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Education and the Cultivation of the Early Modern Self: *Cultura Animi* as Self-Care in Juan Luis Vives

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Abstract

Does the modern self still need self-care? Pierre Hadot, Michel Foucault and others suggested that self-care mostly disappeared with the advent of modernity. How this happened, or whether self-care instead took on new forms, is still not well understood. This article examines the Renaissance appropriation of the concept of a “culture of the soul” (*cultura animi*) as a marker for how self-care was adapted to modernity. After detailing how Cicero used *cultura animi* as a metaphor for self-care, I study the appropriation of this concept by the humanist Juan Luis Vives (1493–1540), who made it into a central notion for his educational reform. I argue that, for Vives, self-care does not consist in the following of rules, precepts or “technologies of the self”; it is not a philosophical “art of living”. Instead, “culture” stands for an organic way of learning, a practice of absorbing multifarious experience, especially through the study of historical literature. Accordingly, the “self” to be cultivated is not one’s individual ego or transcendent soul, but one’s practical judgment. Education, centered on the cultivation of practical wisdom, is essential for self-care and for the flourishing of community.

Keywords

culture of the soul – care of the self – *ingenium* – Hadot–Foucault exchange – Cicero – Juan Luis Vives – humanism – Renaissance – cultivation – art of living – good life – pedagogy – technologies of the self – spirituality – self-transformation – ethics – flourishing – Stoicism – Aristotelianism

1 Introduction

Self-care has a long and complex history, ranging from the ancient Vedic care of the self to twentieth-century Black feminist resistance and twenty-first century wellness consumerism, with its latest transformations currently underway in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. These historical practices of self-care have been continually renewed and repurposed, providing guidance for new generations (with Modern Stoicism as one prominent recent manifestation). As the concept of self-care today covers such a wide range of meanings and practices, writing its history implies making choices and requires rigorous historicization. In this article, I analyze early uses of the expression “the culture of the soul” (*cultura animi*) and the practices to which it refers in terms of self-care. The focus on this key concept provides us with a circumscribed corpus, a clear anchor point for an in-depth inquiry, and a way to historicize self-care by analyzing this actors’ category in its historical and textual context.

The historical section of this article starts with a short discussion of how Cicero introduced the concept of *cultura animi*, in its particular context, as a specific form of self-care. I am interested in tracing the vicissitudes of this relatively uncommon metaphor for its potential to function as a lens to bring into better focus how some classical forms of self-care were adapted to early modernity. I then detail how the renowned Valencian humanist Juan Luis Vives (1493–1540) appropriates this Ciceronian notion, expands on it and imbues it with new meanings. Especially from Vives’s systematic work on education, we can gain an understanding of how to cultivate the soul and why this form of self-care took on a central role in his project for Christian education. In the conclusion, I will indicate that Vives developed the “culture of the soul” mostly along Aristotelian lines and adapted it to specific early modern social, religious and political challenges. As such, reading Vives provides a welcome counterweight to the current focus on Hellenistic and Modern Stoic self-care.

Before delving into the historical material, it is instructive to briefly revisit part of the historiography of self-care and the modern self, in order to elucidate some larger questions that are at stake in an in-depth analysis of *cultura animi* in Vives’s work. I start with a brief discussion of the exchange between Pierre Hadot and Michel Foucault, as this allows me to present some important concepts and themes, as well as the central questions that structure my analysis. Referring to Foucault at the outset is convenient also because it sets the stage for the introduction of relevant secondary literature on Renaissance education, humanism and the “modern self,” which has been marked by his influence; in addition, it may bring to mind other themes and resonances with other works that cannot be explicitly addressed within the scope of this article.

Although Hadot's and Foucault's accounts of self-care have little direct bearing on my historical investigation of *cultura animi*, I will come back to them in the conclusion to illustrate some historiographical outcomes.

2 Hadot, Foucault and the Historiography of the Modern Self

Around 1980, a brief but remarkable intellectual exchange took place that led to a renewed interest in the history of self-care. In 1977, Pierre Hadot, a specialist of Neoplatonism, Stoicism and ancient mysticism, published an article on the "spiritual exercises" that made ancient philosophy an "art of living."¹ This article was brought to the attention of Michel Foucault and had a profound influence on him, contributing to the reorientation of his work towards self-care and providing him with a new conceptual framework. This new orientation was developed most notably in his 1981/82 lectures at the *Collège de France*, where he presented a general outline of the early history of self-care.² It is instructive to briefly discuss Foucault's account and Hadot's response, in part because of their continuing influence, but more importantly, because it is an effective way to introduce some key themes, concepts, and questions.

In his lectures, Foucault distinguished between Platonic, Hellenistic, and Christian modes of self-care, drawing broad contrasts in order to come to grips with a wide array of complex texts from different periods. He characterized the first – the Platonic mode – as "pedagogical" and saw it exemplified in Socrates, who helped the young Alcibiades to attain to knowledge of his true self so that he would become better able to take care of others. By contrast, Hellenistic self-care is described in medical metaphors, as a therapy or cure, and is focused more on self-mastery. It was not propaedeutic but had to be practiced continually during one's life; a process that would give meaning to the life of the practitioner. Foucault called it a "culture of the self": an autonomous, self-finalized art that provided an all-encompassing set of techniques for self-transformation. The Christian mode would appropriate these "technologies of the self" – for instance, in the practice of confession –, but instead of aiming for self-mastery, the goal became self-renunciation, a giving

1 Pierre Hadot, "Exercices spirituels," *École pratique des hautes études, Section des sciences religieuses. Annuaire 1975–1976*, 84 (1977), 25–70.

2 Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, transl. Graham Burchell (New York, 2005), and especially the course summary, which had been published separately much earlier, in 1982, in the *Annuaire du Collège de France* (1981–1982).

up of self.³ Throughout all of the criticism and the amendments to which it has been subject, Foucault's account continues to inspire new scholarship; one example can be found in the work of Gur Zak, who proposed a new distinction between Stoic and Augustinian (and to a lesser extent Ovidian) streams of self-care.⁴ Foucault's simplified scheme at least helps us to recognize that there were important interconnections between self-care, self-knowledge, knowledge more generally and self-transformation, as well as shifting relations to education, politics, religion, and spirituality – themes that are central to the history of *cultura animi*.

While Hadot recognized broad agreements with this new line of Foucault's work, he also became one of its earliest critics, singling out especially Foucault's account of the "self." The concept of "techniques of the self" was "focused far too much on the self, or at least on a specific conception of the self," wrote Hadot, and one should not speak of a "culture" of the self, but rather of overcoming and transcending the self.⁵ He stressed that the Stoics did not focus on the self per se, but only on "the best portion of the self," that is, a transcendent self. For Hadot, Foucault's conception of the self was yet too immanent, too focused on individuation and self-creation. Self-care is not a self-fashioning, it is no "subjectivation"; instead, Hadot writes, it "liberates oneself from one's individuality, in order to raise oneself up to universality."⁶ In this account, Foucault and Hadot thus describe two very different kinds of self-care: the self-creation of one's individuality versus its overcoming. In turn, they imply very different conceptions of self.

What historiographical lessons can we draw, for the purpose of this article, from this disagreement? First of all, while it is clear that practices of self-care take different historical forms, the Hadot–Foucault exchange demonstrates the importance of precision when invoking key concepts such as "self," "culture,"

3 Ibid., 254. For a slightly different notion of "culture" (translated as "cultivation"), see Part II in Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self*, transl. Robert Hurley (Harmondsworth, 1986).

4 Gur Zak, *Petrarch's Humanism and the Care of the Self* (Cambridge, 2010), 13, 162. In particular, Zak has studied writing and self-writing as a "technology of the self" in Petrarch, differentiating between three "streams": the "Stoic" assertion that secular writing can lead to virtue, the "Augustinian" contention that only sacred letters can save the self, and the "Ovidian" attachment to writing, which could be a form of therapy, but was also a means to fame and glory. On the Ovidian stream, which stands uneasily between the other two, as it represents the worldly forms of self-care typically rejected by philosophical and religious authors, see especially *ibid.*, 129 and 161.

5 Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, transl. Michael Chase (Oxford, 1995), 207; Pierre Hadot, *The Selected Writings of Pierre Hadot*, transl. Matthew Sharpe and Federico Testa (London, 2020), 230.

6 Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 210.

and “care.” Time and again, these concepts have been used unreflexively or as specific analytic categories, often shaping the analysis in unhelpful ways; instead, their meanings should be explained and historicized. In this article, “culture,” “self,” and “care” are therefore our *explananda*, not part of our *explanans*. Secondly, in the context of self-care, we can see that these concepts co-determine each other in historically specific ways. I will thus take the following two questions as our starting point: What is this “self” of which we need to take care? and What is this “care” of the self? Or, in the case of *cultura animi*, what exactly do “*cultura*” and “*animus*” mean when put together in specific historical contexts?⁷

In addition to taking issue with Foucault’s account of the “self,” Hadot also disagrees with Foucault’s assessment that ancient self-care lost its relevance in the early modern period. While for Foucault, Hellenistic and Christian spirituality assumed that the self must transform itself in order to access the truth, the Cartesian subject had *a priori* access to a transparent truth. The “modern subject” did not require self-care. By contrast, Hadot argued that the crucial rupture came earlier: philosophy ceased to be a way of life already in the Middle Ages, when universities professionalized philosophy and philosophy became auxiliary to theology. However, he also acknowledged that some philosophers, usually working outside institutional contexts, kept alive certain aspects of this ancient care of the self. While Foucault’s and Hadot’s accounts have been criticized, the perception remains that both self-care and the self were profoundly transformed when crossing over into modernity. We can refer again to Gur Zak, who provided a recent reassessment when he identified in Petrarch the birth of a new, specifically “humanist tradition” of self-care. Although Petrarch struggled between secular and sacred tendencies, he attained, late in his life, a certain harmony between Stoic, Ovidian and Augustinian “streams” of self-care, as such offering a “new philosophy of life.”⁸ As the Renaissance is

7 For *cultura*, I will also take into consideration related terms, such as the noun *cultus* and the verbs *colere* and *excolere*. Because I look at the historical evolution of these categories, I will translate key terms “literally,” which in this case means translating *cultura* by “culture” and *animus* by “soul,” even though the twenty-first-century meanings of culture and soul do not neatly correspond to the Latin terms (the slight alienation that results from this misalignment is intentional). I will usually translate *colere* and *excolere* as “cultivation” and *cultura* as “culture” to highlight nuances. For instance, *cultura* has a strong agricultural connotation, *cultus* is closer to a more general “care,” *colere* is also a more general term for “taking care” of something, and the “ex” in *excolere* stresses the drive towards perfection. In considering these nuances, I have sometimes modified existing translations.

8 Zak, *Petrarch’s Humanism*, 162. Petrarch nevertheless seems to have favored the Stoic perspective “that the cultivation of the self through writing and the reading of secular letters [...] is the best means available in this life to improve both himself and the world around him.”

traditionally seen as the pivot point between medieval times and early modernity, it is indeed a privileged period for the study of how self-care, and the self it presupposes, has changed into modernity.⁹ This period is especially relevant for our study of *cultura animi*, because – as we will see – this specific notion of self-care was appropriated and came into prominence only in the late Renaissance.

Locating the emergence of a new self in the Renaissance is part of a long tradition that goes back to the nineteenth century, at least to Jacob Burckhardt, who in *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien* (1860) famously redefined the Renaissance as the moment when the self discovers the self, that is, when “man became a spiritual individual, and recognized himself as such.”¹⁰ This focus on the “self” also took more Foucauldian forms since the 1980s, with Stephen Greenblatt’s *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* as a prominent example. Greenblatt located in the Renaissance an increased self-consciousness that the self can be fashioned as a work of art while, at the same time, seeing the self as the product of power relations in a particular society (a process he also calls “culture”).¹¹ In the most recent decades, new theoretical perspectives on the self and the deconstruction of Burckhardt’s Renaissance individual have opened up new avenues for studying the origins of the “modern self.”¹² The characterization of this “self” has also become increasingly diverse (as subject, individual, ego, person, consciousness, interiority, etc.), and has been influenced by contemporary preoccupations with gender, race, class, self-fashioning, or even the “death” of

The predominance of the Stoic mode is also reflected in Petrarch’s conception of self, as he adhered to the Stoic idea of a noble soul, and identified the “true self” with reason and virtue, which was to be achieved by the control of reason over the passions (*ibid.*, 84; see also 10, 14 and 158).

- 9 For the period after the Renaissance, notable works treating of self-care and knowledge acquisition are Matthew Jones, *The Good Life in the Scientific Revolution* (Chicago, IL, 2006) and Sorana Corneanu, *Regimens of the Mind* (Chicago, IL, 2011). See Matthew Sharpe and Michael Ure, *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (London, 2021) for an overview, also for later periods.
- 10 Jacob Christoph Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, transl. S. Middlemore (London, 2004), 98.
- 11 Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (Chicago, IL, 1980), 2–4 and 256. Greenblatt sees self-fashioning as the specifically Renaissance version of the control mechanisms that govern behavior, which he calls, referring to Clifford Geertz, “culture” (*ibid.*, 3). For an analysis of Greenblatt and revisionist history of the Renaissance self, see John Martin, *Myths of Renaissance Individualism* (Basingstoke, 2004).
- 12 Divergent opinions locate it sometime between the twelfth century and the French Revolution; see, for these two poles, Alain De Libera, *L’invention du sujet moderne* (Paris, 2015) and Gregory S. Brown, “Am ‘I’ a ‘Post-Revolutionary Self’?” *History and Theory*, 47 (2008), 229–248.

the subject. As a result, this literature has been called a “muddle.”¹³ In order to regain clarity in the historiography of the “self,” it is necessary to pay careful attention to the original expressions in the sources. A detailed study of the self-concept implied in *cultura animi*, in specific historical contexts, thus offers a modest but pertinent contribution. In a further departure from the literature just surveyed, I propose in this article that we can profitably turn on its head the question about the origins of the modern self. One could ask, indeed, if the self has ever been modern. Thus, what interests me here is not the “end” of self-care or the “origins” of a modern self, but the persistence of this other (“pre-modern”?) self, the self that still needs care, and how it had to adapt to survive into modernity. *Cultura animi*, in its Renaissance form, seems to be just such an attempt at adaptation.

3 Classical Self-Care as the Culture of the Soul

The concept of the culture of the soul, *cultura animi*, found an early and influential expression in Cicero's *Disputationes Tusculanae* (45 BC), an engaging set of discussions on the right way to live one's life, which depends on the “study of wisdom, which is called philosophy.”¹⁴ In order to understand the later evolution and appropriation of this concept, it is instructive to pay careful attention to some passages in this text and its social context. The *Tusculan Disputations* are divided into five books, giving an eclectic panorama of classical philosophy and how it bears on the good life. The books focus on attitudes towards death, bodily pain, grief, and other perturbations of the soul, leading in Book 5 to the (Stoic) conclusion that virtue ensures happiness under all circumstances. While these can be seen as the philosophical musings of a retired politician, reflecting on the meaning of an eventful life in uncertain circumstances, the book can also be read as presenting a new ethics and educational project for Rome's republican elite, preparing them for opposition to the new Caesarian tyranny. The practical exercising of philosophy is thus a *paideia* and a preparation for an active political life.¹⁵

13 Jan Goldstein, *The Post-Revolutionary Self* (Cambridge, MA, 2005), 2.

14 Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, Book 1, §1. I have consulted the Yonge, Peabody and King translations, and I use the Yonge translation for quotations, although with some modifications. For the Latin text, see Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, transl. J. E. King (Cambridge, MA, 1966). I will refer to book and paragraph number to facilitate consultation in different editions.

15 Ingo Gildenhard, *Paideia Romana: Cicero's Tusculan Disputations* (Cambridge, 2007); Yelena Baraz, *A Written Republic: Cicero's Philosophical Politics* (Princeton, NJ, 2012).

The *cultura animi* expression occurs in a very specific context, as an alternative to the more common, ancient medical metaphor of philosophy as the cure of the soul.¹⁶ After a preamble, Book 2 starts with a comment by Cicero's interlocutor, who affirms that, as a concrete result of the previous day's discussions, he has been freed from any uneasiness about death. Cicero confirms that it is indeed the effect of philosophy to cure the soul. He singles out specifically groundless worries, desires, and fears – the afflictions of the soul which present the main obstacles to the good life – as being cured by philosophy. Philosophy is not a panacea, however: while the efficacy of medicine may depend on the disposition of the patient's body, similarly, philosophy's cure only works well if embraced by a suitable disposition.

Cicero asserts that his interlocutor was given a strong soul by birth, and this is why philosophy can act so quickly and strongly on him. This is quite exceptional, however, and he points out that most philosophers don't adhere to their own precepts:

For how few philosophers will you meet with, whose life and manners are conformable to the dictates of reason! who look on their profession, not as a means of displaying their learning, but as a rule for their own practice! who follow their own precepts, and comply with their own decrees!¹⁷

Cicero presents philosophy as a practice, an art of living, and the worth of a philosopher should be measured by the results of this art, that is, by their conduct in life. In the context of a discussion on natural inclinations, he is also suggesting that, contrary to the Romans, the Greeks (who “invented, canvassed, and published” philosophy) do not have the appropriate natural disposition for philosophy to be really effective. Cicero's anonymous interlocutor, who by birth has received a better “nature” for philosophy, stands in for the Romans more generally, who have the natural aptitude for bringing philosophy's potential to fruition.

Indeed, Cicero feels that a new agricultural metaphor works better than a medical one to express the idea that a natural inclination, aptitude or talent is crucial: “as not all the fields that are cultivated [*colere*] are fruitful [...] so not all souls that are cultivated [*animi culti*] bear fruit.”¹⁸ Furthermore, this new metaphor allows him to better express the idea that the care of the self also

16 See Martha Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire* (Princeton, NJ, 1996), for an analysis of this medical metaphor in ancient philosophy.

17 Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, Book 2, §4.

18 Ibid., Book 2, §5.

demands diligence and work, which is at least as important as natural inclination. Cicero continues: “as a field, however naturally fertile, cannot abound in fruit without culture [*cultura*], so neither can the soul, without education [*doctrina*]; such is the weakness of either without the other.” At this juncture, philosophy is explicitly introduced as the “culture of the soul” (*cultura animi philosophia est*): “Philosophy is the culture of the soul, which plucks up vices by the roots, prepares the soul for the receiving of seeds, commits them to the soul, or, as I may say, sows them, in the hope that, when come to maturity, they may produce a plentiful harvest.”¹⁹ This is the end of the introduction to the second book of the *Tusculan Disputations* and it delineates a new framework for philosophy and education. It shows that a reformed philosophy is not just a “cure,” removing obstacles that stand in the way of the good life (which, in the agricultural metaphor, would only correspond to weeding out vices and harmful behavior), but it should also add new positive content and skills, based on education (*doctrina*), which help to shape what a good life can look like.

After discussing Cicero’s concept of the “culture” or “cultivation” of the self, we can now look more closely into what kind of “self” needs to be cultured. Cicero consistently writes about the culture of the *animus* or soul. What this soul is becomes clearer if we look at the context of the phrase: when Cicero mentions *cultura animi* in the beginning of Book 2, he is reflecting back on the conclusions of Book 1, on the fear and contempt of death, which comprises a systematic treatise on the nature of the soul. Cicero discusses the opinions of many philosophers from various schools, weighing their arguments on whether souls die, continue to exist for a while, or are immortal. While he ridicules those who deny the existence of the soul simply because it is so difficult to understand, Cicero concedes that it is almost impossible to imagine how the soul can see and understand itself (similar to an eye that cannot see itself). Cicero continues that this is the real meaning of the precept of Apollo, which offers the advice: “know thyself.” Indeed, the saying is not about knowing our limbs, size or form, Cicero writes, “when, therefore, he [Apollo] says, ‘Know yourself,’ he says this, ‘Know your soul.’”²⁰ This divine injunction gives Cicero hope that knowledge of the soul is possible after all. Even if it is impossible to know the nature of the soul directly, one can know of its existence, its movements, one can see that it has vigor, sagacity, memory, motion, and velocity; all of which are great, divine, eternal properties. “Thus, though you don’t see the soul of man, as you don’t see the Deity, nevertheless, as by the contemplation

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid., Book 1, §22.

of his works you are led to acknowledge a God, so you must acknowledge the divine power of the soul.”²¹

Cicero spends most of Book 1 arguing that the human soul is of divine origin and immortal. Indeed, there is a particular nature and power of the soul that is hard to characterize, but, “*whatever it is* that perceives, that understands, that lives, that acts,” this particular aspect of the soul is heavenly and divine, and on that account must necessarily be eternal.²² Cicero calls this aspect the *mens*, usually translated as “mind.” Cicero continues that we cannot know much about this power itself, which we share with God, but it is not necessary to understand its nature. It is enough to see that there is a higher power of the soul, called *mens*, which is immortal and divine.²³ As an Academic skeptic and an eclectic thinker, Cicero can never be fully certain. But he has amassed many reasons and much evidence for believing that the soul is immortal, and he concludes Book 1 by admonishing his interlocutor: “let us think that we have a refuge and haven prepared for us” after death.²⁴ In any case, the long theoretical discourse on the soul was not meant to be a logical proof, but was intended to change the attitude of Cicero’s interlocutor (or reader) and to remove his fear of death.

By introducing the phrase *cultura animi*, Cicero uses a new and strongly agricultural metaphor for philosophy as the care of the self. In this way, he stresses three points: the importance of one’s natural disposition, the belief that this natural disposition can be developed through diligence and hard work, and the possibility, not of a “cure,” but of a more perfected state (including new skills and knowledge). From the contents of the rest of the *Tusculan Disputations*, it is clear that this more perfected state would include the management of the emotions (which he continues to discuss with the medical metaphor of curing the soul), the attainment of virtue and an active involvement in the *civitas*. This cultivation of the self will be achieved through education, which, in this context, largely coincides with philosophy. Cicero makes clear that the “self” that needs to be cultivated is the immortal soul, which is of divine origin. This latter point facilitated the reception and Christianization of the *cultura animi* concept during the Renaissance.

21 Ibid., Book 1, §28.

22 Ibid., Book 1, §27 (my italics).

23 Ibid., Book 1, §27–28. In *De finibus* (Book 5, §14), Cicero identifies “reason” (*ratio*) as the most important part of the soul, the most divine element in man and the source of virtue.

24 Ibid., Book 1, §49.

4 Culture in Its Renaissance Context

Following Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, some students of humanism have painted a negative, skeptical picture of Renaissance humanistic education in terms of power structures and the disciplining of subjects. In the same vein, Grafton and Jardine's influential account of humanist education has rejected traditional claims of its liberating power, arguing rather that it supported docile subjection to new elites:

The older [medieval educational] system had fitted perfectly the needs of the Europe of the high middle ages, with its communes, its church offices open to the low-born of high talents and its vigorous debates on power and authority in state and church. The new system [of humanist education], we would argue, fitted the needs of the new Europe that was taking shape, with its closed governing elites, hereditary offices and strenuous efforts to close off debate on vital political and social questions. It stamped the more prominent members of the new elite with an indelible cultural seal of superiority, it equipped lesser members with fluency and the learned habit of attention to textual detail and it offered everyone a model of true culture as something given, absolute, to be mastered, not questioned – and thus fostered in all its initiates a properly docile attitude towards authority.²⁵

Instead of questioning this account, I want to provide a perspective shift – to some extent resembling the shift from Foucault's earlier focus on disciplining to his later fascination with self-care – on what kind of “culture” humanists tried to instill and promote.²⁶ In order to do this, I take “culture” as an actors' instead of an analysts' category when studying the appropriation of Cicero's *cultura animi* expression in the Northern Renaissance. Doing this will reveal that culture was seen as an act of cultivation rather than a given authority or a

25 Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities* (London, 1986), xiii–xiv. Bushnell and Dolven have recognized resonances between this account and Foucault's interest in disciplinary technologies; see Rebecca W. Bushnell, *A Culture of Teaching: Early Modern Humanism in Theory and Practice* (Ithaca, NY, 1996), 74 and Jeff Dolven, *Scenes of Instruction in Renaissance Romance* (Chicago, IL, 2008), 61.

26 For a critique of Grafton and Jardine, see James D. Tracy, “From Humanism to the Humanities: A Critique of Grafton and Jardine,” *Modern Language Quarterly*, 51 (1990), 122–143; and Paul F. Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy* (Baltimore, MD, 1989). On Foucault's shift in focus, it is worth mentioning that his evolving thought has continued to reconsider and reframe the tension between discipline and liberation.

system of power relations. As such, I will focus less on systems of domination, and more on ideas of a self that can care for, or culture, itself.

While the metaphor of the “medicine of the soul” was in wide use since antiquity, the metaphor of a “culture of the soul” was put forward by Cicero and only really took off with his new and unparalleled popularity in the Renaissance.²⁷ Cicero’s books were among the first to be printed, with the editio princeps of *Tusculanae disputationes* in 1469 (Udalricus Gallus, Rome) and of *De finibus bonorum et malorum* shortly afterwards, enhancing the circulation of his ideas and terminology even more towards the end of the fifteenth century, when Italian humanism defined itself as the movement to restore Ciceronian eloquence.²⁸ Although Northern humanists, aiming to combine Christian piety with humanist values, strongly criticized Cicero as a pagan author, he remained an unrivalled authority and source of inspiration.²⁹ Desiderius Erasmus ridiculed Cicero’s imitators in his *Ciceronianus* (1528) but also claimed that “[Cicero] has inspired my soul, and made me feel myself a better man.”³⁰ Vives called Cicero the “father of his style” and described him as the best possible author, praising his unique all-encompassing talents.³¹

Cicero’s *cultura animi* expression found fertile soil in the Renaissance, when agricultural metaphors were in abundance. Indeed, it has been argued that *renasci* itself, the actors’ category from which the Renaissance derives its name, is an agricultural metaphor as it does not simply mean “rebirth,” but

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- 27 For early uses of the medical metaphor, going back to Homer, see, for instance, Nussbaum, *Therapy of Desire*, 49–52. For the earliest usages of *cultura* and *cultura animi*, see Joseph Niedermann, *Kultur, Werden und Wandlungen des Begriffs und seiner Ersatzbegriffe von Cicero bis Herder* (Florence, 1941).
- 28 See Patrick Baker, *Italian Renaissance Humanism in the Mirror* (Cambridge, 2015), especially chapter 3; and David Marsh, “Cicero in the Renaissance,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Cicero*, ed. Catherine Steel (Cambridge, 2013), 306–317.
- 29 For background on Northern humanism, see Lewis W. Spitz, *The Religious Renaissance of the German Humanists* (Cambridge, MA, 1963).
- 30 Erasmus in a letter to Johannes Ulattenus (sometimes the full letter is included as an introduction or preface in editions of Cicero’s *Tusculan Disputations*). I quote from Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, xxviii–xxix.
- 31 On “the father of his style,” see David Amherdt, “La vie de Cicerón’ d’après l’humaniste Juan Luis Vivès (1492–1540): un portrait idéal au service d’une conception de l’action politique,” *Latomus*, 64 (2005), 995–1007; on the other points, see Vives, *De tradendis disciplinis*, 177; 93v. As there is not yet a critical edition of *De tradendis disciplinis*, I refer to its first edition: Juan Louis Vives, *De tradendis disciplinis*, in idem, *De disciplinis libri viginti* (Antwerp, 1531), fols. 79r–160r. A critical edition of Vives’s works is currently underway with Brill, under the direction of Charles Fantazzi.

more specifically, the regrowth of a tree after having been pruned.³² This made it possible for the humanists to imagine the Renaissance itself as a process of cultivation. Other examples were Ciceronian and Senecan notions such as “seeds of virtue” or “seeds of knowledge,” which became commonplaces shaping humanist discourse ranging from theology to education.³³ If the soul has by its very nature a “seed plot” implanted by God, this would allow humankind the potential to improve, maybe even achieve perfection, through cultivation. As we will see, Vives refers to both the “seeds of virtue” and “seeds of knowledge” to promote a new system of learning that cultivates (*excolere*) these seeds.³⁴

As I indicated in the previous section, Cicero’s *cultura animi* can be read as a programmatic concept to reshape the education of Roman citizens, so it should perhaps not come as a surprise that many humanists started using the metaphors of culture and cultivation, especially in educational literature. Thomas More, for instance, writing about the education of his daughters, argued that as reason was present in both men and women, education could “cultivate” reason in both sexes.³⁵ The humanist cardinal and educational reformer Jacopo Salodeto refers in passing to the “diligent culture [*cultura*] of the bare land of fresh souls,” which “grew a harvest of noble virtue and morals.”³⁶ Here, I focus on Vives in particular, not only because he was one of

32 Gerhart B. Ladner, “Vegetation Symbolism and the Concept of the Renaissance,” in *De Artibus Opuscula XL: Essays in Honor of Erwin Panofsky*, ed. Milard Meiss (New York, 1961), 303–322.; Jost Trier, “Zur Vorgeschichte der Renaissance-Begriffes,” *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 33 (1951), 45–63.

33 Cicero refers to the seeds of virtue in the second book of the *Tusculan Disputations*. Diogenes Laertius connects the theory specifically to the Stoics. The idea is also present in the Aristotelian tradition, e.g., in commentaries on Aristotle’s ethics; see David A. Lines, *Aristotle’s Ethics in the Italian Renaissance* (Leiden, 2002), 121 and 197; more generally, see Maryanne Cline Horowitz, *Seeds of Virtue and Knowledge* (Princeton, NJ, 1998). Bushnell, *Culture of Teaching*, explores agricultural metaphors in Renaissance education more generally.

34 Vives, *De tradendis disciplinis*, fol. 81r.

35 “By [learning], reason is cultivated, and (as a field) sowed with the wholesome seed of good precepts, it bringeth forth excellent fruit. But if the soil of woman’s brain be of its own nature bad, and apter to bear fern than corn (by which saying many do terrify women from learning) I am of opinion, therefore, that a woman’s wit is the more diligently by good instructions and learning to be manured, to the end, the defect of nature may be redressed by industry.” (Cresacre More, *Life of Sir Tomas More* [London, 1828], 142).

36 “[...] quibus promptum est cognoscere, ex illis disciplinæ bonæ seminibus, atque illa tanquam novalium agrorum, sic recentium animorum diligente cultura, eas virtutum & morum optimorum fruges fuisse effusas, quibus prisca ætas redundavit” (Jacopo Sadoletto, *De liberis recte instituendis* [Lyon, 1533], 10). For more on Sadoletto, see Richard M. Douglas, *Jacopo Sadoletto, 1477–1547: Humanist and Reformer* (Cambridge, MA, 1959).

the most prominent Northern humanists (the most read after Erasmus), but especially because, as I will show, cultivation metaphors play a key role in his ideas on education.³⁷ Indeed, Vives literally employed the Ciceronian *cultura animi* phrase and made it into the pinnacle of his educational project. As he wrote major works on education as well as on the soul, Vives's work provides a unique source for a detailed understanding of Renaissance ideas of cultivation and of the self that needed to be cultivated.

Vives was born in 1493 in Valencia, Spain, into a persecuted *converso* family (which may have predisposed him against theological intolerance).³⁸ His experiences at Montaigu College in Paris turned him against scholasticism, acquainted him with the methods of the *devotio moderna*, and fed his interest in humanism.³⁹ After his studies he moved to the Low Countries where he lived from 1512 until the end of his life. Under the influence of Erasmus, who became a close friend and collaborator, he became part of the so-called "Christian humanist" movement in Northern Europe, with its focus on moral, religious, and philosophical teachings. Both Erasmus and Vives combined a humanist admiration for antiquity with a practical spirituality marked by devotion and piety and geared towards moral improvement and the inculcation of virtue. As such, it will be clear that Vives presents a challenge to the

37 On Vives's life, reception and influence, see especially works by Enrique González González, such as his *Una república de lectores. Difusión y recepción de la obra de Juan Luis Vives* (Mexico City, 2007). For Vives's popular Latin school dialogues, published in 601 editions and translations, see Demmy Verbeke, "A Call for Sobriety: Sixteenth-century Educationalists and Humanist Conviviality," *Paedagogica Historica*, 49 (2012), 1–13.

38 For background on Vives and recent scholarship, see Carlos G. Noreña, *Juan Luis Vives* (The Hague, 1970); Charles Fantazzi, ed., *A Companion to Juan Luis Vives* (Leiden, 2008); Lorenzo Casini, "Juan Luis Vives," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Stanford, CA, 2021).

39 The *Devotio Moderna* was a spiritual renewal movement that focused on one's individual responsibility for salvation. The movement had systematized spiritual techniques and exercises to deepen one's individual piety. Vives studied at Montaigu College (like Erasmus, Calvin, and Ignatius of Loyola) where the teaching was influenced by the *Devotio Moderna*. Noreña (*Vives*, 34, 53) suggests that Vives's attachment to the *Devotio Moderna* may explain his "otherwise strange decision to move to the Netherlands after 1512." His friends in the Netherlands (including Erasmus) were also influenced by the movement; see also Charles Fantazzi, "Introduction: Prelude to the other voice in Vives," in Juan Luis Vives, *The Education of a Christian Woman*, ed. and transl. Charles Fantazzi, (Chicago, IL, 2000), 1–42, 29–30. Vives and Erasmus also rejected the stern character of this mystical spirituality, however, turning them away from a "hermeneutics of the self." On the *devotio moderna* and humanism (especially Erasmus), see, e.g., Jean-Claude Margolin, "L'Humanisme aux Pays-Bas au XVI^e siècle," *Studi Francesi*, 51 (2007), 532–553; more generally, see John Van Engen, *Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life: The Devotio Moderna and the World of the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, PA, 2008).

opposition proposed by Foucault between Hellenistic and Christian modes, and he does not fit well into Zak's concept of "humanist self-care," determined as it is by the tension between secular and sacred letters. Vives does not call for a hermeneutics of the self or self-renunciation, nor is he consumed by the tension between secular desire and sacred virtue.⁴⁰ His focus on the cultivation of the self towards practical wisdom, piety, and, ultimately, God, goes beyond such tensions and oppositions and, as we will clarify, presents us with a kind of self-care that cannot be understood with the Hellenistic modes of self-care that dominate the secondary literature.

Vives wrote a large oeuvre filled with different genres, including editions of classical texts, learned commentaries and theoretical tracts, practical devotional texts and political pamphlets, which are all potentially relevant for a history of self-care.⁴¹ Indeed, his *De concordia et discordia in humano genere* ["On Concord and Discord in Humankind"] (1529) analyzes international politics and war in terms of the disorder of human emotions, and Vives tries to foster peace through pacifying these emotions.⁴² In this article, I focus specifically on the work for which Vives is probably best known, his systematic treatment of an ideal educational program, because it places the *cultura animi* metaphor at its center.

It is worthwhile noting that Vives's ideas on education were rooted in his own practice and experience. Most famously, after he traveled to England in 1523, at the behest of King Henry VIII and Queen Catherine of Aragon, he became a confidant of the Queen and the tutor of Princess Mary. He wrote *De institutione feminae Christianae* ["The Education of a Christian Woman"] (1524) on the invitation of Catherine, devised the *De ratione studii puerilis* ["Plan of

40 The strict *devotio moderna* was characterized by self-renunciation, which can be seen, for instance, in their attitude towards marriage as the avoidance of concupiscence. As a secular and married scholar, Vives had a very different perspective on marriage: he saw it as the ultimate form of friendship as it represents the union not only of two souls, but also of two bodies; see Fantazzi, "Introduction," 29, and Constance M. Furey, "Bound by Likeness: Vives and Erasmus on Marriage and Friendship," in *Discourses and Representations of Friendship in Early Modern Europe 1500–1700*, ed. Maritere López and Daniel T. Lochman (London, 2010), 29–43.

41 For a list and bibliography of Vives's works, see Joan Tello, "A Catalogue of the Works of Joan Lluís Vives," *Convivium*, 31 (2018), 59–100 and Carlos G. Noreña, *A Vives Bibliography* (Lewiston, NY, 1990).

42 Cathy Curtis, "Advising Monarchs and their Counsellors: Juan Luis Vives on the Emotions, Civil Life and International Relations," *Australian and New Zealand Association of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 28 (2011), 29–53, Kaarlo Johannes Havu, "Between Concord and Discord: Juan Luis Vives (1492/1493–1540) on Language, Rhetoric, and Politics" (PhD dissertation, European University Institute [Florence], 2015).

Study for Girls”] (1523), aimed at Princess Mary, and set up a study plan for boys, directed at the son of the Queen’s chamberlain William Mountjoy.⁴³ It is only in 1531, during the final and most creative part of his career as a scholar, residing again in the relative quietude of Bruges, that he put together his ideas on education in *De tradendis disciplinis sive de doctrina Christiana* (“On the Transmission of Knowledge, or Christian Education”), which forms the second part of his magnum opus, *De disciplinis* (the first part discusses the causes of the corruption of education).

While Vives’s own practice followed Aristotle’s model of educating the powerful – indeed, he worked for the epitome of royal absolutism – his notion of *cultura animi* suggests an educational program that was widely applicable. Like Aristotle, Vives was engaged in cultivating the character of the elite, raising them to virtue and practical wisdom in order to check their worst impulses, as he saw this as the most effective way to change society, work towards peace and harmony, and promote a more general culture of the soul. Referring to Vives’s use of *cultura animi*, José Ortega y Gasset has called *De disciplinis* (somewhat hyperbolically) “the first reflection of western man upon his own culture, and his book should properly be called *A Treatise on Human Culture*.”⁴⁴ As I will argue below, there is some truth in Ortega y Gasset’s claim if we take “culture” in the narrow sense in which Vives himself meant it, that is, as the process of cultivating right judgment and practical wisdom to become a virtuous, pious, and critical citizen.

5 Vives’s Humanist Pedagogy as Self-Care

Vives mentions the *cultura animi* trope in a key passage where he explains the aim (or “fruit”) of education: “When a boy is taken to school, let the father know what he ought to consider as the fruit of studious labor [*fructus laboris studiosi*]; surely, not honor or money, but the culture of the soul [*sed animi cultura*] – a thing of exceedingly great and incomparable value – that the youth

43 His advice to Mary is typical of his attitude towards education: “The authors in whom she should be versed are those, who, at the same time, cultivate [*excolere*] language and morals: those who help to inculcate not only knowledge but living well.” (Juan Louis Vives, *De ratione studii puerilis epistolae duae* [Basel, 1537], 35; see Foster Watson, *Vives and the Renaissance Education of Women* [New York, 1912], 146–147) He goes on to mention, first of all, Cicero, and then Seneca and the works of Plutarch.

44 José Ortega y Gasset, *Vives–Goethe* (Madrid, 1961), 63.

may become more learned and more virtuous through sound education.”⁴⁵ The general gist of this quote corresponds to the ideal, both philosophical and Christian, to strive not for external benefits (honor or money) but to focus on the soul. The fruit of education is the “cultured” soul, and it is here that true, even incomparable value is located.

This theme is reinforced and spelled out in more detail in a second key passage, which also addresses the aim of education and should be read in parallel with the first (they convey the same message, but are directed to the father and the child respectively):

Let the children be convinced that what they are going to receive at school is the cultivation [*cultus*] of the soul, that is, of our better and immortal part; that this cultivation [*cultus*] has been handed down from God to the human race, as the greatest gift and out of fatherly indulgence, and that it could not have been given by any other source, and that assuredly this is the pursuit and way through which they may please God and attain to Him in Whom is their highest happiness. In this way they will both love cultivation [*cultus*] of this kind as necessary for them, and revere and adore it as sacred and sent down from heaven. They will then enter into their schools as if they entered into holy temples, ready to venerate.⁴⁶

In both passages, the same educational aim is expressed. In the first passage, an agricultural metaphor is suggested and reinforced with the form *cultura*; in the second passage, the religious significance of cultivation is explored, making *cultus* more appropriate. In the former quote, it is remarkable that *cultura* is not so much described as the process of cultivation but as a “thing.” This “thing” represents the perfected fruit; it is the soul in a state of excellence, that is, the learned and virtuous soul. In the latter passage, Vives explains that the soul to be cultivated is not the soul more generally, as the animating principle, but the “better and immortal part” of man.⁴⁷ Vives is also more specific about what this cultivation is: it comes uniquely from God and it is also the path to

45 Vives, *De tradendis disciplinis*, fol. 92r. For the translation, I closely follow Foster Watson, with some modifications (which I do not specifically mark in the text); see Foster Watson, *Vives: On Education. A Translation of the De Tradendis Disciplinis of Juan Luis Vives* (Cambridge, 1913), 73.

46 Vives, *De tradendis disciplinis*, fol. 95v; see Watson, *Vives: On Education*, 87.

47 In *De anima*, Vives defines the human soul as “the spirit by which the body to which it is united lives, fit to know and love God, and therefore to be united to him for eternal bliss.” (Juan Louis Vives, *De anima et vita* [Basel, 1538], 104; the marginal title mentions *Animae definitio*).

God. How does the rest of Vives's work, and especially *De tradendis disciplinis* shed light on what exactly this "self" or "soul" is that has to be cultivated, and of what this "cultivation" actually consists?

Cicero identified *cultura animi* with philosophy, and the training he had in mind was based on philosophy. Appropriating Cicero's notion of *cultura animi*, for Vives, the training of the soul does not correspond neatly with philosophy; in fact, philosophy seems to have only a small part in it. Since for Vives "culture" is the fruit of the "studious labor" that students will go through at school, we need to take a closer look at Vives's educational program to better understand what is comprised under "culture." Vives's project for education reform does not follow the traditional arts curriculum, as was to be expected, but it also has a broader orientation than the typical educational positioning of his humanist colleagues, who mostly focused on classical languages and rhetoric.⁴⁸ What does a system of learning predicated on self-care actually look like?

The first part of teaching discussed by Vives in *De tradendis disciplinis* is propaedeutic: it is not part of education proper but prepares and selects the children that are suited for studies.⁴⁹ This teaching covers the basics of religion and moral philosophy, as exemplified in Vives's popular book, *Introductio ad sapientiam* (1524).⁵⁰ It introduces students to wisdom, elucidating man's inclination towards sin, the need for divine grace and the battle between reason and the disturbances of the soul. Vives uses agricultural metaphors, comparing bad emotions to weeds that foolish boys may let take root if they are not careful and if they are ignorant of the fact that, if left untended, these weeds will be almost impossible to uproot at a later time, no matter how much effort is invested in the attempt.⁵¹ In order to avoid the roots of these vices going deep and sprouting forth again and again, early and appropriate cultivation is necessary. Indeed, this propaedeutic phase is essential, as the imbibition of the correct religious and moral attitude determines the right approach towards learning itself (including the right interpretation of pagan sources). After this initial phase, the teacher should judge whether the student is fit for learning or should rather pursue some more practical art.

Education proper starts with the study of languages, including one's mother tongue, Latin, and perhaps Greek as well. "The first thing man has to learn is

48 On the development of the humanist curriculum, see Grendler, *Schooling*.

49 Vives, *De tradendis disciplinis*, fols. 94v–95v.

50 This work was, in Vives's own words, full of "little flowers from the philosophers and sacred authors" (Vives, *De tradendis disciplinis*, fol. 94v; see Watson, *Vives: On Education*, 84), and has been described as: "a short handbook of ethics, blending Stoicism and Christianity." (Casini, "Vives").

51 Vives, *De tradendis disciplinis*, fol. 95r.

speech,” Vives quipped, and Book 3 of *De tradendis disciplinis* is devoted to this subject that was close to the heart of the typical humanist. Nevertheless, for Vives, the learning of languages is not a goal in itself. Languages are the gates to the sciences and arts but if the student stops there, he will remain stuck in the entrance hall. The real acquisition of knowledge starts with cosmography, natural history, and the study of causes (as in metaphysics and natural philosophy). Inspired by Plutarch and Seneca, Vives believes that the study of nature points at the invisible presence of God and should always be combined with the cultivation (*excolere*) of moral character, so that the teacher “may mold his pupils’ souls to virtue.”⁵² The rest of Vives’s curriculum, until the student is 25 years old, comprises logic, rhetoric, and mathematics.

Once the student is mature and has mastered the theoretical disciplines, he is ready to study “life” itself. Although Vives is keenly interested in the practical arts that supply us with the necessities for life, advanced formal education should focus on the soul in its broadest sense, i.e., the vegetative, sensitive, and rational souls.⁵³ The teacher may discuss the theoretical knowledge typically found in *De anima* treatises, but much more important is the imparting of knowledge of how to heal body and soul.⁵⁴ Indeed, Vives has a radically practical orientation on education in general: he is focused on useful knowledge and condemns useless erudition, as “we do not learn arts and sciences for their own sakes, but for ours.”⁵⁵ Knowing how to heal body and soul corresponds to two paths of study. The first path concerns healing the ensouled body, for which one needs to know natural history, dietetics and medicine. The second path of study, which involves practical knowledge of the higher soul, is of special interest to Vives and is covered in the fifth and final book of *De tradendis disciplinis*. Vives introduces this book by setting it apart from what came before. Whereas the previous books dealt with the knowledge of nature, which is useful especially for understanding and healing the human body, Book 5 deals with “that other question,” i.e., “how souls [*animi*] are to be cultivated [*excolere*] and made healthy [*sanare*].”⁵⁶ While other disciplines may contribute to – or at least prepare for – the cultivation of the soul, Book 5 deals specifically with the subjects at the core of the process of cultivation.

52 Ibid., fol. 114r.

53 Although the practical arts are not to be taught at school, Vives stresses that students should seek out knowledge about these arts directly from artisans and other experts.

54 Vives, *De tradendis disciplinis*, fol. 121. Vives writes this in reference to Ficino, but he subscribes to this division as it is also the structure that he created for the rest of the book.

55 Ibid., fol. 84; see Watson, *Vives: On Education*, 33.

56 Vives, *De tradendis disciplinis*, fol. 125r.

6 Cultivation as the Path towards God

If learning is the path for taking care of the self, what are the implications for self-care? For Vives, the essence of the care of the soul is the cultivation of practical wisdom (*prudentia*). This is not the learning of theoretical knowledge or being in a state of contemplation: *prudentia* is a trained skill that enables one to see what is good, make the right decisions and take adequate actions in concrete situations.⁵⁷ Vives also mentions piety (*pietas*) in this context, which he considers as the religious counterpart of practical wisdom, generating knowledge and right action in divine matters.⁵⁸ How does one cultivate practical wisdom? By gaining more experience and by training one's judgment. There are many ways to go about this, but Vives believes that there are disciplines particularly suited for this task, and the foremost of these is history.

First of all, while experience is gained through our actions and retained by memory, history is the storehouse of our collective experience. Vives explains that history is also indispensable for all kinds of practical knowledge as well as for all the arts, including theology. Not only does history contribute detailed factual knowledge, it also brings joy and inspires. Even more importantly, it brings examples and concrete materials by which our judgment can be tested and trained. Vives writes that history is more excellent than all the other studies because it “gives birth to, nourishes, develops or cultivates [*excolere*] all the arts.” It does so not “by bitter and troublesome precepts or exercises, but by the delectation of souls” which results in “a real restauration and repair of the soul [*animus*].”⁵⁹ History does not offer impracticable rules or mental games, as philosophy and other genres of the “care of the self” tend to do; rather, history shows life as it is, increasing our experience and cultivating our judgment, which in turn raises, repairs and cultivates the soul. In order to realize this potential, history writing should not focus on frivolous or offensive details but should study practical wisdom “in action,” including important sayings and maxims (*apophthegmata*) that are the outcome of rational deliberation.⁶⁰

57 On “prudence” in Vives, see J. Antonio Fernández Santamaría, *Juan Luis Vives: Esceptismo y prudencia en el Renacimiento* (Salamanca, 1990); Renaud Malavialle, “Histoire, prudence et expertise politique chez les humanistes espagnols. De Juan Luis Vives à Benito Arias Montano,” in *Experts et expertises politiques à l’époque moderne en Europe*, ed. Marion Brétéché and Héloïse Hermant (Rennes, 2021), 215–232; Havu, “Between Concord and Discord.”

58 For the cultivation [*excolere*] of “practical wisdom or virtue,” which Vives explores in an explicit agricultural metaphor, see Vives, *De tradendis disciplinis*, fol. 137r.

59 Ibid., fol. 126v; see Watson, *Vives: On Education*, 235.

60 Vives, *De tradendis disciplinis*, fol. 127r.

The second discipline that cultivates practical wisdom is moral philosophy (comprising the study of behavior, including ethics, economics, politics, and the study of local duties and customs). Moral philosophy can be helpful for the good life but only if it is “joined together with history,” otherwise it will remain powerless.⁶¹ Indeed, Vives was very explicit in writing that moral examples (*exempla*) are of more avail than precepts (*praecepta*), “for everyone more willingly and more promptly imitates what he admires” (similarly for piety, people will follow the example of Christ and martyrs rather than the admonitions of theologians), and, Vives notes, all these *exempla* are taken from history.⁶² While philosophy is limited in the extent to which it can give us experience, it is also limited in providing right judgment because reason is occluded by original sin. As only divine reason is fully clear and unperturbed, our central precepts must not come from philosophy but from God and His mediators, i.e., Christ, his disciples, and other holy men. These instructions should be collected in a short, clear book, which can be supplemented with the knowledge and precepts from the moral disciplines. Here, piety and practical wisdom necessarily converge, with piety always leading the way. Moral philosophy thus needs the support of both history and religion to be effective.

One of the most important aspects of the cultivation of the soul is to know how to avoid diseases invading the mind, or, if they have already done so, to know how the power of reason (*ratio*) can expel them and restore the health of the mind.⁶³ Vives explains that practical wisdom needs to be cultivated so that man can keep his center, regardless of the challenges of life and the storms of the emotions, and both history and philosophy are specifically useful in this regard.⁶⁴ Although history involves change, the essential nature of human beings does not really change, and this goes especially for the nature of

61 Ibid., fol. 129v, with the marginal subtitle “*Philosophia morum*.” See J. Antonio Fernández Santamaría, *The Theater of Man: J. L. Vives on Society* (Philadelphia, PA, 1998), for a broader discussion of Vives’s curriculum, although in that account, moral philosophy is given more importance than seems warranted.

62 Vives, *De tradendis disciplinis*, fol. 126v; see Watson, *Vives: On Education*, 233. For the Renaissance perspective on *exempla* in history, see Timothy Hampton, *Writing From History: The Rhetoric of Exemplarity in Renaissance Literature* (Ithaca, NY, 1990).

63 Vives, *De tradendis disciplinis*, fol. 125.

64 For the storms of the emotions, see *ibid.*, fol. 125r. Vives gives a detailed account of the emotions in his *De anima*, which is well studied; see, for instance, Carlos G. Noreña, *Juan Luis Vives and the Emotions* (Carbondale, IL, 1989); Marina Mestre Zaragoza, “La théorie des passions de Juan Luis Vivès,” in *Les passions à l’âge classique*, ed. Pierre-François Moreau (Paris, 2006), 29–44; Lorenzo Casini, “Aristotelianism and Anti-Stoicism in Juan Luis Vives’s Conception of the Emotions,” in *Moral Philosophy on the Threshold of Modernity*, ed. Jill Kraye and Risto Saarinen (Dordrecht, 2005), 283–305.

the human passions, how they are aroused and quelled, and what their effects are on society. It is the highest practical wisdom to grasp the workings of the passions in concrete historical circumstances.⁶⁵ Philosophy can also teach us about the passions, but as this is of limited use for practical wisdom, he skips over it in *De tradendis disciplinis* (he also points out the dangers of reading classical authors on this subject, as their principles may contradict religion). Instead, he focuses on the precepts of moral philosophy, which have been prepared, like an army, to bring support to reason and wage war on the passions; but, as we have seen, these precepts in themselves have little power on students if they are not brought to life. Therefore, Vives believes that the teacher of moral philosophy should instruct by example: he should be a holy, pure, modest man, full of practical wisdom and, especially, with a lot of experience in ordinary life.⁶⁶ Through his erudition, power of speech, use of maxims, good reasons and edifying histories, he may increase the experience and exercise the judgment of his pupils, and this may, in turn, cultivate their souls.⁶⁷

For Vives, history is practical and concrete, while philosophy is more abstract and focuses on principles and rules. This distinction is related to the question of whether history and philosophy are “arts,” and as we will see, this is a crucial question for understanding cultivation more precisely. This question is also at the core of an ongoing debate, instigated by Hadot and Foucault, about whether philosophy should be considered the theoretical pursuit of truth or should be practiced as an “art” of living. One recent Foucauldian account attributes the latter, “technical” conception of philosophy to the ancient Stoics. According to John Sellars, the Stoics distinguished philosophical knowledge as rational understanding (*logos*) from technical philosophical knowledge analogous to the expert knowledge of a craftsman (*technè*). This philosophical art (*technè*) does not reject *logos* but incorporates it as one of its essential components; yet, it supplements *logos* with exercise and training that will translate both into action and the transformation of one’s life. Sellars summarizes the Stoic “technical” conception of philosophy as follows: “philosophy is conceived as an art directed towards the cultivation of an ideal disposition of the soul, a disposition that may be called excellence or wisdom.”⁶⁸

65 Vives, *De tradendis disciplinis*, fol. 126r.

66 Ibid., fol. 130v.

67 Vives describes the “union” of the soul of the teacher with the soul of the student, who he helps towards practical wisdom (which is equated with virtue), and compares this to the relation between the farmer and his field, or between parent and child; *ibid.*, fol. 137r–v.

68 John Sellars, *The Art of Living: The Stoics on the Nature and Function of Philosophy* (London, 2014), 168–171. Sellars considers the Stoic distinction to be very different from the Aristotelian distinction between philosophy as theoretical knowledge (*episteme*) and

It is clear that Vives is close to the Socratic and Stoic traditions that inspired Sellars, Hadot and Foucault, but there are also illuminating differences. For Vives, in line with the Renaissance development of a Ciceronian project, an art is characterized by formal precepts that can be communicated and taught.⁶⁹ Not every kind of knowledge is called an art, Vives writes, but “only that which becomes a rule for doing something.”⁷⁰ Those which are not brought together under rules and precepts are not arts at all, but, to use a general name, are “experiential knowledge” (*cognitiones & peritiae*), and Vives gives the example of the knowledge of history or the contemplation of God. In contrast, he defines an art as “a collection of universal rules brought together for the purpose of knowing, doing or producing something.”⁷¹ An important difference between history and philosophy is that philosophy is an art but history is not, and that makes history *more* suited as a discipline to cultivate the soul. The art of philosophy as a collection of universal rules can be taught at school; its precepts can be memorized but cannot be easily absorbed, incorporated, and embodied; the efficacy of philosophy is thus called into question. Vives suggests, for instance, that philosophers have not been suited for ruling cities and peoples because of their lack of engagement with history, “which is the nurse of practical wisdom.”⁷² Vives believes that it is not the precepts of philosophy that will transform the life of the student, but rather the *exempla* from history. Cultivation of the soul is based on practical wisdom, not art; it is not a “technique of the self,” but a “praxis of the soul,” in the Aristotelian sense.

Vives’s particular stance on a mode of learning by experience, which resists rule-forming or the distillation of principles and therefore cannot even be learned as a technique or an art, is crucial for understanding the meaning and process of cultivation. As we have seen, the essential part of the cultivation of practical wisdom is the cultivation of judgment. Strikingly and paradoxically for a teacher and educational reformer, Vives writes that judgment cannot be taught: “Judgment such as is inherent in natural practical wisdom cannot be taught; it can only be polished [*elimare*] or cultivated [*excolere*].”⁷³

philosophy primarily concerned with practical wisdom (*phronesis* or *prudentia*); note also Sellars’s interesting use of “cultivation.” Vives aligns cultivation with *prudentia*, not with art.

69 See Pascal Dubourg Glatigny and Hélène Vérin, *Réduire en art* (Paris, 2008).

70 Vives, *De tradendis disciplinis*, fol. 81r; see Watson, *Vives: On Education*, 22.

71 Vives, *De tradendis disciplinis*, fol. 81v; see Watson, *Vives: On Education*, 24. See Vives, *De anima*, 66 for another account. Vives also admits that the expression “an art” is sometimes used in a looser, wider sense.

72 Vives, *De tradendis disciplinis*, fol. 126r; see Watson, *Vives: On Education*, 232.

73 Vives, *De tradendis disciplinis*, fol. 125v; see Watson, *Vives: On Education*, 230. Judgment and practical wisdom were the focus of debate during the Renaissance, and there was

Although judgment cannot be taught, there are steps one can take towards its cultivation, such as reading specific authors that show good judgment. This would be a kind of reading that is not focused on acquiring facts or theoretical knowledge, and not even a reading with a view to distilling maxims and rules from the text; the objective would instead be to absorb the *exempla* of judgments in the text, to make these one's own.⁷⁴ As I have mentioned earlier, Vives believes that reading historical works in this way was an excellent way to cultivate judgment. Vives explains that this cultivation works by "absorption": By applying judgment (*judicium*) to history, a mature student will convert or "absorb" (*convertere*) its lessons in such a way that it will be useful for practical life (just like moisture is diffused through the body by natural heat, by which the body is fed and life is generated).⁷⁵ Philosophy, which is focused on sterile precepts and exercises, is much less effective and can contribute to the cultivation of practical wisdom only when combined with history in examples that can be imitated and absorbed. Vives not only uses the cultivation metaphor to express the importance of natural disposition and the possibility of developing the soul towards a more perfected state, as Cicero did; he also uses it to make an Aristotelian point, stressing the role of experience in the formation of character and the importance of an organic way of learning that absorbs the "life" of its subject.

7 Which "Self" Should Be Cultivated?

Now that we have explored what cultivation means for Vives, we can return to the question of what is the "self" that needs to be cultivated. Generally speaking, Vives wants to develop the whole human being. He repeatedly stresses the

disagreement on whether or not they could be taught. This debate goes back to classical antiquity, with Plutarch maintaining that prudence must be learned, while Aristotle and Plato remained skeptical of this possibility. In the Renaissance, practical wisdom was often seen as the result of conversation, not study; see Eugenio Garin, *Italian Humanism: Philosophy and Civic Life in the Renaissance*, transl. Peter Munz (Oxford, 1965). Ramus, however, believed that it could be inculcated in the classroom; see Petrus Ramus and Audomarus Talaueus, *Collectaneae praefationes, epistolae, orationes* (Marburg, 1599), 279. For a discussion of why practical wisdom is not an art, see, for instance, Ioannes Iovianus Pontanus, *De prudentia* (Florence, 1508), Book 3, fol. 58v, while Gracián promotes exactly such an art of practical wisdom; Karl Alfred Blüher, "Les origines antiques d'un 'art de la prudence' chez Baltasar Gracián," *Asterion*, 3 (2005), 301–323.

74 Note that logic and rhetoric are also mentioned as tools that can be used in the cultivation of judgment.

75 Vives, *De tradendis disciplinis*, fol. 126v.

need for exercising the body and following an appropriate diet, for instance, but these are not ends in themselves. They contribute to avoiding physical disease and are necessary for keeping the mind sharp and clear, but the perfection of the body cannot be the goal of life. In fact, too much focus on the body would be detrimental, as it distracts from the real purpose of life, which is the cultivation of the soul. It is therefore crucial to distinguish the “self” that needs to be cultivated – that is, the part of us that needs to be perfected – from the resources and the parts of the self that are employed in the processes of cultivation.⁷⁶ What is the “self,” according to Vives? In his *De anima*, he paraphrases Cicero when referring to the Delphic oracle’s exhortation to “know thyself”: the “self,” he writes, does not refer to our bones, flesh, nerves or blood, but to the nature of our soul, its quality, natural disposition (*ingenium*), powers and affections.⁷⁷ All these aspects of the soul are engaged in different ways in self-cultivation.

In *De tradendis disciplinis* and *De anima*, agricultural metaphors and the concept of cultivation (*excolere*) are centered on two aspects of the self. The first aspect are the seeds of knowledge and virtue that God has sowed within our soul. God has given us a propensity for some simple truths (or seeds) which Vives characterizes as first intuitive judgments: these are natural anticipations that direct us towards both what is true and what is good.⁷⁸ These seeds need to be cultivated, like a farmer cultivates his crops, by our faculty of judgment. In this way, mankind has developed all reliable knowledge, and these seeds are at the origin of all the arts, sciences and practical wisdom.⁷⁹ The seeds of knowledge and virtue are not evenly distributed, however. Talented students with a stronger *ingenium* may have the fortune to have more of these anticipations, or their anticipations may guide them more strongly, providing more certainty.⁸⁰ In alignment with Renaissance educational literature, Vives explores the concrete possibilities and limitations of the mind in terms of

76 Vives writes, for instance, about the “sustenance” of the body versus the “cultivation” of the soul (Vives, *De tradendis disciplinis*, fol. 84v).

77 Vives, *De anima*, preface, fol. 2v. For an overview of the *De anima*, see Valerio Del Nero, “A Philosophical Treatise on the Soul: *De Anima et Vita* in the context of Vives’s opus,” in Fantazzi, ed., *Companion*, 277–314.

78 See Vives, *De tradendis disciplinis*, fol. 81r–v, and several passages in *De anima*. Vives rejects Plato’s *recollectio* and refers to philosophers (the Stoics), theologians, and Church fathers who also referred to these seeds as conscience, natural judgment or the light of the mind.

79 However, if our judgment is lacking or corrupted, these seeds degenerate into fraudulent arts in exactly the same way as the whole mass becomes sour from sour leaven or rennet.

80 Vives, *De anima*, 67.

ingenium.⁸¹ In *De anima*, he explains that the soul's relation to the body is like the artisan using an instrument. The body does not taint the soul but its natural disposition constrains or empowers the soul similar to the way a sharp or blunt instrument shapes the artisan's actions and products differently. *Ingenium* is the concept by means of which Vives explicates this relationship. He defines "ingenium" as "the whole power of the mind [*mentis*] as it uncovers and reveals itself in the use [*ministerium*] of its instruments."⁸² Vives compares *ingenium* with a window, which may be clouded or frosted and may partially obscure the view. *Ingenium* thus pertains to the power of the mind not in a universal sense but as actualized in a variety of concrete operations. Through discussion of *ingenium*, Vives can analyze the actions of the mind in relation to the body, that is, from the specific perspective of how the mind is constrained or enabled by the bodily temperament, the humors and spirits. Some boys are highly skilled with their hands, others are good with judgment and reason, Vives writes, some minds are light, others are solid.⁸³ It is *ingenium* that accounts for the variety of mental capacities in students, and their parents and teachers must sound the student's *ingenium* in order to decide for which discipline she would be best suited.⁸⁴ *Ingenium*, whether or not cultivated, determines the possible paths one can take in one's life and, together with personal experience and cultivation, this is a major factor in individuating the "self."

Vives became well known for his study of *ingenium*, for his detailed attention to the variety of minds and his consideration of the natural ability of students, insisting that this be taken into account in their education. Indeed,

81 For *ingenium* in the educational literature, see Richard Oosterhoff, "Methods of Ingenuity: The Renaissance Tradition behind Descartes's *Regulae*," in *Descartes and the Ingenium: The Embodied Soul in Cartesianism*, ed. Raphaële Garrod and Alexander Marr (Leiden, 2020), 163–183.

82 Vives, *De anima*, 77: "Universam mentis nostrae vim, de qua sumus hactenus locuti, ingenium nominari placuit, quod se instrumentorum ministerio exerit et patefacit." In *De tradendis disciplinis*, fol. 92v, Vives describes the parts of ingenium more specifically as sharpness of attention, capacity of comprehension, and the power of comparison in judgment. On Vives and *ingenium*, see Lorenzo Casini, "Quid sit anima: Juan Luis Vives on the Soul and Its Relation to the Body," *Renaissance Studies*, 24 (2010), 496–517, 509, and Emilio Hidalgo-Serna, Lynne Ballew and Holly Wilson, "Ingenium' and Rhetoric in the Work of Vives," *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, 16 (1983), 228–241. For the complexity of *ingenium* in the early modern period, see Alexander Marr, Raphaële Garrod, José Ramón Marcaida and Richard J. Oosterhoff, *Logodaedalus: Word Histories of Ingenuity in Early Modern Europe* (Pittsburgh, PA, 2019).

83 See Vives, *De tradendis disciplinis*, fols. 92v–93r.

84 This practice is also part of an ancient tradition. Note that I am using the "she" form here as a nod to the fact that Vives was a pioneer in female education, recognizing the extraordinary talents of women; see Fantazzi, "Introduction."

when he introduces the educational project of *De tradendis disciplinis* to the King of Portugal, he specifically frames it as the cultivation of *ingenium*. In the dedication to the King, he associates the cultivation of *ingenium* with the highest form of wisdom (*sapientia*). The first line of the preface elaborates on this: “there is nothing more beautiful or more excellent in life than the cultivation [*colere*] of *ingenium*, by what we call education [*disciplinae*], by means of which we separate ourselves from the rites and customs of savages, are restored to humanity, and are raised towards God Himself.”⁸⁵ In particular, as we have alluded to already, *ingenium* also undergirds judgment, the basis for practical wisdom. Even the highest forms of cultivation are thus rooted in a concrete embodied perspective and need to take into account students’ natural dispositions.⁸⁶

The second aspect of cultivation focuses on the power of judgment. In *De anima*, judgment is discussed as a power of the mind, together with simple intelligence, reflection, recollection, combination, reasoning, and contemplation, and the mind itself is part of the rational soul, broadly speaking, which – following Augustine – consists of mind, will and memory (reflecting the Trinity). Vives describes judgment as the power of the mind that measures, as with a carpenter’s square and rule, and weighs, as with a balance.⁸⁷ Vives sees judgment as the central faculty for knowledge acquisition, including the knowledge of good and evil, but it is also highly personal. While it is the case, as with lawyers in a court case, that good reasons can be provided by others, one still needs to judge for oneself. That judgment is based on previous experience and is the basis for one’s knowledge and actions, that is, it is characterized by – and characterizes – one’s character and individuality. Furthermore, judgment underlies the good affections, which motivate man to do good, and judgement is at the basis of curing bad affections.⁸⁸ Vives calls judgment the highest power of our mind: there is nothing higher for teaching the arts and the whole of life than a right and healthy judgment. As such, it is the privileged mental faculty that should be the focus of our efforts of cultivation. Indeed, it is the core of the “self” that we need to tend.⁸⁹ Vives is thus specific about

85 Vives, *De tradendis disciplinis*, preface; see Watson, *Vives: On Education*, 6.

86 Judgment consists in bringing things into relation with one another and is based on comparison (Vives, *De tradendis disciplinis*, fol. 92v). One’s power of judgement depends on the amount of information that one can process and the comparisons one can make, which are rooted in one’s *ingenium*.

87 Vives, *De anima*, 74.

88 Ibid., 149.

89 Judgment paves the way for contemplation, which is a tranquil and happy state of seeing knowledge that is certain and proven. For Vives, contemplation should not be the end

which “self” should be cultivated: the “seeds” or intuitive first judgments, the *ingenium* in which these are embedded and which serves as the instrument for judgment, as well as the power of judgment itself.

8 Conclusion

In this article, I have studied the Renaissance appropriation of the Ciceronian metaphor of the “culture of the soul” in terms of self-care, starting with an elucidation of how Cicero used this agricultural metaphor to stress three aspects of self-care: the importance of one’s natural disposition (which should guide but also limits self-development), the possibility of self-transformation through hard work, and the idea that we can continue to improve ourselves even if we are already well-balanced and thriving, that is, we can cultivate ourselves towards a more perfected version of our self. After some background information about agricultural metaphors in the Renaissance, we turned to the humanist Juan Luis Vives’s reform of learning as a prominent Renaissance *locus* of the *cultura animi* metaphor.

The article has pivoted around two essential questions: What, according to Vives, is the “self” that needs to be cultivated or cared for? And: What exactly is this “cultivation”? For Vives, *cultura animi*, and cultivation more generally, was a broader concept than the “medicine of the mind,” which focused on eliminating or controlling the emotions. Instead, “cultivation” covered a whole Christian educational program in which the agricultural metaphor served to stress the importance of natural disposition, the possibility of development and perfection, as well as an organic experiential way of learning. For Vives, it was not literature, art, or science that were the real fruits of cultivation, but it was instead the “cultured soul”. In essence, however, cultivation involved the training of practical wisdom, not through theory or precepts, but through multifarious experience and the absorption of *exempla*. The “self” to which this cultivation was directed, is the part of the soul related to judgment, that is, the seeds of knowledge, the *ingenium*, and the power of judgment. Although judgment is obscured by the body as well as by original sin, Vives presents an optimistic anti-Augustinian perspective on cultivation, which, being both a

point, however, as we should all strive for the good, so that men can engage in the arts and in practical wisdom, which is also based on judgment and facilitates action in changing circumstances (Vives, *De anima*, 97). Practical wisdom is not a universal knowledge but a knowing of how to act in one’s particular circumstances. As such, perfecting practical wisdom corresponds to one’s unique path to God.

gift from God and a path towards God, has the potential to overcome these limitations.⁹⁰ In *De anima*, he makes clear that this possibility is inscribed into the nature of our soul itself, as it is made of the same substance as God and is capable of participating in the divine.⁹¹ Through cultivation, the soul is able to make a Neo-Platonic ascent to God: the cultivation of judgment will allow one to reach knowledge and be good while the cultivation of love perfects piety, allowing man to rise to the level of the angels and even “become a god in a certain way.”⁹²

To conclude, I will briefly reflect on how this article fits into the broader historiography on Renaissance self-care and the “modern self” presented in the first section. Contrary to the Italian humanists described by Zak, Vives does not fit into the Augustinian or Stoic conceptions of self but represents a different synthesis between ancient thought and Christian thought. According to Zak, Petrarch followed the Stoics and identified the “true self” with reason and virtue, something Hadot describes as a liberation from individuality and an ascent to universality. In contrast, the multifarious literature on the modern self has tended to focus on immanent, individualizing accounts of the self. For Vives, however, the cultured self very much remains an individual, even though this individual participates in the universal. Indeed, for Vives, focusing on judgment in all its forms and embodiments (seeds, *ingenium*, or as a power of the rational soul) means focusing on the continuous mediation between the universal and the particular. This seems appropriate for a scholar who wants to bring together Christian religion based on the dogma of incarnation and personal immortality with a practical humanism interested in affecting concrete change in a complex world.

For Vives, cultivation involves neither a “hermeneutics of the self,” as in Augustine, Petrarch or Foucault’s Christian mode, nor does it constitute a special sense of interiority.⁹³ Self-knowledge, for Vives, is not to delve into the

90 While the first part of *De disciplinis* explains how the limits of the human mind had caused the corruption of arts and is pessimistic about overcoming original sin, the second part, *De tradendis disciplinis*, is more optimistic and is set up as a method to overcome these limitations.

91 Vives, *De anima*, 104. Indeed, we have been given rationality in order to know, and therefore to love God, which will lead to our eternal happiness; see *ibid.*, 36. This rationality, Vives writes, in essence consists of reason (*ratio*), deliberative judgment (*consilium*), and judgment (*iudicium*).

92 *Ibid.*, 105.

93 John Martin has argued that there was a Machiavellian shift in the meaning of *prudentia*, away from practical wisdom and towards a kind of self-fashioning, i.e., referring to the prudent façade one presented to the outside world. According to Martin, this created a new sense of interiority; see John Martin, “Inventing Sincerity, Refashioning Prudence:

deepest recesses of the soul, but rather to experience the soul in its concrete operations; while the self is cultivated and realized “outwardly,” this is not a self-fashioning but a virtuous engagement with the world.⁹⁴ Similarly, self-cultivation does not happen through “techniques of the self,” or “bitter mental exercises,” as Vives puts it, but through a “*praxis* of the soul” that advances through learning and especially through concrete experiences in the world. Indeed, against most of the scholarly tradition that has studied self-care as part of a philosophical “art of living,” for Vives, not philosophy but history is the pre-eminent discipline for cultivating the soul. Through a process of “absorption,” the student will cultivate judgment, which is at the core of cultivating practical wisdom.

It is clear that, for Vives, the self needs to be carefully nurtured and cared for, even though this care is not the inward-looking self-care that fascinated Hadot and Foucault. Vives is a well-read humanist and eclectic thinker, who adopts and modifies ideas from a wide range of traditions; yet, his account of cultivation has strongly Aristotelian overtones, including the focus on judgment, *prudentia* as the most significant virtue, *praxis* instead of *technè*, cultivation of character through experience, and a moderate anti-Stoic account of the passions. Whereas Foucault denies the possibility of an Aristotelian model of self-care, dismissing Aristotle as the least spiritual of the philosophers, it is helpful to read Vives exactly in light of an Aristotelianism as modified through integration with Christian and rhetorical traditions.⁹⁵ Against the Stoic tendency

The Discovery of the Individual in Renaissance Europe,” *The American Historical Review*, 102 (1997), 1309–1342. For Vives, *prudentia* was practical wisdom based on right judgment, and he strongly opposes this new meaning of the word as well as the practices it represents; see Vives, *De anima*, 163.

94 Indeed, Vives is not interested in “self-fashioning” in the sense intended either in Foucault, Martin, or Greenblatt, but uses the term to denote the power of free will to choose virtue.

95 Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 17, 189–190. Despite the humanists’ new reading of the ancients, they were strongly influenced by centuries of commentaries and the cross-pollinations between different philosophical traditions; see, for instance, David A. Lines (*Aristotle’s Ethics*) for the medieval and Renaissance reception of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Vives was also strongly influenced by the rhetorical tradition as exemplified by Cicero and Quintilian and, in his writings on education, by, for example, Plutarch and Pseudo-Plutarch. While for a detailed understanding, generalizing models and labels (such as Aristotelianism) are often an obstacle, I think that they can have some heuristic value – for instance, to draw broad contrasts between texts or traditions or to indicate new lines of inquiry. In this case, I think it is helpful to point towards Aristotelian flavors of self-care because they have previously been denied or marginalized in favor of Hellenistic and especially Stoic self-care. Given Vives’s adaptation of Cicero’s *cultura animi* metaphor as analyzed in this article, his perspective on self-care can of course also be described as “Ciceronian.”

to stress the liberation from emotions, custom and convention, it is intrinsic to cultivation that it works *with* emotions, limitations, dispositions and constraints within a particular context, and builds on them instead of trying to eliminate them.⁹⁶ The influence of Aristotle is also visible in the end goal of cultivation: while the bulk of *De tradendis disciplinis* is devoted to the cultivation of the individual, with the cultured soul as its fruit, Vives explains in the last section that the real fruit is the common good (which the “cultured soul” can advance through its perfected practical wisdom).

For Aristotle, self-care only makes sense within the political project of the city-state. Vives's political project, by contrast, is a harmonious international Christian community, achieved not only through better educating the elites (as suggested by Grafton and Jardine), but more generally by cultivating Christian citizens.⁹⁷ In Vives's thought, the transformation of the individual's self-care into a social project is made by virtue of God: while cultivating the soul is the individual's path to God, the cultured soul will align itself with God's wishes and will recognize that we need to “offer our erudition and whatsoever of His gifts we possess to the use of our fellow men, that is, of His children.”⁹⁸ As such, self-care is transformed into the care of others, and the “self,” for Vives, is not an isolated individual seeking God but is also always a social self. Vives's reinvigoration of Aristotelian self-care through an ambitious educational program, characterized by a caring for self and others, was a daring attempt to counter the disintegration of the international Christian “polis.”

Although Vives tried to actualize his account of self-care in his own life as a scholar, according to the role model of the “erudite” (which he described in *De tradendis disciplinis* as one realistic embodiment of the cultured soul), he may have felt that his cultivation project was a desperate attempt to turn the political tide. As the flourishing of cultured souls and the flourishing of the Christian *polis* were considered to be co-dependent, the context of imperial war and religious schism in the 1520s and 1530s made both personal culture and social concord increasingly difficult. Despite these challenges, Vives's educational project of self-care was successful – for instance, through the wide circulation of his school manuals and the influence of *De tradendis disciplinis*

96 In many ways, the issues highlighted by the process of cultivation are orthogonal to the opposition between domination and liberation that has characterized some of the historiography of self-care and the literature on education.

97 In contrast to Italian humanism, which flourished in city-states, Northern humanism developed in a context of empire, but this did not necessarily draw these humanists to Stoicism, as we have seen. See especially Havu, “Between Concord and Discord,” on the overarching importance of concord and discord in Vives's work.

98 Vives, *De tradendis disciplinis*, fol. 136; see Watson, *Vives: On Education*, 283.

on later educational writers, assuring the continued culture of young souls and taking the development of the notion of “culture” in new directions.⁹⁹ With the failing of Vives’s political project of self-care as a method to bring peace and harmony, however, the next generation of scholars would be pushed to explore new attitudes towards the self and self-care, often turning to Stoicism and *novatores* to come to grips with the crises of modernity.

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99 For one perspective on how the concept of “culture” was developed after Vives, see Koen Vermeir, “Historicizing Culture: A Revaluation of Early Modern Science and Culture,” in *Cultures without Culturalism*, ed. Karine Chemla and Evelyne Fox Keller (Durham, NC, 2017), 227–249.