, and therefore die a good death. In fact, according to Heidegger, one must live "towards" death. By doing this, a new theory of how to live well is developed in that Heidegger views the care of the self and of others as a way to become authentic, and therefore have meaning, in one's existence. By having this realization of the true self, one is then free to live a full life devoid of underlying anxiety about death. With the further development of philosophical inquiry on this topic, as seen in the work of Michel Foucault, it will soon become apparent how this more recent line of thinking has developed from the historical figures that we have analyzed so far. New approaches to how one should live will be presented, all within the context of how these philosophers proposed how one should understand death. This chapter will give yet another approach to how one should live well, but the same topics of acceptance and living towards death are still present in the underlying philosophical thought. It is this continuation of the same themes throughout the centuries that drive home how important these topics are to how one should live well in order to die a good death.

1.) Martin Heidegger's Care of the Self

This analysis must first clarify the terminology employed by Heidegger in order to further compare the philosophies that have been presented. To Heidegger, death is an

"existential phenomenon" and is "that *possibility which is one's ownmost*" (Heidegger 240, 250). From the start, death is not defined in negative terms. Instead, Heidegger is presenting death as an essential characteristic for each and every individual. Immediately, it is obvious that Heidegger is trying to show his readers that death is nothing to be afraid of. According to his analysis, just as in the philosophies shown previously, death is just another part of life. Death is absolutely ours, and it is therefore a trait that should not be denied or hidden because, as the reader will see, death is what gives meaning to life.

Another essential concept while analyzing Heidegger is that of "Dasein. " In his concept of Dasein, one's "there-being" in the world, death is the original disposition of being because it is the most extreme and exterior from Dasein itself. Again, just as was seen in the philosophy of the Greeks and Montaigne, death is an undeniable aspect of life. Without death giving Dasein this context to live in, there would be no wholeness to Dasein. This is so because death provides Dasein a horizon to live towards, a goal, just as with the Greek telos, which it can live towards. Dasein is "'specifically mine' (*je meiniges*); it is *personal*, unique… it is neither *merely there (Vorhanden)*, nor is it only *specifically mine*. Also, it does not only relate itself *understandingly* to its *Being* but it is also *being in the world*" (Choron 231). Again, as Dasein, the individual is a Being within the context of the world and finitude, and this is how Dasein can come to understand itself. This is so because Dasein is always related to its death in the process of dying, we have our dying with us as soon as we are born, and yet Dasein can never actually be with its death. When Dasein is dead, it is no longer Dasein, so, at most, Dasein can only live "towards" death because it can never be "in" death. Accordingly, death "is a most private (*eigenste*) possibility insofar as it is *specifically mine*… it is an unrelated possibility

(*unbezueglich*), insofar as in death the relations to all other *Daseins* are dissolved… it is an unsurpassable (*unueberholdare*) possibility, insofar as it represents the most extreme possibility, 'the possibility of absolute impossibility of *Dasein"*' (Choron 235). Dying, the relation between Dasein and its death, is what gives Dasein meaning. Death, as understood as what Dasein is being-toward, is what gives Dasein its "'towards-which of serviceability, and the 'for-which' of usability" (Heidegger 116). Heidegger makes this statement in his analysis of the tool.

Just as with any concrete tool, the tools of life have this same type of "serviceability" and "usability" for Dasein. These traits of a tool can only come about if there is an end towards which they may work, and, in the case of Dasein, this end is death itself. Like a hammer, the tools to living the good life must be utilized in order to build quality in Dasein's being in the world. This is a continuation of the philosophical thought previously discussed in this analysis. Dasein develops from these characteristics of mortality not because death sets a limit on existence, but because death allows for an increased importance of the quality of life. It is not the quantity of days that defines the individuals but instead it is the fullness of each day that is lived. Foucault offers another set of tools directed to this same philosophy because he promotes a completion of being. Without the finality of death, existence would not have any incentive to develop meaning and a sense of self because it would be infinite and incomplete. The following analysis will help to elucidate why life must have meaning for Heidegger's Dasein and Foucault's complete being and how this position applies to the tools for meaning-making in life.

For Heidegger, death is something that is completely your own, you cannot take it from anyone, and you cannot overtake it. These essential qualities of death are what give

parameters for Dasein's interactions with the world, itself, and other beings in the world. In terms of the relation between Dasein and other beings, Heidegger posits that "the dying of Others is not something which we experience in a genuine sense; at most we are always just 'there alongside'" (Heidegger 239). Again, Dasein cannot die for another, but there is still a relation with the other, even in the process of dying and death. Accordingly, "in the dying of the Other we can experience that remarkable phenomenon of being which may be defined as the change-over of an entity from Dasein's kind of Being (or life) to no-longer-Dasein" (Heidegger 238). At most, each individual can only witness the dying of another through the interactions that Dasein has with the world it exists in. Given this, by witnessing the death of another, Dasein can peripherally connect to the process of death, even if it cannot be experienced firsthand. The fact that a relation between Dasein and the other can still be maintained through dying, death, and mourning is important, but the other must still be an individual in death. This is essential because it makes death an event, which defines Dasein as an individual, and not just a part of the collective "they" of society, as Heidegger terms it (Heidegger 258). Therefore, Dasein can find significance in death, as death is what defines Dasein within the context of its relation to the "they," because it individualizes Dasein and therefore allows for relations.

Another important aspect of death for Heidegger is that "*no one can take the Other's dying away from him*," just as you cannot die for someone else (Heidegger 240). Dasein therefore cannot be cheated out of its own death. Given what this analysis has presented so far, this is to the benefit of Dasein, even if it may not be accepted as being such. If death could be taken away, Dasein would not longer be able to view itself as an individual among the greater "they," and therefore would never be able to develop and

find meaning in life. Without death, Dasein could never reach an authentic state of existence. Put in such strong terms, Heidegger is again defending the concept that death is Dasein's "ownmost" Being, which cannot be taken away or replaced. Each of these facts of death and dying, as set down by Heidegger, pose a unique impediment for Dasein, even if death is beneficial to Dasein. Death is detrimental to Dasein only if Dasein continues to fear the finitude that it cannot escape. Yet, instead of limiting development by only granting a restricted amount of time, death allows for Dasein to see its inner truth and authenticity.

Self-realization and development, which are products of death and dying, would seem to be positive traits that Dasein should crave and readily accept. Yet, Dasein flees from this very inescapable fact of its own essential being. As is seen in modern society, Dasein is prone to avoid acknowledging the certainty of death. This is where separation from the "they" is essential for Dasein because "the 'they' covers up what is peculiar in death's certainty—*that it is possible at any moment*. Along with the certainty of death goes the *indefiniteness* of its 'when'" (Heidegger 258). Not only does the "they" cover up Dasein's essential state, but it also increases the fear Dasein has for the unknowable characteristic of death. A negative outlook on death leads to a fleeing away from death, which alters Dasein's way of living from authentic to inauthentic existence. The authentic Being is engaged, unlike the inauthentic Being, which has fallen away from its true self and into a superficial view of the world. "Idle talk, curiosity, and ambiguity" characterize this inauthenticity for Heidegger, and this is how one falls away from interacting with the world in an authentic way and into everydayness (Heidegger 219). Heidegger recognizes that even the language around death changes when Dasein has a negative approach to

death. While in denial, Dasein "talks of [death] in a 'fugitive' manner, either expressly or else in a way which is mostly inhibited, as if to say, 'One of these days one will die too, in the end; but right now it has nothing to do with us'" (Heidegger 253). This altered perception of death is not conducive to a well-lived life for Dasein. If death is denied as being a possibility, Dasein cannot discover its true self or develop meaning in order to die a good death. Trapped perpetually in this state of denial, Dasein will live a restricted life, living in fear of the unknown if death can never be accepted.

The denial of death is nonsensical because death is inherent within Dasein, and there is nothing that Dasein can do to change this fact of its existence. Again, Death is posed as Dasein's "ownmost possibility, which is non-relational and not to be outstripped, which is certain and, as such, indefinite" (Heidegger 259). The term "possibility" is vital to this analysis because "Dasein has a kind of Being in which it is brought before itself and becomes disclosed to itself in its thrownness" (Heidegger 181). In a similar way, the indefinite aspect of death comes from the fact that death is a possibility for Dasein at any point in time, yet it is never a set time that Dasein can know in any concrete manner as it extends infinitely being Dasein after its life has been finished. Death is non-relational in that it exists outside of Dasein itself because whenever Dasein is, death is not. Death also cannot be outstripped because Dasein cannot get ahead of death to see into the afterlife, just as it cannot get behind birth to see its pre-existence.

Dasein's "thrownness, as a kind of Being, belongs to an entity which in each case is its possibilities, and is them in such a way that it understands itself in these possibilities, and is them in such a way that it understands itself in these possibilities an

in terms of them, projecting itself upon them" (Heidegger 181). Dasein is "thrown" into the world, armed with these traits and characteristics, whether they and existence itself are accepted or not. Accordingly, death is a possibility that can't be actualized; it is only a thing towards which Dasein can live. When Dasein is alive, it is living towards death, and when Dasein is dead, it is no longer Dasein. Yet, as a possibility of Dasein, death can be actualized at any moment, as is the nature of possibility. The inevitability of death for Dasein leads Dasein towards death through the process of dying, a progression which beings as soon as Dasein is born. This mode of living while being lead to death is a "Being towards" for Dasein, in that death is always a possibility in the future on the horizon of existence. Yet, since death can never be actualized, Dasein has "anxiety", as Heidegger uses the term. This is the reason, as stated previously, that Dasein flees from death and towards the "they" in which is perceives a sense of safety in the whole. The reason that there is anxiety in death for Dasein is because "that in the face of which one has anxiety is characterized by the fact that what threatens is *nowhere*" (Heidegger 186). Death is not something that is specific which Dasein can know, and yet it is an inevitable fact of Dasein's future. Dasein is aware that death is in the future but it can never actually "know" death.

There is anxiety in this because of this unknowable element of death itself. Given this statement, Heidegger continues the analysis by stating that "what oppresses us is not this or that, not is it the summation of everything present-at-hand; it is rather the *possibility* of the ready-to-hand in general; that is to say, it is the world itself" (Heidegger 187). To summarize, because Dasein cannot know it's death and because death is something that is indescribable and yet still a possibility that Dasein must live toward,

Dasein has this sense of anxiety. Given the unpleasant nature of anxiety, Dasein wants to flee away from that which makes it anxious, namely death, and towards the known of others. Instead of acting as a balm, fleeing only exacerbates the dread that Dasein experiences because authenticity cannot be obtained without the acceptance of death. It is only by truly living towards death that Dasein can become free and authentic.

Not only does fleeing not allow for authenticity, but also the denial of death only heightens and traps Dasein in a state of inauthenticity. It is only through truly living towards death that Dasein can be free to live. Yet, in a sense, anxiety brings hope to Dasein because it "brings Dasein face to face with its *Being-free for* (*propensio in*…) the authenticity of its Being, and for this authenticity as a possibility which it always is" (Heidegger 188). Therefore, Dasein can never turn away from its own possibility of death, and states of being, such as the feeling of hopelessness, are "only one of its own modes of *Being towards* these possibilities" (Heidegger 236). Freedom is then held in realizing one's potentiality for being in the world. If anxiety is used to make Dasein realize its own authentic state of Being, "one becomes free for one's own death, one is liberated from one's lostness in those possibilities which may accidentally thrust themselves upon one; and one is liberated in such a way that for the first time one can authentically understand and choose among the factical possibilities lying ahead of that possibility which is not to be outstripped" (Heidegger 264). The possibility of death has been accepted and therefore overcome if Dasein can live in such a way that it is living towards death itself.

From this development of the "possibilities" of Dasein, Heidegger goes on to develop the notion of "anticipation." Anticipation is characterized as an element of a

Being whose "kind of Being is anticipation itself" because "Being-towards-death is the anticipation of a potentiality-for-Being" (Heidegger 262). In this way, the potentiality of Being is what leads to anticipation because of the possibilities inherent in the act of living. This component of existence is "essential to the basic constitution of Dasein… [because] there is *constantly something still to be settled*" (Heidegger 236). Death, as a possibility of Dasein, fulfills this need in that it will always be an unknown that Dasein must anticipate. Again, instead of limiting Dasein by giving it this finitude, death stirs the need to develop within Dasein. If death can be accepted, Dasein is then said to have this Being-towards-death within itself, an anticipation that comes with the possibility of death.

Leading this analysis further, Heidegger claims, "anticipation turns out to be the possibility of understanding one's *ownmost* and uttermost potentiality-for-Being—that is to say, the possibility of *authentic existence*" (Heidegger 263). Anticipation does this by revealing "*to Dasein its lostness in the they-self, and brings it face to face with the possibility of being itself... in an impassioned* **freedom towards death**—*a freedom which has been released from the Illusions of the 'they', and which is factical, certain of itself, and anxious*" (Heidegger 266). Again, it is only through being towards death that this may occur. Anticipation turns the scope of Dasein's existence from inauthentic everydayness to its inner authentic being. It is this awareness of Dasein that is sparked when Dasein becomes aware of itself as it exists in the world. It is only through the self-knowledge that this entails that Dasein can be engaged and authentic. By taking this step towards self-awareness, there is freedom because the self no longer depends on the They, and therefore Dasein is able to exist in a way that is authentic to itself. As has been

shown in the previous philosophies of other individuals, it is only through the acceptance of death that one can realize life. Similarly to these previous philosophies as well, Heidegger must formulate his own solution to the question of how to live well once death has been accepted. The result of this change in how to exist towards death is a care for the self and others as formulated by Heidegger.

For Heidegger, "Dasein's Being reveals itself as *care*" (Heidegger 182). This results because Dasein is always a Being-in-the-world and, in doing so, is interacting alongside others. Care is defined in this context as "a primordial structural totality, [which] lies 'before' ["vor"] every factical 'attitude' and 'situation' of Dasein, and it does so existentially *a priori*; this means that it always lies *in* them" (Heidegger 193). Dasein is therefore a relational being, and, as such, its authenticity is fulfilled within these terms. Yet, it is also through concern for the self and others that Dasein falls into the "they" and becomes homogeneous. Jacques Choron summarizes this notion by saying that "in its everyday mode of being, *Dasein* 'dissolves' itself, as it were, in the world. No one is an isolate I for without the others it is a fiction. *Being in the world* is then also *being together with—Mitsein*, and it is characterized not by being different from the others, but precisely by being like the others" (Choron 232). Even if this initially may seem to be a negative attribute of care, "care is *ahead of itself*… and in this structure the disclosedness of Dasein lies hidden. *With* and *through* it is uncoveredness; hence only with Dasein's *disclosedness* is the *most primordial* phenomenon of truth attained" (Heidegger 220). It is through the innate characteristic of Dasein as having care for others and for the self that disclosedness may be attained, and disclosedness is that which leads to truth for Dasein. When disclosedness is achieved in care, it is claimed that "'*there is*' *truth only in so far*

as Dasein is and so long as Dasein is. Entities are uncovered only *when* Dasein *is*; and only as long as Dasein *is*, are they disclosed" (Heidegger 226). Yet, even as Dasein reveals and loses itself in care, it is individualized in death. A circular relation seems to have developed with death creating the need to care for the self and others in order to find meaning while, at the same time, care is developed and individualizes the self through the possibility of death. One can only care for another if they are an individual and not a sum of separate beings. Care is for the singular existence in this case. What makes something singular though is the confrontation with death that will make it an authentic being. By becoming an authentic being, Dasein is able to engage with the world in a way that displays this care for the other. Again, the initial turning of Dasein towards the fact of its existence must be accomplished in order for care to occur because authenticity allows Dasein to display care for the other. The cycle is continuous, but it must first be initiated by the self-awareness of Dasein that only comes through the confrontation with death.

The concept of anxiety now returns in this analysis because there can be no relation without individuality. In this way, care needs death in order to be meaningful for the individual Dasein as opposed to the collective "they". Death is therefore essential to the care of Dasein because "in anxiety there lies the possibility of a disclosure which is quite distinctive; for anxiety individualizes. This individualization brings Dasein back from its falling, and makes manifest to it that authenticity and inauthenticity are possibilities of its Being" (Heidegger 191). Compounded this is the fact that singular relations cannot be developed within the context of a collective. It is only through individual Beings in the world that relations may be seen because they require individual care. Dasein can only be cared for and recognized as an individual entity so long as death

is a possibility of existence. So, in order to live well, one must individuate from the "they" by anticipating death and having care, and therefore allowing disclosedness to allow for truth and authenticity to regulate Dasein. All of these comingling factors balance upon each other to create an analysis of how to approach death and dying that, as with the previous philosophies, is what allows the individual to live well.

This understanding of death is not about the limit that mortality imposes or the urgency to live, which this outlook can sometimes inspire. Instead, Heidegger is proposing a way of living toward death that emphasizes a quality of existence that can only be found when death is a possibility. In this way, death gives meaning to life. Heidegger states this clearly by saying that "in Dasein there is undeniably a constant 'lack of totality' which finds an end with death. This 'not-yet' 'belongs' to Dasein as long as it is; this is how things stand phenomenally" (Heidegger 286). Given this, it is clear that only by living towards death can one fully reach their potential authenticity, which is based on a meaningful existence. By reaching this state, Dasein has reached a quality in life that is not dictated by any limit that death could impose. In this way, by establishing an existence that is meaningful and authentic for Dasein, "with its death, Dasein has indeed 'fulfilled its course'" (Heidegger 288).

Instead of having death mark the end of its Being, Dasein is dependent on an internal state of care and knowledge of the self. Such a foundation can be completed during any period of time, and therefore death cannot rob the Dasein that has come to this state by cutting its time short. Death no longer holds sway over Dasein through anxiety. Rather, Dasein has filled the unknown of death with anticipation, which created a new and authentic Dasein, and is therefore a complete Being in the world. This fulfills the

requirement that "Dasein must, as itself, *become*—that is to say, *be*—what it is not yet" (Heidegger 287). By living towards death, Dasein must release itself from the anxiety that death presents by creating a firm sense of self through meaning-making, which then allows for the truth and authenticity that comes with self-knowledge. It is only through this ultimate realization that Dasein will be able to tear free from the anxiety of death and be free to live in a way that is true to itself. For Heidegger, existence is defined by care, and this can only come about if Dasein is a finite being. Death plays this essential role because it gives Dasein a being-towards, and this gives Dasein its essential authenticity. Without death and the finitude, Dasein would have an inauthentic and empty existence. The care of the self is the tool that Heidegger is proposing one should use in order to engage with the world and being authentic in this manner, and therefore give life the quality and meaning that humankind strives for. Yet, as has been previously presented in this analysis, there are several ways in which to approach meaning-making in life. This line of thinking is analogous to the philosophy of Michel Foucault who also proposes the idea that a complete life can only be found if death is accepted as a fact of that very state of living. Even if these two philosophies are similar in their basic premises, the tools that are proposed as being necessary for a meaningful existence differ. It is this shift in thinking of how to make life meaningful that continues the human need to question how one should live life.

2.) Michel Foucault's Development of the Self

Michel Foucault's theories on the self are similar to those that have been presented from Heidegger's philosophy, but his essential tools for how to live are

different. For both, the care of the self and other allows for the development of the self as a work of art. Yet, this process can only be done when death is embraced as a completion to life instead of an unwanted limit to existence. Such an outlook on death changes one's perspective on how to live life by prioritizing the essential act of meaning-making. This developed because "western man was gradually learning what it meant to be a living species in a living world, to have a body, conditions of existence, probabilities of life, and individual and collective welfare, forces that could be modified and a space in which they could be distributed in an optimal manner" (Foucault, *Sexuality* 142). Foucault had a theory that there existed several different technologies, and one of which was "technologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality" (Foucault, *Technologies* 18).

In this manner, Foucault is proposing that the tools presented in his philosophy of the art of living will aid the reader in achieving the good life. One must utilize tools in order to bring this about because the self "is to be found in this principle which uses these tools, a principle not of the body but of the soul" (Foucault, *Technologies* 25). Accordingly, "you have to worry about your soul—that is the principle activity of caring for yourself. The care of the self is the care of the activity and not the care of the soul-as-substance" (Foucault, *Technologies* 25). Again, as the essential theme of this argument and a question that has driven philosophical thought, Foucault is presenting another vision of what it means to live well. Yet, as the reader will see, this art of living is only present when death is acknowledged during life. In this way, the soul is not a "substance"

to be cared for, it is an activity. In this manner, Foucault is defining the soul as something that isn't a substance, and this is important because that which is a substance is mortal. On the other hand, that which is an activity never truly dies because mortality is not an inherent trait to it. It is through this care of the self that Foucault is able to show that "the use of one's reason in order to find out who one is and how one can be best" will lead to a better and more fulfilling existence (Nehamas 166). It is through this reason, as is found in philosophy, that creates the essential purpose of philosophical thought: "to change people's lives on an individual level" (Nehamas 164). This is done through the care of the self because it allows the individual to embrace death in order to create meaning in life, and therefore to have a complete existence.

The care of the self through the utilization of philosophical thought has been established because, for modern individuals, "what was demanded and what served as an objective was life, understood as the basic needs, man's concrete essence, the realization of his potential, a plentitude of the possible" (Foucault, *Sexuality* 145). Foucault references the Greeks in helping to develop the concept of "*epimelēstbai sautou*, 'to take care of yourself,' 'the concern with self, 'to be concerned, to take care of yourself'" (Foucault, *Technologies* 19). The care of the self, as has been presented in this text, has reappeared yet again because of the common understanding that this is of vital importance to the development of the individual. Such a tool, the concern for the self, cannot be overlooked, and Foucault is acknowledging the history behind this philosophical thought. Yet, Foucault will not stop there, because he must create his own tools for living in this manner. Foucault even directly states that his philosophy is greatly different from that of the ancient Greeks. He believes that "one of the main evolutions in

ancient culture has been that this *techne tou biou* become more and more a *techne* of the self" (Foucault, *Reader* 348). Instead of focusing on the *tou biou*, how to live, one must focus instead on the self. This fundamental change influences the tools for living that come from this philosophical thought. Foucault makes the following comparison in order to highlight the contrast between the two modes of thought and how one developed from the other. Foucault states, "a Greek citizen of the fifth or fourth century would have felt that his *techne* for life was to take care of the city, of his companions. But for Seneca, for instance, the problem is to take care of himself" (Foucault, *Reader* 348). The tools for living are now tools for the self, and that is how this philosophy will develop as Foucault explains the tools that may be used to approach existence. Although the initiating force behind this has changed, the need to have a goal in order to live a good life and then die a good death is still the same.

The use of writing and the reflection that can be found in this practice is of vital importance to Foucault. Foucault cites Pliny, a man of ancient Rome, as one who "advises a friend to set aside a few moments a day, or several weeks or month, for a retreat into himself" (Foucault, *Technologies* 27). Foucault agrees that this seclusion is necessary "to discover—but not to discover faults and deep feelings, only to remember rules of action, the main laws of behavior. It is a mnemotechnical formula" when one experiences this "retreat into the country" (Foucault, *Technologies* 34). Writing, sometimes even in conjunction with this journey away from the city, also acts as a mode of reflection for Foucault. The expression of self through the written word allows one to reflect by witnessing events a second time and seeing the patterns of action within these decisions. In this way, "taking care of oneself became linked to constant writing activity.

The self is something to write about, a theme or object (subject) of writing activity" (Foucault, *Technologies* 27). Foucault is a proponent of this reflection because it soon becomes a form of meditation for the individual, a way to prepare the self for future actions and life events, such as death, by confronting the self through written word. The written word is different from oral expression in its nature as being for just the author. This freedom allows for expression of self, which is not something that can always occur in oral discussion. By giving the individual this freedom, the self may emerge before the author, and this is when analysis and reflection may occur.

Foucault states that "a subject first ensure his autonomy and independence—and he ensures it in a rather complex relationship to the knowledge of the world, since it is this knowledge which allows him to ensure his independence and it is only once he has ensured it that he is able to recognize the order of the world as it stands" (Foucault, *Reader* 371). It is clear to the reader that the development of the self and of freedom is a process that is interdependent on various factors, but all lead to a better way of life. It is because a good life is composed of these essential factors that they are so intertwined in this manner. Each requires the other to be present in order to allow for the development of the characteristic. Foucault also states that "no technique, no professional skill can be acquired without exercise; neither can one learn the art of living, the *techne tou biou*, without an *askesis* which must be taken as a training of oneself by oneself" (Foucault, *Reader* 364). Writing in its repetitive and revealing nature allows for this training of the self in a way that is unique to this mode of expression. Without this freedom and reflection, the self would never become aware of itself according to Foucault. It is only

through self-awareness that one can life the good life and care of others though, and therefore the act of writing is an essential tool for living in the context of this philosophy.

The care of others, the compliment to the care of the self, is established in sharing the essential truths found in self-discovery. Foucault employs the concept of *parrhêsia*, first presented by the ancient Greeks, as a way to show care for the other. This act of truth-telling, whether or not the audience wishes to accept what is being said, takes courage. Socrates embodied this in his discussions with interlocutors because he led the other to a higher level of understanding during the course of the dialogue. As Foucault presented it, *parrhêsia* has a specific purpose, which "is to attend to his fellow citizens like a father or an older brother in order to show them what is important is not money or reputation but the care of themselves—not a concern for the world but for wisdom, truth, and for their own soul" (Nehamas 165). Yet, this care for the others can only be accomplished once the care of the self has been established. Accordingly, in order to care for the self, one must accept death as a completion of life and find meaning in existence. This care of the self will, in turn, lead to a developed self of self which can then lead others to a similar act of caring. Such a self is completed only in death, but this is not a threat to the developed self because death no longer brings fear and anxiety.

According to Foucault, the self is always in flux because "…he believed that the care of the self was not a process of discovering who one truly is but of inventing and improvising who one can be" (Nehamas 178). Again, this can only be accomplished if the limit set by death is seen as an opportunity to complete life, analogous to the theory Heidegger presented in his philosophy. In fact, instead of limiting the self, death gives opportunities to the self. Each pattern of existence that developed in life through this

changing sense of self creates a new completed being that is established in death. Given this, Foucault states that "'from the idea that the self is not given to us, I think that there is only one practical consequence: we have to create ourselves as a work of art…Couldn't everyone's life become a work of art? Why should the lamp or the house be an art object, but not our life?'" (Nehamas 177). Foucault is promoting a way in which "we have to build our existence as a beautiful existence; it is an aesthetic mode" for him (Foucault 356). The individual must also live this life in a moral way because "if they want to have a beautiful existence, if they want to have a good reputation, if they want to be able to rule others, they have to do that" (Foucault, *Reader* 356). One cannot create a work of art if life has been sullied by unmoral decision. It is because of this that "they accept those obligations in a conscious way for the beauty or glory of existence. The choice, the aesthetic choice or the political choice, for which they decide to accept this kind of existence—that's the *mode d'assujettissement*. It's a choice, it's a personal choice" (Foucault, *Reader* 356). Yet, "the relationship to the self intersects the relationship to others and the world. The relationship to the self no longer needs to be ascetic to get into relation to the truth. It suffices that the relationship to the self reveals to me the obvious truth of what I see for me to apprehend that truth definitively. Thus, I can be immoral and know the truth" (Foucault, *Reader* 371-372). This second quote puts the previous statement in a new light, and what is revealed is similar to the "Truth" that the ancient Greeks sought in their philosophy of life. It is in this way that, even if it may seem that Foucault is condemning a certain way of life in this passage, it is more the case that he is giving the individual the freedom of choice. It is up to each and every individual to decide what kind of self they wish to create on a daily basis. No one else can make this

decision for them, and they are the ones who must live with the consequences. The limit of death, in this circular way, is putting quality and morality into existence. The empowering fact that choices must be made in everyday existence gives life meaning. In this way, each decision made will reflect of the completed self that is created at the end of life. This theory of life and how one should live "is a choice about existence made by the individual. People decide for themselves whether or not to care for themselves" (Foucault, *Reader* 361). The first step to living, according to Foucault, is making this choice, which will then go on to create meaning in life. Without death, the artwork of life would never be a completed piece and the care of the self would never be accomplished because there would be not final act and no moral consequence. It is only through death that one may see life as a piece of art because it must be completed, as with any man-made object, and that there can be a beauty in how one lives life.

Inherent in this line of thinking is "the 'right' to life, to one's body, to health, to happiness, to the satisfaction of needs, and beyond all the oppressions or 'alienations,' the 'right' to rediscover what one is and all that one can be" as protected by political power (Foucault, *Sexuality* 145). It is only through the tools for the care of the self that self-knowledge may be achieved. For Foucault, "it always held that a subject could not have access to the truth if he did not first operate upon himself a certain work which would make him susceptible to knowing the truth—a work of purification, conversion of the soul by contemplation of the soul itself" (Foucault, *Reader* 371). These are what his tools are trying to achieve because they allow for the reflection that leads to the care of the self, the telos of the philosophy that he is presenting. Whether the self is developed through authenticity of Dasein as with Heidegger or as a work of art as seen in Foucault, the

underlying element is meaning-making. Just as was seen in the philosophies previously presented, one must have a foundation of meaning in order to live well, and this can only be done if death is accepted. Foucault even goes so far as to connect "these instruments of morality explicitly to medical thought and practice and used something approaching the language of therapy regarding them" (Nehamas 178). In turn, "the cure is reached through the process of taking care of oneself that constitutes the main task of philosophy" (Nehamas 163).

Contrary to what one might assume about philosophy establishing only one clear way to exist, seeing as we all want to live well as our own individual self demands, there are many different avenues through which to approach well being. Alexander Nehamas succinctly summarizes this by stating that "the art of living has no rules, that there is no such thing as *the* art of living. There are only arts of living—many arts, recognizable only after they have already been practices and after their products have been brought into being" (Nehamas 184). What is interesting about the two philosophers cited here, Heidegger and Foucault, is how much they still reflect ancient Greek thought that was established on this topic. Even if there may be many variations to the approach of self-development, one can see that throughout the centuries of philosophical thought, the underlying theme of meaning-making is still present and applicable to each individual. Even if we may search throughout the centuries of dominant philosophical thought for a radically different perspective on meaning-making, it seems, as has been presented by this analysis, that the same basic components will be found. These different paradigms of the good life will keep reappearing with death and meaning-making as foundational elements.

Conclusion

The questions surrounding death and dying echo through the history of philosophy because death is an event we must all confront. Each death is an individual act, but the event is communal in its effects. By witnessing the death of another, the fact of our own mortality is brought further into light. It is because of these essential qualities of death that one should strive to overcome the fear inherent in the notion that death is an imposing limit on life that should be dreaded.

We have reviewed several philosophies that attempt to answer these questions. The fundamental, underlying premise that is shared by all these philosophies is that one should embrace death as simply another part of life. With this change in perspective, the individual is then freed from the anxiety that death produces and can live a good life by using the various tools that the philosophers have been recommended for building meaning. These different recommendations can be thought of as a collection of minor premises that distinguish one philosophy from another. Even if these tools for living and their desired outcomes differ among the philosophy of the ancient Greeks, Montaigne, Heidegger, and Foucault, they also seem to share the underlying conclusion that we will die the way we live, and they inspire us with the idea that if we live a philosophical life we can both live well and die well.

This argument is not just a historical relic but also an important one for us today. Death has become a fearful unknown in present society, giving it even more power over how we conduct our lives. This is a new type of death: “the ugly and hidden death, hidden because it is ugly and dirty” (Aries 569). As a society, we have responded accordingly by attempting to isolate and ignore the inevitable. Not only does this change

the process of death and dying, but it also makes the acceptance of death an increasingly difficult transition to make. The tools that have been presented in the past cannot be utilized until this acceptance takes place; and so, the individual is not able to develop the same pattern of a meaningful existence.

Examples of how this permeates society are as numerous as are their long-term effects. Even in the last stages of dying "the protection of the patient had to outweigh the joys of a last communion with him" (Aries 612). The farewell, mourning, and funeral rites that were so essential previously are now made private. The dying individual is so gripped with fear at the thought of their own death that they would rather deny the fact of their dying than admit what is inevitable. Friends and family sometimes only reinforce this wild hope for survival and only increase the problem. It seems that it has become more socially acceptable to allow the dying to hold onto this false hope and avoid death at all costs.

Another part of the problem is the medical system, where "the time of death can be lengthened to suit the doctor. The doctor cannot eliminate death, but he can control its duration, from the few hours it once was, to several days, weeks, months, or even years" (Aries 585). In this same attitude of god-like control of death, "death has ceased to be accepted as a natural, necessary phenomenon. Death is a failure, a 'business lost'" (Aries 586). The attitudes of the surviving loved ones, the medical system, and the dying individual all reinforce the attitude that death can be controlled and made separate from society because we are unwilling to accept it as a fact of life.

The desire to isolate the dying in secluded hospitals and assisted living homes along with this privatization of mourning reinforces our deep-set fear. It seems that

"although it is not always admitted, the hospital has offered families a place where they can hide the unseemly invalid whom neither the world nor they can endure. It also gives them a good excuse to let someone else deal with all those awkward visitors, so that they can continue to lead a normal life" (Aries 571). What was once a communal effort has become a solitary burden for the surviving friends and family. Coupled with the fact that we do not have much experience with death and dying, the mystery this event holds only increases. One cannot fully accept the inevitable future that death brings each and every one of us if death is concealed in this manner. Without having to experience death in any form, ignorance will prevail, and the individual will be left with the unanswered question of what the future holds. As has been presented in the previous philosophical traditions, without the acceptance of death, one cannot live with meaning and therefore cannot die a good death. This creates a vicious circle if society itself continues to hide from the reality of death and dying.

If individuals were able to accept death instead of hiding from it, many possibilities for how to live well would become available. The tools for living that have been presented in this thesis offer some examples of these different modes for living, and they all require this initial step of acceptance. Other modes of meaning-making do exist outside of this history of philosophy, but the core values are generally the same. The necessity for death exists throughout history because "everyone became separated form the community and the species by his growing awareness of himself. The individual insisted on assembling the molecules of his own biography, but only the spark of death enabled him to fuse them into a whole" (Aries 605). In this way, the tools for living are able to guide the individual through life and prepare one for death, but death itself is the

necessary final element for creating a united self. Whether the individual chooses to follow the “voluptuousness” of Montaigne or the “care of the self” of Heidegger, these tools are presented as options to be considered in the process of creating a meaningful life, and, therefore, a good death.

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