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ARTICLE

Philosophical Practice as Self-modification: An Essay on Michel Foucault's Critical Engagement with Philosophy

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ABSTRACT. This essay argues that what makes Michel Foucault's oeuvre not only stand apart but also cohere is an assiduous philosophical practice taking the form of an ongoing yet concrete self-modification in the medium of thought. Part I gives an account of three essential aspects of Foucault's conception of philosophical activity. Beginning with his famous characterization of philosophy in terms of *ascēsis*, it moves on to articulate his characterization of philosophical practice as a distinct form of meditation, differing from both Cartesian meditation and Hegelian meditation, as it aims to stand vigil for the day to come and operates as a preface to transgression. Part II begins the articulation of crucial traits left implicit in this understanding of philosophy by turning to Foucault's in-depth investigation of philosophy in Antiquity during his lectures at the Collège de France in the 1980s. First, it develops how philosophy here begins to constitute and distinguish itself by establishing itself as an activity that has a privileged relationship to truth and truth-telling as an unremitting, existentially determining challenge for the philosopher. Further, it instantiates how Platonism elaborates the need for a sustained 'auto-ascetic' ethical non-compliant differentiation as the condition of possibility for accessing and stating truth, and then describes how the assertion of an ethical differentiation and attitude in Cynicism takes the form of an insistent combat for another world in this world. Finally, it underlines how the ethical-practical philosophical work upon oneself in Antiquity is developed in an ongoing critical and political exchange with others. Part III indicates how ethical differentiation according to Foucault remains an essential precondition for the practice of philosophy and is further developed in the modern age. This is particularly perspicuous in Kant's determination of the Enlightenment, in the attitude of modernity exemplified by Baudelaire, and in the history of revolt since the beginning of early Modernity. On this background, Part IV develops how philosophy as an ongoing meditative practice of self-modification leads to an affirmative critique, confirming the virtuality of this world in order to investigate the potentiality in the examined. In this manner, the essay presents Foucault's philosophical practice as well as an outline of the history of ideas of a seemingly alternate, yet still agenda-setting conception of philosophical practice today.

Keywords: Philosophy, history of ideas, *ascēsis*, transgression, historicity of revolt, potentiality, virtuality, knowledge, truth-telling, Platonism, Cynicism, Enlightenment, Kant, Baudelaire, French Revolution, Iranian Revolution

INTRODUCTION

Et hoc simile est, sicut si diceremus quod litterae scriberent seipsas in tabula
[And this is similar, just as if we said it was the characters that wrote themselves on the writing tablet]
Albert the Great, *De anima, III. III. II, 27*

Michel Foucault exerts an overarching influence in our contemporary world. He has had and continues to have an enormous impact on the social sciences and the humanities; and through his reception in many instances and contexts, he also has an enormous impact on theory and practice more generally.

Our *ambition* in this essay is to articulate the specificity that sets Foucault's oeuvre apart within the sciences in general as well as within philosophy proper, a distinctiveness that forms an essential part of the strong attraction it exerts, even though it is usually insufficiently understood and often misconstrued. Our *claim* is that a salient feature in Foucault's oeuvre that makes it stand out in a contemporary theoretical, scientific and analytic landscape is above all an ongoing assiduous philosophical practice. We claim that it is philosophy conceived and practiced as an ongoing yet concrete *self-modification in the medium of thought* that forms a connecting thread joining other recurring and shifting elements together. We also claim that Foucault from beginning to end had a long-standing *Auseinandersetzung* or critical exchange with philosophy as a work of thought upon itself and with the very act of writing as a philosophical exercise of the self.

Philosophy as a continuous self-modificatory practice in the medium of thought forms a coherent trajectory that links Foucault's various diagnostic interventions. On this level, there is continuity rather than a constant revision of analytical tools in use that are reassigned in new studies and contexts. It is a continuity that is not to be found on the level of specific positions, propositions or opinions, or on a thematic level where Foucault's analyses can only be understood as *disjecta membra* of his oeuvre and as relatively isolated parts that result from a sudden conversion, only to be followed and ended by an equally sudden reconversion and abandonment.

Concomitantly, this conception of philosophy differs from philosophy as a disciplinary approach or a specific mode of scholarship in favor of a history of thought that situates itself on the margins of scientific and practical knowledge while remaining in constant dialogue with traditional philosophical thought. In our view, this non-disciplinary and original renewal of philosophy is one of the major reasons why Foucault's work has become so relevant for other disciplines.[1]

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[1] In this essay, we aim to articulate Foucault's philosophical practice as it establishes a coherent trajectory in Foucault's thought and articulates a form of philosophical practice that may still play an essential role today. In our recently published monograph, Sverre Raffnsøe, Marius Gudmand-Høyer and Morten S. Thaning: *Michel Foucault: A Research Companion. Philosophy as Diagnosis of the Present* (2016), we have already given an extensive account of certain transversal traits in Foucault's oeuvre and approach. Recurrent in Foucault's thought is, on the one hand, a diagnostic approach implying that he commits himself to "philosophy" as a "diagnostic activity" that investigates present phenomena and contemporary concerns while also "studying the space in which thought unfolds, as well as the conditions of that thought, its mode of constitution" (Michel Foucault, "Qu'est-ce qu'un philosophe?" [1966], in *Dits et Écrits I: 1954-1969,* ed. Daniel Defert and François Ewald (1994), 553/Michel Foucault, "Philosophy and the Death of God" [1966], in *Religion and Culture by Michel Foucault,* ed. Jeremy R. Carrette (1999), 85-86). On the other hand, we have outlined certain traits that mark Foucault's philosophical thought – e.g. its contextual character, its

Our argument comprises four parts. Part I gives an account of three essential aspects of Foucault's conception of philosophical activity that represent important prolegomena for the understanding of philosophy as self-modification in the medium of thought. To this effect, we focus on Foucault's meta-philosophical reflections on his philosophical practice, employing key texts from his late as well as his early work in order to show the continuity at play. We begin by focusing on his famous characterization of philosophy in terms of *ascēsis* in 1984. Then, we make use of a relative unknown but crucial text from 1963 to characterize Foucault's conception of philosophical activity as a distinct form of *meditation* to be distinguished both from the Cartesian as and from the Hegelian ideas of philosophical meditation and contemplation. Following from this, the third section presents Foucault's conception of philosophical practice as an anticipation of transgression. Even if these three aspects, *ascēsis,* meditation and transgression, are concepts in Foucault's work that have been treated before, our synthesizing approach employs these meta-philosophical aspects to show how they establish a primary and enduring unity in his concrete philosophical activity.

In the following three parts, we further articulate crucial traits of Foucault's philosophy left implicit in the first part. Here, we turn to Foucault's critical engagement with philosophy in Antiquity and Modernity to finally return to a more elaborate characterization of Foucault's philosophical practice. Together, these parts present an outline of the history of ideas of a seemingly alternate, yet agenda-setting conception of philosophical practice today.

Part II further articulates the historically created conditions of possibility for philosophy becoming a meditative self-modification in the medium of thought and the wider implications of this turn. Hence, it turns to Foucault's in-depth investigation of philosophy in Antiquity during his lectures at the Collège de France in the 1980s. First, we develop how philosophy in Antiquity according to Foucault begins to constitute and distinguish itself by establishing itself as an activity that has a privileged relationship to truth and truth-telling as an unremitting, existentially determining challenge for the philosopher. Subsequently, we show how Platonism in Foucault's rendering elaborates the need of an ethical differentiation in the form of an ongoing philosophical practice if one is to be able to state truth, even in dire straits. Then we develop how the assertion of an ethical differentiation and a true life in Cynicism takes the form of an ongoing instantaneous combat for another world in this world. We end this part by summing up and arguing that, for Foucault, central strands in Ancient philosophy make it plain that it is an indispensable condition for good governance, for the establishment of healthy relationships, for assuming responsibility for one's life and for living an authentic life to constitute an *ethos,* or a way of conducting oneself that one develops as an irreducible ongoing practice throughout one's existence.

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normative commitment to yardsticks still in the making, the focus on event and experience, etc. – to such an extent that they can be easily traced across his oeuvre. In this essay, however, we focus on another salient feature of Foucault's oeuvre and demonstrate how it forms a connecting thread that joins together both the diagnostic approach and the recurring traits mentioned. This connecting feature is philosophy conceived as self-modification, or, more precisely, philosophy understood and practiced as an ongoing yet concrete self-modification in the medium of thought prompted by the repetitive interrogation of present experiences. The path of Foucault's philosophical thinking can be understood as a continuous endeavor to make use of historical investigation to challenge and substantially modify the ways in which we relate to experiences of collective importance in our present practices and discourses and the ways in which we relate to ourselves. While a number of passages in this essay draw markedly on our previously published monograph, we at the same time add substantially to the exposition of the self-modificatory trait.

Part III part returns to an examination of more patently contemporary discussions to develop how a deep-seated ethical differentiation for Foucault remains an essential precondition for the practice of philosophy in modern times as an allocutionary meditation committing itself to speaking the truth. We show this in a discussion of three genealogical instances instigated in the modern age. First, we make it plain how this conception of philosophy in Foucault's reading becomes particularly perspicuous in Kant's determination of the crux of Enlightenment and of the heritage of the French Revolution. Second, we indicate how an ethical differentiation for Foucault is re-enacted in contemporary terms with the attitude of modernity as it is exemplified by Baudelaire. Here ethical differentiation takes the form of a distantiation that attempts to transfigure or recreate a world that is at first experienced as ephemeral. Lastly, we specify how Foucault's fascination with philosophy as ethical meditative differentiation also leads to his interest in the Iranian uprising against the Shah and a continued attention to the historicity of revolt and its virtuality.

Moving closer to a characterization of crucial aspects of Foucault's contemporary philosophical practice, Part IV articulates how philosophy as an ongoing meditative practice of self-modification combatting for another world in this world leads to an affirmative critique, confirming not the actual world, but the virtuality of this world, in order to investigate the potentiality in the examined. In this manner, Foucault's parrēsiastic philosophical meditation on the faint and excited philosophical murmur rippling through the non-philosophical writes a preface to transgression that exhorts to stand vigil for the day to come.

In short, as will become clear, the essay articulates how philosophy for Foucault remains a meditative practice of self-modification in the medium of thought, finding and testing its own reality in an insistent and restive address to political, social and scientific arenas as it not only distances itself ethically from established forms of knowledge and practice but also stands vigil for the day to come and offers a preface to transgression. The essay claims that this insistent ethical differentiation and self-modification is both what distinguishes Foucault's philosophy from present predominant forms of knowledge and philosophy and what forms an essential part of the interest and attention it attracts.

PART I
THREE CRUCIAL ASPECTS OF PHILOSOPHICAL ACTIVITY
AS SELF-MODIFICATION IN THE MEDIUM OF THOUGHT

Throughout his itinerary, Foucault practices the philosophical exercise of thought upon itself as an ongoing and unremittent activity that must begin over and over again, prompted and reignited by its encounter with the non-philosophical present.[2] What establishes coherence in Foucault's thought is the fact that he continuously turns towards the present over and over again to fathom its mode of being and understand the "ontology of the present, of present reality, an ontology of modernity, an ontology of ourselves."[3] However, this coherence becomes most patent when it is recognized that

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[2] See Michel Foucault, *L'ordre du discours. Leçon inaugurale au Collège de France prononcée le 2 décembre 1970* (1971), 77-78/Michel Foucault, "The Discourse on Language" [1971], in *The Archeology of Knowledge* (1972), 236.

[3] Michel Foucault, *Le gouvernement de soi et des autres. Cours au Collège de France. 1982-1983* (2008), 22/Michel Foucault, *The Government of the Self and Others, Lectures at the Collège de France. 1982-1983* (2010), 21.

the attempt to comprehend this ontology of the present entails that Foucault's own thought simultaneously remains implicated in this exercise to comprehend the ontology of the present. Essentially, the coherent continuity in Foucault's work on a basic level is thus philosophy as the ongoing but concrete self-modification of thought and being as it makes itself felt through the repetitive interrogation of the present.

1. Essay and *ascēsis*

It is the particularity of this transformative capacity of philosophical thought that Foucault stresses in a well-known passage from the introduction to the second volume of his *Histoire de la sexualité:*

> What is philosophy today – philosophical activity, I mean – if it is not the critical work that thought brings to bear on itself? In what does it consist, if not in the endeavor to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known?[4]

In the year of his death, Foucault here perceives philosophy not as the ability just to think differently in any possible way. Rather, philosophy is perceived as the ability to think differently in the very specific ways that springs from the specific self-modifications of previous modes of thought that prove necessary as philosophy encounters and tries to make sense of the non-philosophical. According to Foucault, philosophy "is entitled to explore what might be changed, in its own thought, through the practice of a knowledge that is foreign to it."[5]

Foucault comes to characterize both his previous studies and those that should follow as "studies of 'history'" in so far as they investigate and refer to certain historical material, domains and problematics. However, he finds it even more important to stress the circumstance that they are not "the work of a 'historian.'" This, he details, is due to the fact that they "are the record of a long and tentative exercise that needed to revise itself and be corrected again and again (*de se reprendre et de se corriger*). It was a philosophical exercise: Its stake (*son enjeu*) was to learn (*savoir*) to what extent the effort (or work, *travail*) to think one's own history can free thought from what it silently thinks, and so enable it to think differently (*lui permettre de penser autrement*)."[6] In this context, Foucault further asserts that "the living substance of philosophy (*le corps vivant de la philosophie*)", or more precisely, the living 'embodiment' of philosophy, is "the 'essay' (*l''essai'*)"; and by using the French term for 'essay', he stresses the fact that philosophy lives on as a still unfinished and tentative mental attempt: a personal effort, but also a test of and an experiment with oneself that one makes in thought and language. Accordingly, Foucault also describes the philosophical essay as a "modifying ordeal or trial of oneself (*l'épreuve modificatrice de soi-même*)."[7] In this sense, philosophical practice is an enduring ordeal which one undergoes at the hands of thought, an ongoing ritual and *rite de passage* that modifies one's manner of being, perceiving and thinking in uncontrollable and unpredictable ways as one enters the game of truth.

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[4] Michel Foucault, *L'usage des plaisirs. Histoire de la sexualité 2* (1984), 14-15/Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure. The History of Sexuality 2* [1984] (2006), 8-9.

[5] Foucault, *Usage des plaisirs*, 15/*Use of Pleasure*, 9.

[6] Ibid. 15/9; trans. modified.

[7] Ibid., 15/9; trans. modified. Somewhat misleadingly, the English translation renders "L' 'essai' – qu'il faut entendre comme l'épreuve modificatrice de soi-même dans le jeu de la vérité" as "the 'essay' – which should be understood as the assay or test by which, in the game of truth, one undergoes changes".

In addition to emphasizing the importance of the essay as form, Foucault can therefore also characterize his practice of philosophy as "an 'ascesis'", or "an exercise of oneself (*un exercice de soi*) in the activity of thought (*dans la pensée*)."[8] Doing so late in his work, Foucault situates himself in continuance of an ancient Greco-Roman tradition in which one imposed limitations on oneself and one's immediate existence, although not to remain within these confinements, but rather to permit and force oneself to modify and transgress oneself. Foucault's suggestion in the second volume of his *Histoire de la sexualité* that philosophy is an 'essayistic' practice in so far as it constitutes a test of the self in the medium of thought draws upon his work on 'self-tests' as an essential dimension of practices or techniques of the self, conducted in particular in his lectures at the Collège de France *L'herméneutique du sujet (The Hermeneutics of the Subject)* from 1982. Here he investigates simple cases of self-testing in Pythagorean contexts and pursues this phenomenon as it develops into more sophisticated and extensive forms of testing in Epicurean and Stoic thought. Techniques that have the character of tests undertake the reflexive attempt to treat the present as a test, i.e. as something that has the potential of providing the subject with self-insight. The tests articulated in Hellenistic philosophy seek to elicit a particular *enacted form of reflectivity* as the tests should help the subject to adopt "a certain enlightened and conscious attitude towards what one is doing and towards oneself doing it."[9]

Viewing Foucault's characterization of philosophy as a self-test on the background of his earlier investigations into self-testing in Hellenistic philosophy, also underlines a crucial trait in Foucault's conception which shall seek to characterize more precisely in the following sections: Whereas the Hellenistic forms of thought are intended to modify the subject by strengthening his independence in relation to his affective life, i.e. to solidify individual self-sovereignty, Foucault's conception of philosophy points to a more profound or radical form of self-modification. Here the aim is not Stoic independence or sovereignty but rather the purpose is to employ philosophy in order to bring about decisive, uncontrollable and unpredictable, effects upon oneself.

In retrospective, Foucault views self-modification and self-conversion as crucial components of his philosophical writing throughout his career. When towards the end of his life he discusses his own book on the French writer of formal constraints, *Raymond Roussel,* which was published at the beginning of Foucault's career in 1963, Foucault directs attention to the fact that self-modification and the ability to re-conceptualize the present and one's own existence has been a life-spanning, driving force and a central aim for his undertaking in general:

> It is true that the first text one writes is neither written for others, nor for who one is: one writes to become someone other than who one is. Finally there is an attempt at modifying one's way of being through the act of writing.[10]

2. Meditation

Upon closer inspection, self-modification in the medium of thought also implies a meditative relation in which philosophy turns towards itself and examines itself and its

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[8] Ibid. 15/9.

[9] Michel Foucault, *L'herméneutique du sujet. Cours au Collège de France. 1981-1982* (2001), 412/Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject. Lectures at the Collège de France. 1981-1982* (2005), 431.

[10] Michel Foucault, "Archéologie d'une passion" [1984], in *Dits et écrits IV: 1980-1988,* ed. Daniel Defert and François Ewald (1994), 605/Michel Foucault, "Archaeology of a passion," in *Foucault Live (Interviews, 1961-1984*), ed. Sylvère Lotringer (1996), 404.

own mode of being. This is a kind of philosophical meditation that Foucault continues to nurture as a life-long ambition, since this test of thought forms an essential precondition for philosophy to become a modifying self-ordeal and thus for urging philosophy on as a still unfinished attempt and experiment in the medium of thought.

In the philosophical tradition, meditation is a well-known recurring way to practice self-examination. An outstanding example is Descartes' *Méditations métaphysiques (Metaphysical Meditations)*. In Descartes, thought turns towards itself to critically examine its own preconceived certainties and assumptions. For Descartes, it seemed essential to withdraw from the world into one's own world if one were to meditate properly. At the beginning of his first *Meditation,* Descartes stressed how he "procured" himself "a quiet time in quiet solitude" and "released" his "mind (*esprit*) from all cares", sat down "by the fire", in "a winter gown", to "cast aside all my former opinions."[11] Likewise, at the beginning of his third meditation, Descartes mentions how he "will shut his eyes", "stop his ears", "withdraw all my senses", "give no heed to them, as being vain and false, and by discoursing with myself, and prying more rightly into my own inner being, will endeavor to make myself little by more known and familiar to myself."[12]

Contrary to Cartesian meditation, however, Foucault's meditation gives prominence to "the knower's" chance to "get free of himself (*se deprendre de soi-même*)" and his "straying afield of himself (*l'égarement de celui qui connaît*)"[13] as an essential motivation for philosophical passion and curiosity. Despite his marked interest in meditation as an ascetic exercise of oneself in the activity of thought, Foucault thus nevertheless displays a marked reticence to the specific meditative approach practiced in the Cartesian tradition.

An important example of this is found in the famous exchange with Jacques Derrida concerning the status of Descartes' *Méditations métaphysiques.*[14] Here Foucault labours the point that there is a material difference of crucial importance between a meditation and a demonstrative discourse. In a demonstrative discourse, the subject remains "not implicated in the demonstration", "fixed, invariable, and as if neutralized" "in relation to it". On the other hand, a meditation

> produces, as so many discursive events, new utterances that carry with them a series of modifications of the enunciating subject: through what is said in meditation, the subject passes from darkness to light, from impurity to purity, from the constraint of passions to detachment from uncertainty and disordered movements to the serenity of wisdom, and so on. In a meditation, the subject is ceaselessly altered by his own movement; his discourse provokes effects within which he is caught; it exposes him to risks, makes him pass through trials or temptations, produces states in him, and confers on him a status or qualification he did not hold at the initial moment. In short, meditation implies a mobile subject modifiable through the effect of the discursive events that take place.[15]

Accordingly, Descartes' meditations have an important "ascetic" thread and must be seen as "an exercise modifying the subject". They should not only be read as "a group of propositions forming a system" but also understood as

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[11] René Descartes, *Méditations métaphysiques* [1647] (1979), 66-69; trans. by authors.

[12] Descartes, *Méditations,* 96-97; trans. by authors.

[13] Foucault, *Usage des plaisirs,* 14/*Use of Pleasure,* 8; trans. modified.

[14] See Raffnsøe et al., *Michel Foucault,* 100-101, 116-117.

[15] Michel Foucault, "Mon corps, ce papier, ce feu" [1972], in *Dits et écrits II: 1970-1975,* ed. Daniel Defert and François Ewald (1994), 261-262/Michel Foucault, "My body, this paper, this fire", *History of Madness* (2009), 563.

a group of modifications forming an exercise, which each reader must carry out, and by which each reader must be affected, if he wishes in his turn to be the subject enunciating this truth on his own account.[16]

Another relevant example of Foucault's attempt to elicit aspects of his own philosophical practice in the idea of philosophical meditation can be seen in *L'herméneutique du sujet*. In Greco-Roman and early Christian philosophy studied in these lectures, it is to be conceived as "a sort of exercise of thought, rather an exercise 'in thought' (*une sorte d'exercice de pensée, exercice 'en pensee'*);" however not in the sense of "a game the subject plays with his own thought (*un jeu du sujet avec sa propre pensée*), with the object or possible objects of his thought", but in the sense of "a game that thought performs on the subject himself (*jeu effectué par la pensée sur le sujet lui-même*)." A meditation of this kind is not an "exercise carried out on thought and its content", but "an exercise by which, through thought, the subject puts himself in a certain situation."[17] In *L'herméneutique du sujet*, Foucault pursues the conception of philosophy as meditation in an intriguing reading of Seneca's *Natural Questions*, which is juxtaposed and contrasted with Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*.[18] In this context, however, his intention is not to characterize his own conception of philosophy in terms of meditation but more indirectly to explore the nature of the Stoic conception of meditation as a historically singular phenomenon.

However, in an earlier text, Foucault gives a self-mirroring articulation of philosophy as an ongoing meditative auto-transformative practice. More precisely, the opening of "Guetter le jour qui vient" ("Standing Vigil for the Day to Come"), a review essay of French writer and philosopher Roger Laporte's first major book *La Veille (On Watch)*, published in 1963, seems quite relevant in our context. This text is of particular importance since it accentuates the ways in which a meditative practice that starts from a diagnosis of the present distinguishes itself from a more traditional philosophical meditation. Here Foucault, indirectly but not inadvertently, gives voice to the kind of philosophy that he tries to develop in an exemplary and condensed manner.

With withering scorn, Foucault remarks that, like God in the creation, "Descartes meditated for six full days", only to become "a physicist again" in all likelihood on the seventh day.[19] Thus, the problem with Cartesian doubt is that philosophical meditation, as it is practiced here, does not lead to the practice of self-problematization and self-modification that is critically important to Foucault, but, at the end of the day, rather to self-affirmation in the form of a confirmation of certainties that the subject already adheres to.

In a marked contradistinction to this "evening meditation, the extension of a task that started long ago and that nightfall lightens" in which one severs the ties to the surrounding world and its fluctuations and retires and shuts oneself up in order to devote oneself to the study, recollection and worship of what finally proves to be the true constitutive invariants of an inner world, Foucault opts for a different kind of

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[16] Foucault, "Mon corps," 258/"My body," 563.
[17] Foucault, *Herméneutique du sujet,* 339-341/*Hermeneutics of the Subject,* 356-358.
[18] Ibid. 249-297/261-311.
[19] Michel Foucault, "Guetter le jour qui vient" [1963], in *Dits et écrits I*, 261-62/Michel Foucault, "Standing Vigil for the Day to Come" [1963], *Foucault Studies* 19 (2015), 217.

meditation in his review of Laporte's book.[20] Noting that he knows very well that the clarity of midday, which nightfall meditation after all depends on and seeks to purify and consume *après coup*, in all serenity, at a stage when the essential is already consummated and not much happens, "is not here and that it is still far away," Foucault refuses to shut his eyes and stop his ears. In line with his conception of philosophy as diagnosis of the present, Foucault instead insists that it is indispensable to philosophical thought to remain perceptive and in touch with the world.

An ongoing openness and ability to be affected by the world is deemed essential, since Foucault adheres to and strives to develop an "exercise of thought (*exercice de pensée*) and in the medium of thought (*exercice 'en pensée'*)."[21] In this he moves towards something that has not yet arrived and is still in the process of arriving and tries to keep up with and cope with something that is still dawning. He strives to articulate:

> what could truly constitute a reflection before the day, before the morning of each day? Calling it a reflection is already going too far, perhaps, rather, an exercise in thought and in language (*exercice de la pensée et du langage*) – in pensive speech (*de la parole pensive*) –, which recedes from the earliest light, advances towards the night from which it comes, and endeavours cautiously to remain in a place without space, where eyes remain open, ears cocked, the entire mind alert, and words mobilized for a movement that they do not yet know?[22]

In this manner, Foucault insists that the practice of philosophical meditation must assume the shape of a detailed inspection in the medium of thought of the way in which one is affected as one perceives and finds oneself in a relationship with the world.[23]

In "Guetter le jour qui vient", Foucault also makes it clear that this is of consequence for how one is to perceive the purpose, contribution and responsibility of philosophy as an ongoing meditation. To some extent, this is in agreement with the Hegelian claim that philosophy should be radically contemporary in the sense that it should prove itself in the here and now instead forestalling the future at the expense of the present.[24] Yet, even though Foucault agrees that philosophical thought is situated in and speaks within a

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[20] Foucault, "Guetter le jour," 262/"Standing Vigil,", 218. Cf. also the considerable disparity between this kind of meditative approach and phenomenological eidetic variation, as it is indicated by Foucault in *Herméneutique du sujet*, 340/*Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 357.

[21] *Herméneutique du sujet*, 339/*Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 356. It is worth noting that Foucault's terminology remains consistent from the early article of 1963 to the late lecture of 1982.

[22] Foucault, "Guetter le jour," 261-262/"Standing Vigil," 218.

[23] Borrowing terminology developed by Jacques Derrida in *La voix et le phénomène. Introduction au problème du signe dans la phénoménologie de Husserl* (1967) one might characterize this examination of the way one is affected as an examination of "auto-affectation" (92-96): By turning towards the experience of being affected, "eyes open and ears cocked", a rendering of the perceived impressions becomes perceptive that exceeds mere representation and re-renders them and "mobilizes them for a movement", leading on and showing the way in directions that the senses are unable to anticipate. In lieu of a return to, repetition and reaffirmation of an already established inner identity, a meditation on auto-affectivity articulates a movement that leads towards something that is still dawning – a dislocation that the meditation must surrender to, follow and measure up to. With auto-affection, a mode of being becomes perceivable in which one continuously outdistances oneself. As a consequence, the movement of a being affected by the world must be examined and explored unremittingly in an ongoing exercise in thought and language.

[24] It is in *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* [1820] (1972), 12-14/*Elements of the Philosophy of Right* [1820] (1991), 21-23, that Hegel emphasizes how philosophy is "a son of its time (ein Sohn seiner Zeit)" and must prove what it can do, here and now. Instead of deluding itself by imagining that it can simply "leap out of (*überspringen*)" and ahead of "the present (*seine Zeit*)" to forestall the future, philosophical thought must find itself able to "dance" in the here and now, as Hegel forcibly puts it. If it wants to fully acknowledge and remain faithful to its point of departure, philosophy must realize that it needs to overcome its innate appetite for "issuing instructions on how the world ought to be (*das Belehren wie die Welt sein soll*)."

specific historical context, and shares the critique of philosophical self-delusion, Foucault still positions philosophical thought rather differently.

Hegel states that the reason why philosophy should stop both forecasting and issuing instructions is its embeddedness, since philosophy's implication in the present means that it always "comes too late" to perform this function.[25] While in Hegel the owl of Minerva flies at nightfall to probe and reconnoite an existing, dwindling landscape, for Foucault the owl of Minerva needs to spread its wings at daybreak to explore an unfamiliar and uncharted landscape still emerging before our eyes. While philosophy in Hegel comes after the fact as an attempt to recognize and reconcile the logic that it saw unfold, philosophical meditation for Foucault is prompted and receives its impetus before the fact as an exploration of a world that is still appearing. Likewise, Foucault cannot help feeling that

> there is always something ludicrous in philosophical discourse when it tries, from the outside, to dictate to others (*faire la loi aux autres*), to tell them where their truth is and how to find it, or when it works up against them in the language of naïve positivity.[26]

Yet this is for the exact opposite reason. Philosophy is unfit to legislate and instruct because it enters and is practiced too early when everything is still in the making and unfinished. This conception of philosophy can be viewed as the reason for Foucault's conviction that it "is entitled to explore what might be changed, in its own thought, through the practice of a knowledge that is foreign to it."[27]

As a consequence, Foucault's kind of meditation entails attentiveness to a manifestation still taking place, an alertness in which one "stands vigil" for the day to come as it is still in becoming. In this sense, standing vigil is an attunement that leaves the purely personal behind as it moves ahead to focus on and render that which "is 'not yet' in the arriving following day, and which may never arrive and become real:

> What says, 'not yet' to the next day stands vigil: the eve is the day which precedes (*la veille, c'est le jour qui precede*). Or more accurately, it is that which precedes each day, every possible day, including this day on which I speak, on which I speak because my language traces the rise of the day back to the anticipation of it. The eve (*la veille*) is not the other day, the day before; it is today, even now, this simultaneous shortfall and excess that borders on and surpasses the day, and due to which the day inexorably

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[25] Hegel writes that: "As the thought of the world, philosophy appears only at a time when actuality (*die Wirklichkeit*) has gone through its formative process (*ihren Bildungsprozess vollendet*) and attained its completed state (*sich vertig gemacht hat*)" (*Philosophie des Rechts*, 14/*Philosophy of Right*, 23). Thus, "when philosophy paints its grey in grey", it is an indication that we have passed midday and that the night is approaching: "a shape of life (*Gestalt des Lebens*) has grown old, and it cannot be rejuvenated, but only recognized, by the grey in grey of philosophy". Consequently, "the owl of Minerva begins its flight with the onset of dusk." According to Foucault, however, philosophical meditation as diagnosis of the present begins with another kind of grey: not the grey that closes in after midday in the evening when the daylight is fading, but the gray emerging before the morning as the day begins to break and a faint promising light begins to shimmer through the haze. "In this 'not yet' of morning", a grey appears which is "as though diaphanous to its own transparency" ("Guetter le jour," 262/"Standing Vigil,"18), and in which the shape of things to come begins to form.

[26] Foucault, *Usage des plaisirs*, 14-15/*Use of Pleasures*, 8-9. Literally this passage – "lorsqu'il se fait fort d'instruire leur procès en positivité naïve" – translates to: "gives itself airs by instructing them in the language of naïve positivity."

[27] Ibid., 14-15/8-9.

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comes and perhaps will never stop having not yet come. It is not me who is on watch in the eve's vigilance; it is the recoil of the coming day.[28]

In Foucault, philosophical meditation is not the due consideration of what has proved essential. At a time when the world is still experienced as young and the present as arriving, a meditation appears which is a non-defensive open-mindedness focusing on and seeking to render what is not yet in the arriving day, articulating the excess in and shortfall of the arriving day which may never fully arrive. Accordingly, this kind of meditation is not a reflection on being or on the present, but rather a meditative pre-meditation. It is an exercise of thought in thought prompted by the contemporary that turns towards and examines how one is affected and moved by this to lend "voice to the repetition of what has not yet taken place." Like the "oscillation" on site of "a time not yet inaugurated."[29]

3. Preface to transgression

In addition to the elements of the essay, *ascēsis* and meditation, the through-going self-modificatory trait in Foucault's philosophical practice also presents itself in a particular relation to transgression. When reiteratively lending voice to what has not yet happened, but which may be arriving in what is arriving in thought, we do not leave the realm of philosophy, as Foucault stresses in "Preface to transgression", an article on Bataille's work published in 1963:

> We do not experience the end of philosophy, but a philosophy which can regain its speech (*reprendre la parole*) and pick itself up again in it (*se reprendre en elle*) only in the marginal region which borders its limits (*sur les bords de ses limites*).[30]

According to Foucault, the philosophical enterprise cannot itself be a transgression but only take the form of a preface to transgression, a run-up to going beyond, which marks its own finitude as it points further than itself towards something it sees dimly, but may never arrive at.[31] Foucault does not consider this the end of philosophy, but rather, "the breakdown of philosophical subjectivity" and "the end of the philosopher as the sovereign and primary form of philosophical language". Whereas "the sovereignty of the philosophical subject" was continually re-constituted in Cartesian meditation, Foucault's outwardly directed meditation in "philosophical language" opens "a soft and violent intrusion into the inwardness (*dans l'intériorité*), and makes it become beside itself (*hors de soi*)", or 'ecstatic'.[32] In Foucault's poetic language, this allows "voiceless words to be born" and leads into a dark night in which a "dispersion of stars" shimmers through.[33]

Philosophy is "to draw as close as possible […] to that which precedes it" and stirs its certainty, the present and its various occurrences which provoke us and provide food for thought. The idea is thus certainly not that this should permit philosophy to arrive at, or even come close to, "its final fulfilment". Neither is the ambition that philosophy

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[28] Foucault, "Guetter le jour," 262-263/"Standing Vigil," 218; trans. modified.
[29] Ibid. 265, 267/221, 222; trans. modified.
[30] Foucault, "Préface à la transgression" [1963] in *Dits et écrits I*, 242/Michel Foucault, "Preface to Transgression" [1963], in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Collin Gordon (1980), 41; trans. modified.
[31] Foucault, "Préface à la transgression," 235/"Preface to Transgression," 32; trans. modified.
[32] Michel Foucault, *La pensée du dehors* [1966] (1986), 47/Michel Foucault, "Maurice Blanchot: The thought from outside" [1963], in *Foucault/Blanchot* (1987), 47.
[33] "Préface à la transgression," 242-43/"Preface to Transgression," 42-43; trans. modified.

should remain turned backwards while staying as close as possible to that "which precedes it". The crucial task for philosophy is to install itself in continuous and repeated contact with the non-philosophical while avoiding becoming disconcerted or going "beyond concepts." However, in order to avoid reducing the "singularity of history, the regional rationalities of science, the depths of memory in consciousness," philosophy must concomitantly turn towards itself in order to "to pick them up again (*reprendre*)" "to think them (*penser*)" in the medium of thought and to "reveal" "the sense, meaning and direction this non-philosophy has for us (*révélant le sens que cette non-philosophie a pour nous*)."[34]

Turning towards itself in continuous contact with the non-philosophical, philosophy becomes an ongoing meditation that is existentially differentiating in that it challenges philosophy to relate itself to specific tendencies in the present in order to think differently in specific ways. Moreover, this differentiating movement even moves forward beyond the immediately perceived as it results in an anticipation and a pre-meditation of what it might imply. Yet this ecstatic element and moment of presentiment does not transport philosophy beyond itself. Philosophy points the way ahead as it is mirrored within philosophy. As Foucault puts it:

> Transgression, then, is not related to the limit as black to white, the prohibited to the lawful, the outside to the inside, or as the open area of a building to its enclosed spaces. Rather, their relationship takes the form of a spiral which no simple infraction can exhaust.[35]

As he tried to escape both traditional philosophical meditation and Hegelianism, Foucault thus finds himself brought back to them, "only from a different angle" and has to face them and figure out how he can pass through them in order to try to "leave" them "behind once more" as he tried to anticipate a different mode of being for philosophy.[36]

PART II
FOUCAULT'S PHILOSOPHICAL ANTIQUITY:
HISTORICAL PRECONDITIONS FOR PHILOSOPHY
BECOMING A MEDITATIVE SELF-MODIFICATION

This conception and practice of philosophy as a self-modification in the medium of thought that does not seek transgression as such but explores only its preface remains present throughout Foucault's entire oeuvre. In Foucault's work in the 1980s, the conception of philosophy as self-modificatory practice becomes a dominant theme of research. This exploration culminates in Foucault's lectures in 1982-84. By investigating the genealogy and the constitution of the philosophical attitude – not primarily concerned with legislating or an unconditional search for true knowledge but rather with the establishment of philosophical meditation as self-modification in the medium of thought – Foucault here examines and articulates crucial traits and preconditions of this attitude that establish a different relationship between truth, individual existence, politics and morals.

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[34] Foucault, *Ordre du discours*, 77-78/"Discourse on Language", 236; trans. modified.
[35] "Préface à la transgression", 237/"Preface to Transgression", 35; trans. modified.
[36] *Ordre du discours*, 75/"Discourse on Language," 235.

1. Truth-telling as an existentially determining ambition and challenge for the philosopher

While Foucault re-initiated his continuing discussion of truth and truth-telling in his lectures at the *Collège de France* during the 1980s[37] by setting off the manifestation of truth as an irreducible and indispensable dimension, in the first instance he aimed at examining how the manifestation and extraction of truth is put to use in order to strengthen the exercise of power and the governance of others. However, his succeeding investigation can be said to take the reverse direction in so far as Foucault in his final years increasingly comes to concentrate on the irreducibility of truth-telling with its widely ramified amplifications.[38] Under the general headline of *The Government of the Self and Others,* Foucault not only devotes his lectures in 1983[39] and 1984,[40] as well as the contemporaneous lectures at Berkeley[41] and Grenoble[42], to highlighting how, "in posing the question of the government of self and others" an investigation of "the obligation and the possibility of telling the truth in procedures of government" permits to illuminate how "the individual constitutes itself as a subject in its relationship to itself and to others."[43] In fact, Foucault ends up dedicating the overall trajectory of these

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[37] Foucault picks up on his earlier examination of the unveilment of truth in Antiquity, already treated in his *Leçons sur la volonté de savoir. Cours au Collège de France. 1970-1971* (2011*)/Lectures on the will to know. Lectures at the Collège de France. 1970-1971* (2013), as he initiates an investigation of alethurgy in Antiquity from *Du gouvernement des vivants. Cours au Collège de France. 1979-1980* (2012)/*On the Government of the Living. Lectures at the Collège de France. 1979-1980* (2014) and onwards.

[38] For an overview, see Raffnsøe et al., *Michel Foucault*, 369-425. Whereas Foucault in the lectures 1979-80 states that "the verbal manifestation of the truth that hides at the bottom of oneself" "is not intended to establish the sovereign mastery of oneself [*la maîtrise souveraine de soi sur soi*]", the following year he begins to accentuate that it is important to "replace the imperative to 'know yourself,' so characteristic of our civilization, within a larger interrogation that serves as its more or less explicit context: What can one do with oneself [*Que faire de soi-même*}? What work is to be carried out on oneself [*Quel travail opérer de soi*]? How should one govern oneself [*Comment 'se gouverner'*] by exercising actions [in which] one is oneself the object, the domain in which they are applied, the instrument they make use of and the subject of these acts?" (Michel Foucault, "Resumé de cours" [1981], in *Subjectivité et vérité. Cours au Collège de France. 1980-1981* (2014), 299/Michel Foucault, "Course summery" [1981], in *Subjectivity and Truth. Lectures at the Collège de France. 1980-1981* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 293-294. Though receiving its final editing as late as 1981-82, the fourth volume of Foucault's history of sexuality prolongs the previously established narrative and continues to examine the patristic problematization of the flesh from Justinian to Saint Augustine. See Michel Foucault, *Les aveux de la chair. Histoire de la sexualité 4* (2018). For further discussion of the transition, see Raffnsøe: "Michel Foucault's confessions of the flesh," review, *Organization Studies,* forthcoming, September 2018.

[39] Foucault, *Le gouvernement de soi et des autres. Cours au Collège de France. 1982-1983/The Government of the Self and Others, Lectures at the Collège de France. 1982-1983.*

[40] Michel Foucault, *Le courage de la vérité. Le gouvernement de soi et des autres II. Cours au Collège de France. 1984* (2009)/Michel Foucault, *The Courage of Truth. The Government of the Self and Others II. Lectures at the Collège* Michel *de France 1983-1984* (2010), 1-22.

[41] Michel Foucault, *Fearless Speech* [1983] (2001), 11-173. In addition to this series of lectures, originally entitled "Discourse and Truth" when given at the University of California at Berkeley in the fall term of 1983, Foucault also gave a proceeding single lecture, "The culture of the self" (April 12, 1983), followed by a number of discussions with students and faculty at the university. These have been translated and published in French in Michel Foucault, "La culture de soi" [1983], in *Qu'est-ce que la critique? Suivi de La Culture de soi*, ed. Henri-Paul Fruchaud and Daniele Lorenzini (2015), 81-187, while the original audio files in English can be consulted http://www.openculture.com/2014/08/michel-foucaults-lecture-the-culture-of-the-self.html.

[42] Michel Foucault, "La Parrêsia" [May 18, 1982], in *Discours et vérité, précéde de La Parrhêsia,* ed. Henri-Paul Fruchaud and Daniele Lorenzini (2016), 21-75/Michel Foucault, "Parrēsia" [1982], *Critical Inquiry* 41:2 (2015), 219-253.

[43] Foucault, *Gouvernement de soi et des autres,* 42/*Government of the Self and Others*, 42

lectures to an in-depth examination of the emergence of a dramaturgy of *parrēsia*, or free-spokenness, in Antiquity.[44]

In this "modality of truth-telling" in which "the subject, who tells the truth, *manifests himself* […], represents himself and is recognized by others as speaking the truth,"[45] a certain "obligation of truth," a certain dramatic and risky " 'binding oneself to the truth,' a certain 'binding oneself by the truth and by truth-telling'," becomes a decisive activity for the individual agent to engage in and in which its self is asserted and finds expression to such an extent that not only is its very exercise of freedom at stake, but also its assumption of responsibility and its authenticity are ascertained and checked.[46]

What is more, however, realizing that the philosopher in Antiquity from the fourth century BC and onwards (re)appears as a novel creature that begins to constitute and articulate itself in and through a discussion of the basic conditions for meeting the challenges in stating the truth in such a manner that it may serve to guide and organize political life as well as the course of life for those in charge of political life, Foucault consequently directs his attention to an investigation of the constitution of philosophical practice as a specific form of practice that distinguishes itself from (and asserts itself with regard to) other related forms of practice and techniques, such as rhetoric and pedagogics, precisely by virtue of the fact that it establishes a privileged relationship to truth and truth-telling as an unremitting, existentially determining, ambition and challenge for the philosopher.[47] In and through this insistent examination of the composition of another way to devote oneself to and enunciate the truth, converse to traditional political and legislative truth-telling,[48] which is that of philosophy, and where it becomes a crucial issue whether the philosopher over and over again is capable of establishing his own existence in a lifelong commitment to render, in word and in deed, a truth that the philosopher cannot have and hold, Foucault manages to give prominence to a form of philosophical practice that differs decisively not only from philosophy in its previous sense[49] but also in its Aristotelian and modern sense where it is committed directly to knowledge for the sake of knowing. Concomitantly, Foucault articulates how philosophy as the work of the self on (it)self (*le travail de soi sur soi*)[50] committed to leading "the true life and the life of truth" is intimately related to the

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[44] At the beginning of 1984 lectures, Foucault sums up the defining relational characteristics of *parrēsia* in this manner: "in two words, *parrhesia* is the courage of truth in the person who speaks and who, regardless of everything, takes the risk of telling the whole truth that he thinks, but it is also the interlocutor's courage in agreeing to accept the hurtful truth that he hears" (*Courage de la vérité*, 14/*Courage of Truth*, 13).

[45] Ibid., 4/2-3.

[46] *Gouvernement de soi et des autres*, 64-67/*Government of the Self and Others*, 66-69. For a development of the relationship between parrēsia and other cognate terms, see Stanley B. Marrow, "'Parrhēsia' and the New Testament," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 44:3 (1982), 431-446.

[47] *Gouvernement de soi et des autres*, 178, 180/*Government of the Self and Others*, 194, 196.

[48] Whereas the key objective for political truth-telling is to muster the courage to set the agenda in the right way and for traditional philosophico-juridical truth-telling to legislate and state the basic conditions for social interaction, according to Foucault the aim for the philosophical injunction to tell the truth is not that you will "be Solon." Instead, you must "be Socrates" (*Courage de la vérité*, 75/*Courage of Truth*, 81).

[49] "There was already a strong ancient tradition, perfectly attested in the fifth century, that the philosopher was, could be, and had to be a lawgiver (a *nomothetes)* in the city, or else a peacemaker, the one who succeeded in adjusting the balance of the city in such a way as to put an end to dissensions, internecine struggles, and civil var. The philosopher was in fact a lawgiver, a peacemaker for the city. But in the scene of Plato and Dion confronted by Dionysius, the philosopher makes his appearance as a parrhesiast, as the person who, in a particular political conjuncture, tells the truth on the political stage, in order to guide either the city's policy or the soul of the person who directs the city's policy" (Foucault, *Gouvernement de soi et des autres*, 178/*Government of the Self and Others*, 194-95).

[50] Ibid., 224/242.

conception of truth as a test and an alterity, challenging already received forms of life, discussed in the first section of this essay.[51]

2. *Parrēsia* at the Platonic crossroads

To give an account of the crucial traits distinguishing this new kind of philosophical practice that is beginning to come into existence, Foucault, at first and above all, turns to face what he describes as "the Platonic crossroads."[52] By this, he refers to the junction where this new kind philosophy labors to define itself and its own specific kind of truth-telling in opposition to other competitors offering to speak the unvarnished truth on the agora, at the court or in the court-room, especially the philosophical tradition as it had been conceived so far, pedagogics and rhetoric. In fact, philosophy labors so hard to define itself that "the whole of Plato's philosophy" according to Foucault "finds itself presented (*se trouve présenté*) in this problem [concerning how to define, articulate and assert a specific form of philosophical truth-telling]"[53] and that not only "many of Plato's texts could be re-read in this perspective," but also "all of Platonic philosophy could be seen from the perspective of the problem of truth-telling in the field of political structures and in terms of the philosophy/rhetoric alternative."[54] Recognizing that this defining 'Platonic' moment of philosophy is not only voiced in texts attributed to Plato, Foucault's reading is quite wide. Yet, it focusses on, in particular, Plutarch's description[55] of the character of Plato's philosophical truth-telling, when the latter seeks to give counsel at the court of Syracuse,[56] even as it includes Plato's discussion of Socrates' philosophical attitude and way of life depicted in The *Apology of Socrates* and other early Platonic dialogues,[57] and it highlights Plato's 'autobiographical' account of his own attempt at philosophical truth-telling in Syracuse in his letters.[58]

The 'Platonic' experience of philosophy can be said to be offered in response to a severe crisis marking Greek public life in general and upsetting established modes of truth-telling in particular. Whereas Thucydides' *History*,[59] still in its description of the early historical stages of the Peloponnesian War (431–404 BC), depicts a public life in which *parrēsia* above all plays a positive role and in which the possibility and the courage to speak the truth in public is recognized as momentous for political life and its ability to discern and decide, the dangers and risks connected with truth-telling subsequently come to occupy the foreground. In the course and aftermath of the Peloponnesian War, thus, the prospects of being able to speak out freely and the value of *parrēsia* is increasingly questioned around the middle of the following century in particular in texts such as Isocrates' *On the Peace*, among others.[60] While there is an acute

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[51] *Courage de la vérité*, 308/*Courage of Truth*, 338.

[52] *Gouvernement de soi et des autres*, 180-81/*Government of the Self and Others*, 196-97. In fact, Foucault considers the problematics studied by him so all-pervasive and redefining for the understanding of Plato's philosophy that "it is difficult to talk about 'truth and politics' with regard to Plato without making another general exposition, another general re-reading of his work" (ibid., 181/197).

[53] Translation rectified by authors

[54] Ibid. 180-81/196-97. In fact, Foucault considers the problematics studied by him so all-pervasive and redefining for the understanding of Plato's philosophy that "it is difficult to talk about 'truth and politics' with regard to Plato without making another general exposition, another general re-reading of his work" (ibid., 181/197).

[55] Plutarch, *Lives of the Noble Greeks and Romans, Dion*, IV.

[56] *Gouvernement de soi et des autres*, 47-52, 175-79/*Government of the Self and Others*, 48-54, 191.

[57] Ibid., 286-300/311-27. *Courage de la vérité*, 67-105/*Courage of Truth*, 73-116.

[58] *Gouvernement de soi et des autres*, 192-259/*Government of the Self and Others*, 202-296.

[59] See Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, I.139-140, II.37,60.

[60] Isocrates, *On the Peace*, VIII.3.

awareness of the dangers and the sanctions that the speaker exposes himself to when speaking an unpalatable truth, inasmuch as the audience is quite likely to turn against the nuntius, there is equally a consciousness that listeners are quite likely to be convinced by the speakers who flatter them and tell them what they would like to hear, and are thus likely to arrive at the wrong decision as they mistake flattery for truth.

In this conjecture where public *parrēsia* undergoes a severe crisis, the Platonic tradition of philosophy does not content itself with voicing severe criticism of traditional institutions and practices, including their pretentions to be privileged sites for the emergence of truth-telling.[61] Instead, Platonism raises the bar insofar as it requests philosophy to accept this challenge in order to remain philosophy. The essential touchstone for philosophy is whether it can make a decisive contribution to ensuring that the truth can appear and to clarifying the conditions for stating the truth in a proper manner, even in these dire circumstances.[62]

To respond to this challenge, however, philosophy needs go beyond being a mere representation of knowledge, as it is rendered in speech or text. Arguing the case for Plato's move to Sicily in order to educate and counsel the tyrant, the *Seventh Letter* makes a decisive distinction between *logos* and *ergon.* When he deliberates whether he should go and take the risk of speaking out, it proves a decisive consideration for the author that Plato is "guided by his own regard for himself" and that it would appear that he as a philosopher is mere logos or "altogether mere hollow words (*logos monon atekhnos*)" which would never ever put his hand to work (*ergon de oudenos an pote hekon anapsasthai*)."[63] Thus, from Plato's *Seventh Letter* it is clear that philosophy with regard to politics and truth-telling cannot simply be *logos* and *mathesis,* or an apprenticeship of knowledge that examines and passes judgment on its inherent truth and transmits it,[64] in order to give men laws and state the rules and norms according to which they should behave.[65] Instead, the test or reality check for philosophy is that it is capable of facing reality and putting its hand to action, finding and attesting to its reality for itself and others by proving itself capable of cutting through flattery, deception and delusion and by practicing veridiction and paving the way for practicing veridiction in the face of power and politics, thus contributing to their necessary (re)organisation.[66]

Rather than stating what must be done in the realm of politics or prescribing directly how one should govern, or examining what is true or false in the realm of knowledge, philosophy is a practice that has a sustained privileged relationship to these fields, yet an unremitting relationship that is concomitantly one of exteriority, reluctance and indocility; and it is precisely in its capacity to forge this privileged and ambiguous relationship that philosophy may become and prove to be real.[67]

As a consequence, the real of philosophy can also be said to be found in the dealings with this relationship, as it is continually maintained and developed in a number of

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[61] *Courage de la vérité,* 35/*Courage of Truth,* 35.

[62] Philosophy, according to Foucault, becomes an endeavour to answer the question: "What is the mode of knowledge (*savoir*), or what is the tekhne, what is the theory or what is the practice, what is the body of knowledge (*connaissance*), but also what is the exercise, what is the mathesis and what is the askesis that will make it possible to take up this parrhesia?" (G*ouvernement de soi et des autres,* 180/*Government of the Self and Others*, 196, trans. modified).

[63] Plato, Letter 7, 328b-c.

[64] Foucault, *Gouvernement de soi et des autres*, 201/*Government of the Self and Others,* 219.

[65] Ibid., 325/255.

[66] Ibid. 212, 202/230, 219.

[67] Ibid. 221, 223-24/242. Plato, *Letter* 7, 341b.

practices.[68] For this very reason, the tyrant Dionysius proves to be an impostor, refusing the lengthy path of philosophy and unable to pass the test of philosophy, as he is able to convince himself of having grasped the essentials in the course of Plato's first lecture on philosophy and immediately proceeds to commit his impressions to writing in a philosophical treatise, without feeling the need to further educate himself.[69] Rather than in a sudden conversion or in the apprehension of certain pieces of knowledge *(mathemata)* provided by a master, which can be comprehended once and for all, written down, passed on and shared, the crux of philosophy is to be sought in a co-habitation or living with *(sunousia),* a rubbing or friction *(tribe)* with the practice of philosophy, which renders it feasible that a light *(phos)* may be kindled and nurtured to finally grow by itself.[70] What appears is thus philosophy, not as an apprehension of a given body of knowledge *(mathemeta)* or of a given art *(technē),* but as an *ascēsis,* as a practice that finds its test of reality in the relationship that one is able to establish with oneself, *and* in the difference that this relationship is able to establish with regard to and within the political and social field.[71]

In this manner, philosophy can not only be said to indicate the need for an "ethical differentiation" within political and social life as a necessary precondition if the truth is to appear, but also to begin to elaborate an *ethos,* the practical work upon oneself, that would permit this ethical differentiation, an elaboration that is closely related to an examination of the kind of access to the truth that would permit to form this kind of ethos and an investigation of the political and social conditions in which this kind of truth and its ethos would be permitted to express and assert itself properly.[72]

The elaboration of this ethical differentiation plays a crucial part in the set of Platonic dialogues dedicated to the discussion of the various stages leading to Socrates' sentence and death. Whereas his trial is debated in the *Apology,* the *Crito* renders the discussion between Crito and Socrates concerning his possible escape and the *Phaedo* gives an account of the last moments before Socrates' death.

The *Apology* contains an examination of the question why Socrates does not engage in politics in the sense that he would take the floor to address the people and give advice to the city, but instead chooses to seek out his fellow citizens independently.[73] Part of the reason Socrates gives is that it has become so risky to speak out in public that it is not worth the effort and that he might not even have survived until now, had he chosen to do so; but the main reason is that he has been called upon and given the even more pressing mission to encourage his fellow citizens to take care of themselves, i.e. their reason *(phronēsis),* their truth *(alētheia)* and their soul *(psychē).*[74] Socrates' concern that we should above all be concerned with ourselves and take special care of that part of our existence which is concerned with the truth and living the true life also proves decisive for his decision to stay in prison to happily face his death sentence, as his care for the self and that of others makes him conclude that we should not care about the opinion of everybody and anybody but mainly about the judgment which enables us to decide what is just and unjust.[75] Finally, Socrates' famous last words to his disciples in the

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[68] Foucault, *Gouvernement de soi et des autres,* 326/*Government of the Self and Others,* 354.
[69] Ibid., 227/246.
[70] Ibid. 226-37/245-55. Plato, *Letter 7,* 341b-d.
[71] *Gouvernement de soi et des autres,* 202, 224, 211/*Government of the Self and Others,* 219, 242, 229.
[72] *Courage de la vérité,* 35, 63/*Courage of Truth,* 35, 66.
[73] Plato, *Apology,* 31c.
[74] Plato, *Apology,* 29e.
[75] Plato, *Criton,* 48a.

Phaedo requesting them to offer a cock to Asclepius and urging them not be forgetful of this debt can be seen as a conscientious sacrifice to the god of healing thanking him for a successful cure from a common disease that may attack the soul, the widespread falling prey to common false opinions and to unhealthy self-forgetfulness, a sacrifice to the benevolent god who helps us to cure ourselves when we take care of ourselves.[76]

What is more, Socrates' calling to concern himself with helping his fellow citizens concern themselves with taking care of themselves and their reason, their truth and their soul, forms a prime motive for the Socratic method as is developed in a number of Platonic dialogues.[77] Whereas Socrates rejects the role of the master who passes on teachings (*mathema* or *techne)* to his students, and in this respect remains a student on par with the other students, he concomitantly takes up a position different from his interlocutors insofar as he administers a Socratic test that works as a touchstone *(basanos)* and permits to develop a parrēsiastic practice that one needs to repeat and profit from throughout one's life.[78]

What thus appears is philosophy as rupture with political activity in the strict or narrow sense of the word that permits to move from the *polis* to the *psyche* as the essential correlate of the elaboration of truth[79] and to elaborate a *psychagogy:* a transport or guidance of the soul which is at the same time a testimonial of knowledge and truth; a test of the soul, its courage and ability to tell and practice the truth; the practice or *ascēsis* of the soul on itself; and a form of behaving and a way of life.[80] As is evident in Socrates' life and response to his trial, this practice and test of the courage of truth, which cannot primarily take place on the political platform, must be exercised onto death and becomes an overriding concern to the extent that it may supersede not only political activity but also the apprehension about one's own bounded existence in its immediately given sense.

3. The ethical exteriority of the Cynic approach

At closer inspection, however, the Platonic crossroad is not alone in marking out and articulating this ethical differentiation and its implications. Whereas the constitution of this irreducible independent ethical dimension takes a relatively discrete inwardly oriented and esoteric form in Platonic academic philosophy,[81] the contrary is the case in other contemporaneous forms of philosophy according to Foucault. While the distinctive school of ancient philosophers somewhat disparagingly termed *kynikoi* (or 'dog-like') by other more elitist and academic strands of ancient philosophers can be said to further develop and accentuate the ethical distance with regard to the political space, the Cynics concomitantly purify this irreducible ethico-philosophical Socratic irony,[82] not to establish and hide it away in certain privileged spaces, but rather to defiantly put it on public display. With Cynicism, the ethical exteriority of the philosophical approach and its courage of truth assume a heightened, radicalized and often almost hostile public

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[76] Plato, *Phaedo,* 118a. Foucault, *Courage de la vérité,* 87-105/*Courage of Truth,* 95-114.

[77] The Socratic 'method' is tried, tested and discussed in a number of Platonic dialogues, among others in particular in *Protagoras, Gorgias, The Republic,* and *Laches.*

[78] *Courage de la vérité,* 135, 141/*Courage of Truth,* 145-46, 152.

[79] *Gouvernement de soi et des autres,* 299/*Government of the Self and Others*, 395. *Courage de la vérité,* 61/*Courage of Truth,*: 64.

[80] Ibid., 61/64. *Gouvernement de soi et des autres,* 308, 296/*Government of the Self and Others*, 335-36, 320.

[81] Raffnsøe, "What is Critique? Critical Turns in the Age of Criticism." *Outlines. Critical Practice Studies* 18 (2017), 28-60, 47.

[82] Ibid., 51-52.

expression. Practiced persistently as an openly displayed strangeness, ethical irony is here consistently developed and dramatized as a strangeness and queerness that is likely to cause public scandal. By the public, Cynic gestures of open defiance may even come to be perceived as war-like campaigns against the surrounding society.

This blatant ethical defiance is, for example, put on display in the infamous story of a meeting between Diogenes the Cynic and Alexander the Great, as it is related by, among others, Dio Chrysostom of Prusa (A.D. 40-110). Dio relates how the powerful king leaves his court and his entourage to enter the public space and go visit the philosopher, who "cajoled no man by flattery but told everybody the truth and, even though he possessed not a single drachma, […] was the only man who lived the life he considered the best and happiest."[83] When Alexander comes up to Diogenes and greets him, however, Diogenes looks up at him from his barrel with a terrible glare like that of a lion and orders him to step aside, as he happens to be warming himself in the sun. In the ensuing face to face, Diogenes constantly provokes and challenges Alexander, also to make the point that Alexander's monarchy is fragile and precarious since it depends on external factors, is consequently exposed to all sorts of misfortune and may be lost. By contrast, that of Diogenes is unshakable and cannot be overturned, since he needs nothing to exercise it. At the end of the day, Diogenes proves to be the real king. Only he is an unappreciated king who may be difficult to recognize, due to the renunciation and deliberate endurance to which he exposes himself, a relentless work of self on self, always pushing back the limits of what he can bear, sacrificing himself and pestering others, yet all this to enable himself to take care of others. Ultimately, thus, the only way of being a true king proves to be to behave like one and to continue to behave like one.

In this manner, cynicism starkly and forcefully proclaims that philosophy is fundamentally not just a discourse, but above all a mode of life that has an essential connection with the question and practice of truth-telling.[84] For Cynicism, philosophy is a preparation for life which entails that one takes care of oneself by stripping existence of externals such as material possessions, food and unnecessary knowledge to attain a life without mixture and dependence that permits to state the truth and take care of others at all times. In Cynicism, consequently, the problem of the true life and the philosophical life is taken up and radicalized to such an extent that the Cynic's life is turned into a demand and an assertion of the need for another life and an incessant combat for an other world in this world. With the Cynic figure of true royalty, the idea of a true life is transposed into the theme of an other life; an other life whose otherness the philosopher must lead to lead the change of the world, another life he must lead to bear witness to an other world.[85]

4. Ethical differentiation in ancient philosophy

Whereas Platonism elaborates a "philosophical mode of being bound to the truth of Being and the practice of the soul," which asserts the necessity of "the transformation of the soul" to such an extent that Foucault also characterizes this mode of being as "auto-ascetic,"[86] Cynicism, according to Foucault, articulates a different but related modality.

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[83] Dio Chrysostome, "Fourth Discourse on Kingship", in *Dio Chrysostom I, Discourses I-XI* (1932), 171 (§ 8). See Foucault, *Courage de la vérité,* 252-57/*Courage of Truth,* 275-83. *Fearless Speech,* 124, 71/*Discours et vérité,* 240-48.
[84] *Courage de la vérité,* 216-17/*Courage of Truth,* 234-35.
[85] Ibid., 264/286-87.
[86] *Gouvernement de soi et des autres*, 308/*Government of the Self and Others*, 336.

In a very significant way … the Platonic modality … accentuates the importance and the extent of the *mathemata,* it gives knowledge of the self the form of the contemplation of self by self and the ontological recognition of what the soul is in its own being; it tends to establish a double division: of the soul and of the body; of the true world and the world of appearances; in short its considerable importance is due to it having been able to link that form of the care of the self to the foundation of metaphysics, while the distinction between esoteric teaching and the lessons given to all limited its political impact.[87]

"The Cynic modality," by contrast,

reduces as strictly as possible the domain of the *mathemata,* it gives the knowledge of self the privileged form of exercise, test and practices of endurance; it seeks to manifest the human being in its stripped down animal truth, and if it held itself back in relation to metaphysics and remained foreign to its great historical posterity, it left a certain mode of life in the history of the West, a certain *bios,* which, in its different modalities has played a crucial role.[88]

While Platonism brings a "metaphysical experience of the world," giving rise to the "genealogy" of "the *psyche,* knowledge of self, work of purification, access to the other world," Cynicism opens a "historico-critical experience of life," giving rise to the genealogy of "the *bios,* putting oneself to the test, reduction to animality, battle in this world against the world."[89]

Despite this apparent contrast between the focus on the soul and its transports, on the one hand, and the embodied life, its passions and events, on the other hand, and despite a shift of emphasis between a temporality of edification which leads towards another world and a spatiality of leading a true life which is another life in an insolent finding and showing oneself in the here and now, Platonism and Cynicism can nevertheless be considered as two contrasting but closely related modalities of an emerging philosophical mode of being.[90] In both cases, a relative ethical independence, which implies also a presence of relations, is introduced as a matter of vital importance and further developed.[91] In this manner, philosophy makes the point that it is an indispensable condition for good governance, for an equitable exercise of power and for the establishment of healthy relationships to constitute an *ethos,* "a way of being and doing, a way of conducting oneself corresponding to rational principles and founding the exercise of freedom understood as independence," a way of conducting oneself that one develops, modifies, perfects and applies as an ongoing practice throughout one's existence.[92]

While Platonism may seem to make the case for this ethical differentiation most articulately and in the way that has historically proved more fraught with consequences, Cynicism can be said to flesh out this philosophical heroism in its most unmediated, uncompromising and pure mode.[93] Predominantly passed on in the form of anecdotes or stories *(chreiai* and *apomnemoneumata)* that were quite often funny episodes *(paignia)* but also worked as a serious challenge and exercise, the practice of Cynicism cultivated a

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[87] *Courage de la vérité*, 310-11/*Courage of Truth*, 338-39.

[88] Ibid.

[89] Ibid. 289, 310/315, 349.

[90] Ibid., 293/319.

[91] Ibid., 309/338.

[92] Ibid.

[93] Ibid., 195-96/210-11.

new kind of traditionality of existence, different from the more well-known traditionality of doctrine; and whereas a traditionality of doctrine has the objective of recalling and re-actualizing a core of knowledge or thought that tends to be forgotten in the present, the traditionality of existence permits to restore the force of a conduct beyond moral enfeeblement.[94] Presenting the concretization of a marked continuous existence of otherness repeated as decisive in each and every moment, Cynicism constitutes the "matrix, the embryo" of a "fundamental ethical experience in the West."[95] Cynicism makes graphic how the idea of an other life can be lived as a life whose alterity leads to a change of the world in the here and now but is concomitantly only of consequence if it is repeated as critical existential decision in each and every consecutive moment. Since it applies a principle of non-concealment literally, Cynicism becomes the heightened emblematic and diagrammatical expression that a philosophical life must appear as radically other than all other forms of life, in a way that challenges all other forms of life; and it states in plain terms that this radical ethical distantiation is a *conditio sine qua non* for assuming responsibility for one's life and living an authentic life.

In his last lectures, Foucault thus carefully further articulates crucial traits of the philosophical practice developed in the first section of this essay: a philosophical attitude characterized by a sustained meditative approach that takes the form of a modifying trial of oneself in the medium of thought made possible by an ethical differentiation from the world that permits to reconnect with the world.

To be in a position to speak the truth in conjectures where it has become a daunting challenge to do so, it is necessary to mind oneself: One must withdraw from the world and social interaction as they are immediately perceived and turn towards oneself in order to critically examine one's own preconceived certainties and practice self-examination. When minding oneself, however, the desire is not to arrive at some evidential knowledge hidden in a private subjacent space at the core of oneself that can subsequently be transmitted and enables one to assume the position of the legislator, as still seems to be the ultimate goal of Cartesian meditation. Rather, the driving ambition is a limited retreat from the world that permits to elaborate *an ethos*, or a practical work upon oneself that one develops and modifies as an ongoing practice throughout one's existence, enabling one to re-engage in the world in a manner that is no longer dictated by the world as it is immediately perceived.

As is evidenced in both Platonic and Cynic philosophy, ethical-practical differentiation as an ongoing modificatory work upon oneself entails a distantiation not only from received perceptions and opinions, but also from one's own existence in one's immediately existing pre-given form, a differentiation in and through which it re-appears in a mediated form. If it is to permit this ongoing practical work upon oneself, ethical differentiation must take the form of a retreat to a place that is not a private space, isolated from the rest of the world. As has been made graphic by both Socrates and Diogenes, ethical differentiation instead presupposes and draws upon a retreat to a privileged social space devoted to an ongoing practical-ethical work upon oneself in an ongoing critical exchange with others, a practical work upon oneself that finds its ultimate test in its ability to become the touchstone for and manifest the truth for its surroundings.

Thus, rather than its capacity to ascertain and represent knowledge, the decisive test of philosophical practice in its ethical differentiation, the check that permits one to

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[94] Ibid., 194/208-09.
[95] Ibid., 264/287.

discern whether it is real, is philosophy's ability to become an inherent, impersonal touchstone and criterion of truth for surrounding practices that challenges these to raise the bar.

Consequently, philosophy's ethical differentiation implies both a limited and decisive retreat from the surrounding world to a world self-modification. Ethical exteriority is limited insofar as philosophical practice, despite its ethical differentiation, remains in a close and critical, spirited exchange with its surroundings. It re-mains a crucial reality check for philosophy that it is able not only to confront and relate to the surrounding political world, but also that it is able leave its mark on and make a difference in the world. Ethical differentiation remains decisive insofar as philosophical practice in this manner is able to become an ongoing manifestation of the need for an other life and an incessant combat for an other world within this world.

PART III
FOUCAULT'S PHILOSOPHICAL MODERNITY:
PHILOSOPHY AS ETHICAL DIFFERENTIATION
AND SELF-MODIFICATION IN MODERN TIMES

In prolongation of his lectures on the constitution of ancient philosophy, Foucault can envisage as the general theme of examination a history of philosophy which is no longer so much concerned with philosophy as a forgetting or development of rationality, but rather with philosophy as a "series of episodes and forms – recurrent forms which are transformed – of veridiction."[96] This kind of examination would envisage philosophy in its "allocutionary force" as an insistent and restive address to political, social, scientific fields or life forms from a position of relative exteriority in which it concomitantly finds and tests its own reality.[97]

Insofar as Cynicism forms the heightened emblematic and diagrammatical expression of philosophical life as a witness or martyr of non-dogmatic truth that is not of this world, this history would also "show the permanent existence across all European culture of something which may appear as Cynicism itself (*le cynisme*)," re-appearing, of course, "under diverse forms, different practices, and styles of existence."[98]

This history would eventually lead on to the constitution of modern art as a field where received rules and forms are suspended in the name of the irruption of a naked, bare and true, existence still re-iteratively in the making.[99] It would equally permit perceiving the recurrence of revolution in Modernity as motivated by the fascination with true and militant forms of life, rather than caused by the captivation in a political project.[100]

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[96] *Gouvernement de soi et des autres*, 322/*Government of the Self and Others*, 350.
[97] Ibid. 322/351.
[98] *Courage de la vérité,* 166/*Courage of Truth,* 180.
[99] Ibid., 174-75/188-89. According to Foucault, "modern art is Cynicism in culture; the cynicism of culture turned against itself. And if this is not just in art, in the modern world, in our world, it is especially in art that the most intense forms of truth-telling with the courage to take the risk of offending are concentrated" (ibid., 174/189).
[100] Ibid. 169-71/183-84.

1. Foucault's Enlightenment

Even more importantly, however, Foucault's elaboration of an attitude of ethical differentiation and self-modification in Antiquity and in his own work permits avoiding a reductive doctrinal perception of the Enlightenment and its aftermath in Modernity.[101] Instead of contenting itself with a mere debunking of a set of inherited dogmas or doctrines in order to replace them with more adequate knowledge and found a scientific discourse in truth, philosophy in the Enlightenment can be said, according to Foucault, to assume and re-assert the *parrēsiastic* function crucial for philosophy in Antiquity under present circumstances.[102] In Enlightenment, philosophy equally takes the form of an insistent and restive address to political, social, scientific fields or life forms from a position of relative exteriority, even as it finds and tests its own reality in this insistent and restive address. From this vantage point, the real crux of the Enlightenment is to be sought in the independent and self-dependent light that can be kindled and nurtured as a result of the indocile exercise of oneself in the activity of thought, rather than in the establishment of new set of more adequate authoritative pieces of knowledge or *mathemata.*

Foucault recurrently argues how this becomes particularly perspicuous in Kant's determination of the Enlightenment, as it was first presented in his text known as "Was ist Aufklärung?" ("What is Enlightenment?") from 1784.[103] According to Kant, *Aufklärung* is to be understood as a decisive event in human history, namely humans' exit from their "state of minority (*Unmündigkeit*)," in which they find themselves as long as they submit themselves to the direction of others and are unable to muster the courage to govern themselves.

When Foucault considers Kant's canonical analysis, he is at first interested in the fact that Kant raises the question of Enlightenment in an article published in the journal *Berlinische Monatsschrift,* the mouthpiece of a group of liberal thinkers called the *Berliner Mittwochsgesellschaft* or Berlin Wednesday Society, which existed from 1783 until it was closed down in 1798 as a threat to public order. An article of this kind is thus not at the time intended as a contribution to a discussion among scholars that would permit establishing true and lasting academic knowledge, but rather conceived as a contribution from a man of culture to a public discussion in order to aim for exactly a discussion of the relationship between the writer and his public.[104] Even more importantly, however, the question taken up by Kant does not regard a rejected foundation to which the public should return or a finality towards which it is moving. Instead, Kant poses the question as an open question about what is going on right now in the present. In pondering the Enlightenment, Kant asks what kind of phenomenon is in question in the present. What does it involve and what can I – in posing the question – say about Enlightenment and the present. The question is thus raised so as to include the one who poses the very question and the public he addresses.

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[101] Michel Foucault, "Qu'est-ce que Les Lumières?" (2) [1983/1984], in *Dits et Écrits IV,* 686-87/Michel Foucault, "Kant on Enlightenment and Revolution," *Economy and Society,* 15:1 (1986): 42.

[102] *Gouvernement de soi et des autres,* 322-23/*Government of the Self and Others,* 349-50.

[103] Immanuel Kant, "Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?" [1784], in *Schriften zur Anthropologie, Geschichtsphilosophie, Politik und Pädagogik 1. Werkausgabe Band XI,* ed. von Wilhelm Weischedel, 53-61/Immanuel Kant, "An Answer given to the Question: What is Enlightenment?" [1784], in *Kant's Political Writings,* ed. Hans S. Reiss (1970), 176-192. For a more elaborate discussion of Foucault's relationship to Kant, see Raffnsøe et al., *Michel Foucault.* 426-54.

[104] *Gouvernement de soi et des autres,* 9-10/*Government of the Self and Others,* 7-8.

Kant's pondering on his contemporary world is first initiated as a questioning of the present as an event and secondly as an inquiry into the mode of being of this event and what it implies. A third question implied by Kant's text is how we can relate adequately to the present and its ontology. In this way, Kant opens the question of the ethical modality in which one can relate to the present: the question of an adequate ethos. Rather than pretending to evaluate the present from an Archimedian point outside time and space, philosophy with Kant seeks to relate to our own existence to this present and target it in our meditation.[105]

At the outset, Kant defines Enlightenment as something first and foremost negative: Enlightenment is an exit *(Ausgang)* from man's self-imposed tutelage. Kant thereby distances himself from an attempt to employ omens in determining the future that is unfolding. His aim is not to find out which age he belongs to; rather, he seeks to resolve what has happened insofar as a phenomenon like the Enlightenment rises to such prominence in his present. As Foucault points out, Kant asks what difference the present or 'today' makes in history in relation to the past: "It is in the reflection on 'today' as difference in history and as motive for a particular philosophical task that the novelty of this text appears to me to lie."[106] Since philosophy, for Kant, begins to concern itself with the present in an archer-like relation, the present appears to philosophical reflection as a singularly irreducible and incomplete event that breaks with previous events. It thus becomes imperative for philosophy to target and flesh out the decisive moments of which it is part but on which it cannot help to reflect independently.

Accordingly, the question of public interest and of interest for a philosophical interrogation that Kant focuses on is not so much the determination of the present as such but the question of the determination of "one particular element that is to be recognized, distinguished, and deciphered" "among all the other elements of the present." And the decisive point for philosophy is to investigate "how this element is the bearer or expression of a process which concerns thought, knowledge, philosophy," in order to indicate "in what respect and how the person who speaks as a thinker, a savant, a philosopher, is himself a part of this process" and in order to test how he has a role to play in this process in which he is "both an element and an actor."[107] It is thus not sufficient merely to perceive the present as an actual event.

As Foucault mentions, this becomes clear in a passage from another small manuscript by Kant, namely "Der Streit der Fakultäten" ("The conflicts of the Faculties"), originally presented in 1798.[108] Here Kant seeks signs of proofs that make it possible to speak about progress for mankind. He identifies such indications in the French Revolution, which took off in the interim between the publication of *Was ist Aufklärung?* and *Der Streit der Fakultäten.* The revolution is here seen as a decisive event that results in a distinction between today and yesterday to such a degree that it becomes possible to speak of progress. On closer inspection, it becomes clear that Kant's decisive point does not concern the concrete historical events. For Kant, the real event in this regard is the way in which the French Revolution was received in Europe. As the revolution unfolded, it

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[105] Foucault, "Qu'est-ce que Les Lumières?" (2), 679-80/"Kant on Enlightenment," 90.
[106] Michel Foucault, "Qu'est-ce que Les Lumières?" (1) [1984], in *Dits et Ecrits IV*, 568/"What is Enlightenment?" [1984], in *The Essential Foucault. Selections from the Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*, ed. Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose (2003), 48.
[107] *Gouvernement de soi et des autres*, 12-13/*Government of the Self and Others*, 12.
[108] Immanuel Kant, "Der Streit der Fakultäten" [1798], in *Schriften zur Anthropologie, Geschichtsphilosophie, Politik und Pädagogik 1*, 351-368/Immanuel Kant, "The conflicts of the Faculties" [1798], in *Kant's Political Writings*, 176-192.

generated enthusiasm and elation unrelated to the immediate personal loss or gain from what transpired. This enthusiasm suggests to Kant that there exists an inherent and deeply felt desire for progress within human beings.

It is thus possible to claim that Kant is not primarily interested in the French Revolution as an empirical phenomenon but first and foremost takes an interest in the revolution insofar as philosophy can interpret it as the eruption of a new incisive challenge. With the French Revolution, something new occurs that attains incontrovertible importance for the onlookers. This event in the events, which comes to occur as a result of the actual occurrences, opens a horizon for thought and action that takes the form of a new challenge that cannot be ignored.

In an important sense, the guiding interest for Kant in Foucault's reading is not what actually happened. It is rather a transversal level that emerges and gains importance by creating new dispositions that shape the actuality of various succeeding events. According to Foucault, the revolution as an actual event risks being abandoned when history moves on, "but seen from the viewpoint where its specific content becomes unimportant, its existence attests to a permanent virtuality which cannot be ignored."[109]

The French Revolution proves to be a decisive contemporary event that is thought-provoking since it opens up new horizons in ways that can no longer simply be obliterated as it sets a new agenda. Thus this event provokes us to rethink the contemporary in order to stay vigilant to what seems to make itself felt as it shimmers through the haze: to what may still be to come and to what might have been. This meditation remains important even if what it indicates might never be realized and even though the French Revolution as an empirical or actual phenomenon may fall decisively short of such great expectations.

For Foucault, Kant's discussion of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution raises an important question about the attitude one can establish to the contemporaneity of which one is part. By "attitude," Foucault understands,

> a mode of relating to contemporary reality; […] a way of thinking and feeling; a way, too, of acting and conducting oneself (*agir* et *se conduire*) that at one and the same time marks a belonging (*appartenance*) and presents itself as a task (*tâche*).[110]

At the same time, he specifies that this is similar to what the ancient Greeks called an *ethos*, or an elaboration of oneself that presents itself as a daunting task and that one continuously develops, modifies and applies throughout one's existence in critical exchange with the contemporaneity within which one is situated. From the vantage point of Enlightenment philosophy, the age of Enlightenment presents the problem of which particular way of living becomes possible when one must relate personally to contemporary times as an event that is coming into being and that one is inscribed into. And Enlightenment philosophy responds by raising the difficult question: How can a mode of living or an ethical self-problematization and modification be attained that responds adequately to the fundamental challenges put forward by its epoch?

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[109] "Qu'est-ce que Les Lumières?" (2), 686/"Kant on Enlightenment," 96. Here, 'virtuality' and the 'virtual' should be understood etymologically from the Medieval Latin *virtualis*, which designates 'something which has an inner power or potential.' Virtuality thus means the effective force contained and expressed in material or actual events. In understanding an occurrence as an event in Foucault's sense, one focuses on the forces and effects that are implicitly at work in the occurrence.

[110] "Qu'est-ce que Les Lumières?" (1), 568/"What is Enlightenment?" 39.

2. The reticent transgressive attitude of philosophical modernity

Foucault claims that Enlightenment philosophy in Kant hereby establishes a 'tradition' that not only continues and reignites the parrēsiastic strand of philosophy on modern terms but also stretches forward via Fichte, Hegel, Nietzsche and Weber to Heidegger and the early Frankfurt School, represented by Adorno and Horkheimer. Consequently, Foucault considers his own thought in extension of the philosophical activities found there.[111] In this tradition, philosophy is defined by its restive and challenging relationship to the present of which it is part; and, according to Foucault, this tradition constitutes an important movement in the philosophy of modernity.

Equally, this reticent transgressive attitude of philosophical modernity is detectable in Kierkegaard's philosophy. In particular, it is markedly present when Kierkegaard, in an autobiographical note, compares himself to a number of his successful contemporaries. Whereas they were all benefactors of the age who had made a name for themselves by expanding and applying knowledge in order to make life easier and more coherent at a practical, organizational or mental level, Kierkegaard sets a radically different goal for himself:

> You must do something but inasmuch as with your limited capacities it will be impossible to make anything easier than it has become, you must, with the same humanitarian enthusiasm, as the others, undertake to make something harder.[112]

It is a philosophical tradition that is not united by any common doctrine, but rather by the continuous return to a questioning of its contemporaneity, a questioning that must constantly be raised anew without receiving a definitive resolution. Kant's texts therefore seem to mark "the discreet entrance into the history of thought of a question that modern philosophy has not been capable of answering, but that it has never managed to get rid of either." Modern philosophy thereby becomes the philosophy that seeks to answer the question "raised so imprudently two centuries ago."[113] In extension of this, Foucault claims,

> philosophy as the problematization of a present-ness, the interrogation by philosophy of this present-ness of which it is a part and relative to which it is obliged to locate

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itself: this may well be the characteristic trait of philosophy as a discourse of and upon modernity.[114]

In line with his understanding of crucial strands of philosophy in Antiquity and the Enlightenment, Foucault suggests that it might prove more fruitful to understand modernity as the adoption of a certain attitude instead of perceiving it as a specific epoch. Understanding modernity as an attitude of modernity and thus as "a mode of relating to contemporary reality," "of acting and conducting oneself (*se conduire*) that at one at the same time marks a relation of belonging (*une appartenance*) and presents itself as a task," permits the consideration of modernity as the re-actualization of the parrēsiastic practice in modern terms.[115]

Foucault finds this attitude of modernity in the poet Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867), who presents it in an emblematic manner. In "Le peintre de la vie moderne," Baudelaire describes the modern as the "ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent."[116] For Baudelaire, however, being modern is not equivalent to simply confirming this movement or the experience that all that is solid melts into air. Rather, it implies taking up an attitude of ethical distantiation that rebels against mere changeability. In distinguishing itself from a mere subservience to the dominant tendencies of the present age, the attitude of modernity is the effort to reconquer something eternal that is located in the transient. According to Foucault, "it is in the will to 'heroize' the present."[117] As was the case in Cynic defiance, the present is here sought glorified, but now by attempting to force something more from the mere momentary.[118]

In Foucault's view, the modern attitude found with Kant and Baudelaire is not just a relation established with the present but also an attitude toward oneself. The attitude of modernity thus also involves relating to the self in a certain way in order to establish a new relationship to oneself and the world. Just as it is not merely a question of accepting the present but reviving it, the modern self-relationship is not merely an issue of accepting that self in the fleeting moment or reestablishing it in a more basic sense. Rather, it involves relating to oneself as an ongoing meditative process in order to make this self "the object of a complex, difficult and painstaking elaboration of oneself." One must make oneself the subject of an ascetic effort: a self-cultivation that inhibits spontaneous or unmediated activity or self-realization in order to make new opportunities possible. Thus, the attitude of modernity and the activity of truth-telling in modernity regard human beings' "inevitable, but also precarious and difficult "revolt against" themselves.[119]

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[114] "Qu'est-ce que les Lumières?" (2), 680/"Kant on Enlightenment," 89.

[115] Foucault highlights that he is inspired to envisage modernity as an attitude continuing Enlightenment when he "refers back to Kant" and adds that modernity perceived in this way becomes "no doubt, a bit like what the Greeks called an *ethos*" ("Qu'est-ce que les Lumières (1)," (1984), *Dits et Ecrits IV*: 568/"What is Enlightenment?" 48).

[116] Charles Baudelaire, "Le peintre de la vie moderne" [1869], in Charles Baudelaire, *Curiosités esthetiques. L'Art romantique* (1990), 467/Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern life, and Other Essays*, ed. Jonathan Mayne (1964), 13.

[117] "Qu'est-ce que les Lumières (1)," 569/"What is Enlightenment?" 49.

[118] For further development of this aspect, see Raffnsøe et al., *Michel Foucault*, 436-37.

[119] Foucault, "Qu'est-ce que les Lumières (1)," 570-71/"What is Enlightenment?" 50.

3. The historicity of revolt

It is, however, not only with Kant and Baudelaire that humans' search for authentic forms of existence through troublesome revolt against themselves is given an exemplary expression. While reading Kant and Baudelaire, Foucault also sought to attain firsthand experience of such a contemporary revolt when he twice traveled to Iran in 1978 to cover the uprising against Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi (1919-1980) in a number of newspaper articles.[120] The purpose of what Foucault termed an example of "ideational 'reports'" is not to engage in a moral debate for or against what is being examined, but to examine the ideas at work and what they may bring to a Western context.[121] In Iran, Foucault was attracted to an *ethos* that he thought was present in the first phase of the revolution. Here the people rebelled against not only the Shah's secret police but also the Western processes of modernization and liberalization that the Shah represented. Indeed, Foucault emphasizes how the man on the street, as well as the high-ranking clergy, were attempting to create room for an otherwise nonexistent "political spirituality."[122]

It is not the immediate religious implications of this term in the Iranian context that Foucault finds interesting here. In a contemporaneous discussion held on the 10th anniversary of another revolt – the May 1968 protests in France – Foucault suggests that the central aspect of such a political spirituality is "the will to discover a different way of governing oneself through a different way of dividing up true and false."[123] Political spirituality comes about in shaping and refracting the political space such that a transformation of the self and by extension the political arena becomes possible.

In his closing remark on the Iranian Revolution, Foucault complains about the regime of terror that it led to but holds that it is a fallacy to claim that religious despotism and governance by Mullahs was inherent in the Iranian uprising and its enthusiasm from the very beginning.[124] To investigate where it might have led, Foucault remains loyal toward the initial phases of the revolution and its implicit momentum. He retains a tension between the end of the revolution and the virtuality contained in the course of events. Thus, Foucault's relation to the Iranian evolution is not unlike what he determined to be Kant's relationship to the French Revolution.

What immediately fascinates Foucault in the revolution is the revolt. To Foucault, this "movement through which a lone man, a group, a minority, or an entire people say, 'I

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[120] For a more elaborate discussion, see Raffnsøe et al.: *Michel Foucault,* 439-445. Cf also Foucault's retrospect discussion with Farès Sassine of his investigation of the Iranian uprisings published in English as Michel Foucault, "There Can't Be Societies without Uprisings" [1979], in *Foucault and the Making of Subjects,* ed. Laura Cremonesi et al. (2016), pp. 25-51.

[121] Michel Foucault, "Les reportages d'idées" [1978], in *Dits et Écrits III,* 706-07.

[122] It had occurred to Foucault already at this early stage that "the problem of Islam as a political force is essentially one for our time and the coming years. In order to approach it with a minimum of intelligence, the first condition is not to begin by bringing in hatred" (Michel Foucault, "Réponse de Michel Foucault à une lectrice iranienne" [1978], in *Dits et Écrits III,* 708/Michel Foucault, "Foucault's response to Atoussa H." [1978], *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution,* 210. Likewise, Foucault here stressed that one must not ascribe him to any conception of an Islamic spirituality and government replacing the previous dictatorship. Instead, Foucault attempted to examine what he considered an interesting moment in this "political spirituality."

[123] Michel Foucault, "Table ronde du 20 mai 1978" [1980], *Dits et Écrits IV:* 30/"The Impossible Prison" [1980], in *Foucault Live,* 275-86.

[124] Michel Foucault, "Inutile de se soulever?" [1979], in *Dits et Écrits III,* 552–553/Michel Foucault, "Is it useless to revolt?" [1979], in *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution. Gender and the Seductions of Islamism*, ed. Janet Afary and Kevin B. Anderson (2005), 265-66.

will no longer obey,' and are willing to risk their lives in the face of a power that they believe to be unjust" "seems" to be "irreducible."[125] The moment of the uprising or revolt fascinates Foucault since it seems to be a part of history that is eradicable in the sense that no power, even the most totalitarian, has been "capable of rendering it absolutely impossible," and even "Warsaw will always have its ghetto in revolt and its sewers populated with insurgents."[126] Equally eradicable is the sense that it can never be fully explained why people would prefer "the risk of death over the certainty of having to obey."[127] Finally, it is eradicable and fundamental in the sense that it constitutes the condition for having a history at all. If there were no moments of indignation or revolt and existing power had universal domination, history would come to a grinding halt. The moment of revolt constitutes the precondition for history moving on, just like it ensures the continuation and development of sociality.

In Foucault's examination of the revolt, ethical differentiation and the irruption of truth in the form of an other life and an other world consequently acquires a very prominent status. Were it not for such acts of uprising, it would be difficult to imagine historical development and the dynamic exercise of power at all. Forming a condition of possibility for the appearance of history, ethical defiance and the irruption of a different truth give rise to history and affects how history happens. They seriously affect the mode of being of history, or historicity.

The continuous re-enchantment that aggravation and revolt introduce into history means that history does not take on the character of a continuous developmental process where the succeeding events built on the preceding; rather, history takes the form of an ongoing change characterized by ruptures and upturns that result in previous states imploding so as to be recreated in new ways. Nonetheless, the revolt is not given the status of a 'counter-power' to be located beyond and transcending power relations. Rather, it is understood as an internal rupture in history and established power. Since such a rupture prevents established power and history from becoming absolute and closing in on themselves, it challenges and sets both into movement. In this sense, established power is challenged to exert more power to conserve and continue itself.[128]

Likewise, Foucault's fascination throughout his career with various "counter-movements,"' be they religious Christian movements from the eleventh to the seventeenth century, contemporary Islamic movements or contemporary protests against incarceration or psychiatric hospitalization, is not largely due to their oppositional character, or even their eventual claims to be radically different and their ensuing pre-occupation with resistance. What fascinates Foucault in these movements of non-compliance is not so much their re-active character, but rather an element of revolt. As "revolts of conduct (*revoltes des conduites*)" these movements intrigue Foucault as they call for further examination in the realm of thought to remain attentive to where they may lead.

In the same vein, Foucault mentions that his thought was inspired by various liberating movements originating in the 1960s and 1970s in so far as these movements developed and experimented with new forms of social interaction, new kinds of relationship between sexes and new aesthetic norms. Still, Foucault's aim was not to

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[125] Ibid. 791-92/263.
[126] Ibid. 791/263.
[127] Ibid.
[128] In Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power" [1982], in Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics, Second Edition* (1983), he therefore points out how the exertion of power requires the "intransigence of freedom" (222).

adhere to these communities, nor to subscribe to specific norms, but rather to examine where these experiments might lead.[129]

PART IV

FOUCAULT'S CRITICAL EXCHANGE WITH PHILOSOPHICAL PRACTICE

From the beginning of to the end of his work, Foucault can thus be seen to have a longstanding exchange with philosophy conceived as a work of thought upon itself and a continuous self-modificatory practice in the medium of thought in its various historical incarnations. In and through this exchange, Foucault can concomitantly be said to give an outline of a not explicitly written genealogy of this kind of philosophy.[130]

1. The establishment of an insubmissiveness permitting to state the truth and to remain attentive to the possibility of living another life in this life

When examining the development of philosophy in Antiquity, Foucault discerns how the establishment of a new privileged relationship to truth in the form of a dramatic and risky truth-telling, in such a manner that it may serve to guide and organize political life as well as the lives of those in charge of political life, becomes a defining characteristic of philosophy and an unremitting, existentially determining, ambition and challenge for the philosopher.

To live up to this requirement, philosophy needs to go beyond the mere pursuit and acquisition of adequate knowledge. To be able to speak the truth in the face of power, philosophy must elaborate an ethos. It must become a sustained practical ascetic work on oneself, a life devoted to an ongoing self-transgressive self-modification, permitting one to ethically differentiate oneself from one's surroundings and develop oneself independently in such a way that one is capable of leading a true life, a life devoted to the manifestation of truth.

By means of this initial declaration of independence, proclaimed in the form of an ethical differentiation, philosophical practice becomes an enduring ordeal that one undergoes at the hands of thought, an exercise of oneself in the activity of thought, that modifies one's manner of being, perceiving and thinking in unpredictable ways as one enters the game of truth which one does not control.[131] In and through its devotion to becoming a manifestation of a binding truth that never becomes a personal possession, philosophical practice can develop a true life that makes room for another world within the given world.

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[129] Michel Foucault, *Sécurité, territoire, population. Cours au Collège de France. 1977-1978* (2004), 195-219/Michel Foucault, *Security, Security, Territory, Population. Lectures at The Collège De France, 1977-78* (2008), 191-226.

[130] See Edward McGushin, *Foucault's Askesis. An Introduction to the Philosophical Life* (2007), a most interesting and recommendable monograph, related to our study here, which aims to "present Foucault's unwritten genealogy of philosophy" (xxiii).

[131] For Foucault an overriding theme of philosophy is the question and the task, "How to have access to truth" (*Herméneutique du sujet*, 18/*Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 20). Concomitantly, however, he repeatedly makes sure to stress the irreducibility and the alterity of truth. In the manuscript that ends his very last lecture at the Collège de France, Foucault makes sure to stress "in conclusion" that: "there is no establishment of the truth without an essential position of otherness (altérité); the truth is never the same; there can be truth only in the form of the other world and the other life (l'autre monde et de la vie autre)" (*Courage de la vérité*, 311/*Courage of Truth*, 340. Equally, the irreducibility and alterity of truth is a recurrent theme of Foucault's first series of lectures at the Collège de France (see Raffnsøe et al., *Michel Foucault*, 22-23, 29-33.

With its initial declaration of independence, all the same, philosophical practice and existence does not sever all ties to political life to become an end in itself. In contradistinction to the sage who voluntarily retires, adopts a life in internal or external exile and keeps quiet,[132] the philosopher has an essential duty and obligation to speak and manifest the truth as plainly as possible in the given context to help his interlocutors realize who they are.

As a consequence, philosophical practice as self-modification in the medium of thought does not declare itself satisfied with making way for an other world in this world. When fashioning his own existence to lead the true life, the philosopher is intent upon constituting an ethos that permits making an other world unmistakably present in this world, even to the extent that it might prove detrimental to his own existence.

Consequently, the true philosophical life is the life that allows its ethos to be easily recognizable but precisely so in its privileged, enduring and stormy, critical relationship to political life.[133] Avoiding complacency and flattery, philosophical self-transgressive practice adopts and develops a transversal, restive and indocile approach to this world that questions and challenges it, committing it to live up to what can rightfully be expected of it and become attentive to the possibility of living another life in this life.

2. The establishment of a transversal, indocile and non-compliant attitude to the present attentive to the virtual and the potential

When examining the development of philosophy in modern times, Foucault discerns how important strands re-assume and further develop this transversal, restive and indocile approach to question established political life and received knowledge on given modern conditions. The parrēsiastic ambition of philosophy is re-assumed and reasserted in Kant's contribution to the public, non-scholastic discussion of the philosophical heritage of Enlightenment. According to Kant, the essential heritage of Enlightenment that philosophy can claim and preserve is not adherence to a specific well-established corpus of knowledge. Rather, what can be assumed is a transversal and archer-like relation to the present and to received knowledge, an ethos of insubmissiveness that implies that one must leave the state of self-imposed minority in which one forgets oneself to examine, question and problematize established political life and power relations, unshakeable beliefs and knowledge over and over again.

As becomes evident in Kant's discussion of a particularly accentuated expression of Enlightenment's urge to realize true and militant, insubmissive forms of lives, the French Revolution, what comes to the fore as crucial in philosophy's parrēsiastic transversal, restive and indocile examination of present events is not so much what actually transpired, but rather the virtuality present in the events. What is to be retained by the philosophically inclined spectator as the decisive event in the revolution that can no longer be obliterated is the inner potential of the event: the predispositions and the predilections for a more authentic, truer life that generated widespread enthusiasm as they were revealed, despite the fact that this life was never fully and permanently realized.

Equally, when Foucault takes interest in and investigates a series of revolts that predominantly occur at the end of the Middle Ages and in early Modernity, as well as in his own times in Iran and Western Europe, what he finds particularly noteworthy for

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[132] *Courage de la vérité*, 7-20, 226-228/*Courage of Truth*, 16-19, 245-247.
[133] Ibid. 206/223.

the purpose of his own philosophical investigation is not so much the final outcome or the results of these uprisings, but rather the attitude he found in people as they revolted and in the virtuality inherent in this attitude. He takes particular interest in an ethos of insubmission and a political spirituality of paramount importance in which one seeks not only to shape and refract the existing political space but also to modulate and transform one's personal existence to pave the way for the arrival of an other world and an other life within the existing world. Furthermore, he strives to articulate how the advance of this restive attitude and its virtuality for the philosophically informed observer attain paramount importance for the development of history and its actuality. What comes to the fore in Foucault's philosophical investigation of these social movements is thus the experiment inherent in the experimentation with new forms of existence and social interaction.

3. A historicity of virtuality perceived by parrēsiastic philosophy

In continuance with his examination of the parrēsiastic philosophical tradition in which restive intervention and self-modification go hand in hand, Foucault's own philosophical investigation can equally be regarded as an original contribution to this tradition.

While staying true to the concluding remarks of his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France in 1970 that philosophy must remain "present, uncertain, mobile all along its line of contact with non-philosophy, yet only existing by means of it," Foucault equally takes pain to stress that if it were still to have a reason and a justification for its existence, philosophy needed "to begin from a foundation that is at once arbitrary and absolute" and wonder if philosophy is "already there secretly present in what is not itself, starting to formulate itself half-aloud in the murmur of things."[134] Starting from within political and social life, Foucault's philosophical practice becomes a meditation on what transpires here.

Yet, when trying to reveal "the sense, meaning and direction that non-philosophy has for us,"[135] Foucault's transversal, restive and indocile philosophy aims not primarily to determine what has actually happened in the examined or to make graphic the normativity that guides it or that it counterfactually asserts. Instead, his parrēsiastic philosophy investigates the examined as a decisive moment in the history of revolt, in the history conceived as a history of care for oneself. This is a history where people exit from their state of minority to take care of and guide themselves as they devote their lives to experiencing a truth that cannot be grasped in its entirety[136] and that one can only gain access to at the cost of and through a self-conversion and self-modification of the mode of conducting oneself that can be undertaken individually, but is often carried out in modes of living together that take the form of an "intensification of social relations."[137]

As people in the history perceived by parrēsiastic philosophy involve themselves in independently caring for themselves and in mustering the courage to unveil and manifest the truth, not infrequently so diligently that they risk their lives, they leave established normativity behind and begin developing new yardsticks that they project

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[134] Foucault, *Ordre du discours*, 77-78/"Discourse on language," 236; trans. modified.
[135] Ibid. 78/236; trans. modified.
[136] *Herméneutique du sujet*, 412/*Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 431.
[137] Michel Foucault, *Le souci de soi. Historie de la sexualité 3* (1984), 69/Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self. History of Sexuality 3* [1984] (1990), 53.

and adhere to. However, what Foucault's transversal meditative practice sets off when he examines this history of decisive moments is not what was realized or forestalled in these moments, but rather another very real plane of existence or aspect of the world, the virtual, as it makes itself felt, acts in and through this history of revolt and its occurrences. Making itself felt as a force that modifies what occurs, the virtual constitutes the genetic condition of real experience.[138] What Foucault's meditative practice brings to the front is not so much the direction in which this insubmissive force detectable in past or present events seem to have taken the participant or the investigator, but rather how this virtuality makes another world or a better life become perspicuously perceivable, even if they were never realized.

4. Standing vigil for the day to come

In this sense, Foucault's philosophy is not an evening meditation that probes an existing, dwindling landscape in order to determine where one may already seem to have arrived. Rather, it is a meditation before the day that not only remains attentive to a day that is still arriving, but aims to stay attuned to and articulate that which is still not yet present in the arriving day and which may never become real. Re-opening the virtuality in the events, Foucault's transversal philosophical practice can be said to have a radical anticipatory character. It takes the form of a meditation in advance on the virtuality shaping the events, before the fact and before it is revealed where they are likely to lead, in order to move ahead of time to probe and reconnoite where they might lead or might possibly have led in terms of an other life. In this manner, Foucault's philosophical practice aims to stay vigil for the day to come.

Accordingly, Foucault also characterizes his "historical-critical work upon ourselves" as expressing "an experimental attitude," since it,

> must on the one hand open up a realm of historical inquiry and, on the other, put itself to the test of reality, of contemporary reality, both to grasp the points where change is possible and desirable, and to determine the precise form this change should take.[139]

Thus drawing as close as possible to that which precedes it to stir its certainty and modulate its virtuality, philosophy refracts and redirects it to such an extent that it begins to point in new directions and new lines of flight are established.[140] Nevertheless, since these lines of flight are refractions of the virtuality of the events examined, they are not to be conceived as routes that permit escaping it as they lead elsewhere. Rather, they

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[138] Cf. Sverre Raffnsøe, "Beyond rule; trust and power as capacities," *Journal of Political Power* 6:2 (2013), 249-250.

[139] "Qu'est-ce que les Lumières?" (1), 74/"What Is Enlightenment?" 46.

[140] Foucault and Agamben can thus be said to share not only an interest in virtuality, but also an interest in or in what can be done. See Giorgio Agamben, "On Potentiality" [1986], "Absolute Immanence" [1996] and "Bartleby, or On Contingency" [1993], in *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, ed. Daniel Heller-Roazen (1999), 177-184, 220-239, 243-271). Nevertheless, Agamben takes a particular interest in the "cardinal secret" that "all potential to be or to do something is always also potential not to be or not to do" and thus foregrounds complete or perfect potentiality, or the potentiality not to (ibid., 245). By contrast, Foucault is particularly concerned with exploring concrete or specific potentiality, as he experiments with and probes what can be done in specific settings characterized by a specific virtuality. In continuance with his interpretation of the Enlightenment, Foucault thus strives to examine "the present field of possible experiences" as "patient labor giving form to our impatience for liberty" ("Qu'est-ce que Les Lumières?" (2), 686/"Kant on Enlightenment," 119). Concerning the relationship between Foucault and Agamben's conception of potentiality, see also Arne de Boever, "The Allegory of the Cage: Foucault, Agamben and the Enlightenment," *Foucault Studies* 10 (2010), 7-22.

are refractions that permit attaining the marginal region that borders on its limits.[141] In that sense, Foucault's transversal philosophical practice remains a repetitive preface to transgression.

5. Thinking and writing as exercises of self-conversion devoted to truth-telling and affirmative critique

Thus, by taking the insubmissiveness virtually present in non-philosophy as its starting point to begin formulating half-aloud a philosophy already secretly existing here, Foucault's philosophical meditation can itself become a sustained self-modification in the medium of thought. From beginning to end, Foucault's philosophical course of thought can be regarded as an ongoing conversion in which he simultaneously seeks to know himself better and to take care of himself, not in isolation but as affected by a larger social setting. Equally, his writing is a sustained modifying ordeal or test of himself in which he works hard to take care of himself by continually getting free of himself and continually re-affirming himself as he strays ahead of himself in the medium of thought.[142] In and through this continual averse self-modification in the medium of thought and writing, philosophical meditation elaborates an ethos, a practical work upon itself, that permits it to assert itself as a parrēsiastic activity: to speak truth in the face of established knowledge and power, and to vouch for its often provocative veridiction in a manner that contributes to their necessary re-organization.

It is in accordance with this overall approach that Foucault also stresses how philosophy as a parrēsiastic activity should try to dispense with a commonplace negative judgmental form of critique as it continues to "dream about" and struggles to measure up to a different, more affirmative, kind of critique. It is,

> a kind of criticism that would try not to judge but to bring an œuvre, a book, a sentence, an idea to life [faire exister une œuvre, un livre, une phrase]; it would light fires, watch the grass grow, listen to the wind, and catch the sea foam in the breeze and scatter it. It would multiply not judgments but signs of existence; it would summon them, drag them from their sleep. […] Criticism that hands down sentences sends me to sleep; I'd like a criticism of scintillating leaps of the imagination.[143]

As Foucault underlines, this kind of critique is on closer inspection "a non-positive affirmation" insofar as critical philosophy in this sense does not confirm or remain "bound by" any peculiar content in the affirmed, but instead affirms the virtuality in the

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[141] Accordingly, Foucault's remitting involvement in the present political field can be understood as parrēsiastic attempts to examine, test and explore the potentiality in actual virtuality. This goes not only for his organization of a press conference in Madrid in 1975 to protest against death sentences given to 11 people by the Franco regime in a special trial that had no defence. It is equally the case when he participates in a symbolic barricade of *Prison de la Santé* in 1977 to prevent the administrative extradition of *Rote Armee Fraktion* defendant Claus Croissant for prosecution in Germany. Moreover, Foucault attempts to state the truth and explore further possibilities for action when he protests the Polish communist government's repression of *Solidarnosc* in 1977 and subsequently drives a convoy of medicine and writings to Poland in 1982. For further examples of Foucault's parrēsiastic interventions, see Raffnsøe et al., *Michel Foucault*, 82-83.

[142] Cf. also the "very interesting" "aporia", or impassable and insolvable opposition, in Foucault between the work to care of oneself and the endeavor to get free of oneself, or the ongoing tension arising from a care of the self that should conclude in a getting rid of oneself highlighted in Giorgio Agamben, "Une biopolitique mineure. Entretien avec Giorgio Agamben," *Vacarme* 10 (January 1999), 4.

[143] Michel Foucault, "Le philosophe masqué" [1980], in *Dits et Écrits IV*, 106/Michel Foucault, "The Masked Philosopher" [1980] in *Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth, The Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Vol. 1*, ed. Paul Rabinow (1997), 328.

event as it experiments with reinforcing and refracting it. Philosophy is affirmative since it "affirms limited being" by affirming "the limitlessness into which it leaps as it opens this zone to existence the first time."[144] Critique hereby becomes inherent and affirmative, insofar as it takes an outset in a rupture in that which is examined in order to confirm and experiment with deflecting this movement to explore potentiality. By actively pursuing this movement on its way and examining its further possible directions, critique affirms and transcends this movement from within. Through its confirmation of an ongoing historical movement, critique is able to seek out its boundary – not only boundaries that condition it, but also boundaries that it points toward. All the while Foucault characterizes critique as a certain kind of critical attitude, he can also determine this virtue or ethos as a "limit attitude" and "a work on our limits." As one leaves behind the established grounds of validity, one begins to create and commit to new normative guidelines. Foucault can therefore also argue that the critical attitude should "move beyond the outside-inside alternative" by beginning to perceive the limits of that which is well known and familiar as a threshold or transition to something new.[145]

6. Cartesian evidence and Foucauldian meditation

Though important, the philosophical tradition depicted here, accentuating the intimate link between the access to truth and the self-transformation necessary to access truth, nevertheless remains one specific philosophical branch among others. According to Foucault, it is even an approach to philosophy and knowledge that has increasingly been superseded by other strands since early modernity.

While recognizing and commemorating the meditative character of Descartes' *Meditations Metaphysiques,* Foucault nevertheless understands Descartes' meditation as "an event in thought" and "as a decisive moment that is still of major significance as a decisive turning point in the history" resulting in the oblivion of the parrēsiastic tradition.[146] As Foucault elaborates in his 1982 lectures, "the Cartesian moment" places "self-evidence [évidence]" at the origin of and the end of the philosophical approach and knowledge, that is, "self-evidence as it appears... as it is actually given to consciousness without any possible doubt."[147] By doing so, the Cartesian line of action or procedure establishes a certain relationship of the self to the self and to knowledge as decisive not only for acquiring knowledge and certainty, but also for establishing an authentic relationship to oneself.[148]

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[144] Foucault, "Préface à la transgression," 242/"Preface to Transgression," 41; trans. modified.
[145] "Qu'est-ce que les Lumières?" (1), 574, 578, 574/"What Is Enlightenment?" 46, 50, 46.
[146] *Herméneutique du sujet,* 11/*Hermeneutics of the Subject,* 9.
[147] Ibid. 16/14.
[148] In his first course of lectures at the Collège de France, Foucault develops how Aristotle in the first lines of his *Metaphysics* carries out an operation concerning "philosophical discourse itself" "as it has existed in our civilization" (*Leçons sur la volonté de savoir,* 7/*Lectures on the will to know,* 5). In the opening passage of his *Metaphysics,* Aristotle contends that "all men by nature desire to know" and states that "an indication of this" is "the delight we take in our senses; for even apart from their usefulness, they are loved for themselves and above all others the sense of sight" (*Metaphysics,* I, 980a 22). Thus inscribing knowledge in a primordial will to know inherent in human nature, philosophy in Aristotle is able to lay the foundations for itself while it conceives knowledge as an end or a value in itself. Philosophy and knowledge arise from and are funded in a certain, singular and higher serene, form of desire, viz. curiosity, the desire to know for the sake of knowing; and as desire to know, human curiosity is in turn inscribed within and belongs specifically to knowledge and has the cognition of its object as its ultimate goal. As a consequence of and through this turn, knowledge acquires the status of an absolute value and an end in itself; the subject of desire and the subject of knowledge become one and the same; the desire to know is lodged within

With the Cartesian moment, the subject's relationship to itself and to the world essentially becomes theoretical. One is able to establish an adequate relationship to oneself and relate authentically to oneself only to the extent that one knows oneself; and one is only able to relate adequately to the world to the extent that one knows oneself and possesses adequate knowledge of the world. The 'know yourself'," as developed in a privileged manner in philosophical thought, here becomes "a fundamental means of access to truth" according to Foucault, since Descartes puts,

> the self-evidence of the subject's own existence at the very source of access to being, this knowledge of oneself (no longer in the form of the test of self-evidence, but in the form of the impossibility of doubting my existence as subject).[149]

Not only is this turn significant for "our modern mode of being subjects" for which the imperative to know becomes a fundamental way of relating to oneself, but it is concomitantly the event that lays the groundwork for and forms the somewhat invisible background for modern scientific thought and for modern philosophical thought as it is embodied in contemporary academic institutions.

In prolongation of the Cartesian moment, philosophy becomes a primarily intellectual activity aiming for the discovery of truth in the form of propositional and systematic knowledge. According to this idea of "a philosophical practice indexed to the scientific model" in the modern sense of the word,[150]

> knowledge will simply open out onto the indefinite dimension of progress, the end of which is unknown and the advantage of which will only ever be realized in the course of history by the institutional accumulation of bodies of knowledge, or the psychological or social benefits to be had from discovered truth after having taken such pains to do so.[151]

After the philosophical conversion to truth, any piece of information or knowledge may be regarded as factual evidence by shedding light on and being apprehended by the cognizing subject; but knowledge and the process of cognition cannot be perceived as inextricably connected with the subject's transfiguration or qualitative change. For Foucault,

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knowledge; and knowledge becomes a "cause of itself and the desire directed towards it" (*Leçons sur la volonté de savoir*, 19/*Lectures on the will to know,* 18). Even though the Peripatetic is, toward the beginning of the modern age, designated as "*the* philosopher" by Thomas Aquinas and according to Foucault can be considered the early "founder of philosophy in the modern sense of the term," Foucault makes sure to stress that Aristotle should not be regarded as "the pinnacle of Antiquity, but its exception" (*Herméneutique du sujet*, 19/*Hermeneutics of the Subject,* 17). — According to Foucault, yet another important moment in the disconnection of the access to truth and the transformation of the cognizing subject is to be sought in the Medieval and Renaissance tradition of theology, reaching a pinnacle in Saint Thomas. Establishing itself as it re-assumes Aristotelian modes of thought, scholastic theology is able to maintain a strict correspondence between a cognizing god and believers able to apprehend him unmediatedly, on the condition that they believed. Due to this divide, a marked conflict between "philosophical thought and the demands of spirituality" can be seen to traverse Christianity from the end of the fifth to the seventeenth century (cf. ibid., 28/26). Insofar as it prolongs this tradition, the modern conception of philosophy, knowledge and science can be characterized as onto-theological.

[149] Ibid. 16/14; trans. modified.
[150] *Courage de la vérité*, 217/*Courage of Truth,* 236-37.
[151] *Herméneutique du sujet,* 20/*Hermeneutics of the Subject,* 19.

the modern age of the relations between the subject and truth begins when it is postulated that, such as he is, the subject is capable of truth, but that, such as it is, the truth cannot save the subject.[152]

Foucault considers the conversion toward and search for general knowledge as an end and a value in itself for the human subject remaining relative unaffected by its cognition as a characteristic strand in modern Western thought and philosophy from Descartes and Leibniz to Husserlian phenomenology and analytic philosophy.[153]

With the described transition, the teacher, the academic, the modern professor and the technician have superseded the parrhēsiast as the characters who impersonate a privileged ability to access and state the truth. Concomitantly, truth become transmissible in the form of *mathemata,* or a set of docile knowledge that can be passed on, represented and professed unaltered from the master to the disciple, even as it can be recognized and kept in mind without presuming any specific alteration of the knower, until it may eventually disappear.[154] Knowledge is essentially perceived as an expertise, a sort of savoir-faire or knowledge how to that can be acquired and made use of independently of one's personal habitus.[155] In modernity, this turn is not only detectable in and determines the conception and the shape of philosophy. It equally exerts a determining influence on the conception of knowledge and the institutionalization of knowledge in general.

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[152] Ibid.

[153] "With the all too easy clarity of hindsight – of what Americans call the 'Monday-morning quarterback'" Foucault, in a late interview, indicates that there were "two possible paths that led beyond this philosophy of subject," but which he did not take: "The first of these was the theory of objective knowledge as an analysis of systems of meaning, as semiology. This was the path of logical positivism. The second was that of a certain school of linguistics, psychoanalysis, and anthropology – all grouped under the rubric of structuralism. These were not the directions I took. Let me announce once and for all that I am not a structuralist, and I confess, with the appropriate chagrin, that I am not an analytic philosopher. Nobody is perfect. But I have tried to explore another direction. I have tried to get out from the philosophy of the subject, through a genealogy of the modern subject as a historical and cultural reality – which means as something that can eventually change" ("Sexualité et solitude," [1981], in *Dits et Écrits* IV, 170/"Sexuality and Solitude" [1981], in *Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth*, 176–177).

[154] *Gouvernement de soi et des autres*, 228-229/*Government of the Self and Others*, 247-248. Foucault indicates how this turn and its implications are detectable in the figure of Faust. From the sixteenth century, when the knowledge of intellectual knowledge begins "to advance its absolute rights over the knowledge of spirituality, Faust was the figure who, until the end of the eighteenth century, represented the powers, enchantments, and dangers of the knowledge of spirituality." In this manner, Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* is described as "a condemned hero because he was the hero of an accursed and forbidden knowledge." Nevertheless, as Foucault notes, Lessing is able to save Faust because, according to Lessing, Faust is able to convert "the spiritual knowledge he represents" "into belief [in the] progress of humanity. The spirituality of knowledge becomes faith and belief in a continuous progress of humanity. And humanity will be the beneficiary of everything that was demanded of spiritual knowledge, [that is to say] the transfiguration of the subject himself. Consequently, Lessing's Faust is saved. He is saved because he succeeded in converting the figure of the knowledge of spirituality into the knowledge of intellectual knowledge, as he resorted to this belief [in] progress" (*Herméneutique du sujet*, 296/*Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 309-310; translation modified). If one follows up this idea, it might seem that an important precondition for the salvation or deliverance of the philosopher or the scientist of today is the ability to conclude the counter-Faustian pact and make the wager suggested by Lessing. To be redeemed or delivered, he or she who knows must be able to convert and transform the figure of the knowledge of spirituality into intellectual knowledge. He or she must be able to convert devotion to the transfiguration of the subject into a belief in the progress of humanity and to transform the practice of the transfiguration of the subject into a systematic contribution to the improvement of humanity, its skills and knowledge.

[155] *Courage de la vérité*, 23-25/*Courage of Truth*, 28-30.

In a cultural and scientific landscape characterized by such salient features, Foucault's philosophical practice stands out as an essentially different approach to philosophy and knowledge. The uniqueness of his coat-trailing parrēsiastic approach to philosophy and truth-telling may account for the quite strongly aggressive response his thought often prompts within the present setting. Nevertheless, the preoccupation with an updated form of existential and social meditative self-modification is equally what seems to justify the widespread contemporary appeal that Foucault's philosophical practice elicits.

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