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Foucault, Reader of Plato: The Problem of ἐπιμέλεια τοῦ βίου

Fábio Serranito

1. Introduction

Months before his death,, in his final set of lectures at the Collège de France, Foucault revisited his 1982 reading of the notion of care of the self (ἐπιμέλεια ἑαυτοῦ) in Plato's *First Alcibiades*. In the 1982 lectures, he found in the *First Alcibiades* a fertile ground for his examination of the care of the self (*souci de soi*). In this dialogue, Socrates shows that Alcibiades lacks the knowledge and ability to execute his life-project of becoming superlatively powerful and prestigious. Socrates points out the need for a care of the self: Alcibiades needs to take care of himself as a preliminary stage to his entry into public life (*Alc. Maior* 124b-c; 127e-128a).

According to Foucault's reading of the *First Alcibiades*, the care of the self proposed in this dialogue is a care of the soul (ἐπιμέλεια τῆς ψυχῆς) (Foucault 2001, 53). According to Foucault, in the *First Alcibiades* the Delphic gnomic principle of know thyself (γνῶθι σαυτόν) is tied together with the care of the self. To care for oneself, one has to understand what oneself really is – and that is, in fact, the soul (ψυχή). The care of the self is a care of the soul – associated with a knowledge of the self. Foucault's conclusion is that the care of the self is understood in purely cognitive terms.

> "I would say, rather, that Platonism was the constant climate in which a movement of knowledge (connaissance) developed, a movement of pure knowledge without any condition of spirituality, precisely because the distinctive feature of Platonism is to show how the work of the self on itself, the care one must have for oneself if one wants access to the truth, consists in knowing oneself, that is to say in knowing the truth." (Foucault 2005, 77)

In the 1984 series of lectures, Foucault revisits the question regarding ἐπιμέλεια ἑαυτοῦ from a different angle. As a result of his reading of the *Laches*,Foucault introduces a different kind of care, one whose object is βίος, the way of living, and which I designate, in analogy with ἐπιμέλεια τῆς ψυχῆς, as ἐπιμέλεια τοῦ βίου (although Foucault himself never uses the term).

> "As the dialogue progresses, what is designated as the object one must take care of is not the soul, it is life (bios), that is to say the way of living. What constitutes the fundamental object of *epimeleia* is this modality, this practice of existence." (Foucault 2011, 126-127)

This is a modality of care of the self that has as its object the way of living, not the soul; and whereas the care of the soul consists in self-knowledge, the care of βίος consists in what Foucault designates as "test of life" (épreuve de vie) or "test of existence" (épreuve de l'existence).

> "When we compare the *Laches* and the *Alcibiades*, we have the starting point for two great lines of development of philosophical reflection and practice: on the one hand, philosophy as that which, by prompting and encouraging men to take care of themselves, leads them to the metaphysical reality of the soul, and, on the other, philosophy as a test of life, a test of existence, and the elaboration of a particular kind of form and modality of life." (Foucault 2011, 127)

As the final words suggest, the focus on the way of living as opposed to soul results in a philosophical activity with more of a practical bend than the purely cognitive concerns of the care of the soul. In fact, Foucault insists at different points in the 1984 lectures on how this other modality of care focuses on the way life is lived, and in the possibility of life being changed and moulded like a work of art (Foucault 2009, 148-152).[1] The object of this modality of care is not this being that we are – the soul – but rather the way in which we are.

> "Of course, there is no incompatibility between these two themes of philosophy as test of life and philosophy as knowledge of the soul. However, although there is no incompatibility, and although in Plato, in particular, the two things are profoundly linked, I think nevertheless that we have here the starting point of two aspects, two profiles, as it were, of philosophical activity, of philosophical practice in the West. On the one hand, a philosophy whose dominant theme is knowledge of the soul and which from this knowledge produces an ontology of the self. And then, on the other hand, a philosophy as test of life, of *bios*, which is the ethical material and object of an art of oneself." (Foucault 2011, 127)

While Foucault recognises that these two modalities are not incompatible – and are indeed linked, especially in Plato – he nonetheless emphasises their distinctiveness. He does so to draw attention to this second and often overlooked strand of the philosophical tradition,

[1] This constitutes what Foucault calls the "aesthetics of existence". See Davidson 2005, 113-140; McGushin 2007, 300-301; Miller 2021, 174-176.

in which truth is not something to be accessed as an object of cognition, but rather something to be lived, embodied, and enacted in the way one lives.[2]

In this chapter I am going to look at Plato's *Laches* and see how the two types of ἐπιμέλεια Foucault identifies are connected with each other. I will use Foucault's 1984 lessons as a guide: I will pay close attention to the key moments within the *Laches* that Foucault identifies throughout his lectures.[3] These key moments are: first, Lysimachus' speech, in which the initial situation is set out; second, Socrates' initial intervention, which changes the direction of the dialogue, and third, Nicias' and Laches' speeches, in which they expound on βίος as they accept to be examined by Socrates. My goal is to read the *Laches* in dialogue with Foucault – as though we were discussing the dialogue in a seminar.[4] My work is made easier by the very nature of Foucault's lectures: these were provisional and preliminary snapshots of Foucault's ongoing investigations, sadly cut short by his untimely death. I will look at what Foucault looked at, but with a greater focus at the profound link Foucault admits exist between the two types of ἐπιμέλεια he identified.

There is much in which I am in broad agreement with Foucault, but that there are also some significant points of divergence. The main one is that my reading does not focus on care as a component of the parrhesiastic game, but rather on the kind of care that underpins the discussions within the dialogue and how this relates to different perspectives on what life ought to be about – in other words, the existential project the care at stake is supposed to further. Another important point of divergence is methodological: my reading emphasizes the polyphony of the Platonic dialogue. These are characters expressing different and sometimes conflicting views, based on different assumptions and cognitive attitudes. My own methodological approach starts from this diversity to understand its integration into an overarching set of philosophical arguments. Plato does not simply express views through his characters. He makes his characters embody and enact them. Therefore, I look beyond explicit statements, while looking at whatever explicit statements there are within their dramatic context. This lends a different significance to the fathers' recognition of failure (section 2), and a different meaning to the task of putting life to the test (section 3). It also allows me to zoom

[2] Foucault explores this second strand throughout the 1984 lectures, identifying the *Laches* as its point of origin. Foucault 2011, 246: "On the other hand, still on the basis of the care of self, but starting now from the Laches rather than the Alcibiades, taking the Laches as the point of departure, the care of self does not lead to the question of what this being I must care for is in its reality and truth, but to the question of what this care must be and what a life must be which claims to care about self."

[3] I will focus particularly on the lessons of 22 and 29 February 1984.

[4] In this I am inspired by Michel Foucault's stated desire to engage in group research within a closed seminar setting, allowed by the rules of the *Collège de France*. See Foucault 2011, 31; 163.

in on something Foucault overlooks entirely: how care for the soul is still the decisive kind of care at stake even in the *Laches* (section 2).

2. The failed fathers

The first key moment is the speech that sets out the dramatic context of the dialogue. Lysimachus, speaking also on behalf of his friend Melesias, asks Nicias and Laches, the two famous generals, for advice about the education of their sons.[5] Foucault sees in this speech a clear example of the theme that will be at the centre of his analysis throughout the 1984 lectures – παρρησία.[6] He does so because Lysimachus admits frankly to their own shameful situation: Lysimachus and Melesias are failed old men, without any accomplishments and merits. They blame their own fathers, prominent statesmen who, having focused all their care on the matters of the city, neglected their sons and let them do as they wished, without any direction.

> Now, as I said at the beginning of my remarks, we are going to speak quite freely [παρρησιασόμεθα] to you. Each of us has many noble deeds of his own father to relate to these young fellows—their numerous achievements both in war and in peace, when they were managing the affairs either of the allies or of this city; but neither of us has any deeds of his own to tell. (*Laches,* 179c)[7]

Foucault makes much of Lysimachus' παρρησία in admitting to his and Melesias' failures, which are a result of lack of care on the part of their famous fathers (Foucault 2009, 120-121). According to Foucault, the discussion is based on a *parrhesiastic* pact where the

[5] Nicias and Laches were prominent Athenian generals and statesmen (στρατηγοί, annually elected military leaders), active during the Peloponnesian War. Nicias is famous due to his pivotal role in achieving an armistice lasting 421-416 (the "Peace of Nicias"), and his involvement in the disastrous Sicilian expedition. Melesias and Lysimachus, although the sons of prominent fathers, were more obscure. Melesias was the son of the statesmen Thucydides, an opponent of Pericles ostracised c. 443. This Thucydides (of Alopece, son of Melesias) should not be confused with the historian. Lysimachus was the son of the famous Aristides, the rival of Themistocles. This marks them out as the sons of politicians who were opposed to the radical democracy that was in power at the time of the dramatic setting of the dialogue, c. 424. This might explain Melesias and Lysimachus' non-involvement in the affairs of the city at this point, although Melesias will become one of the Four Hundred, the Spartan-sponsored regime that briefly replaced the democracy in 411. See Nails 2002, 47-9, 180-1, 212-15 290-2; Schmid 1992, 3-15. On the interaction between the characters within the dramatic structure of the dialogue, see Emlyn-Jones 1999, 123-138; Michelini 2000, 60-75; Stefou 2018, 4.

[6] See Foucault 2011, 13: "So, in two words, parrhesia is the courage of the truth in the person who speaks and who, regardless of everything, takes the risk of telling the whole truth that he thinks, but it is also the interlocutor's courage in agreeing to accept the hurtful truth that he hears." The exploration of this practice is a crucial strand that connects the 1982-1983 and the 1984 lectures. Cf. Miller 2021, 169-174. On the problems of applying Foucault's notion of *parrêsia* back to Plato, see Atack 2019, 23-48 and Lima 2022, 1-21. To a certain extent, my argument on the opposition between the two forms of care of the self Foucault identifies in Plato's thought mirrors Atack's suggestion regarding Foucault's *parrêsia*: while Plato's thought is fertile ground for Foucault's own philosophical thought, Foucault's model cannot be applied back to Plato unproblematically.

[7] All translations from the *Laches* are based on Lamb's translation, with some modifications by me.

fathers admit to their shameful shortcomings and ask for help in caring for their sons. But I want to refocus the reading of this key passage, putting aside the question of *parrhesia* and concentrating on the nature of the care at stake. This is a conception of care with which and against which the Socratic examination is going to take place – a care that aims to achieve certain ends defined by an understanding of what life ought to be about, without, however, interrogating those same ends. My contention is that the speech is not just the trigger of the discussion, but rather the moment that defines the terms and assumptions against which the Socratic examination will take place.

What goal have the fathers failed to achieve? Borrowing Platonic terminology, we could designate this as a philotimic goal.[8] For those who aim at this goal, life's ultimate objective is to obtain and enjoy power, prestige and the admiration of others. The means to obtain this admiration depend on the values of the community. In this case, the community values the ability to persuade others, to give good advice in matters pertaining to the governance of the city as well as competence in defending it militarily. These are the fields of action in which the grandfathers became prominent, and for which the grandsons must be prepared. This is the good at which the care at stake here should aim.[9] Since the pursuit of the philotimic good is the guiding principle of life's actions and choices, at stake in the question whether the boys should learn how to fight in armour are the lives of those young men in their totality – their value, their significance, whether they will fail at life or else succeed.

Since Lysimachus and Melesias do not wish to condemn their sons to a life without accomplishments, they are now asking the advice of prominent, successful men about how they should educate their sons – specifically whether they should hire the services of the master-at-arms Stesilaus to tutor their sons.[10] Foucault very aptly observes that at this point Stesilaus is being put to the test. Is he worth hiring? Is what he is trying to sell worth buying? Is the activity he has dedicated himself to, and become a master of, worth learning? (Foucault 2011, 129-

[8] Φιλοτιμία and φιλότιμος are recurring terms in Plato, often paired with φιλονικία (love of victory) to designate the desire for and attachment to honour and the admiration of other people. See, e.g., *Republic* I, 347b; V, 475a; VIII, 553c, 555a; IX, 581b, 586c; X, 620c; *Symposium* 178d, 208c; *Phaedo* 68c, 82c.

[9] Cf. Stefou 2018, 6: "Therefore, future power will be the result of possessing a body of knowledge, leading directly to care of oneself (*epimeleia heautou*), and from such self-care onwards to the acquisition of virtue to the greatest degree through the performance and display of deeds in honor of one's ancestors' glory." See also Schmid 1992, 56-59.

[10] Stesilaus is an expert in the art of fighting in armour – ὁπλομαχία. We know nothing about him apart from what we learn in *Laches*. He is a silent figure throughout the dialogue – talked about and discussed, but never heard – but is nonetheless described in terms analogous to a sophist: he is a paid teacher who advertises by an exhibition of skill – ἐπίδειξις. See Nails 2002, 273; Schmid 1992, 20-21.

131)[11] What is at stake in Stesilaus' test is more than competence: it is suitability of this skill to achieve the philotimic ideal.

But Foucault overlooks that Stesilaus' test is preceded and motivated by another test – the test the fathers themselves have failed. Highlighting the fathers' failure according to their own standards and in view of their accepted goals opens up the question about the validity of those standards and goals. Ultimately, what starts as a a question about the care that fathers should bestow on their sons opens up questions about what kind of care is best for anyone. So, we can see how into this very specific and pragmatic question – should our sons learn the skill this man proposes to teach? – are folded some very serious and very difficult problems.

The cause of the existential failure of Lysimachus and Melesias is lack of care, i.e., neglect (ἀμέλεια). But what is the meaning of ἐπιμέλεια in this context?

> Well, we have resolved to give them our most constant care [ἐπιμεληθῆναι], and not—as most fathers do when their boys begin to be young men—let them run loose to do as they want [ἀνεῖναι αὐτοὺς ὅτι βούλονται ποιεῖν], but begin at once taking every possible care of them [ἐπιμελεῖσθαι]. Now, knowing that you too have sons, we thought that you above all men must have concerned [μεμεληκέναι] yourselves with the question of the kind of upbringing [πῶς ἂν θεραπευθέντες] that would make the best of them; and if by any chance you have not given your attention to the subject, we would remind you that it ought not to be neglected [οὐ χρὴ αὐτοῦ ἀμελεῖν], and we invite you to join us in arranging some way of taking care [ἐπιμέλειάν τινα] of our sons. (*Laches*, 179-a-b)

Firstly, the point of application of this care at the beginning of the dialogue is the sons of Lysimachus and Melesias. But also at stake is the failed care that should have been applied to Lysimachus and Melesias themselves. By extension, Lysimachus' address to Nicias and Laches points out that this also applies in the present time to their own sons. But it is also clear from Lysimachus' speech that this care of the fathers towards the sons is associated with the care that the young men need to have towards themselves. The fathers' care is a kind of care by proxy, or, considering the inexperience and the lack of judgment that is supposedly characteristic of youth, a kind of supervised care of oneself.

[11] "Anyway, here we have someone who presents himself as a teacher, as a sort of Sophist more specialized in arms drill, and he demonstrates what in fact he can do. He puts himself to the test. And it is this test that Lysimachus and Melesias, Laches and Nicias watch; they witness it. (…) You can see that already we are in a dimension which is not one of verbal presentation, of the ability to present verbally what one is supposed to be able to do; we are in the domain of the test, but of the direct, visual test." This becomes clearer when read against Nicias' (181d-182d) and Laches' (182d-184c) assessments– especially the latter. Laches' assessment of Stesilaus, as with his assessment of Socrates, depends on how he conducts himself outside the confines of the exhibition and contains an condemnation of his character. Cf. Schmid 1992, 63-72; Hobbs 2000, 82-84; Stefou 2018, 20-21.

However – and this aspect will play a decisive role – any form of ἐπιμέλεια entails cognitive assumptions. Taking care of something or someone always presupposes that the carer knows what they are doing, regarding both the ends and the means. To take care of something implies an intervention aimed at improving the condition of what is being taken care of, which in turn implies a conception of the good that is being aimed at and of the means suitable for achieving it. But while knowledge is crucial, ἐπιμέλεια is not a cognitive phenomenon at its core. Rather, as Foucault stresses as early as in the *History of Sexuality*, what is at stake in ἐπιμέλεια is not a feeling or attitude (although that is also part of the phenomenon). It is a whole set of actions and behaviours.

> The term *epimeleia* designates not just a preoccupation but a whole set of occupations; it is *epimeleia* that is employed in speaking of the activities of the master of a household, the tasks of the ruler who looks after his subjects, the care that must be given to a sick or wounded patient, or the honors that must be paid to the gods or to the dead. With regard to oneself as well, *epimeleia* implies a labor. (Foucault 1986, 50)[12]

But what occupations are included in this care? We can get some hints from looking at the opposite of ἐπιμέλεια, ἀμέλεια. The alpha privative could suggest that ἀμέλεια is simply the absence of ἐπιμέλεια. However, Lysimachus' speech introduces elements that add detail to what ἀμέλεια and, by contrast, ἐπιμέλεια, may mean.

The ἐπιμέλεια of Lysimachus and Melesias towards their sons is contrasted with the practices of most parents, who, when their sons reach the age when they become μειράκια (which is a rather vague term "let them run loose to do what they want [ἀνεῖναι αὐτοὺς ὅ τι βούλονται ποιεῖν]" (*Laches,* 179a). My rough translation of ἀνεῖναι for "let loose" is not innocent. After the control applied during childhood, once children reach an age approaching adulthood, parents relax the reins, let them off the leash, to go wherever they want and do whatever they wish. The result of this "letting loose" is a lack of direction and control. It is assumed in this passage that young mencannot define the course of their life to make it meaningful or orderly. This creates a kind of chaos defined solely by immediate whims.

Continuous supervision of the fathers over their sons is necessary to avoid this.Therefore, parental care must be extended beyond childhood and exercised differently. The point is to give the young men the necessary skills to accomplish the philotimic good. In this speech, there is no third alternative besides this parental care aimed at the philotimic good, on

[12] See also Foucault 1994, 355, 622-623; 2001, 81ff.; 2011, 110.

the one hand, and the *laissez-faire* approach that leads to a wasted life. Either one, due to successful ἐπιμέλεια, applies oneself and acts in an orderly way in pursuit of the good (here identified with prestige), or else one lives chaotically, without any specific final good in mind, with eyes only for what one fancies at each moment.

The latter alternative becomes clearer when Lysimachus mentions the mistakes made by his and Melesias' fathers when they were in a similar situation. When Lysimachus and Melesias were μειράκια, their fathers "εἴων τρυφᾶν".

> We cannot help feeling ashamed that our boys should observe this, and we blame our fathers for leaving us to indulge ourselves [εἴων τρυφᾶν] when we began to be young men, while they looked after other people's affairs; and we point the moral of it all to these young people, telling them that if they are careless of themselves [ἀμελήσουσιν ἑαυτῶν] and will not take our advice they will win no reputation [ἀκλεεῖς γενήσονται], but if they take care [ἐπιμελήσονται] they may very likely come to be worthy of the names they bear. (*Laches,* 179d)

The Greek for "to indulge", τρυφᾶν, has a pejorative connotation: it invokes a life of decadent and idle luxury, dedicated to the enjoyment of pleasures, and, by extension, an idea of softness and fragility. The simple fact that this care is necessary in the first place suggests that the tendency towards indulgence is an intrinsic tendency, a kind of existential inertia. The pursuit of the philotimic good requires effort, attention and a set of activities that must be forced. They do not originate from a spontaneous impulse; rather, they are in conflict with the spontaneous impulses aimed at pleasure and idleness. But a life lived according to these spontaneous impulses becomes shapeless and unsubstantial.

Lysimachus and Melesias' present condition is the result of a life lived under the twin stars of indulgence (τρυφᾶν) and doing what they want (ὅ τι βούλονται ποιεῖν). Their self-diagnosis implies the recognition that the object of care, if left alone, can be ruined.. This shows that care is always intended as a positive contribution: it makes its object better. It also implies a diagnosis of the condition, situation and potential of its object. And it also implies the representation of a project, an objective and an end – that which one intends to produce through care. The cases of ἀμέλεια just shown are examples of this. It is because they have no prestige that Lysimachus and Melesias can tell that they failed due to their ἀμέλεια. This shows them that a mix of benevolent attention and decisive intervention is required to help a young man's life develop in a way that he may become excellent (ἄριστος).

As illustrated by the lives of Lysimachus and Melesias, young men need someone to guide, encourage and correct them. Left to their own devices, they will go astray and neglect

what they should care for. In this sense, the fathers are of Lysimachus and Melesias failed as fathers and are to blame for the mediocrity of these men.They were careless towards their sons.[13] In contrast, Lysimachus and Melesias have no intention of failing as fathers. They will apply their care where their own fathers were negligent and focus on the education of their sons. Therefore, instead of letting their sons do what they want, they will equip them with whatever they need to accomplish the philotomic project.

As measured against the philotimic ideal, at stake is the life of the boys in its totality: whether it will be a failure or a success. And so even in a non-philosophical perspective like the one represented by Lysimachus and Melesias, we can already find something suggestive of a care for the unfolding of a life in its totality. At this point in the dialogue, this care is primarily directed at the lives of the sons, but it nonetheless entails a diagnosis of the lives of the old men, and of the meaning and value of life in general. On the other hand, it is recognised that this cannot happen by inertia. It requires effort, dedication, attention and the acquisition of new skills and knowledge. Without an effective beneficial intervention, life (βίος) will not advance towards the end identified as the good, but will rather proceed chaotically, determined by immediate impulses. In other words, there is an alternative between a βίος that, as the result of an effective care, is a success, and a life that, as the result of ἀμέλεια (neglect), is a failure.

The fathers's admission of failure is significant beyond being the opening gambit in a parrhesiastic game, as Foucault seems to suggest. It defines the conceptual landscape against which the remainder of the dialogue will unfold. While Lysimachus' speech does introduce the notion of something akin to a care that has βίος as its object, this is based on a very specific diagnosis of what is at stake in these people's lives and what life in general ought to be about for people like them. It is this diagnosis that will trigger the Socratic examination that will occupy most of the dialogue.

3. Caring for the soul

The second key moment identified coincides with the first significant intervention of Socrates. The discussion at first is set to include only the fathers and the generals, but Socrates

[13] This is another example of a test preceding the dialogue: by testing their own lives, they are also testing the lives of their own fathers. And while their fathers may not be deemed failures according to the standards of the philotimic ideal, they are nonetheless failures *as fathers*. See Stefou 2018, 3-4. This is a failure Lysimachus and Melesias are trying to avoid – in a way redeeming their own lives through their sons. But it is also a risk successful men like Nicias and Laches are urged to avoid. The successful father or father-figure who fails to make the next generation better is a recurring theme in Plato: *Meno* 94c-e, *Protagoras* 319d6-320b5.

is unexpectedly pulled into it by Laches, as an expert consultant who spends his time discussing the best pursuits for young men. Socrates soon changes the whole direction of the discussion.

> [Socrates]
> What, Lysimachus? Are you going to join the side which gets the approval of the majority of us?
> [Lysimachus]
> Why, what can one do, Socrates?
> [Socrates]
> And you too, Melesias, would do the same? Suppose you had a consultation as to what your son's exercise should be for a coming contest, would you be guided by the majority of us, or by the one who happened to have trained and exercised under a good master?
> [Melesias]
> By the latter, naturally, Socrates.
> [Socrates]
> Would you be guided by him alone rather than the four of us?
> [Melesias]
> Very likely.
> [Socrates]
> Yes, for a question must be decided by knowledge [ἐπιστήμῃ], and not by numbers, if it is to have a right decision.
> [Melesias]
> To be sure. (*Laches,* 184d-e)

This is the moment, as Foucault observeswhen the political model is replaced by a technical model (Foucault 2011, 134). The matter is not whether all or a majority agrees, but rather what is the opinion of those who possess the requisite knowledge to decide. Before, the question was about the proper course for the care of the young men – and this question was tied to the suitability of a specific skill and the competence of the one who was proposing to teach it. But with Socrates' intervention, the question shifts: it is now a matter of assessing whether those who are to pass judgement on these topics possess the knowledge and competence required to do so. So, we go from an examination of Stesilaus and his skill to an examination of those who were called upon to make the first examination..

But what need Nicias and Laches to be competent in to properly judge this matter?

> [Socrates]
> And in a word, when one considers a thing for any purpose, the consulting is in fact about the end [οὗ ἕνεκα] one had in view to start with, and not about the means to be used for such end.
> [Nicias]
> Necessarily.

> [Socrates]
> So we must consider our adviser too, and ask ourselves whether he is a skilled expert in the treatment required for the end [οὗ ἕνεκα] which is the subject of our consideration.
> [Nicias]
> Certainly.
> [Socrates]
> And we say that our present subject is an accomplishment studied for the sake of young men's souls [τῆς ψυχῆς ἕνεκα τῆς τῶν νεανίσκων]?
> [Nicias]
> Yes.
> [Socrates]
> So what we have to consider is whether one of us is skilled in treatment of the soul [τεχνικὸς περὶ ψυχῆς θεραπείαν], and is able to treat it rightly, and which of us has had good teachers. (*Laches,* 185d-e)

Socrates pinpoints the subject of the required competence by identifying the "end" (οὗ ἕνεκα) – that for the sake of which – of the deliberation: the souls of the young men (τῆς ψυχῆς ἕνεκα τῆς τῶν νεανίσκων). Therefore, the competence required regards the soul – one needs to be skilled in treatment of the soul (τεχνικὸς περὶ ψυχῆς θεραπείαν).

While Foucault does not overlook that the subject of this skillis the soul, he does overlook, however, the implications of this for his distinction between the care of the soul and the care of βίος.

> "It is a question—and he employs the word—of *tekhne*? It is a question of *tekhne*, and consequently what should prevail is not the greatest number, [but] technique. What kind of technique? Well, precisely what we are looking for is, he says—and we should absolutely hold on to the word—a *teknikos peri psukhes therapeian* (a technician of the care, of the "therapy," of the soul)." (Foucault 2011, 134)

> "They will be questioned on what qualifies them to speak on this technical question of the art of *psukhes therapeia* (the care of the soul)." (Foucault 2011, 136-7)

Foucault overlooks that this τέχνη is about a form of care –one that takes soul as its object. Foucault's oversight could perhaps be explained by the fact that the term is θεραπεία and not ἐπιμέλεια. However, as far as I can tell, there is barely any distinction between the two concepts in this context.[14] One could argue that ἐπιμέλεια has a more generic flavour, whereas

[14] See also *Laches* 179b, where the notion of θεραπεία is applied as means to the end of making the boys the best – ἄριστοι. Cf. Foucault 2005, 8-9, 98, where Foucault treats both Greek terms as equivalent. The change in terminology signals a change in the understanding of the true object of care as well as a focus on its cognitive requirements. Cf. Stefou 2018, 33: "Nowhere, however, do they make any reference to *psuchēs epimeleia*, but

θεραπεία is associated with the possession of a technical skill or competence. But even if we were to ascertain this distinction, the fact remains that θεραπεία is a kind of ἐπιμέλεια.. The care of the young men is the subject of the discussion from the beginning, and Socrates is not turning away from it now. In fact, Socrates is developing the same theme, while introducing some additional determinations. The first is that the care at stake is rooted on expert knowledge. The second is a more precise delineation of what is at stake: the young men's souls.

The parallel with the *First Alcibiades*, which Foucault examined in detail in the 1982 lectures, is easy to draw. In that dialogue, Socrates identifies the soul as the proper object of the care of the self.. The soul of Alcibiades is identified as Alcibiades himself – it is the "self" of Alcibiades. This identification is done by isolating the soul from what pertains to the soul – the body – and what pertains to that – all those entities that the body interacts with and possesses – through a complex dialectical discussion (*Alc. Maior* 130a-c; Foucault 2005, 54-58). But while Socrates does not go through a similar dialectical discussion in the *Laches*, the result is the same: an identification of the soul as the object of care – identified in the *Laches* in its more "technical" flavour: θεραπεία. But whereas a great deal of fuss is made in the *First Alcibiades* about this identification, in the *Laches* this passes almost unnoticed.[15] The interlocutors simply accept it without discussion. But neither do they make anything of it – they will, in fact, go on to discuss the notion of βίος in some detail, paying no mind to ψυχή.[16]

One could object that the reason nobody bats an eyelid when Socrates introduces the notion of ψυχή is because it makes no difference. However, while the notion of ψυχή itself is never discussed , its introduction plays a structural role within the dialogue. This needs to be understood in stages. The first has to do with the introduction of the two criteria for finding out whether one is τεχνικὸς περὶ ψυχῆς θεραπείαν.

> [Socrates]
> We also, therefore, Laches and Nicias—since Lysimachus and Melesias have invited us to a consultation on their sons, whose souls they are anxious to have as good as possible [ὅτι ἀρίστας γενέσθαι τὰς ψυχάς]—should bring to their notice what teachers

only to the *epimeleia* of young men. This observation becomes even more surprising when we take into consideration the fact that they previously identified the aristocratic self's *epimeleia* with the *epimeleia* of young men. Socrates aims to gradually establish the true meaning of *epimeleia*, which, of course, can only refer to the individual human soul."

[15] Emlyn-Jones observes that this transition "receives immediate and unquestioning assent from [Nicias]" (Emlyn-Jones 1996, 77), but I disagree as to its significance. Rather than suggesting that "Plato does not believe that [Socrates] is introducing a controversial or difficult idea", I read this as signalling the interlocutors' lack of awareness of the significance of the change.

[16] With the sole exception of one of Laches' definitions of courage, in 192b. The generals are unlikely to read into the term the metaphysical implications developed throughout the Platonic corpus and hinted at here.

> we have had, if we say that we have any to mention, who being themselves good to begin with, and having treated the souls of many young people [πολλῶν νέων τεθεραπευκότες ψυχὰς], taught us also in due course and are known to have done so. Or if any of ourselves says he has had no teacher, but has however some works of his own to speak of, and can point out to us what Athenians or strangers, either slaves or freemen, are acknowledged to owe their goodness to him, let him do so. (*Laches,* 186a-b)

The two criteria are: what teachers did you have? Who have you made better through your care? In fact, one could reduce the first criterion to the second, since the competence of the teacher is measured by the results of their teaching. The teacher needs to be himself good – since it would be absurd to know how to make others good while neglecting oneself – and have treated the souls of many young men. The proof is in pudding, in the concrete positive effects of the θεραπεία.[17] In a typically Platonic sleight of hand, how to understand "goodness" in this context is never explained, allowing the interlocutors to understand it according to their own preconceptions.[18] It is likely that the philotimic ideal is still in operation here: "goodness" here is equivalent to the presence and exercise of those virtues(ἀρεταί) that are conducive to the realisation of the philotimic ideal. However, the reference to ψυχή introduces an element of awkwardness to this equivalence, suggesting that something different might be at stake: an ideal that is less focused on performance and results. What this might be, however, remains undefined.

But the structural importance of the introduction of the notion of soul as the object of care becomes clearer once the two generals accept being examined by Socrates – more on this later – and Socrates changes his approach.

> [Socrates]
> […] If we happen to know that sight joined to eyes makes those eyes the better for it, and further if we are able to get it joined to eyes, we obviously know what this faculty of sight is, on which we might be consulting as to how it might be best and most easily acquired. For if we did not know first of all what sight or hearing is, we should hardly prove ourselves consultants or physicians of credit in the matter of eyes or ears, and the best way of acquiring sight or hearing.
> [Laches]
> Truly spoken, Socrates.

[17] See Stefou 2018, 32: "after being initially introduced, the concept of *epistēmē* is now being consolidated through the craft analogy, which centres on the results of a craft process, namely the visible/tangible products of a craftsman's art." Cf. Balaban 2007, who draws a sharp distinction between a sophistic conception of *techne* as "expert knowledge of means" and a Platonic conception focused on "knowledge of the ends" (p. 6). On the 'craft analogy' see also Irwin 1977, 71-77. See also Roochnik 1996; Balansard 2001.

[18] Cf. Schmid 1992, 80-81, on the tension between Socrates' new focus on this τέχνη of the soul and the need to understand what virtue is.

[Socrates]
And you know, Laches, at this moment our two friends are inviting us to a consultation as to the way in which virtue may be joined to their sons' souls, and so make them better?
[Laches]
Yes, indeed.
[Socrates]
Then our first requisite is to know what virtue is? For surely, if we had no idea at all what virtue actually is, we could not possibly consult with anyone as to how he might best acquire it?
[Laches]
I certainly think not, Socrates. (*Laches,* 190a-190c)

At this point, instead of asking for concrete evidence of people who have been made better by one's care to prove oneself as τεχνικὸς περὶ ψυχῆς θεραπείαν, Socrates asks for what makes the soul better –virtue (ἀρετή). He is not asking for the results – whether this or that person is a success or a failure and how they achieved or failed to achieve their philotimic goals. Rather, he focuses squarely on the soul and on what makes the soul better.

From this point, the discussion regarding virtue, and the specific virtue that is courage (ἀνδρεία) will dominate the dialogue.[19] But we must not lose sight of the fact that the discussion about virtue in general, and courage in particular, comes about as part of an inquiry that is all about care, and a care of the soul to boot. The question about what constitutes the best care for the sons of Lysimachus and Melesias and about the competence of all those involved in the discussion to adjudicate the matter is never put aside and continues to determine the course of the dialogue till the very end.

Structurally, the importance of the introduction of the τεχνικὸς περὶ ψυχῆς θεραπείαν does not simply lie on the fact that the discussion is now being conducted under a technical model, as Foucault suggests. Rather, it refocuses the discussion on soul as the object of care – something that was absent from the dialogue until this point.

4. Putting life to the test

According to the terms of the discussion, you cannot be competent to judge what may or may not improve the souls of the young men if you cannot even account for that thing which, when joined to the soul, makes the soul better – virtue (ἀρετή). This reframes the

[19] See *Laches* 190c-e. While, strictly speaking, the programme of inquiry would require the identification of ἀρετή as a whole, Socrates restricts the scope to one singular ἀρετή, ἀνδρεία – courage. This suits the interlocutors, whose life is dedicated to military matters, and the initial question regarding the education of the boys. Cf. Schmid 1992, 98-100; Hobbs 2000, 84-86; Stefou 2018, 47-53.

discussion about courage as a test of the generals' competence. The question is not simply what courage is; but rather whether the generals (and Socrates) know or can find out what courage is. I would therefore agree with Foucault's observation that Socrates shifts the focus of examination to the generals themselves – to what they claim to know and be able to do (Foucault 2011, 137-8). Foucault, however, overlooks that the question about the competence of the generals is tied to the fact that the soul is the object of the specific kind of care they are talking about. But this is very easy to miss. After all, ψυχή as object of care is introduced without any kind of fanfare and its structural importance is only evident in retrospect.

Between these two moments, Plato inserted the third key moment Foucault identifies: Nicias' and Laches' speeches on Socrates himself. For Foucault, this moment is crucial, since it defines the terms of what Foucault designates as "the game of parrhesia" (Foucault 2011, 137-8). These are the terms by which Socrates is going to put the generals to the test. This is a crucial point where the idea of putting life to the test, which Foucault connects with the kind of care that takes βίος as its object – is brought to the foreground.

Nicias' speech stresses that, whatever the original subject of conversation, Socrates always leads the discussion towards the same matter: the βίος of the interlocutor.

> You strike me as not being aware that, whoever comes into close contact with Socrates and has any talk with him face to face, is bound to be drawn round and round by him in the course of the argument—though it may have started at first on a quite different theme—and cannot stop until he is led into giving an account of himself [εἰς τὸ διδόναι περὶ αὐτοῦ λόγον], of the manner in which he now spends his days, and of the kind of life he has lived hitherto [ὅντινα τρόπον νῦν τε ζῇ καὶ ὅντινα τὸν παρεληλυθότα βίον βεβίωκεν]; and when once he has been led into that, Socrates will never let him go until he has thoroughly and properly put all his ways to the test [ἂν βασανίσῃ]. (*Laches*, 187e-188a)

The phrase Nicias uses is the familiar λόγον διδόναι – to render account.[20] However, the Platonic λόγον διδόναι is usually applied to the notions themselves – the interlocutor renders an account of the notion in discussion, or, more precisely, the interlocutor justifies his adoption of a given thesis regarding a given notion. But Nicias is talking about something different. Socrates makes the interlocutor render an account of himself (περὶ αὐτοῦ)Ç how he

[20] On this notion in Platonic thought and its antecedents, see Vancamp 2005, 55-62; Weiner 2012, 7-20. Nicias' use feels closer to the political or forensic aspect of the notion, in particular the process of δοκιμασία, used to ascertain whether a citizen had the capacity to exercise certain public rights and duties. According to some scholars, δοκιμασία entailed the whole of the candidate's life to probe their suitability for office. See MacDowell 1978, 167-169; Adeleye 1983, 295-306. Nicias' formulation closely parallels Lysias, *For Mantitheus* 9 "it is right to give an account of one's whole life [παντὸς τοῦ βίου λόγον διδόναι] in δοκιμασίαι.".

lives in the present, and how he has lived up until now (*Laches*, 188a). The interlocutor himself is implicated in the discussion not simply in an indirect way, insofar as the notions in discussion are part of his conduct and worldview, but directly: the life of the interlocutor itself is being examined. This is described as being put to the test(βασανίζεσθαι).

> For I delight, Lysimachus, in conversing with the man, and see no harm in our being reminded of any past or present misdoing: nay, one must needs take more careful thought for the rest of one's life, if one does not fly from his words but is willing, as Solon said, "I grow old learning ever more and more;" and zealous to learn as long as one lives, and does not expect to get good sense by the mere arrival of old age. So to me there is nothing unusual, or unpleasant either, in being put to the test [βασανίζεσθαι] by Socrates; in fact, I knew pretty well all the time that our argument would not be about the boys if Socrates were present, but about ourselves. (*Laches*, 188a-b)

Nicias' enjoyment is unexpected, as the term usually describes a painful process. A βάσανος is a touchstone, used to ascertain a metal as genuine. But figuratively it is used to designate a test – and more specifically a test or examination by the means of torture. However, while Foucault is quick to recognise the importance of the touchstone as a means of testing, he overlooks the judicial connotation of the image and its association with torture. He therefore overlooks the oddity of Nicias' attitude, and the suggestion that Nicias' ready acquiescence to being examined may in fact be based on a fundamental misunderstanding of what is at stake in Socratic examination [21]

Nicias is saying that he enjoys, as we would say in English, being put on the rack by Socrates. And he enjoys it because the process leads to an improvement of βίος. But Nicias also emphasizes the fact that this testing does not pertain exclusively or primarily to young men. This process is universally beneficial and is available to anyone whomsoever. Moreover, it is suggested that everyone, regardless of status, age or any other factor, is, on the one hand, in want of this putting to the test, and, on the other hand, is capable of improving their βίος as a whole.[22] Without naming it, Nicias is talking about ἐπιμέλεια. Being put to the test by Socrates is, according to Nicias, a form of care that takes life as a whole as its object and results in its improvement.

[21] See Foucault 2011, 145. Cf. Foucault 2010, 370-1. The metaphoric association with torture is suggested by the physical act of rubbing the metal – a partly destructive method. See Moline 1981, 130; DuBois 1991, 107-114; Mirhady 1996, 119-131.

[22] This is a serious use of an idea that appears ironically in *Euthydemus*: old men going to school. See Michelini 2000: 519-520; Sermamoglou-Soulmaidi 2014: 131-132.

In contrast, Laches has no experience of Socrates as a tester of βίοι. Rather than by his words (λόγοι), Laches knows Socrates by his deeds and actions (ἔργα).

> Now of Socrates' words [λόγων] I have no experience, but formerly, I fancy, I have made trial of his deeds [ἔργων]; and there I found him living up to any fine words however freely spoken. So if he has that gift as well, his wish is mine, and I should be very glad to be cross-examined by such a man, and should not chafe at learning; but I too agree with Solon, while adding just one word to his saying: I should like, as I grow old, to learn more and more, but only from honest folk. […] I therefore invite you, Socrates, both to teach and to refute me as much as you please, and to learn too what I on my part know; such is the position you hold in my eyes since that day on which you came through the same danger with me, and gave a proof of your own valour which is to be expected of anyone who hopes to justify his good name. (*Laches*, 188e-189a)

By invoking the proverbial distinction between λόγος and ἔργον, Laches suggests that what Nicias identifies as a fundamental characteristic of Socrates' philosophical practice can be reduced to mere words.[23]

> for when I hear a man discussing virtue or any kind of wisdom, one who is truly a man and worthy of his argument [ὄντος ἀνδρὸς καὶ ἀξίου τῶν λόγων], I am exceedingly delighted; I take the speaker and his speech together, and observe how they sort and harmonize with each other. […] Such a man makes me rejoice with his utterance, and anyone would judge me then a lover of discussion, so eagerly do I take in what he says: but a man who shows the opposite character gives me pain, and the better he seems to speak, the more I am pained, with the result, in this case, that I am judged a hater of discussion. (*Laches*, 188c-e)

According to Laches, the competence of someone who claims to teach and assess others does not depend on what they say, but rather on what they do. But for Laches the two elements are not worth the same. Deeds are far more important. Without these, λόγοι are reduced to mere words without substance and without authority. [24] In Laches' understanding, the function of λόγοι is communicative and didactic. Through λόγοι, the person who is prominent on account of their ἔργα is capable of teaching others. Therefore, it is not just a matter of a coincidence between the meaning of words and the meaning of deeds, but rather a

[23] See Parry 1981, 15-21. Parry identifies three main strands of the λόγος-ἔργον distinction: literary, popular and philosophical. Laches' use belongs to the popular strand, emphasizing the "realness" of ἔργα as opposed to the deceptiveness of λόγοι.

[24] Cf. Or, to use the far more Foucauldian formulation in Lima 2022, 14: "such a harmony (συμφωνία), which sustains Socrates' parrhesia, does not reside in λόγος, but on a plane independent of it, that of sound (φωνή), which (…) is self-sufficient in terms of the manifestation of its truth." I agree with Lima's criticism of Foucault that harmony between λόγος and βίος "is only possible on the basis of a λόγος" (15).

matter of noble and admirable deeds becoming the foundation of the words that are in harmony with them. The criterion by which correct and appropriate words can be judged is their harmony with correct and appropriate deeds. Socrates has passed the test with flying colours, and therefore is deemed competent to teach Laches and to put him to the test.

In these speeches, Foucault finds an expression of how Socratic *parrhesia* puts the interlocutors' way of life to the test and constitutes a form of care.

> [Second], what will Socratic *parrhesia* speak about? It will not speak of competence; it will not speak of *tekhne*. It will speak of something else: of the mode of existence, the mode of life. The mode of life appears as the essential, fundamental correlative of the practice of truth-telling. Telling the truth in the realm of the care of men is to question their mode of life, to put this mode of life to the test and define what there is in it that may be ratified and recognized as good and what on the other hand must be rejected and condemned. (Foucault 2011, 149)

Socratic *parrhesia* is a mode of discourse that incites men to take care of themselves by putting their way of life to the test. As such, the mode of discourse that constitutes Socrates' examination of his interlocutors is a form of ἐπιμέλεια that takes the interlocutor's way of life as its object and point of application. This is done by putting their lives to the test, a test that, according to Nicias, leads to the course correction of one's life.

But Laches and Nicias differ significantly in how they approach the prospect of being put to the test by Socrates. Whereas Nicias speaks of Socrates from the point of view of someone who has already been subjected to such a test and knows its benefits, Laches starts out by setting himself as a tester. He only accepts being put to the test because Socrates has passed the test Laches has set up himself: to live in such a way that words match deeds.

However, Laches' focus on deeds over words and Nicias' focus on βίος as the object of a process of βασανίζειν and λόγον διδόναι suggest something quite distinct from what Socrates does. Socrates' search for who is τεχνικὸς περὶ ψυχῆς θεραπείαν is not based on an assessment of the generals' deeds or of how they have conducted their lives. This is something that Foucault overlooks in his analysis of this key passage. Rather, Socrates is going to ask what virtue – and specifically the virtue that pertains most particularly to military matters, courage – is. The question is not whether Nicias and Laches are themselves virtuous and brave and capable of making others be like them, but whether they know what virtue and courage are in the first place. While virtue and courage have an undeniable existential importance (not least within the parameters of the philotimic ideal), within the discussion priority is given to what

one knows as what determines what one does. The practical dimension is assessed under the light of the cognitive conditions in which it takes place.

The fact that the discussion turns out to be aporetic shows that none of the interlocutors (including Socrates) is τεχνικὸς περὶ ψυχῆς θεραπείαν. , This failure is significant. To improve the soul, the person exercising care needs to have a clear-sighted perspective on what virtue is, and of the means necessary to achieve that goal. None of those involved in the discussion possess such knowledge. They all fail.

Now, the simple fact that the generals accepted to be examined at all is remarkable. These men are, after all, the very models of the ideal that Lysimachus and Melesias failed to achieve. But the failure to achieve any conclusion in this discussion has consequences for the way of life of the generals. How can these men be considered masters in military matters (with all the power and prestige associated with that status) when they cannot even give an account of the most crucial virtue for their field of expertise?[25] Their inability to give an account of their λόγοι makes any claims regarding the value of their ἔργα unsustainable. If this is, as Foucault suggests, an "épreuve de vie", then it is a test they fail. But, crucially, they fail it upon direct examination not of their βίοι (as Foucault's reading would suggest), but rather of their λόγοι.

This represents a crucial inflexion of the theme of testing, which has been present throughout the whole dialogue from the very start of the dialogue. Lysimachus' speech entails a test of his and Melesias' life, as well as of their father's paternal competence. The initial question of the dialogue hinges on a test of Stesilaus' competence and of the value of his skill. Socrates' intervention changes the subjects of the test to the generals – and to himself too. But most crucial of all, the introduction of what Foucault aptly designates as technical model changes the nature of the test as well: from a test of deeds to a test of words, beliefs and knowledge claims.

5. Conclusion

All those involved – and not only the boys – are shown to need ἐπιμέλεια. In this I believe Foucault is entirely correct. He is also correct in identifying the importance of the Socratic practices of putting to the test for that care (Foucault 2011, 152-3). But we should not lose sight of the fact that, whereas the generals' speeches focused on putting βίος to the test

[25] The parallel with Alcibiades is easy to spot: Alcibiades was shown to be a failure because he could not give an account of the crucial virtue in the governance of the city – justice. See *Alc. Maior* 134d-135b.

and the relative value of λόγοι and ἔργα, Socrates' dialogical practice focused on the putting the λόγοι to the test with his sights clearly set on finding who is τεχνικὸς περὶ ψυχῆς θεραπείαν. The failure of all those involved in the discussion to arrive at a definition of courage means that none of them is τεχνικὸς περὶ ψυχῆς θεραπείαν. The consequence of this is that the care, not only of the boys, but of the adults as will have to be outsourced.

> I tell you, gentlemen—and this is confidential—that we ought all alike to seek out the best teacher we can find [διδάσκαλον ὡς ἄριστον], first for ourselves—for we need one—and then for our boys, sparing neither expense nor anything else we can do: but to leave ourselves as we now are, this I do not advise. (*Laches,* 201a)

In the terms of this dialogue, the the best possible teacher (διδάσκαλον ὡς ἄριστον) has to be τεχνικὸς περὶ ψυχῆς θεραπείαν.What is at stake in the kind of care the boys and the adults are shown to be in need of is their souls. The generals' failure to give an account of their λόγοι regarding the most crucial virtue for how their lives are lived has an impact on the validity and value of their way of life,but the problem, lies in their souls, as the seat of their cognitive abilities, as the place in which the λόγοι are held, produced and acquired. The failure of the generals does not consist in having done something wrong – as Nicias would suggest – or in one's words not being in harmony with one's deeds – as Laches states. Not that these two aspects are irrelevant – but they are relevant in a secondary way, as symptoms of a failure regarding the λόγοι.[26] In the form practiced by Socrates in this dialogue, the care that consists in putting one's way of life to the test – the ἐπιμέλεια τοῦ βίου – is still an examination of λόγοι, which is to say an examination of the soul, even if these λόγοι are brought into this process due to their existential importance.

Foucault fails to notice the consequences of Socrates' reformulation of the terms of the debate to refocus the discussion on the care of the soul. Foucault's blind spot regarding this can be explained by the interlocutors' reaction to Socrates' reformulation: they do not notice it at all. They misunderstand the care Socrates can provide, even if they realise its importance. In his analysis, Foucault does not consider the limited points of view being portrayed. So, he overlooks how the fathers and the generals embody and enact perspectives that are not faithful representations of what is at stake in the practice of Socratic examination. In overlooking this, Foucault replicates the same mistake

[26] See Stefou 2018, 96: "The closing *aporia* teaches that it is absurd to search for the appropriate teacher for the young, while, at the same time, being in a state of need due to an individual lack of necessary knowledge. To this end, Socrates invites his interlocutors—and the human race in general—to examine the logical foundations of their beliefs, so that they can closer approach individual knowledge of the good."

But does this mean that there is no such thing as an ἐπιμέλεια τοῦ βίου? If putting to the test is a form of care, then we could join Foucault and identify two forms of care, with two different but related objects: ψυχή and βίος. But the way the discussion is framed in *Laches* suggests otherwise. If putting to the test is a form of care that takes βίος at its object, the improvement of the ψυχή is still its aim.[27]

Nevertheless, I believe that Foucault's intuition that the two kinds of ἐπιμέλεια are profoundly tied together, especially in Plato, is more significant than he lets on in the 1984 lectures. But since his programmatic aim is to identify and explore a neglected strand of the philosophical tradition, he does not explore this link as it deserves. However, the aspects Foucault found in the *Laches* and that led him to modulate his thinking on ἐπιμέλεια can be pursued further – potentially even to a revision of the very notion of ἐπιμέλεια τῆς ψυχῆς he sketches out in the 1982 lectures. But that is a matter for another time.

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[27] The problem, of course, is that whatever connection there may be between βίος and ψυχή is not explicitly examined as such in the *Laches* – although I suspect that the key to this is ἀρετή. Developing this point, however, would take me far off the scope of this chapter.

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