



# To Become Again What We Never Were: Foucault and the Politics of Transformation

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To Become Again What We Never Were: Foucault and the Politics of Transformation

A dissertation presented

by

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to

The Committee on the Study of Religion

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

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Abstract

This dissertation began with two questions. First, how does Michel Foucault understand ethical subject formation as demonstrated in his late work? Second, does the failure of environmental activism in the United States to achieve radical change in individuals' perspectives and practices derive from a faulty understanding of the human subject? I address these questions in two stages. In the body of the dissertation--through close reading in French of the courses at the Collège de France from 1981-1984 and Foucault's late interviews, essays, and occasional lectures--I engage in exegesis of some of the basic terms of his late work on ethics, including conversion, *askēsis*, *parrhēsia*, and the self. The key conclusions that I draw from this work are five-fold: (1) the self is a process rather than a substance, and ethical transformation requires questioning the assumptions and values of one's society and conversion to a different regime of truth; (2) conversion occurs through daily training of the mind and body through practice, what Foucault calls "the subjectivation of true discourse," and is a life-long task; (3) this training must be supported both by intimate relationships of friendship and guidance and larger communities of practice; (4) social transformation occurs through personal transformation in the course of demonstrating the truth to others through words and actions, a practice Foucault terms *parrhēsia*; (5) Foucault imagines freedom both as the

radical contingency of reality and the ability of individuals to think and be otherwise. Freedom is not a possession or state, but a practice.

In the introduction, I explore the importance of troubling the subject of environmental philosophy and activism, arguing that one key reason that environmental activism is ineffective is the lack of critical reflection on theories of subjectivity. In the conclusion, I bring Foucault into conversation with Bill McKibben, one of the most prominent environmental activists in the United States. Thinking with these two men, I suggest some ways in which a Foucauldian understanding of ethical subject formation might promote better strategies for individual change.

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## Abbreviations for Foucauldian Works

AMV	"De l'amitié comme mode de vie," in <i>Dits et écrits</i> (Interview 1981)
AGE	"À propos de la généalogie de l'éthique: un aperçu du travail en cours," in <i>Dits et écrits</i> (Interview Revised for Publication in French 1984)
CMF	"Conversation avec Michel Foucault," in <i>Dits et écrits</i> (Interview 1971)
CA	"Choix sexuel, acte sexuel," in <i>Dits et écrits</i> (Interview 1982)
CT	<i>The Courage of the Truth: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1983-84</i>
ES	"L'écriture de soi," in <i>Dits et écrits</i> (Essay 1983)
E	"Entretien avec Michel Foucault," in <i>Dits et écrits</i> (Interview 1980)
ESP	"Espace, savoir et pouvoir," in <i>Dits et écrits</i> (Interview 1982)
EE	"Une esthétique de l'existence" in <i>Dits et écrits</i> (Interview 1984)
ESS	"L'éthique du souci de soi comme pratique de la liberté," in <i>Dits et écrits</i> (Interview 1984)
F	"Foucault" in <i>Dits et Écrits</i> (Encyclopedia Entry 1984)
FE	"Foucault étudie la raison d'état," in <i>Dits et écrits</i> (Interview 1980)
GE	"On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress," in <i>Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth</i> (Interview 1983)
GSA	<i>Le Gouvernement de soi et des Autres: Cours au Collège de France, 1982-83</i>
GSO	<i>Government of the Self and Others: Lectures at the Collège de France 1982-83</i>
HDS	"L'herméneutique du sujet," in <i>Dits et écrits</i> (Course Summary 1982)
HS	<i>L'herméneutique du sujet: Cours au Collège de France, 1981-82</i>
HOS	<i>The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981-82</i>

VS	<i>L'histoire de la sexualité I: Volonté de Savoir</i>
UP	<i>L'histoire de la sexualité II: L'usage des plaisirs</i> (1984)
SS	<i>L'histoire de la sexualité III: Le souci de soi</i> (1984)
HOS1	<i>The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction</i> (Published in English 1978)
HOS2	<i>The History of Sexuality, Volume 2: The Use of Pleasure</i> (Published in English 1985)
HOS3	<i>The History of Sexuality, Volume 3: The Care of the Self</i> (Published in English 1986)
I	"Interview de Michel Foucault," in <i>Dits et écrits</i> (Interview 1981)
MS	"The Minimalist Self," in <i>Politics, Philosophy, Culture</i> (Interview 1983)
CPF	"Mon corps, ce papier, ce feu," in <i>Dits et écrits</i> (Essay 1972)
NGH	"Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" in <i>Foucault Reader</i> (Essay 1971)
OS	"<<Omnes et singulatim>>: vers une critique de la raison politique," in <i>Dits et écrits</i> (Essay 1981)
PE	"Politique et éthique: une interview," in <i>Dits et écrits</i> (Interview 1983)
PM	"Le philosophe masqué," in <i>Dits et écrits</i> (Interview 1980)
PPP	"Polémique, politique et problématisations," in <i>Dits et écrits</i> (Essay 1984)
PTI	"The Political Technology of Individuals," in <i>Technologies of the Self</i> (Lecture 1984)
PR	"Préface à l' <i>Histoire de la sexualité</i> ," in <i>Dits et écrits</i> (Essay 1984)
QL	"Qu'est-ce que les Lumières," in <i>Dits et écrits</i> (Essay 1984)
RM	"Le retour de la morale," in <i>Dits et écrits</i> (Interview 1984)

SPPI	"Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity," in <i>Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth</i> (Interview 1982)
SAS	"Sexuality and Solitude," in <i>Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth</i> (Essay 1981)
SV	"Le souci de la vérité," in <i>Dits et écrits</i> (Interview 1984)
SPS	"Structuralisme et poststructuralisme," in <i>Dits et écrits</i> (Interview 1983)
SH	"Le style de l'histoire," in <i>Dits et écrits</i> (Interview 1984)
SP	"The Subject and Power," <i>Critical Inquiry</i> , vol 8, no 4 (Summer 1982)
SEV	"Subjectivité et vérité," in <i>Dits et écrits</i> (Course Summary 1981)
TPS	"Truth, Power, Self: An Interview with Michel Foucault, October 25, 1982," in <i>Technologies of the Self</i>
TS	"Technologies of the Self," in <i>Technologies of the Self</i> (Lecture 1982)
TSPS	"Le triomphe social du plaisir sexuel: une conversation avec Michel Foucault," in <i>Dits et Écrits</i> (Interview 1982)
UPTS	"Usage des plaisirs et techniques de soi," in <i>Dits et écrits</i> (Essay 1983)
VES	"La vie: l'expérience et la science," in <i>Dits et écrits</i> (Essay 1984)
WC	"What Is Critique?" in <i>The Politics of Truth</i> (Lecture 1978)

## Introduction

On a crisp but sunny day in September, I walked towards the Upper West Side of New York City to join the People's Climate March. Navigating through the police barricades to the march's route,<sup>1</sup> I passed through many different groups assembling in the staging area. At one point I found myself in the midst of an ecumenical gathering of religious groups: orthodox Jews carrying banners emblazoned with Talmudic sayings, Christians who had constructed a float in the shape of an ark--complete with children dressed as pairs of animals--, and Tibetan Buddhist nuns and monks moving like rays of golden sun through the crowd. Ultimately, I found myself marching with the unions--specifically the United Automobile Workers and the Amalgamated Transit Union; appropriate, I thought, to be walking with individuals whose livelihoods depend on transportation options in a country fixated on cars. We had marched for ten or fifteen minutes when I stepped to the side to get a long view of all the people assembled for this moment of collective action. Several groups back, I saw large white birds flying over the crowd. They approached, and I realized that they were kites representing species of birds endangered by global warming. As I gazed up at their forms moving through the blue sky, they looked like doves seeking a safe place to land.

My experience at the People's Climate March was one of unity in diversity. It was astonishing to see so many people from all over the country gather to tell their stories

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<sup>1</sup> The police presence seemed excessive for what was ultimately a peaceful march involving many families with small children and older people, some of them in wheel chairs.

about what climate change means for their presents and their futures. However, media coverage of the event asked an extremely pertinent question of this largest climate march in history: "So what?" Most sources agreed that it was the biggest environmental call to arms in decades, but, at the same time, they were skeptical that this would mean anything significant for political action on climate change. Rebecca Leber of *The New Republic* wrote, "the failure of a major international program, the Green Climate Fund, to meet its target for funding suggests that richer countries are not willing to provide poorer ones with the help they need."<sup>2</sup> Timothy Johnson, of the blog *Media Matters for America*, noted that despite the size of the event, it was given no air time on the Sunday talk shows of major news outlets such as NBC, ABC, CBS, CNN, and Fox.<sup>3</sup> Finally, in terms of the impact of the march on leaders' resolve to make tough choices to tackle climate change, the UN Summit that the march hoped to influence resembled gatherings in the past: serious talk, but little else.

Strangely, I felt this ambiguity even during the march itself. I was surprised the day before to discover that the route had been diverted from what would have been an extremely powerful climax: hundreds of thousands of people standing outside the UN

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<sup>2</sup> Rebecca Leber, "300,000 People Just Marched About Climate Change. Will It Matter?" *The New Republic* (September 22, 2014): accessed November 5, 2014, <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/119523/300000-nyc-climate-change-march-what-it-means-summit>. One of the major sticking points in international negotiations surrounding cutting emissions is that poorer countries insist that richer countries have made the economic gains they have by burning the kinds of fuels that these countries are now being asked to give up--coal, for instance. Thus, these countries--who also tend to suffer disproportionately from climate change--insist that richer countries should subsidize their conversion to cleaner forms of energy.

<sup>3</sup> Timothy Johnson, "Sunday News Shows Ignore Historic Climate March," *Media Matters for America*, (September 21, 2014): accessed November 5, 2014, <http://mediamatters.org/blog/2014/09/21/sunday-news-shows-ignore-historic-climate-march/200839>.

speaking directly to world leaders. Instead, the march culminated in a sort of urban-industrial wasteland on 11th Avenue. Crossing the finish line did not usher one into a mass of people pulsing with energy, but rather a slow entropy. A man with a bullhorn instructed marchers to discard large signs and other items in designated bins--for what reason unclear, but it certainly felt as though we were being asked to check our protest at the door. No speeches or large-scale performances animated the march's end. Rather, some people stood around in small groups talking, others tried to peddle climate-themed gear, and everyone else just wandered off, back to their normal lives. I headed downtown to embark on what would be a grueling seven-hour bus ride back to Boston through bumper-to-bumper, climate-activist-generated gridlock: a fitting allegory for the current state of affairs.

For herein lies the problem. What is the connection between such an event and actual political or personal action? President Barack Obama said after the march, "Our citizens keep marching. We have to answer that call."<sup>4</sup> Yet, as Ben Adler of the prominent environmental news website, *grist.org*, notes, the speeches of heads of state at the UN summit mostly "consisted of familiar talking points, platitudes, and boasts about preexisting national energy policies."<sup>5</sup> Bill McKibben--the founder of the group organizing the event, *350.org*, and a man at the forefront of climate change activism in the United States--wrote in his May call to arms in *Rolling Stone Magazine* that marching is crucial but it does not always work. It did, he says, for Vietnam and segregation. It

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<sup>4</sup> Ben Adler, "Obama says he's ready to lead on climate," *Grist* (September 23, 2014): accessed November 16, 2014, <http://grist.org/climate-energy/obama-says-hes-ready-to-lead-on-climate/>.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*



failed, on the other hand, in bringing about an end to the war in Iraq. One might ask, however, was it just public demonstrations that pressured the government to end the conflict in Vietnam and promote civil rights, or was it the daily struggles of individuals against an unjust regime and a political nightmare? McKibben answers this question in part by insisting that we must "[give] our leaders permission to actually lead," which requires not only active demonstrations of collective will, but also quotidian resistance that is "scattered, local, and focused on the more mundane."<sup>6</sup> In this age of focus groups and massive donations, he argues, politicians will not take a risk on an environmental issue until their constituents demonstrate that they are willing to do the hard work in their own lives. In other words, it is the old adage retooled: "Put your life where your mouth is."

### *Unlikely Bedfellows*

This dissertation project arose from a happy confluence of reading. At the moment when I started to explore the late lectures of Michel Foucault on the conversion of the subject and care of the self, I was concomitantly reading the work of Bill McKibben on climate change. It does not take long when reading through McKibben's oeuvre<sup>7</sup> to realize that he is quite angry: angry at politicians for not taking the problem seriously for the past twenty-five years, and angry at people in general for not doing

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<sup>6</sup> Bill McKibben, "A Call to Arms: An Invitation to Demand Action on Climate Change," *Rolling Stone Magazine* (5 June 2014): 47-49.

<sup>7</sup> He wrote the first popular book on climate change, *The End of Nature*, in 1989, back when scientists still called the phenomena "global warming."

enough to combat the problem in their own political and personal lives. At one point he even writes an article entitled, "Maybe We Should Call It Something Scarier."<sup>8</sup> As the two different strands of thought interacted inside my head, it began to seem as though they were speaking to one another. Perhaps, I thought to myself, the problem with McKibben's strategy is that he is operating with a false understanding of the human subject. He believes, like many good progressives, that if a person is informed about a problem, made aware of the ways in which she adds to that problem, and then sufficiently frightened about the consequences of that problem, she will naturally change her behavior. From a Foucauldian perspective, this is simply not the case.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, an improbable conversation came into being. Beyond their physical resemblance and the fact that both are writers and educators, McKibben and Foucault have very little in common. McKibben moved from New York City to the middle of the Adirondacks with his family to pursue a life closer to nature and be able to indulge in his love of the outdoors, particularly hiking and cross-country skiing. Foucault, by contrast, notoriously hated nature. Didier Eribon, Foucault's most prominent French biographer, relates that when, during a car trip through the Italian alps, Foucault's companion, Jacqueline Verdeaux, stopped to gaze at magnificent landscapes, Foucault made a production of taking one look and walking back towards the road, saying "[m]y back is

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<sup>8</sup> Bill McKibben, "Maybe We Should Call It Something Scarier," in *The Bill McKibben Reader: Pieces from an Active Life* (New York: Henry Holt, 2008), 71-73. Indeed, his frustration at the slow pace of change in reference to a growing environmental threat is palpable, here and elsewhere.

<sup>9</sup> Increasingly neuroscience and its allied fields, such as behavioral economics, agree. For a great exploration of this subject, see George Lakoff, *The Political Mind: Why You Can't Understand 21st-Century Politics with an 18th-Century Brain* (New York: Viking, 2008).

turned to it."<sup>10</sup> Moreover, McKibben is a committed Christian and a Bible-school teacher; Foucault had a complicated, if not hostile, relationship to Christianity. Lastly, McKibben writes popular non-fiction and, though a professor at Middlebury, does not demonstrate an explicit interest in larger philosophical debates, whereas Foucault's philosophy has so permeated both European and American academic circles that many of his concepts have simply become naturalized over the past thirty years.<sup>11</sup> Unlikely bedfellows, indeed.

However, on closer inspection, the two men do have something in common: understanding their philosophies as ways of life. In his memoir *Oil and Honey: The Education of an Unlikely Activist*, McKibben explores the ways in which his concern over climate change came to impact his own behaviors, and then eventually transformed him--although not without some suffering--into a political activist. Similarly, Foucault attempted to live the life he thought and wrote,<sup>12</sup> whether that meant being embroiled in clashes with police during the student protests of the late 1960s, militating for prisoners' rights at the highest levels of government, or diving into subcultures of sex and drugs in California in search of transformative experience. Moreover, despite Foucault's active disinterest in nature, his work has been taken up productively by scholars working on environmental issues, most successfully in the field of biopolitics and governmentality.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Éric Darier, introduction to *Discourses of the Environment*, ed. Éric Darier (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999), 6.

<sup>11</sup> He has, for instance, popularized Jeremy Bentham's notion of the panopticon, as a metaphor for the ways in which modern society encourages self-policing and normalization. He has also dramatically affected the ways in which contemporary scholars think about power, as well as having introduced the concept of discourse into social thought.

<sup>12</sup> He would not actually see these things as separate. Life is writing and thinking.

Starting from this basis, I asked myself, how would McKibben's strategies change if confronted by Foucault's work on ethical subject formation? In this endeavor, I take heart from other scholars applying Foucault's thought to work on environmental issues, and in Foucault's own pronouncement that his work should be understood as a set of tools, applicable to whatever problem they can effectively address. Similarly, my project insists that while not every environmental activist must steep herself in post-modern philosophy, it might be productive to begin to trouble the concept of the subject at the heart of efforts for change.

### *Ground Work*

It became evident at the beginning of this project that the task of bringing together Foucauldian thought on the subject with McKibbean strategies of environmental activism was limited by one important factor: I required a basic understanding of what Foucault is talking about when he discusses conversion to the self, *aksēsis*, veridiction, and all the key concepts of his late work. What is the self, how is it formed, and how can it be transformed according to Foucault? Ultimately I decided to pursue a somewhat unorthodox route to finding out. In order to trace that process, allow me a slight digression into Foucault's life.

Between 1976, when Michel Foucault published the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* and 1984, when the second and third volumes appeared, his thought

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<sup>13</sup> For instance, see the edited volume by Éric Darier, entitled *Discourses of the Environment*, or the work of Arun Agrawal, for instance, *Environmentality: Technologies of Government and the Making of Subjects* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005).

underwent a significant transformation. This transformation is sometimes characterized as an ethical turn, or a reorientation toward the subject.<sup>14</sup> As detailed in the preface to the second volume of *The History of Sexuality, The Use of Pleasure*, Foucault originally envisioned the *History of Sexuality* series as a genealogy of individuals as desiring subjects. In other words, "it was a question, in short, of seeing how, in modern Western societies, 'experience' was constituted such that individuals came to recognize themselves as subjects of a 'sexuality' that opens onto very diverse domains of knowledge and that is articulated onto a system of rules and constraints" (UP 10). In order to address the issue of sexuality as experience, Foucault used volume one of the series<sup>15</sup> to debunk certain ideas about sexuality that he felt had become pervasive in his own contemporary society. Primarily these revolved around the notion that sexuality was something static, universal and natural; it had been repressed by the bourgeois culture of the Victorian period; and thus the liberation of sexuality from this repression led to freedom from power.<sup>16</sup> Volume one, like most of Foucault's work, is set in the historical period between the seventeenth century and the nineteenth century. However, he acknowledges that as he began research on the subsequent two volumes, he felt that the theory of the desiring subject, which

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<sup>14</sup> Many scholars viewed this as a break because, in previous work, Foucault had focused largely on how subjects are constituted by power rather than looking at the ways in which they form themselves through practice, as he will examine in his later work. Although these are obviously intertwined processes, it does seem a fair characterization to say that his lens changes. This is one reason that recent scholarship has attempted, more or less successfully, to integrate his earlier and later work, either explicitly, as in the case of Edward McGushin's *Foucault's Askēsis*, or more implicitly, in, for instance, Lynn Huffer's *Mad for Foucault*.

<sup>15</sup> Entitled in French, *La volonté de savoir* (The Will to Know), but subtitled in English, "An Introduction."

<sup>16</sup> See Michel Foucault, *L'histoire de la sexualité I: The volonté de savior* (Paris: L'Éditions Gallimard, 1976).

animated 20th-century France, derived, in fact, from the long history of "the Christian experience of the 'flesh'" (UP 11). Thus, "it seemed difficult to analyze the formation and development of the experience of sexuality from the eighteenth century on without doing a historical and critical study of desire and the desiring subject," going back to the beginning of Christianity (UP 11-12). In essence, the more research he conducted, the larger his field of interest became, eventually encapsulating "the forms and modalities of the relation to self by which the individual constitutes and recognizes himself as a subject" (UP 13), running from Pericles to the present.

Suddenly faced with a historical period encompassing several millennia and, at the same time, feeling the pressure of a publishing schedule, Foucault had to step back and make a decision. Recognizing that engaging in such a massive genealogy would "take [him] far from [his] original plan" (UP 13), he asked himself, should I "maintain the original project, accompanying it with a brief historical examination of the theme of desire, or reorganize the entire study around the slow formation, during Antiquity, of a hermeneutics of the self" (UP 13)? He ultimately opted for the latter, despite the personal and professional difficulties it might cause. The first rationale he gives for this decision was that this second option would be more consistent with the overall purpose of his life's work, the analysis of "the games of true and false by which being is historically constituted as experience; that is to say, as something that can and must be thought" (UP 13). In other words, like any good scholar, his research has allowed him to clarify his key questions and he feels compelled to follow where they lead.<sup>17</sup>

The second reason he gives is in many ways more interesting and more germane to my exploration of his late work. He says that the practice of philosophy--philosophy as an academic method but more importantly as a way of life<sup>18</sup>--must entail the attempt to get free of one's pre-established beliefs and assumptions by "undertak[ing] to know how and to what degree it might be possible to think otherwise" (UP 16). Foucault explains in several late interviews and essays that for him the purpose of writing a book is open avenues of thought that could not have been conceived prior to the work of thinking and writing itself. In a preface to a later edition of *The Use of Pleasure*, he argues that writing "permit[s] him to establish with himself a new and strange relationship. The pain and the pleasure of the book is that of being an experience" (PR 1403). Similarly, in the interview entitled "An Aesthetic of Existence," he notes, "[w]hen one knows in advance where one wants to arrive, there is a dimension of experience that is lacking, that which consists precisely in writing a book with the risk of not being able to overcome it" (EE 1549).<sup>19</sup> Ultimately, Foucault is motivated by curiosity, but not the malign curiosity that afflicts the cat and the dilettante. In the preface to *The Use of Pleasure*, he states,

[i]t is curiosity--the only kind of curiosity, in any case, that is worth practicing with any degree of obstinacy: not the curiosity that seeks to assimilate what it is proper for one to know, but that which enables one to detach from oneself [...]  
There are moments in life when the question of knowing if one can think

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<sup>17</sup> He notes that one of the risks is that of plunging into unfamiliar texts in languages in which he is not and expert, and thus potentially "losing [...] the thread of the questions that I wanted to ask" (UP 15). I would argue that he does not succumb to this danger, but while wading through the lectures, it is easy to see how he might have.

<sup>18</sup> In the sense given to the phrase by Foucault's colleague, Pierre Hadot. See *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault* (New York: Blackwell, 1995).

<sup>19</sup> By "it," Foucault ostensibly means the original plan of the book. In other words, when one has already decided what one will write about, there is no risk in the writing, there is no chance of thought transforming the individual during the process.

differently than one thinks and perceive differently than one sees is indispensable for continuing to look and reflect at all. (UP 15-16)

For Foucault, philosophy, as "the critical work of thought on itself" (UP16), reaches beyond itself in the very act of manifesting itself. True thought risks itself. Foucault states, concerning the original meaning of the philosophical essay, "the 'essay'--which should be understood as a trial through which, in the game of truth, one modifies oneself, and not as the simplistic appropriation of others for the purpose of communication--is the living substance of philosophy, at least if it is still what it was in other times, that is to say an 'ascesis,' an exercise of self, in thought" (UP 16). In fact, one of the motivating factors for Foucault's work is that he believes that not only has philosophy become an academic practice divorced from the everyday world, but he fears that not many philosophers are willing to use their work as an exercise to challenge their own cherished beliefs and assumptions, much less their identities or modes of being. Thus, we see, in this second explanation for the long hiatus between the three volumes of *The History of Sexuality*, two intertwined projects that inform not only Foucault's own philosophical life, but the impact that he hopes his works will have on their audience: the reconceptualization of philosophy as an critical exercise of thought on itself, and the conversion of the subject in her search for access to truth.

So what comes out of Foucault's reorientation towards the classical sources? The last two volumes of *The History of Sexuality*--the texts that are taken to embody Foucault's deliberate work on ethics because they were guided through publication by Foucault himself--make two major claims. First, he delimits two spheres of ethics that are frequently conflated: the moral code, which is a more or less well-developed body of



"values and rules of action that are proposed to individuals and to groups through the intermediary of diverse prescriptive apparatuses, such as the family, educational institutions, churches, and so forth" (UP 36), and ethics, which he conceives as "the manner in which one must constitute oneself as an ethical subject acting in reference to the prescriptive elements that make up the code" (UP 37). In the interview, "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress," he clarifies this understanding of ethics, stating that ethics represents "the kind of relationship you ought to have with yourself, *rapport à soi* [...] which determines how the individual is supposed to constitute himself as a moral subject of his own actions" (GE 263). Based on this demarcation between morals and ethics, the project of the last two volumes of *The History of Sexuality* is to demonstrate the fact that while the code of sexual behavior changed very little between the Roman period and the early Christian period, the major sea change came in the realm of ethics, the way in which individuals interacted with the code in order to constitute themselves as ethical subjects. The two books--intended to be one until shortly before publication--examine a number of different moral realms, explore the ethical framework in Antiquity, and then contrast it with the framework in early Christianity.

In order to facilitate the deep analysis of ethical paradigms, Foucault introduces the second major contribution of the two volumes, the breakdown into four different parts of the process he understands as ethics. First, Foucault identifies what he calls the substance of ethics, which refers to the primary aspect of the subject that forms the focus of ethical work (UP 37-38). This can be desires, feelings, intentions, or in the case of the ancient Greeks and Romans, *aphrodisia*, which he describes as "the force which ties

together acts, pleasures, and desire" (UP 60). Second, Foucault identifies the mode of subjection, or the ways in which people are called or encouraged to recognize their moral obligations, essentially the authorizing discourse which tells a person why they should try to cultivate a certain ethical subjectivity. This changes throughout the period under examination, but, for the Greeks, Foucault argues that the main reason is to "[seek] to give one's personal life a form that responds to criteria of brilliance, beauty, nobility, or perfection" (UP 38). The third aspect is the practices by which people constitute their subjectivity, called alternately by Foucault techniques of self, practices of the self, elaboration, ethical work, or, in its overall framework, *askēsis*. The substance of the two volumes revolves largely around elaborating these practices of the self and how they connect to the other three aspects. Finally, Foucault notes that each model of ethical formation possesses an ideal or goal, which he calls the *telos*.<sup>20</sup> In describing the *telos* he states, "[a] moral action tends toward its own accomplishment; but it also aspires, beyond this, to the establishment of a moral conduct that leads the individual not only to act always in conformity with values and rules, but also to a certain mode of being characteristic of the ethical subject" (UP 39). Foucault will show that for the ancient Greeks, the *telos* of ethical subjectivation is mastery of the self, whereas for the Romans it will change to achieving a permanent state of tranquility and self-sufficiency, which also, of course, involves self-mastery. Interestingly, Foucault reframes these four components later in *The Use of Pleasure* as ethics' "ontology, deontology, ascesis, and

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<sup>20</sup> Understood in the Greek sense of "purpose" or "goal."

teleology" (UP 52), words that would likely be more familiar to a twentieth-century philosophical audience.

So far we have been on familiar ground. Foucault took an ethical turn in his later years, and that ethical turn is represented in the major monographs that he published at the end of that period, *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self*. However, there exists another body of work during this period of time that tells a more complete story of what his last years were spent trying to unravel; these are his courses at the Collège de France and his late interviews and essays. It can certainly be argued that interviews and lectures, perhaps even journalistic pieces, should not be put in the same category as major published works because they have not received the same kind of attention to detail, to argument, and to linguistic construction that those works destined for publication have. In fact, one does get the impression that at times Foucault is talking off the cuff both in the interviews and occasionally in the lectures. However, I am going to make a case for the fact that this dissertation will focus almost exclusively on close reading, in French and English, of the lecture series given between 1981-1984,<sup>21</sup> supplemented by the late interviews and essays, and then the final two volumes of *The History of Sexuality*.

First, for Foucault, the fact that something has been rigorously edited and then published does not ensure that it will not later be subject to massive revision and reconceptualization. In some ways, this is a consequence of his desire to continually attempt to think otherwise. As he mockingly says in regards to his critics,

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<sup>21</sup> *The Hermeneutics of the Subject, The Government of the Self and Others, and The Courage of the Truth: The Government of Self and Others II*, chronologically.

You see, that's why I really work like a dog and I worked like a dog all my life. I am not interested in the academic status of what I am doing because my problem is my own transformation. That's the reason also why, when people say, 'Well, you thought this a few years ago and now you say something else,' my answer is, [Laughter] 'Well, do you think I have worked like that all those years to say the same thing and not to be changed?' (MS 14)

However, even beyond this active practice, Foucault acknowledges in hindsight the weaknesses of his earlier work. This comes out in interviews where he attempts to correct misinterpretations of his work, as well as clarify or rethink issues that he has come to doubt. It also becomes evident in the fact that he occasionally rewrites essays or even interviews for their second publication, as he did with the preface to *The Use of Pleasure*, as well as, for instance, the interview, "On the Genealogy of Ethics," which he revised and expanded for publication in French. Moreover, whether one views this positively or negatively, his desire to reformulate can be seen in his life-long tendency to try to conceptualize his entire oeuvre as one project that falls in line with whatever his main concern is at the time of writing.<sup>22</sup> In any case, one can see from his own relationship with his work that while it is fair to give priority to his published monographs,<sup>23</sup> the nature of his ongoing attempt to think otherwise suggests that his published work may not be the only, or even best, avenue for understanding his evolving thought.

My second justification focuses on the relationship between the late lectures and Foucault's final two monographs. While the courses do share much material with *The Use*

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<sup>22</sup> David Couzens Hoy notes, "Foucault himself continually reflects on his own development and offers his own interpretations of it, often with honest self-criticisms. Not all these self-interpretations seem readily compatible, however." Couzens Hoy, introduction to *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, ed. David Couzens Hoy (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 1986), 2. An instance of this occurs in the introduction to *The Use of Pleasure*, as I have noted above.

<sup>23</sup> This is supported by his prohibition of posthumous publishing.

of *Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self*, especially concerning *askēsis*, or practices of the self, they demonstrate an important transition in Foucault's thought during these years. The centrality of sexuality falls away, and Foucault focuses on a number of concepts that are not emphasized in the monographs, primarily *parrhēsia*, or frank speech, the issue of modes of veridiction or games of truth, and the conversion of the world through conversion of the self as a concept in classical Cynicism.<sup>24</sup> However, how do we know that the move beyond *aphrodisia* represents his current research? The rules of the Collège de France concerning lectures by faculty were strict; each faculty member had to spend at least thirteen hours each year lecturing on his or her current research. We know from this fact, and from Foucault's introduction to each year's lectures, that the research he presents is what he is working on at the time. Moreover, in the interviews from the same period, he frequently tries to direct the conversation away from issues of sexuality toward practices of the self and ways of living. The starkest example of this occurs in "On the Genealogy of Ethics," where Foucault claims that he is not that interested in issues of sex and sexuality, saying, "I must confess that I am much more interested in problems about techniques of the self and things like that than sex...sex is boring" (GE 253). He goes on to claim that despite the focus of the latter two volumes of *The History of Sexuality*, the Greeks were not particularly fixated on sex either, especially when compared to an issue like diet (GE 253). Ian Hacking concurs with my interpretation in seeing the interviews

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<sup>24</sup> While this reorientation can also be felt in the monographs, it is stronger in the courses. *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self*, of necessity, retain their focus on the *aphrodisia*, and are oriented around the four problematics Foucault identifies in the transition from the Greek period, through the Roman, and into early Christianity--namely "the relationship to the body, the relationship to one's spouse, the relationship to boys, and the relationship to the truth" (UP 45).

as ways of better understanding Foucault's late work. He states, "[t]he interview is a French art form used to present work in progress which is destined, at first, for limited circulation, and which is couched in terms suitable for discussion among one specific audience. Hence there is a directness here that is often missing from the long and elaborately constructed books."<sup>25</sup> Moreover, in his late interviews and essays, Foucault continually ties the issue of sexuality to ways of living, rather than sex per se, as he does in the interview, "Friendship as a Way of Life," where he argues that gay men should not seek to discover or uncover their gayness, but endeavor to become gay, to embody gayness in their way of life so as to create new possibilities for relationships in the world.<sup>26</sup> Interestingly, the relationship he focuses on most in this interview is not a sexual one; it is friendship, for reasons that we will explore in chapter three. It seems evident, then, that Foucault's focus began to change in the last three years of his life, evidenced both by the content of his late lectures and the ways in which he frames his project in interviews and essays.

Therefore, my foundational premise is that, compared to the three lecture series I am examining, the monographs provide a partial picture of the massive undertaking in which Foucault was involved in the last years of his life, namely the attempt to reconceptualize subjectivity. To be fair, Foucault likes to describe what he is doing in many different ways: sometimes as a history of thought (GSA 4-5), sometimes as a

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<sup>25</sup> Ian Hacking, "The Archaeology of Foucault" in *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, ed. David Couzens Hoy (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 1986), 28.

<sup>26</sup> See Michel Foucault, "De l'amitié comme mode de vie" in *Dits et Écrits: Volume II, 1976-1988*, eds. Daniel Defert and François Ewald (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2001), 982-986

history of experience conceived of as the interaction of the three axes of knowledge, power, and subject formation (UP 10), sometimes as a history of games of truth, or veridictions (GSA 285-86), and often as some combination of the three. So how can we know that his main goal is the reformulation of the concept of subjectivity? Not only because he says it frequently and explicitly, but because of the way in which he continually castigates contemporary philosophy for its concept of subjectivity, which he considers not only false, but dangerous. His explication of the situation is as follows:

In the years that preceded the Second World War, and even more so after the war, philosophy in continental Europe and in France was dominated by the philosophy of the subject. I mean that philosophy took as its task par excellence the foundation of all knowledge and the principle of all signification as stemming from the meaningful subject. (SAS 176)

Foucault believes that this philosophy of the subject began with René Descartes, who established the subject as the foundation of possible knowledge; passed through Immanuel Kant, who argued that the subject not only served as the condition of possibility for experience, but also that the very thing that one could not experience or know was the subject itself; and continued in twentieth-century France in, among other strains of philosophy, that of phenomenology and psychoanalysis (TS 22; HOS 190).

In response to these currents of philosophical thought in post-war France, Foucault turned to the thought of Friedrich Nietzsche, Maurice Blanchot, and Georges Bataille, because they provided, he says, "an invitation to bring into question the category of the subject, his supremacy, his founding function" (E 867). Moreover, although he denies in his late interviews and lectures that he ever was a structuralist, when asked in the interview, "Interview with Michel Foucault," what he thinks might be at the core of

his presumed convergence with avowed structuralists, his ready answer is, "[a] certain urgency to pose again the question of the subject" (E 871). In the 1984 interview, "The Ethic of the Care of the Self as a Practice of Freedom," Foucault is more explicit: "What I have refused, was precisely that one can give in advance a theory of the subject [...] and that starting from this theory of the subject, one comes to pose the question of knowing how, for example, certain forms of knowledge are possible" (ESS 1537). This echoes an earlier statement where, in response to an interviewer asking whether Foucault believed that the subject is the condition of possibility for experience, he responds, "[a]bsolutely not. It is experience that is the rationalization of a process, itself provisional, that results in a subject, or rather subjects" (RM 1524-25). Finally, in one of the last interviews Foucault granted before his death, he lays all his cards on the table:

In the first place, I actually think that there is no sovereign, foundational subject, a universal form of the subject that one can find everywhere. I am very skeptical and very hostile towards this conception of the subject. I think, on the contrary, that the subject is constituted through practices of subjection, or in a more autonomous fashion, through practices of liberation, of freedom, like, in Antiquity, through, of course, a certain number of rules, styles, conventions, that one finds in the cultural milieu. (EE 1552)

Thus, we see that Foucault rejects the theory of the subject that grows from Descartes through Husserl, and that he instead understands the subject as a process, a negotiation between subjection, which he understands as power acting upon the subject, and subjectivation, which he characterizes as the work of self on self through practice (SP 781). One small caveat--although Foucault acknowledges that the process of subject formation takes place as a negotiation between subjection and subjectivation, his third phase focuses largely on the latter, the active transformation of the self through practice.



He argues occasionally that he treated the former in his second phase, the period encompassing *Discipline and Punish*, and the lectures series relating to discipline, normalization, biopower, and government. However, he does not explicitly attempt to combine the two. This dissertation will follow that trajectory, focusing on the issue of intentional subjectivation. This is not only methodologically useful for circumscribing possible sources, but will turn out to be important for Foucault's ethical model since, as we will see, it is active and intentional work on the self that Foucault identifies as ethics.

### *Attention to the Flesh*

My methodology as concerns the Foucauldian texts tends, thus, toward close reading and layering of multiple narratives to derive meaning from disparate works that nonetheless speak of the same topic: the transformation of the ethical self. The purpose of bringing into conversation the disparate works of Foucault's late period is to interrogate aspects of his work introduced in the lectures, but fleshed out elsewhere. As any teacher or scholar knows, it sometimes only takes one well-placed question to help elucidate a difficult topic. Just so for Foucault. Since the lectures do not intend to be broad sketches of ethical subject formation, but rely largely on detailed exegeses of classical texts,<sup>27</sup> bringing them into conversation with interviews, where Foucault is often asked pointedly to discuss his current research, and essays which are more focused and polished, bring together strands of his thought that otherwise could be buried in the witty anecdotes and meticulous exegetical work of his oral presentations.

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<sup>27</sup> The examination of Euripides' *Ion* can seem interminable.

Although choice of sources and periodization is always an active, and potentially arbitrary, delimiting, I have attempted to circumscribe my sources in a way that brings into relief the contours of Foucault's late work on the self. I have read and utilized written sources in the original language, unless that language is one which I cannot read, such as Foucault's journalistic pieces for Italian newspapers, in which case I utilize the accepted French translation that appears in *Dit et Écrits*. For all works in French, the translations are my own, which will likely be obvious since I tend to follow Foucault's sentence structure fairly closely, both in order to be faithful to his texts and also to bring through the style of his thought, which in my mind is far richer and more evocative than standard English translations communicate.<sup>28</sup> In the bibliography, I also include the English versions of some of these works, as I did consult them during the process of thinking through Foucault's late thought. I have chosen in the dissertation to present his work in English, both quotations and titles of works, in order to allow for easy comprehension for non-French speakers. However, my references to standard English titles do not suggest that I am utilizing works in English, as evidenced by the cited sources. In terms of periodization, I originally began with *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* because his previous lecture course, *On the Government of the Living*, was not yet available at the time of my research. I stuck to the three final courses because I felt that they circumscribed well my area of interest. At the beginning of *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, Foucault outlines the importance of care of the self, as it relates to the split between philosophy and spirituality in the history of the west, the responsibility for which

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<sup>28</sup> Although this can also lead to some awkwardness in phrasing, obviously.

he ultimately lays at the feet of René Descartes. Here, Foucault clearly indicates the goal of his exegesis of the classical sources, which is to attempt to intervene in the history of his present. Since this same present shapes environmental activism in a direct way, I decided that this would be the opportune place to start my story. I use interviews and essays from the same period in an effort to understand the evolution of his thought. Thus, I engaged in a comprehensive survey of his works from 1978 until the end of his official publication in 1988--as determined by those pieces included in the second volume of the French collection of his work, *Dits et Écrits*. Obviously *Dits et Écrits* seeks to be fairly comprehensive, but I also sought out other sources which have been published elsewhere from this period, such as Foucault's Berkeley Lectures of 1983, published under the title, *Fearless Speech*. Finally, I occasionally included works from before this period, if they seemed to speak directly to later concerns, such as the essay, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, and History," from 1971.

At a basic level, my project focuses on understanding and extrapolating Foucault's thought on the self, truth, practice, and conversion in the classical sources, sometimes at the level of simply defining terms. In this I have been aided by excellent scholarship on Foucault's late work. In the realm of the classics, we have the lucid critiques and explorations of Foucault's contemporaries, Paul Veyne and Pierre Hadot.<sup>29</sup> In addition, Edward McGushin has written a fascinating study of this period in Foucault's life in his *Foucault's Askēsis: An Introduction to the Philosophical Life*.<sup>30</sup> His work offers a

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<sup>29</sup> For Veyne, see *Foucault* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2010). For Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault* (New York: Blackwell, 2005).

detailed exploration particularly of the concepts of *parrhēsia* and *askēsis* in Foucault's late work, but focuses largely on re-reading Foucault's earlier books in light of his work on ethics in an attempt to show how care of the self defined Foucault's own life and as a provocation to rethink the purpose of philosophy in everyday life. However, despite some excellent work being done on different aspects of care of the self,<sup>31</sup> I felt that it was important to return to the lectures at a basic level. The fact that an exegesis of this period has not yet been done in a comprehensive way is demonstrated by the recently published *Cambridge Foucault Lexicon*. An impressive tome, which "aims to be comprehensive and even exhaustive,"<sup>32</sup> it includes a number of entries pertinent to Foucault's ethical turn, such as care, conduct, freedom, friendship, *parrhēsia*, practice, self, spirituality, and truth. However, it leaves out other crucial terms, such as conversion,<sup>33</sup> *askēsis*, meditation, *technē*,<sup>34</sup> and, shockingly, both art and aesthetics, suggesting that these have not become indispensable terms for the study of Foucault's work. In the section devoted to Foucault's conversation partners, only Plato is given his own entry,<sup>35</sup> while it could be

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<sup>30</sup> Edward McGushin, *Foucault's Askēsis: An Introduction to the Philosophical Life* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007).

<sup>31</sup> Jeremy Carrette on spirituality, Steve Garlick and Tom Roach on friendship, Cressida Heyes, Ladelle Mewhorter and Edward McGushin on practices, Marcozza on *parrhēsia*, and numerous scholars on the topics of subjectivity and freedom.

<sup>32</sup> Leonard Lawlor and John Nale, introduction to *The Cambridge Foucault Lexicon*, eds. Leonard Lawlor and John Nale (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), xvi.

<sup>33</sup> Surprisingly, secondary literature on Foucauldian conversion is largely non-existent, despite the fact that the type of Stoic conversion that Foucault discusses in the lectures essentially underpins his entire understanding of the purpose of care of the self.

<sup>34</sup> There is an entry for "technology," but it's unclear that this means the same thing as technique or more specifically *technē*.

argued that Socrates, Seneca, Marcus Aurelius, and even Diogenes are equally crucial for understanding Foucault's late work.<sup>36</sup> Thus, my work hopes to fill in these holes in order to understand the direction of Foucault's thought on ethical subject formation.

One crucial issue to be addressed in formulating a project utilizing Foucault's late work is his somewhat controversial relationship to classical thought. Many classicists have accused Foucault of a poor reading of his Greek and Latin sources, either because of his lack of training in classical languages and historical context, or more nefariously because of a willful misappropriation of classical texts. I address some of these specific criticisms more fully in the following chapters. Here I will say that while Foucault does present his detailed exegeses as valid readings of the classical sources, and he engages without caveat in philological discussions when it serves his purpose, he does not pretend that his interpretations of the classical sources are always standard. In fact, he makes a point on numerous occasions of noting that his interpretation of, say, Plato is a non-traditional one. For instance, Arnold Davidson notes that in his final year of lectures, Foucault discusses the *Apology*, *Crito*, and *Phaedo* as a trilogy that demonstrates Socrates' commitment to the classical mode of truth-telling known as *parrhēsia*. Following the interpretation of his colleague, George Dumézil, Foucault argues--against, he notes, the common understanding--that Socrates' last words in the *Crito*, "we owe a

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<sup>35</sup> Frédéric Gros writes an entry on "The Ancients," encompassing all prominent Cynics and Stoics, leaving the Epicureans sadly in the dust.

<sup>36</sup> At least as important as Henri de Boulainvilliers. Although you could equally contest why Xavier Bichat gets a place, while Jean-Marie Charcot, the father of modern neurology, and prominent figure in Foucault's *History of Madness*, does not. I suppose cuts have to be made.

cock to Asclepius,"<sup>37</sup> do not mean that Socrates' has been cured of the illness that is life, but that he and his disciples have been saved from the illness of ignorance by the truth of philosophy.<sup>38</sup> Thus, in his final moments, Foucault argues, Socrates continues to demonstrate his commitment to *parrhēsia*. Similarly, Foucault dismisses Aristotle's influence in Antiquity entirely, insisting in his attempt to prove the priority of care of self over knowledge of self, "as everyone knows, Aristotle is not the pinnacle of Antiquity, but the exception" (HS 19). Naturally such a perspective is highly repugnant to a classicist such as Wolfgang Detel, who finds Aristotle to be a crucial, if not the crucial, figure in Antiquity.<sup>39</sup> In fact, these criticisms are not that different from the criticisms made by historians concerning Foucault's creative reimagining of the history of madness or the prison. Thus, his answer is the same. Foucault does not examine the classic sources as a historian, but as a genealogist. Thus, he both uses the past to attempt to understand how we have become who we are, but also fictions the past in order to transform his own way of thinking and others. In this way, he argues, the truth of his work emerges in the future as the world around him transforms in relationship to it. For some projects, this method of investigation and interpretation would be extremely problematic, but given that I, too, am interested in Foucault's use of the classical sources as tools for understanding subjectivity in the present, I am willing to acknowledge that his reading of

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<sup>37</sup> The Greek god of healing, to whom Greeks offered a sacrifice in repayment for having cured an illness.

<sup>38</sup> Arnold I. Davidson, "Ethics as Aesthetics: Foucault, the History of Ethics, and Ancient Thought," in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, ed. Gary Gutting (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 133-34.

<sup>39</sup> See Detel's critique of Foucault in *Foucault and Classical Antiquity: Power, Ethics, Knowledge*, trans. David Wigg-Wolf (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

the classical sources may not be "true" in the traditional sense, and yet crucial to the development of his thought, and thus true in some provisional way. While I believe that my use of Foucault's exegeses of his Greek, Hellenistic, and Roman sources is justified by my project, I do have to admit that it forces me to follow his lead concerning those sources, which means frequently eliding the differences between various schools of thought and accepting schematic, if not simply inaccurate, statements concerning various thinkers and schools of thought, e.g. his views on Aristotle.

This would be a good point to admit that I am also engaged in a selective reading and use of Foucault. I do not, for instance, discuss the importance of Christianity in Foucault's late work, despite its constant presence as a contrast to Greek and Roman ethics, and a challenge to employing them as a lens in which to view the present. Readers might also note a lack of any extensive discussion of the aesthetics of existence or stylization, both central aspects of Foucault's engagement with the classical sources. Similarly, I have not been particularly successful in highlighting the importance of the body for Foucauldian subject formation, despite the vital need in modern ethics--environmental and otherwise--to rethink the subject as fundamentally embodied. To some degree, these omissions emerged due to the thematic nature of my chapters, and the necessary length restrictions of the dissertation. More than this, however, they derive from my attempt to bring Foucauldian thought into conversation with mainstream environmental activism, a project that led me to make certain choices about what was most relevant about Foucault's work for the intervention I imagined. However, the more I think about the intersections between Foucauldian thought and strategies for individual

change vis-à-vis the environment, the more I realize the centrality of issues of embodiment, aesthetics, and religion to my project. Thus, I fully intend to reintegrate them in succeeding iterations of this project.

### *Troubling the Subject in Environmental Ethics*

That said, it is my contention that Foucault's understanding of the self and ethical transformation is not just important for Foucault studies, but can intervene usefully in environmental ethics and environmental activism. Like most moral philosophy in America, environmental ethics presupposes a traditional transcendental, unitary subject. Essentially, this subject exists outside of the realms of immediate sensory experience and, thus, is delimited in a stark way from its environment and even its own body; it persists in a unitary way over time; and it is the foundation of all possible knowledge and experience. As Foucault suggests, this Western subject begins with Descartes, who lays the foundation for this transcendental subject in his *Meditations* by effecting the divorce of mind and body and presupposing that the ability to think is the only guarantor of one's existence, and thus the foundation of all subsequent knowledge. Enlightenment thinker Immanuel Kant supports Descartes' work with rigorous precision in logical argumentation and refutes the objections of the empiricists by showing that certain *a priori*s must exist in the mind prior to sensory experience in order to allow one to have such experience at all. Thus, this "transcendental" part of the subject became the basis for experience and, thus, again, knowledge. Dianna Taylor sums up the moral subject of contemporary philosophy by saying, "[w]ithin the context of the Western philosophical



tradition, 'a subject' takes the form of an active agent, an individual 'rational being', to use Immanuel Kant's terminology, that thinks about and acts upon the world (which takes the form of an 'object') and is the bearer of political rights and moral responsibilities."<sup>40</sup> In the contemporary world, according to Mikael Klintman, this rational agent has become a rational consumer, typically vulgarized as *homo economicus*. He states that the concept of *homo economicus*, "dating back to Adam Smith, is an understanding of each human being as motivated ultimately by economic self-interest, thus portraying humanity as consciously negotiating their choices, using the best information and knowledge in a reflective manner, with the fixed preference of wealth maximization."<sup>41</sup> While Klintman argues persuasively that economic values are not the only ones that motivate our behavior, the model of choice remains. *Homo economicus* is presented as a rational individual agent, facing a world of objects, intentionally manipulating them based on full knowledge to achieve certain personal goals.

Such a theory of the subject reigns in most environmental philosophy and activism. Tim Hayward argues that Enlightenment thinkers such as Descartes and Francis Bacon founded the scientific method, which operates on the principle of breaking down a scientific problem into a constituent set of sub-problems and arranging these according to basic logical importance. Hayward concurs with Fritjof Capra that this can lead to a type of reductionism vis-à-vis nature, in that the method only works if "the world is composed

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<sup>40</sup> Dianna Taylor, introduction to *Michel Foucault*, ed. Dianna Taylor (Durham: Acumen, 2011), 6.

<sup>41</sup> Mikael Klintman, *Citizen-consumers and Evolution: Reducing Environmental Harm through Social Motivation* (New York: Macmillan, 2013), 19-20.

of discrete and largely independent entities,"<sup>42</sup> a claim with which ecologists roundly disagree. The outcome of this type of thinking is Descartes' theory that "the material world could be viewed as a machine, with nature working according to mechanical laws governing matter in motion."<sup>43</sup> This extended to all animals and plants, and, in fact, to the human body itself. In his 1649 letter to Henry More, Descartes states, "there are two different principles causing our movements. The first is purely mechanical and corporeal, and depends solely on the force of the spirits and the structure of our organs, and can be called the corporeal soul. The other, an incorporeal principle, is the mind or that soul which I have defined as a thinking substance."<sup>44</sup> Having discovered no reason to believe that animal behavior need stem from any but the first principles, Descartes comes to the conclusion that animals do not think, and, thus, possess no soul. The fact that they should nonetheless have such a wide range of behaviors, strategies, and goals should come as no surprise, however; "since art copies nature, and people can make various automatons which move without thought, it seems reasonable that nature should even produce its own automatons, which are much more splendid than artificial ones — namely the animals."<sup>45</sup> As Val Plumwood notes, this dualism, intrinsic to the rationalist tradition, defines "what is characteristically and authentically human [...] against or in opposition to what is taken to be natural, nature, or the physical and biological realm," leading to an

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<sup>42</sup> Timothy Hayward, *Ecological Thought: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), 16.

<sup>43</sup> Hayward, 17.

<sup>44</sup> René Descartes, "René Descartes to Henry More: Friday, 5 February 1649," *Electronic Enlightenment*, accessed November 25, 2014, [http://www.e-enlightenment.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/item/descreCU0030360\\_1key001cor/?letters=corr&s=descarene0001288&r=204](http://www.e-enlightenment.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/item/descreCU0030360_1key001cor/?letters=corr&s=descarene0001288&r=204).

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

ethical binary "in which what is virtuous in the human is taken to be what maximizes distance from the merely natural."<sup>46</sup>

Critiques of the Enlightenment's legacy for environmental ethics argue that Kant continues in the dualistic Cartesian vein, ultimately reinforcing the domination of humans over non-humans. While Kant does not go so far as to suggest that animals are machines, he does make a strong demarcation between humans as possessing reason, a distinction that goes back to Greek philosophy, and animals who operate solely based on self-interest. In that Kant's moral system is based on rational judgment concerning categorical imperatives, only humans can be moral and thus free, and when they fall below that threshold, they are described as acting like animals.<sup>47</sup> Stripped of moral considerability, animals and those who act like them can be used as means rather than ends in themselves. Kant illuminates this in a forceful passage where he describes a man who wants to end his own life as having turned himself into an object. He says,

[a]nimals here are regarded as things; but man is no thing; so if, nevertheless, he disposes over his life, he sets upon himself the value of a beast. But he who takes himself for such, who fails to respect humanity, who turns himself into a thing, becomes an object of free choice for everyone; anyone, thereafter, may do as he pleases with him, he can be treated by others as an animal or a thing; he can be dealt with like a horse or dog, for he is no longer a man.<sup>48</sup>

In fact, it seems that the only reason, according to Kant, not to wantonly abuse animals, is because by developing a habit of cruelty towards animals one will deform one's moral

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<sup>46</sup> Val Plumwood, "Nature, Self, and Gender: Feminism, Environmental Philosophy, and the Critique of Rationalism," in *The Ethics of the Environment*, ed. Robin Attfield (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), 200.

<sup>47</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Ethics* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 70-71.

<sup>48</sup> Kant, 147.

character and predispose oneself to act cruelly towards humans.<sup>49</sup> Kant's logic here represents what Victoria Davion, calls a "logic of domination" that "makes use of premises about morally significant differences between human beings and the rest of nature, along with a premise that asserts that these differences allow human beings to dominate non-humans."<sup>50</sup>

Although many thinkers and discourses have contributed to the contemporary hegemony of *homo economicus*, I have focused on Descartes and Kant because of their importance for the Enlightenment, as well as their similarity in terms of logics of domination. This understanding of the transcendental subject, refigured by modern capitalism into *homo economicus*, dominates theories of human relationship to the environment outside of academia, but also largely within. In a standard textbook of environmental ethics, such as *Environmental Ethics: Divergence and Convergence*,<sup>51</sup> most entries accept *homo economicus* whole cloth, starting from the premise that humans can and should be incentivized to engage in practices less damaging to the planet. Alternate voices are given, of course, representing the view from below,<sup>52</sup> the argument

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<sup>49</sup> Kant, 373.

<sup>50</sup> Victoria Davion, "Is Ecofeminism Feminist?" in *Environmental Ethics: Divergence and Convergence*, ed. Susan J. Armstrong and Richard G. Botzler (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2004), 454.

<sup>51</sup> Susan J. Armstrong and Richard G. Botzler, eds. *Environmental Ethics: Divergence and Convergence* (New York: McGraw-Hill 1993).

<sup>52</sup> Edward O. Wilson, in a wonderful exploration of the unimportance of humans to nature, "The Little Things that Run the World" (46-49). Stephen J. Gould makes a similar, if more snarky and ultimately desultory, point in his "The Golden Rule--A Proper Scale for Our Environmental Crisis" (288-294), when he argues that while humans will never be able to destroy the earth based on the scale of geological time, that does not really matter since on the scale of human time, we could very well make our habitation of the planet impossible.

for the aesthetic value of nature,<sup>53</sup> the religious and spiritual perspective,<sup>54</sup> various eco-centric perspectives,<sup>55</sup> and finally the feminist perspective, which tends to be viewed as problematizing the subject-object relationship typical of environmental ethics, and to some degree does.<sup>56</sup> Interestingly, in the chapter entitled, "Environmental Ethics in Society," these alternate voices tend to fade away in favor of practical subjects like, "biotechnology," "property," "economics," "law," and "management." While it might be argued that this represents just one textbook's approach and should not necessarily be thought of as representative of the general attitudes in the teaching of environmental ethics, Arran Stibbe argues that this is, in fact, the general tenor of content in courses on environmental ethics. In a survey of textbooks addressing environmental issues, Stibbe finds that by and large nature is portrayed as a resource for humans and economic growth characterized as almost entirely positive in its effects on human life.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Typified by Henry David Thoreau in an excerpt from "Walking" (121-129), and John Muir, in a passage from "A Near View of the High Sierra" (29-135).

<sup>54</sup> Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh's argument for the oneness of all creation in "The Sun My Heart" (255-258), and Winona LaDuke's call for a return to a deep connection to the earth typified by her Anishinabeg ancestors in "Voices from White Earth" (247-254).

<sup>55</sup> These tend to represent new-age approaches to communion with nature, whether in the magical world of South East Asia, in David Abram's "A More-Than Human World" (148-155), Aldo Leopold's insistence that human's must develop a land ethic in order to understand the intrinsic value of ecologies that are not essentially valuable to us as resources, "The Land Ethic" (374-383), or the various types of inclusive egos that characterize deep ecology, "The Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement, 1960-2000" (400-408).

<sup>56</sup> Although much feminist thought on human-nature relationships tends to fall into neo-pagan goddess worship. For example, Charlene Spretnak's excerpt from *States of Grace* (437-444).

<sup>57</sup> Arran Stibbe, *Animals Erased: Discourse, Ecology, and Reconnection with the Natural World* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2012). Specifically Chapter Seven, "From Counter-Discourses to Alternative Discourses: Environmental Education in Japan" (121-143), where he compares Environmental Studies textbooks coming from the West with traditional teachings on the environment in Japan.

The point of this brief examination of textbooks in environmental ethics is not to downplay the important work being done in alternate understandings of the environment and our place in it. Activists and philosophers, from indigenous peoples like LaDuke and Val Plumwood to queer ecologists like Catriona Sandilands and David Bell, have engaged in inspiring work that has attempted to displace the hegemonic figure of *homo economicus* and rethink both nature and culture, or natureculture as many would say.<sup>58</sup> My point is twofold. First, few of these thinkers have rethought the subject in a productive way. While many challenge the traditional subject and call for an alternate subject, they do not theorize how such a subject would be formed. Thus, they cannot suggest strategies for breaking the contemporary subject out of her economic mindset and sending her down the path of conversion to a new way of being in the world. For instance, deep ecology, a movement founded by Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess in 1973, frequently speaks of an expanded or ecological self that moves beyond the narrow preoccupation with human needs to consider the needs of the biotic community as well. As Plumwood argues, the concept of the self in deep ecology, which relies on a basic sense of identification with nature, "is usually left deliberately vague, and corresponding accounts of the self are various and shifting and not always compatible."<sup>59</sup> She distinguishes, however, three separate strands that are often combined or conflated-- "indistinguishability, expansion of self, and transcendence of self."<sup>60</sup> As Plumwood

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<sup>58</sup> See the wonderful interventions in Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson, eds., *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, and Desire* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010).

<sup>59</sup> Val Plumwood, "Nature, Self, and Gender," 202.

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<sup>60</sup> Plumwood, "Nature, Self, and Gender," 202.

Indistinguishability of self is exemplified in the work of John Seed, an Australian eco-activist. Seed takes the fact of human evolution and personalizes it, thinking of himself, and every other human as having been raised with the earth over millions of years. He states in an essay entitled, "Rainforest and Psyche,"

I believe that contact with rainforests energises and enlivens a realisation of our ACTUAL, our biological self. They awaken in us the realisation that it was 'I' that came to life when a bolt of lightning fertilized the chemical soup of 4.5 billion years ago; that 'I' crawled out of Devonian seas and colonised the land; that, more recently, 'I' advanced and retreated before four ages of ice. (Seed, available at <http://www.rainforestinfo.org.au/deep-eco/rfpsyche.htm>, accessed 1/15/14)

In this passage, he is poetically enacting, albeit with scare quotes that do not appear elsewhere in his writing, the indistinguishability of himself from the natural evolution of the planet, portraying his "self" as rainforest, animal, and even life itself. He argues via the philosophy of deep ecology that if we conceive ourselves as one part of the body of the earth then we do not view our actions as sacrificing interests for the sake of something outside ourselves. With true ecological thinking, says Seed, "'I am protecting the rainforest' develops to 'I am part of the rainforest protecting myself. I am that part of the rainforest recently emerged into thinking'" (John Seed, "Beyond Anthropocentrism," *Rainbow Body*, accessed January 15, 2014, [http://www.rainbowbody.net/Ongwhehonwhe/beyondanthro\\_seed.pdf](http://www.rainbowbody.net/Ongwhehonwhe/beyondanthro_seed.pdf).) Gaia theorists like James Lovelock also promote an identification of self and world.

The transcendental self, growing out of the work of Australian philosopher, Warwick Fox, seems to grow out of the indistinguishability thesis. Fox argues in his 1991 essay, "Self and World," that despite the cultural evidence to the contrary, humans have a stronger drive toward unity and wholeness than they do towards individuation if evidenced by the types of emotions he believes that each state provokes. However, in order to experience this unity, one cannot look outward, as does the scientist, but must look inward, like the mystic (Warwick Fox, "Self and world: A transpersonal, ecological approach," *ReVision* 13, no. 3 (Winter 1991). Available via Academic Search Premier. Accessed 1/18/14). However, while Fox urges his readers to strive for identification with the cosmos, discarding attachment to the individual's personal concerns, emotions, and desires, he does not believe that it is possible or even beneficial to seek complete identification with the planet, in the style of Seed or Lovelock, presumably because such a perspective tends to erase the everyday joys and sorrows of human existence (Warwick Fox, *Towards a Transpersonal Ecology: Developing New Foundations for Environmentalism* [Boston: Shambala, 1990], 12).

Others, like Arne Naess, prefer to conceive of an extended self. Naess began as a semanticist, working with theories of how humans communicate. When he left his career as an academic to pursue environmental activism full-time he brought this semantic perspective, as well as many of the obscurities of analytical philosophical writing, with him. One of his main insights was that meaning occurs in relationality with others. As David Rothenberg notes in his introduction to Naess' *Ecology, Community, and Lifestyle*, "[w]e come up with ideas, we release them to the world, but only if they can be grasped by others can they come to exist collectively and have weight. This is the essence of Naess' 'relational thinking'-nothing exists apart. Neither a person, nor a species, nor an environmental problem" (David Rothenberg, "Introduction: Ecosophy T: from Intuition to System," in *Ecology, Community, and Lifestyle* by Arne Naess [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989], 6). Thus, one of the principles of deep ecology is "[r]ejection of the man-in-environment image in favour of *the relational, total-field image*. Organisms as knots in the biospherical net or field of intrinsic relations" (Arne Naess, "The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement. A Summary," in *The Ethics of the Environment*, ed. Robin Attfield [Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008], 115). He goes on to say that intrinsic relations are defined as those relations between two or more things that are integral to the nature of those things: "without the relation, *A* and *B* are no longer the same things" (115). However, as Rothenberg states, this does not mean that "the individual self or ego is dissolved in the larger Self" (Rothenberg, 9) as it seems to be in the work of Seed and Lovelock. Rather, through an active process of identifying with the more-than-human world, "[w]e discover that parts

notes, these perspectives continue to promote the subject of universality over the contextualized subject, and fail to question the nature of the self that is being projected onto the rest of the world. As she states concerning Warwick Fox, the drive towards unity fails to address the epistemic bases of the human-nature dualism. While John Seed insists that through melding with the rainforest, its needs become his own, Plumwood questions this logic, noting, "there is nothing to guarantee this--one could equally well take one's own needs for its."<sup>61</sup> In other words, humans do need to recognize their interdependence with the natural world, but also the distinctness of other beings' needs from their own. She quotes Jean Grimshaw as saying, "[c]are and understanding require the sort of distance that is needed in order not to see the other as a projection of self, or self as a continuation of the other."<sup>62</sup> Plumwood also argues, "deep ecology does not question the structures of rational egoism and continues to subscribe to two of the main tenets of the egoist framework--that human nature is egoistic and that the alternative to egoism is self-sacrifice."<sup>63</sup> Thus, a failure to really get outside of the logic of Cartesian dualism haunts most work on alternate environmentalities, which certainly makes sense since, in most cases, the writer's goal is not to engage in the project of conceptualizing alternate modes of subjectivity.

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of nature are parts of ourselves. We cannot exist separate from them. If we try, our Self-realising is blocked [...] We must see the vital needs of ecosystems and other species as our own needs" (Rothenberg 11). Thus, all three perspectives on the self in deep ecology tend towards an acknowledgement of human dependence on nature, and attempt to erase, expand, or transcend the perspective of the human subject in order to feel the needs of the more-than-human world as our own needs.

<sup>61</sup> Plumwood, "Nature, Self, and Gender," 203.

<sup>62</sup> Quoted in Plumwood, "Nature, Self, and Gender," 204.

<sup>63</sup> Plumwood, "Nature, Self, and Gender," 205.



The second major problem is that those thinkers who do elaborate alternate understandings of the subject simply cannot compete with mainstream narratives in popular discussions of environmental issues. For instance, Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh performs a crucial intervention in Cartesian dualism by connecting the metaphysical theory of Zen Buddhism with human causes of ecological crisis. Following the cosmology of his order, Nhat Hanh suggests that humans should see themselves as fundamentally interrelated, not only with each other but with everything in the universe. He refers to this as "interbeing": "A more holistic approach is the way of 'interbeing.': 'This is like this, because that is like that.'"<sup>64</sup> He contends, "[i]f we see deeply into the nature of interbeing, that all things 'inter-are', we will stop blaming, arguing, and killing, we will become friends with everyone."<sup>65</sup> Nhat Hanh bases such a perspective not only on religious doctrine, but on common sense. He says,

[w]e have to remember that our body is not limited to what lies within the boundary of our skin. Our body is much more immense. We know that if our heart stops beating, the flow of our life will stop, but we do not take the time to notice the many things outside of our bodies that are equally essential for our survival [...] The sun is our second heart, our heart outside of our body.<sup>66</sup>

Thus, a thinker like Thich Nhat Hanh, with a strong basis in Buddhist philosophy, attempts to intervene in the daily lives of his students to enact change at the level of self, which will then ripple out into their communities. However, despite the massive popularity of Buddhist study in America, this alternate perspective has not been able to

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<sup>64</sup> Thich Nhat Hahn, *Love in Action: Writings on Nonviolent Social Change* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1993), 66.

<sup>65</sup> Nhat Hanh, 68.

<sup>66</sup> Nhat Hanh, 128.

penetrate popular discussion of an issue like climate change even on a minimal level. If Bill McKibben finds it difficult to argue for a slowdown in our overheated machine of economic growth without people calling him a commie-pinko radical,<sup>67</sup> how much hope does a theory based on the non-existence of the self have in a world dominated by the bottom line?

Not much at this point. Even among environmental activists, most tend to toe the line on *homo economicus*, utilizing some version of rational choice theory. An interesting counterpoint to/example of this is the Dark Mountain Project, founded by Paul Kingsnorth, a former environmentalist turned rogue nature advocate and doomsday crier. He has assembled in Britain a network of like-minded artists, philosophers, musicians and writers, and they hold retreats and workshops schooling others in ways to use art and activism to promote consciousness of the impending social collapse.<sup>68</sup> While it may seem that I have adopted a mocking tone, I do, in fact, agree with many of the points in their manifesto. Yet, I question the reach of their message. They indicate that their current mailing list includes two thousand people, but that pales in comparison to Greenpeace's 2.8 million members worldwide, especially when you consider that you have to contribute monthly in order to be a member of Greenpeace, and this is only one of a number of prominent global environmental groups.<sup>69</sup> The question that animates my

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<sup>67</sup> See an amusing discussion of this in Bill McKibben, "My Life as a Communist," *The Washington Post* (March 1, 2011), accessed November 10, 2014, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/02/28/AR2011022803518.html>.

<sup>68</sup> You can find more information about the project at their website, <http://dark-mountain.net/>, unless society actually collapses, in which case, their movement will likely become unnecessary.

work, thus, is how can be radical theories of the subject be integrated into environmental activism without limiting the reach of its message?

This discussion leads directly into the reasons I chose Bill McKibben as Foucault's conversation partner for this project. First, he is arguably the most prominent environmental activist in America, surpassed by Al Gore in name recognition, but not in terms of on-the-ground organizing,<sup>70</sup> or in drawing media attention and vitriol.<sup>71</sup> Second, he thinks in an explicit way about strategies for inspiring and influencing behavioral change in regards to the environment, as evidenced by his founding and directing influence on 350.org,<sup>72</sup> and his 2007 book, *Fight Global Warming Now: The Handbook for Taking Action in Your Community*.<sup>73</sup> Thus, he is ripe for intervention in conceiving of different strategies. Finally, as I discuss further in the conclusion, while McKibben does evince a fairly traditional understanding of the subject, he also models a number of aspects of Foucauldian conversion in his own work. It is the purpose of the conclusion to explore those aspects of McKibben's work and life, and discuss ways that a Foucauldian intervention might provide him with alternate strategies for more effective activism.

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<sup>69</sup> Perhaps their membership would be higher if they led with sea turtles instead of ecocide.

<sup>70</sup> He is, as I have noted, the founder of the cutting-edge environmental NGO, 350.org, and has been a leader both in terms of organizing physical protest and in terms of militating in the media against the Keystone XL pipeline, a decisive issue in terms of stalling the effects of climate change.

<sup>71</sup> A wide swath of conservative pundits have voiced their opposition to his program, and more main stream media outlets have highlighted his leadership on climate change. See for example, Karl Taro Greenfeld, "Bill McKibben's Battle Against the Keystone XL Pipeline," *Bloomberg Business Week* (February 24, 2013). McKibben has also been a guest at least twice on The Colbert Report, which is how you know he has really made it.

<sup>72</sup> As detailed in his recent memoir, *Oil and Honey: The Education of an Unlikely Activist* (New York: Henry Holt, 2013).

<sup>73</sup> Bill McKibben, *Fight Global Warming Now: The Handbook for Taking Action in Your Community* (New York: Henry Holt, 2007).

## *Chapter Overview*

In the dissertation, I explore different facets of Foucault's engagement with the classical sources in order to paint a picture of his understanding of ethical subject formation. Then, I suggest ways in which this understanding can intervene in the strategies of environmental activism, as represented by Bill McKibben's work. Although different aspects of care of the self are not separate in Foucault's lectures, I have artificially separated them into conversion, *askēsis*, friendship, *parrhēsia*, and freedom for the purposes of better understanding each piece. However, the success of this disentanglement can only be imperfect. Thus, the reader will undoubtedly notice cross-references in each section.

The first chapter explores Foucault's concept of conversion, as the initial moment of care of the self. Foucault draws what he calls a third model of conversion--different from the Platonic and the Christian--from the late imperial period, largely from the Stoics, but also to some degree the Epicureans and Cynics. I argue first that the goal of conversion in the Hellenistic and Roman periods of antiquity is to remove oneself from a condition known as *stultitia*, a condition of ignorance, slavery to external forces, and lack of attention to the self. I then explore the process of conversion, highlighting various aspects of Foucault's narrative, such as the fact that he views the self as a process rather than as a substance. Following this, I demonstrate that this exegesis of the classical sources on conversion was not merely an academic exercise for Foucault; rather, conversion to the self is what he is seeking through his own work. I conclude by

addressing the importance of conversion to the formation of subjectivity in the interplay of subjection and subjectivation. This is an argument for transformation. Through this chapter, I hope to show that for Foucault ethics means questioning one's current assumptions, values, and practices, and reorienting one's life toward the truth through intentional subjectivation. This speaks to my contention that environmental activism cannot inspire radical change while clinging to *homo economicus*. In order to change the world, we will first need to change ourselves.

In the second chapter, I examine the daily regime that allows for conversion to the self, referred to by Foucault as *askēsis*. I begin by demonstrating that the subjectivation of true discourse involves habituation to ways of acting through practice. In order to help this process along, true discourses should be relational, jarring, and prescriptive. Then, I argue that Foucault focuses on the co-constitution of mind and body in *askēsis* to demonstrate, first, that one can only subjectivate truth through persistent, daily practice; second, the mind is fundamentally embodied, thus practice must engage both mind and body; and third, care of the self is animated by the pleasure found in discipline and hard work. Finally, I show that the goal of subjectivation of true discourse is habituation to principles of truth so that one acts correctly almost as a reflex. However, this does not suggest that the subject is determined by the process of conversion because she has the ability to choose to engage in forming a new way of life through practice. Moreover, care of the self mimics the structured creativity of language, giving the individual parameters, but allowing for innovation. Here I show the importance of practice for ethical

transformation. This may be one of the most under-theorized aspects of environmental activism, and one that could be of immense strategic importance.

The third chapter, entitled "Friendship," looks at the role of intimate relationships and communities of practice to the formation of the ethical self. First, I show that Foucault's understanding of the ethical primacy of the self navigates a delicate boundary between practical attention to the ethical transformation of the self and the ontological need to lay oneself bare to the forces that perpetually confront the self with their difference. Second, in Foucault's emphasis on intimate and affective relationships, as well as on larger group support, he presents a reframing of the role of community in the formulation of the ethical self. We see the importance of other individuals in helping the *stulta* learn to care for herself and the locating of the conversion to self in a community, but not a community based on pre-established identity, such as we see in communitarian ethics. Instead, as we will see, this community coalesces around the "future we" created by critique and the practice of freedom. In addition, Foucault's understanding of the other goes beyond the typical understanding of a unique other person, embracing a more wide-ranging spectrum of experiences. In his distinction between love and care, Foucault enters the conversation concerning the proper role of affective modes to ethics, arguing that love is a magnetic force that draws people together and to the truth, creating an affective support for the procession of conversion. However, because love is neither positive nor negative, Foucault posits care as the aesthetic dimension of positive relationality. Finally, the chapter argues that Foucault does not adhere to the notion that communities of practice must be linked together through shared norms, values, or

traditions, but rather that communities coalesce around possible answers to the question of the present. On a basic level, the purpose of this chapter is to push back against the criticism that Foucault's understanding of care of the self is egoistic, unconcerned with others, and ultimately alienated from community. In terms of Foucault's intervention in environmental activism, this chapter insists that contemporary environmental ethics must rediscover a productive sense of community--not simply coalescing around pre-established values, but forming in response to shared problems, not ad hoc coalitions that address immediate needs, but intimate communities of practice that can serve as crucibles for new ways of life.

Chapter four turns to the concept that preoccupied Foucault in his final years, *parrhēsia*. This chapter argues first that *parrhēsia*, or frank speech, is the mode of veridiction that allows one to subjectivate true discourse because it maintains a necessary consistency among belief, speech, and action. Next, I explore Foucault's exegesis of the history of *parrhēsia* to suggest that Foucault wants to reunite two strands of this mode of truth-telling--the intimate relationship of guidance and the speaking of truth to power--that he claims became separated during late Antiquity. Finally, the chapter shows that the Cynic represents for Foucault a way to re-inject politics into the heart of care of the self. The Cynics, through living a life of scandal, a life totally other to their society, and because of their love for humanity, intend that their care of self ultimately creates a new world. This chapter allows us to explore the connection between personal conversion and political transformation. Contra the argument that environmental action must first be enacted in policy, and only then impact people's lives, Foucault's *parrhēsia* demonstrates

that the only real way to create possibilities for entirely new ways of organizing social and political relationships is to experiment with alternate ways of being in one's everyday life.

The final chapter excavates the fraught Foucauldian concept of freedom. I begin by reiterating the importance for Foucault of the stylized nature of ancient ethics, arguing that Foucault seizes on this facet of care of self as a way to think himself out of the trap of the reduction of relationality to relationship only to law and norm. Second, I argue, as many have, that Foucault's concept of freedom actually refers to an ontological condition of reality. Given the radical contingency of historical epistemes and subjective ways of being, and the tendency of power relations to solidify and thus become potentially dangerous or oppressive, Foucault argues that practicing freedom leads to the increased fluidity of power, providing more opportunity for alternate ways of being. Like the cracks and fissures that begin to form as an ice sheet breaks down in the summer months, eventually leading to relatively free-flowing ocean, the care of the self and its communities of practice create fissures in social assumptions and norms, allowing more freedom of movement for everyone. Lastly, I address how this concept of historical contingency applies to the subject as agent. In other words, what defines individual freedom for Foucault? Essentially, he insists that freedom is not a state of being of a person, nor is the desire for freedom an ontological characteristic of human nature. Rather, freedom is practiced in local contexts, within specific relationships of power. Individual freedom is not understood as freedom *from*, but as freedom *for*, specifically for thinking and living otherwise. Thus, we return full circle to the title of the



dissertation; the freedom of the individual for Foucault is the freedom "to become again what we never were." This is an argument for possibility. It insists that we move beyond the impoverished understanding of freedom of as endless "choice." Rather, true freedom means commitment to the truth and hard work in enacting the truth in one's everyday life. Freedom for Foucault necessitates a letting go of the solidity of a determined identity, community, values, and practices. It requires an intimacy with uncertainty. These are the lessons that Foucault has to teach the environmental activist.

My conclusion draws out these implications in a sustained interaction between the work of Foucault and that of McKibben. Clearly, an entire book could be--and hopefully will be--written on this interaction, and its implications for our political and personal lives. Here, I only have the space to gesture to some potential interventions and new avenues of practice and discourse for environmental action.

### *Why Bother?*

To wrap up the introduction, I want to say a word about the justification for this project. As I have already noted, Foucault and McKibben are somewhat strange bedfellows. So while, from an academic point of view, it might be obvious why one would engage in the foundational project here, the elaboration of Foucauldian thought concerning ethical subject formation, it may be less obvious why one would bother to bring these two men into conversation, rather than simply thinking about environmental activism directly. To begin with, my argument assumes that if humans continue to interact with the environment in the way they have for the past hundred years, we risk

extremely negative effects, both in terms of natural disaster, economic hardship, and social alienation. As Norbert Wiener, the father of cybernetics, states in his prescient 1950 book, *The Human Use of Human Beings*,

the more we get out of the world the less we leave, and in the long run we shall have to pay our debts at a time that may be very inconvenient for our survival [...] We have modified our environment so radically that we must now modify ourselves in order to exist in this new environment. We can no longer live in the old one. Progress imposes not only new possibilities for the future, but new restrictions.<sup>74</sup>

Those who believe that *homo economicus* is literally the natural state of humans, and we can somehow grow our way out of the environmental conundrums we are in will likely not even have gotten this far in my text.

My second premise is that the logic of *homo economicus* has become so hegemonic that it is extremely difficult to imagine a way of being outside of it. From the perspective of Paul Kingsnorth, the environmental activist who decamped and founded the Dark Mountain Project, even the majority of environmentalists have succumbed to this discourse. He says,

[t]oday's environmentalists are more likely to be found at corporate conferences hymning the virtues of 'sustainability' and 'ethical consumption' than doing anything as naive as questioning the intrinsic values of civilisation. Capitalism has absorbed the greens, as it absorbs so many challenges to its ascendancy. A radical challenge to the human machine has been transformed into yet another opportunity for shopping.<sup>75</sup>

For Foucault this ubiquity derives from the power of neoliberalism to shape subjectivity.

Jason Read argues that individuals subjectivate the truth of neoliberalism through the

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<sup>74</sup> Norbert Wiener, *The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1950), 46-47.

<sup>75</sup> Paul Kingsnorth and Dougald Hine, *Uncivilisation: The Dark Mountain Manifesto*, The Dark Mountain Project, accessed June 9, 2014, <http://dark-mountain.net/about/manifesto/>.

"quotidian experiences of buying and selling commodities from the market. [This logic] is then extended across other social spaces, 'the market place of ideas,' to become an image of society [...] It claims to present not an ideal, but reality; human nature."<sup>76</sup> According to Ottavio Marzocca, Foucault concurs with this sentiment. He states in a lecture in *The Birth of Biopolitics*, "the smooth functioning of the market becomes 'a measure of truth that will make it possible to discern, between the practices of government, those which are just from those which are, instead, wrong.'"<sup>77</sup> Foucault, here, wants to convey the ways in which the freedom of the market comes to determine an entire regime of truth that governs everyday evaluations of right and wrong. From Read's perspective, what Foucault highlights is the fact that our current form of subjectivity, which he himself terms *homo economicus*, subjects us to a logic of the market, rather than being an innate feature of human nature: "for Foucault, we have to take seriously the manner in which the fundamental understanding of individuals as governed by interest and competition is not just an ideology that can be refused (and debunked), but is an intimate part of how our lives and our subjectivity are structured."<sup>78</sup> Therefore, a primary reason to utilize Foucault to address the ubiquity of neoliberal logic is because he himself identified contemporary subjectivity as dominated by *homo economicus*, and suggested ways to combat it. First, denaturalize and problematize the

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<sup>76</sup> Jason Read, "A Genealogy of Homo-Economicus: Neoliberalism and the Production of Subjectivity," *Foucault Studies* 6 (February 2009): 26.

<sup>77</sup> Quoted in Ottavio Marzocca, "Philosophical *Parrhêsia* and Transpolitical Freedom," *Foucault Studies* 15 (February 2013), 141.

<sup>78</sup> Read, 34-35.

logic of neoliberalism through genealogy. Then, embark on an alternate path of subjectivation through care of the self. An interesting addendum to this argument for salience is Melissa Orlie's contention, "[t]he Greek ethics of *aphrodisia* is closer than is the ethics of Augustine and Calvin to the expectation of modulated indulgence that characterizes contemporary consumer culture, whatever truth there may be to Weber's clam about the spirit of modern capitalism at its birth."<sup>79</sup> As we will see, Foucault himself made an argument for the similarity of the Imperial period to his own contemporary moment in arguing for the applicability of classical ethics to modern life. Orlie's point, that an approach to consumerism needs to resemble the ethical negotiation of the Greeks, more than the ethical renunciation of Christian thinkers, demonstrates also the avenues of exchange between the process of ethical transformation described by Foucault and contemporary efforts to reimagine human relationships to nature.

The final motivation for this project stems from a belief, inspired by Foucault,<sup>80</sup> that philosophy, whatever its current degree of confinement in the hallowed halls of the ivory tower, can and must affect daily life. Moreover, it is not just the types of ethics that have been stripped of their complexity in order to become suitable to be "applied" that have relevance for everyday life. Rather, the strands of thought that search most deeply into the great questions of human existence--that speak of truth, meaning, justice, and reality--must be allowed to impact the world in their own pregnant, if unpredictable, ways. Foucault says in the essay, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," that knowledge "is

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<sup>79</sup> Melissa A. Orlie, "The Desire for Freedom and the Consumption of Politics," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 28, no. 4 (July 2002): 406.

<sup>80</sup> Who in turn found inspiration in the classical sources.

made for cutting" (NGH 88). This recalls one of my favorite of Kafka's quotes, "[e]in Buch muß die Axt sein für das gefrorene Meer in uns."<sup>81</sup> Both statements suggest that discourses, philosophical or otherwise, do things in the world. As Arran Stibbe says about the ways we see animals, "[d]iscourses are more than just ways of using language--they encode the models that groups use to construct their own version of reality."<sup>82</sup> This is to say that unless we engage in the type of critique represented by Foucauldian genealogy, and then present alternate versions of reality--Foucault would say fictions of truth--we simply concede the field to the unexamined modes of truth that animate current conversations. As radical environmental philosopher Anthony Weston says, in response to the types of utilitarianism represented by thinkers like Juliet Schor,<sup>83</sup>

I would argue that the very point of radical environmentalism is that this kind of rough and ready utilitarian accountancy is utterly unsuited to the kinds of choices that lie before us. That we choose to generate highly toxic and half-million-year-lived nuclear wastes, for example, mainly in order to continue to use electricity in spectacularly inefficient and unnecessary ways, has to be laid to a choice framework that makes present-day commodiousness almost the only relevant or conceivable standard while knowingly and unabashedly 'discounting the future' (a term of art, indeed, among economists) and foreclosing deontological, relational, and other sorts of values that foreground questions like justice to our descendants or what more proper place humans might find in the larger living world. Such a framework does not need to be tweaked, let alone just made more explicit: it needs to be *superseded*.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> "A book must be the axe for the frozen sea within us."

<sup>82</sup> Stibbe, 54.

<sup>83</sup> One of Schor's main arguments is that reducing our environmental footprint is not a sacrifice, but actually the path to true happiness. See Juliet Schor, *Plenitude: The Economics of True Wealth* (New York: Penguin Press, 2010).

<sup>84</sup> Anthony Weston, "As Paradigms Turn: What It *Might* Mean to Be Green," *Ethics, Policy & Environment* 16, no. 2 (June 2013), 159-160.

Schor would likely argue that such a radical approach is ineffective because it will be rejected by a majority of people. In order to get people on one's side, one must speak a language they understand. Perhaps she is right, but this is precisely the type of conversation, animated by rigorous thinking, that environmental philosophers and activists need to start having. Foucault understands epistemic change in terms of transformation, troubling naturalized concepts, discourses, and practices, and creating new ways of being in the cracks. Weston conceptualizes this shift in terms of Kuhnian paradigms. He states,

[w]hen scientific paradigms shift, according to Thomas Kuhn's classic account, the prevailing 'normal' standards are themselves overturned. A new set of practices and aspirations are embraced by a new community of practitioners, and the resultant gains and losses cannot be commensurated—often it is unclear what even is a gain or loss—because they belong to discontinuous frames of reference.<sup>85</sup>

Although I do not have the types of experience that McKibben does in organizing environmental campaigns, and it might be forward of me to claim to be a philosopher,<sup>86</sup> and thus might be excoriated from both sides for presuming to question basic assumptions in divergent fields, I am a philosopher in the Foucauldian sense, perhaps even a Cynic. At bottom, I believe in the value of thinking otherwise, and that is what I attempt to do in the pages that follow.

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<sup>85</sup> Weston, "As Paradigms Turn," 160.

<sup>86</sup> Certainly not an analytic one; nobody's perfect.

## Chapter One: Conversion

No important change in ethics was ever accomplished without an internal change in our intellectual emphases, loyalties, affections, and convictions. The proof that conservation has not yet touched these foundations of conduct lies in the fact that philosophy and religion have not yet heard of it. In our attempt to make conservation easy, we have made it trivial.

--Aldo Leopold, "The Land Ethic"<sup>87</sup>

And behold, one came up to him, saying, 'Teacher, what good deed must I do, to have eternal life?' And [Jesus] said to him, 'Why do you ask me what is good? One there is who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments' [...] The young man said to him, 'All these I have observed what do I still lack?' Jesus said to him, 'If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.' When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions.

--Matthew 19:16-22<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Aldo Leopold, "The Land Ethic," in *The Ethics of the Environment*, ed. Robin Attfield (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), 104.

<sup>88</sup> Although the current chapter makes the case that Foucault extrapolates a third type of conversion, different from the Platonic and the Christian, I have chosen this passage from Matthew because it is used by Bill McKibben to discuss the difficult path of conversion as relates to wealth and comfort. McKibben makes the point that Jesus is not asking for half measures; rather he asks for a total transformation in the man's way of life. The man, for his part, goes away sorrowful because he cannot bring himself to take this leap. McKibben states, "Not 'went away angry,' or 'went away scornful,' but went away sorrowful, more than half convinced the message was right, and yet unable to act on it." From "Job and Matthew," in *The Bill McKibben Reader: Pieces from an Active Life* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2008), 187.

In this first chapter, I begin at the beginning, with Foucault's understanding of the process of conversion. Foucault commences his discussion of conversion in the first lecture of *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, in the context of his examination of the principles of *gnōthi seauton* (know yourself) and *epimeleia heautou* (the care of the self). In an attempt to understand why the prescription, "know yourself,"<sup>89</sup> has continued to animate philosophical thought in our own time, while the notion of caring for oneself--potentially the more important classical precept--has been lost, Foucault engages in a slight digression through Cartesian thought, which, he insists, severed philosophy and spirituality.<sup>90</sup> He defines philosophy as the form of thought that "attempts to determine the conditions and limits of the subject's access to truth," and spirituality as the types of practices that allow one to become a subject that can access truth (HS 16-17). In other words, philosophy determines what kind of subject one must be to access truth, and spirituality suggests how one becomes that subject. In all of Antiquity and up until the Enlightenment, Foucault argues, these two strands were inseparable.<sup>91</sup> However, Descartes eliminated the need for spirituality by arguing that an individual "is capable of recognizing the truth and having access to it in himself and merely through his acts of knowing, without anything else being demanded of him and without him having to change or alter his being as subject" (HS 19). This, Foucault claims, is the subject that has come down to us, and explains the lack of attention to care of self in Western

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<sup>89</sup> Inscribed in the forecourt of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi.

<sup>90</sup> He does mitigate this by laying some of the blame at the doorstep of medieval Scholastic theologians.

<sup>91</sup> This is not true of Aristotle. However, he dismisses this objection by claiming, grandiosely, "as everyone knows, Aristotle is not the pinnacle of Antiquity, but its exception (HS 19).



thought. Thus, I begin with conversion both because it literally appears at the beginning of the lectures under examination, but also because the notion that one cannot access the truth by remaining where one is seems to be the prerequisite, for Foucault, for his examination of care of the self in general.

In this chapter, I argue first that the goal of conversion in the Hellenistic and Roman periods of antiquity is to remove oneself from a condition known as *stultitia*, a condition of ignorance, slavery to external forces, and lack of attention to the self. In the late imperial period, the concept of *stultitia* suggests the negative view of social norms and mores that characterize traditional pedagogy in Hellenistic and Roman philosophical schools such as the Stoics, Epicureans, and Cynics. The first step of conversion, then, is rejecting the values and practices of society and embarking on a philosophic path. I then explore the process of conversion, demonstrating that conversion as care of the self possesses two aspects, the initial moment of concern for the false life one has been living, and a commitment to the arduous path of conversion to the truth. In order to understand how Foucault understands conversion, it becomes important to elucidate his belief that the subject is a process rather than a substance. Following this, I demonstrate that this exegesis of the classical sources on conversion was not merely an academic exercise for Foucault; rather, conversion to the self is what he is seeking in his own life. This is evident from the fact that Foucault views transformation--or thinking otherwise--as the goal of both his academic work, but also his other everyday practices. It is important to note, however, that while in the classical sources, conversion is guided by received philosophical truths, for Foucault conversion is guided by provisional discourses of truth

underpinned by the values of care and freedom. I conclude by addressing the importance of conversion to the formation of subjectivity in the interplay of subjection and subjectivation.

As an intervention in contemporary ethics, and especially environmental activism, this chapter demonstrates Foucault's conviction that one cannot be ethical, cannot see the truth, without undergoing a transformation in her subjectivity. Thus, it denaturalizes the unitary, transcendental subject of contemporary environmental ethics and environmental activism. Moreover, the concept of *stultitia* puts in stark relief contemporary American society and leads one to question the guiding principles of that society, specifically the ways in which neoliberalism views all relations through the lens of economics. Finally, through establishing subjectivity as processual rather than substantive, the chapter lays the groundwork for the types of interventions that arise in succeeding chapters.

### *The Worst State We Can Be In*

Naturally, Foucault's story of conversion starts with the state of being one wants to, or should want to, escape. The Stoics, Epicureans, and Cynics refer to this state as *stultitia*, which is basically a state of ignorance characterized by valuing the wrong things, being unable to focus one's attention and will, and being unaware of the problems inherent in the way one lives. Foucault examines the concept of *stultitia* almost entirely through the writings of the first century AD<sup>92</sup> Stoic philosopher, Seneca, due to his

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<sup>92</sup> While I understand that "Common Era/Before Common Era" (CE/BCE) is the academic standard, I follow Foucault in using the more archaic, but perhaps more truthful, Anno Domini/Before Christ (AD/BC).

extensive treatment of the subject. As Foucault frequently notes, many texts from this period have been lost to us, and so he often focuses on a single text that he feels to be a well-elaborated representation of a particular concept or school of thought.<sup>93</sup> Moreover, Foucault's lectures suggest that he saw the Stoics as the exemplars of care of the self.<sup>94</sup> Michael Ure states, "Foucault describes this Stoic art of living, as '*the summit of a curve, the golden age in the cultivation of the self.*' Foucault, in other words, chronicles Stoicism as the crowning glory of the ancient ethics of care of the self."<sup>95</sup>

Seneca begins by defining *stultitia* as self-servitude. This recalls Greek value systems, which argue that a free citizen must be master of his passions instead of the slave of them. What Seneca means, however, is slightly different.<sup>96</sup> First, one should free oneself from over-commitment, from all the things in life that are unnecessary and distract one from the self. In order to do this, one must extricate oneself from the cycle of obligation and reward. In the world in which Seneca lives, most people impose obligations on themselves--political, economic, and familial--that speak to certain

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<sup>93</sup> In the case of *stultitia*, for instance, he says that the concept is "commonplace in Stoic philosophy, starting especially with Posidonius" (HS 126). Epicureans and others employ a concept similar to *stultitia* without employing the term itself. While Foucault does frequently utilize one or two specific thinkers in order to elucidate a concept, he nuances his understanding by comparing different sources, for instance, Greek and Roman on the self.

<sup>94</sup> We will complicate this view as we going along, specifically in the case of the Cynics.

<sup>95</sup> Michael Ure, "Senecan Moods: Foucault and Nietzsche on the Art of the Self," *Foucault Studies* 4 (February 2007): 26.

<sup>96</sup> Foucault notes that there are many differences between Platonic conversion and Hellenistic-Roman conversion--Platonic conversion opposes this world of false representations to another world of true forms, whereas imperial conversion takes place entirely in this world: Platonic conversion liberates one from the "prison-body, the tomb-body" (HS 201), whereas imperial conversion liberates us from things in the world that we cannot control: for Platonic conversion, "knowledge in the form of recollection constitutes the essential, fundamental element of conversion is" (HS 202), while imperial conversion stresses training (*askēsis*), rather than knowledge (HS 202).

commonly held values. However, because these obligations are unpleasant, people seek a reward for taking them on, in the form of "financial profit, the profit of glory, the profit of reputation, or profit in the form of the pleasures of the body and life" (HS 262). It is important to understand when interacting with Foucault's transcribed lectures that it is generally unclear when Foucault is quoting directly from his sources. While he may be doing so, it is not represented as such in the transcripts. Thus, all quotes should be assumed to be paraphrases or loose translations of Foucault's own from the classical sources. Interestingly, Alexander Nehamas suggests that this functions not just as a rhetorical strategy, but actually represents one of Foucault's own techniques of self. He shows that Foucault speaks "in Socrates' place, obliterating the lines that separate quotation, paraphrase, accepting another's views, putting words in another's mouth, and finally taking another's self as one's own."<sup>97</sup> To return to Foucault's discussion of *stultitia*, one is reminded, perhaps, of a person working in finance in New York City, who compensates herself for her long, stressful hours at work with excessive drinking or wild shopping sprees in her free time.<sup>98</sup> Seneca says that ultimately neither the obligation nor the reward contributes to long-term wellbeing or one's ability to act ethically in the world; in fact, submitting to them prevents individuals from caring for themselves. This state in which most people live is *stultitia*, and he describes it in *De Tranquillitate* as "the

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<sup>97</sup> Alexander Nehamas, *The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), 183.

<sup>98</sup> In fact, in the conclusion, it will be argued that the contemporary form of *stultitia* is actually *homo economicus*, a mode of subjectivity defined by Jason Read as "a generalization of the idea of 'entrepreneur,' 'investment,' and 'risk' beyond the realm of finance capital to every quotidian relation." Jason Read, "A Genealogy of Homo-Economicus: Neoliberalism and the Production of Subjectivity," *Foucault Studies* 6 (February 2009): 32.

worst state one can be in and, to tell the truth, the state in which one finds oneself when one has not yet begun on the path of philosophy, or in the work of the practice of the self" (HS 126).

The *stulta*<sup>99</sup> is the person who has not cared for herself, by definition. She is not only lackadaisical about engaging in the practices that help train the self, she does not even accede to the first level of care, which is concern. She fails to find anything wrong with her life, and does not recognize the truth of philosophy as potentially beneficial. She may not even be aware that there is another way to live. This leads to extremely negative effects in Seneca's opinion; "the *stultus* is someone who is exposed to all the winds of external representations and who, thus, is not able to separate, or use *discriminatio*, between the content of these representations and the elements that we will call, if you like, the subjective" (HS 127). In other words, the *stulta* cannot focus, cannot decide what she wants in life, much less determine whether it is positive or negative. One day she spends time with an advertising executive, and she wants to go into advertising. The next day she goes to a yoga class and plans to move for several months to India. Like a traditional dilettante, because she cannot focus on anything, she never achieves mastery; she cannot accomplish anything worthwhile. The *stultus* is also "dispersed in time [...]" The *stultus* is someone who remembers nothing, who lets his life pass by, who does not try to restore unity [to his life]" (HS 127). Such subjective dispersion leads to "agitation of the spirit, instability of attention, changing of opinions and wishes, and consequently, fragility in the face of all events that can arise" (ES 1239). Thus, one of the main reasons

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<sup>99</sup> Following Latin usage, *stultus* refers to a male and *stulta* a female.

that *stultitia* is viewed negatively is because it leaves one vulnerable to outside influences and events that one cannot control. Conversely, the main goal of care of the self in Stoicism, Cynicism, and Epicureanism<sup>100</sup> is to be unaffected by things that are outside one's control. Another serious problem for Seneca is that the *stulta* cannot will properly. Her will is not free; it is determined by forces that she does not recognize and which are even contradictory. She wills lazily, changing her objective from moment to moment. Thus, her will is "limited, relative, fragmentary, and changeable (HS 128). It is not hard to determine that from the perspective of Seneca, this person can never be capable of right action in the world, since she cannot even determine to will properly. In order to correct this, the individual must break with the world around her, "the world of error, the world of interest and pleasure, with the whole world which constitutes, in relation to the eternity of truth and its purity, the universe of the impure" (CV 116). One must first reject the state of *stultitia*.

It is possible, of course, to remain in a state of *stultitia*. However, this prevents one from being an ethical subject at all. Seneca goes as far as to suggest,

the individual [...] has never naturally had the relationship of rational will that defines the morally sound action and the morally valid subject. Consequently, the subject should not strive for knowledge to replace his ignorance. The individual should strive for a status as a subject that he has never known at any moment of his existence. He has to replace the non-subject with the status of subject defined by the fullness of the self's relationship to the self. (HS 125)

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<sup>100</sup> Following Foucault, I discuss various philosophers and schools of philosophy as though they are using concepts in the same way, unless he makes an explicit distinction between them, as is often the case, for instance, with Plato. As I noted in my introduction, I acknowledge the fact that he may be eliding important differences between thinkers, but am more interested in the ways in which he is using the classical sources than the accuracy of his reading.

In other words, while one might be able to act in concert with the values and norms of one's society, that is not acting ethically for Seneca. As Thich Nhat Hanh says, if your society is sick, then adapting to it does not bring you health.<sup>101</sup> Similarly, if one's society is characterized by valuing of the wrong things, then adapting oneself uncritically to it does not promote true ethical action, but rather a simple adherence to the rules of a particular moral code.<sup>102</sup>

Nonetheless, the philosophers of Imperial Rome insist that an individual cannot pull herself out of *stultitia* on her own. The *stulta* cannot spontaneously begin to will care of the self, "since what characterizes [*stultitia*] is, precisely, that [one can] not will [the self]" (HS 129). Rather, she must be pulled out, either intentionally by another person who cares about her, or by a chance encounter with the truth. In both cases, the truth enters through the ear. For the Stoics, Cynics, and Epicureans, listening "is the positive condition for acquiring the truth. This tradition is picked up [from the Pythagoreans] during the imperial period, where we see the beginning of the culture of silence and the art of listening" (TS 32). According to Plutarch, "virtue cannot be separated from the *logos*, that is to say from rational language [...]. The only access the soul has to the *logos* is through the ear" (HS 319). In fact, according to Epictetus, listening cannot even be

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<sup>101</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh, *Love in Action: Writings on Non-Violent Social Change* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1993), 123.

<sup>102</sup> Naturally, this begs the question of who decides what true ethical action is. For individuals like Nhat Hanh and Seneca, the answer is fairly straightforward. Precepts guiding ethical action have come down to them through their respective traditions. For Foucault, this question is more problematic, but I will attempt to address it as we go on.

considered a *tekhnē*, or craft,<sup>103</sup> because we are passive receivers of the truth, just beginning to contact it (HS 323). Yet this passive reception is the key to conversion. As Epictetus claims, "[i]n every reasonable soul coming into the world there are seeds of virtue, and these seeds of virtue are awakened and activated by those words of truth that are pronounced around the subject and which he takes in through the ear" (HS 321). Thus, in order to extricate the subject from *stultitia*, she must be introduced to a different paradigm of truth through contact with philosophical *logos*.<sup>104</sup>

So conversion begins when individuals are introduced to a school of philosophical truth, and decide to accept or reject it. This first step is characterized by Foucault as the moment of decision. Certainly one might be introduced to the *logos* and reject it. Foucault highlights just such a situation in Plato's letters concerning his time at the court of Dionysius, the tyrant of Syracuse (GSO 219). Plato speaks the truth, and Dionysius refuses to hear it. In fact, he is so enraged that he tries to have Plato killed. On the other hand, one might use that moment of openness in order to decide to concern oneself with the way one lives. This initial acceptance of the *logos* is described by philosophers like Epictetus, Seneca, Marcus Aurelius, and Plotinus as a process of turning toward the self.<sup>105</sup> As Foucault paraphrases, "it is necessary of course to apply oneself to oneself, that is to say that we must turn away from the things that surround us [...] Our attention,

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<sup>103</sup> A metaphor often used to characterize philosophy.

<sup>104</sup> *Logos* is used in Greek philosophy to describe speech or discourse, but typically in the sense of communicating a true precept orally. This latter meaning is how Foucault uses the term.

<sup>105</sup> "Conversion to the self" is *epistrephein pros heauton* in Greek and *convertere ad se* in Latin; both verbs denoting conversion also possess the sense of "turning around--turning towards" (HS 199).



eyes, mind, and finally our whole being must be turned towards the self throughout our life. We must turn away from everything that turns us away from our self, so as to turn ourselves around towards ourselves" (HS 198). Foucault argues that this turning of the gaze does not represent the Platonic model of "look[ing] inside yourself to discover the seeds of truth within yourself" (HS 209). Rather, it is summarized in the injunction of Marcus Aurelius, "Don't concern yourself with other people, it is much better to take care of yourself" (HS 211). In other words, turning the gaze towards the self represents not worrying about things in the world one cannot control, and not wasting one's time gossiping about others or trying to change one's circumstances.

This does not mean, however, that in turning toward the self one begins navel-gazing or taking the self as an object of analysis. In a key, and yet enigmatic, passage from Plutarch, Foucault describes the moment of decision as the beginning of a continual process of conversion.

Clear a space around the self and do not let yourself be carried away and distracted by all the sounds, by all the faces, and by all the people around you. Clear a space around the self, to think of the aim, or rather of the relationship between yourself and the aim. Think of this trajectory separating you from that towards which you wish to advance, or which you wish to reach. This trajectory of self to self, it is on this that one should concentrate all one's attention. Presence of self to self precisely on account of the distance that still remains between self and self, presence of self to self in the distance of self from self: this should be the object, the theme, of this turning back of the gaze which was previously directed on others and must now be brought back, not to the self as an object of knowledge, but precisely to this distance from the self insofar as one is the subject of an action who has the means to reach oneself, but above all whose requirement is to reach it. And this something one must reach is the self. (HS 214)

Here again, we see that by conversion of decision, Plutarch means that one should clear the space around oneself from distractions. Turning from the things of the world that are

not ultimately valuable, one should decide to be concerned for the self. One should give oneself space for thought and reflection, in order to quiet one's thoughts enough to decide on a goal and to figure out how to reach it. This might take the form of retiring from politics, as Seneca occasionally suggests (TS 30-31), or spending time at a school, like the one run by Epictetus. Once one has made the decision to care, and has turned toward the self as the thing most crucial to care about, one must "think of the aim." This is also described in the classic literature as "it is necessary to advance towards the self as one advances towards a goal" (HS 205). What does this mean? In differentiating Stoic conversion from Christian conversion, Foucault argues that in the former there is no fundamental break with the self, no death of the self, as there is in the latter (HS 203). However, if that is the case, how can the self be both the goal and the entity assessing and moving toward that goal? The phrasing gives the sense of a linear path, like an arrow sailing toward a target. Yet, there is also the "presence of self to self in the distance of self from self," which suggests a co-presence of both forms of the self in each moment. So it seems that we need to solve the problem of two selves, or perhaps even three. For if we combine the phrase "care of the self" with the passage we have just been discussing, it seems that the self is the subject of care, the object of care, and the goal of care.

In order to understand how this process functions, it is important to address directly how Foucault understands the self in classical thought, and how it might relate to the process of subject formation. Throughout Foucault's work on care of the self, he evinces a complicated relationship to Platonic thought.<sup>106</sup> On the one hand, he wants to

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demonstrate that he understands the traditional interpretation of Plato, and how its reception has impacted Western thought. On the other, it seems that his more important goal is to bring to the fore different ways of understanding Plato, or to highlight aspects of his thought that have not been taken up by Western philosophy. This is also the case in his negotiation with Plato's thought concerning the self. Foucault avers that traditionally in Plato, the self is understood as *psyche*, the soul. It is imprisoned in the body, though ontologically distinct from it (CV 147).<sup>107</sup> Plato claims, in his letter VII, that "after [the] death [of the body] this immortal soul will be judged according to what it did during life, and if it has committed injustices in its life it will be exposed to terrible punishments and long peregrinations underground" (GSA 252). Given Foucault's perspective on the transcendental subject,<sup>108</sup> one can be fairly certain that he does not concur with this understanding of the self as immortal soul. However, there is another aspect of Plato's thought that is crucial to his understanding of the self. In his lectures at the University of Vermont in 1982, Foucault argues that Plato demonstrates in the *Alcibiades* that "[t]he

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<sup>106</sup> As classicist Paul Allen Miller notes in his monograph *Postmodern Spiritual Exercises*, "[i]n Foucault's later work, [his] perception of the inherent heterogeneity of the Platonic oeuvre will lead to his reading the dialogues as an interconnected web of individual texts rather than attempting to subordinate them to a single overarching vision." *Postmodern Spiritual Practices: The Construction of the Subject and the Reception of Plato in Lacan, Derrida, and Foucault* (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2007), 183. In other words, Foucault views the dialogues as modeling a way of life, rather than representing a set of theories.

<sup>107</sup> Foucault does not make clear whose interpretation he is describing when he talks about traditionally receptions of Plato. However, a good example in English of a Plato scholar who follows this interpretation is Reginald E. Allen. Longtime professor of philosophy and classics at Northwestern University, Allen translated all of Plato's works into English and was known for his linguistic precision. A good entre into his work is his 1959 article, "Anamnesis in Plato's 'Meno and Phaedo'," *The Review of Metaphysics* 13, no. 1 (September 1959): 165-174.

<sup>108</sup> See for instance, the interviews "Entretien avec M. Foucault," and "Retour de la Morale," in *Dits et Écrits II: 1976-1988* (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), 1105-1114 and 1515-1526.

care of the self is the care of the activity and not the care of the soul-as-substance" (TS 25). This echoes a claim he makes in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, where he states, "[w]hat Socrates cares for [...] is Alcibiades [the eponymous protagonist of the Platonic dialogue] himself, for his soul, for his soul as a subject of action. More precisely, Socrates cares about the way in which Alcibiades will be concerned about himself" (HS 58). We see this notion of the "subject of action" appear also in the passage we are trying to decipher; the gaze must be brought back "to this distance from your self insofar as you are the subject of an action who has the means to reach your self" (HS 214). Foucault tries to explain this by saying, "[t]aking care of oneself will be to take care of the self insofar as it is the 'subject of' a certain number of things: the subject of instrumental action, subject of relationships with others, subject of behaviors and attitudes in general, and the subject also of relationships to oneself" (HS 57).

This is supported by a passage in "Writing the Self," where Foucault talks about two different ways of giving an account of oneself. The first way, in Cicero, is "to give an account of oneself as the subject of action (or of deliberation for a possible action)" (ES 1245). The second way, in Seneca or Marcus Aurelius, is to give an account of the relationship of self to self (ES 1245-46). However, the relationship of self to self is also a relationship of action, as we see above in the measuring of the self against the self, based on emergence in the world through action. Foucault underscores this in an interview in 1983 when he says, "if by ethics you mean the relationship you have to yourself when you act, then I would say that [*The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*] intends to be an ethics" (MS 15). In the moment of action a relationship between the self as emergence

and the self as aspiration<sup>109</sup> is created and being attentive to this relationship, and how one must change it in order to develop a more perfect relationship, defines ethics.<sup>110</sup> The most obvious outcome of this reconceptualization of the self as subject of action is that the self as object of care falls out of our provisionally constructed triad. It seems counter-intuitive, but if the self is not a substance, then one does not care for the self as one cares for a puppy. The thing that one cares for when one cares for the self is the activity of striving toward the ideal self. That is why Foucault notes that Socrates does not care for Alcibiades per se as an individual, but only as concerns his ability to care for himself.

So if we remove the self as the object of care, we are left with the self as the subject of action and the self as the goal toward which one moves. As we have said, the goal suggests an aspirational self, or more specifically, truths that orient and describe the way in which the ideal self exists in the world, in thought, emotion, and action. So finally we are left with the question, what does the subject of action mean? If the self is not a substance, how is it transformed? How can it be measured against the aspirational self? In the essay, "The Ethic of the Care of the Self as a Practice of Freedom," Foucault claims that the subject "is not a substance. It is a form, and this form is neither everywhere nor

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<sup>109</sup> In the classical period, the aspirational self would have been determined by the traditions of one's philosophical school. For the Greeks, this is the self that has mastery over itself, in which reason rules the passions (UP 43). For the Stoics, this self is defined by autarky, or self-sufficiency, and ataraxy, or tranquility (HDS 1175). In other words the self cannot be moved by outside influences over which it has no control, even unto death. It gains ultimate joy only from the self. This is also described by the metaphor of "establishing oneself close to oneself, of 'residing in oneself,' and staying there" (TDS 1175).

<sup>110</sup> In essence, the aspirational self is the truth manifest. It is the way in which an individual would act if they had fully subjectivated the truth, which in the real world can only ever be an aspiration. In fact, both the self as emergence and the self as truth are moving targets, not unitary entities. I will, however, continue to use the phrase, "aspirational self" in order to remind the reader that the process of conversion is an attempt to harmonize two types of selves through action.

always identical with itself. You do not have the same type of relationship to yourself when you constitute yourself as a political subject who goes to vote or who speaks in an assembly and when you seek to realize your desire in a sexual relation" (ESS 1537-38). Foucault seems to be arguing that an individual will manifest different subjects in different contexts, and in response to different matrices of power, knowledge, and truth, some intentional, some not.<sup>111</sup> In order to simplify, when Foucault says that the self is the subject of action, he means it is the entity to which action is predicated. In other words, though it is constituted through action, it also becomes momentarily manifest in action. Despite the confusion that this can cause, Foucault insists that there is no preexisting, or post-existing, subject. As Edward McGushin, notes, "for Foucault subjectivity is not something we are, is it an activity that we do. Subjectivity is relational, dynamic, and restless, potentially unruly and unpredictable."<sup>112</sup> Thus, the subject is constituted in different ways depending on the context, meaning not only a sexual subject and a political subject, as Foucault suggests here, but a different political subject from one moment to the next, depending either on outside conditions, or an intentional training of the self. One is reminded of Nietzsche's pronouncement in *On the Genealogy of Morals*,

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<sup>111</sup> Jana Sawicki argues that Judith Butler's concept of the subject follows this understanding strongly. She states, for Butler "the subject is not a thing, a substantive entity, but rather a process of signification within an open system of discursive possibilities." "Feminism, Foucault and 'Subjects' of Power and Freedom," in *The Later Foucault: Politics and Philosophy*, ed. Jeremy Moss (London: Sage Publications, 1998), 98.

<sup>112</sup> Edward McGushin, "Foucault's theory and practice of subjectivity," in *Michel Foucault: Key Concepts*, ed. Dianna Taylor (Durham, UK: Acumen, 2011): 134-35.

"'the doer' is merely a fiction added to the deed--the deed is everything."<sup>113</sup> Foucault describes the conditions of possibility for the emergence of subjects as matrices of action.

To understand what this means, let's use another Nietzschean metaphor, lightning. A certain number of atmospheric factors have to be present for lightning to manifest in the visible form we are familiar with, among them elevation, latitude, prevailing wind currents, and relative humidity. Even so, no two flashes of lightning emerge in exactly the same way, because between each flash, those atmospheric factors change slightly. The matrices of possible action can be likened to these atmospheric conditions, and the "subject" to the lightning. Just as scattered and invisible electrically-charged molecules come together into a visible, unified, and delimited electrostatic discharge in the form of a lightning strike, the fragmented discourses, values, perceptions, and experiences of the self come together in the visible form of action, and like lightning, Foucault will argue that the subject is never exactly the same from moment to moment and situation to situation. However, taking the momentary emergence of a subject in action and positing a unitary and transcendental subject is like seeing a flash of lightning and positing its existence beyond our momentary experience of it.<sup>114</sup> Unfortunately, our philosophical patrimony provides us with paltry language to understand what it might mean for

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<sup>113</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 45.

<sup>114</sup> Gayatri Spivak makes a similar point in a discussion of whether the subaltern "exists." In *In Other Worlds*, she states, "[d]ifferent knottings and configurations of these strands [of 'politics, ideology, economics, history, sexuality, language, and so on'], determined by heterogenous determinations . . . produce the effect of an operating subject. Yet [humanism] symptomatically requires a continuous and homogenous cause for this effect and thus posits a sovereign and determining subject. This latter, then, is the effect of an effect, and its positing a metalepsis, or the substitution of an effect for a cause." Quoted in Anthony Alessandrini, "The Humanism Effect: Fanon, Foucault, and Ethics without Subjects," *Foucault Studies* 7 (September 2009): 76.

subjectivity to be a process rather than an entity, the momentary emergence of the flash of lightening, with all the environmental conditions that it requires, rather than the impression of the lightning itself.

David Weberman provides a good summary of this traditional understanding of the subject and how it relates to Foucault's concept of the subject in his article, "Are Freedom and Antihumanism Compatible?" The attributes of the generic subject, he states, are that she "possesses beliefs, desires, and, in general, consciousness, [...] has consciousness of itself as a self, [...] is a bearer or 'constitutive subject' (Foucault) of knowledge, [...] has some degree of unity and (psychological) continuity through time; and [...] has the capacity to choose or will."<sup>115</sup> Given that these attributes basically describe how an individual functions on a daily basis, they might be considered the functional aspects of the subject. Weberman concludes that Foucault's constituted subject meets the requirements of a functional subject, but does not meet the more stringent requirements of what he calls the humanist subject,<sup>116</sup> because Foucault insists that the subject is historically contextual rather than transcendental, that it does not possess "a given nature or set of inclinations, needs, desires, and interests," and because of his rejection of the concept of authenticity.<sup>117</sup> While, on the one hand, allowing for the use of the functional subject as relates to Foucault simply circumvents the question of substance versus process, thus forgoing an opportunity to radically reformulate our understanding

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<sup>115</sup> David Weberman, "Are Freedom and Antihumanism Compatible?" *Constellations* 7, no. 2 (2000): 258.

<sup>116</sup> I would be more inclined to call this the transcendental subject.

<sup>117</sup> Weberman, 262.



of subjectivity, we will see as we progress into the issues of free will versus determinism and the political agency of the self that an attempt to differentiate between the functional subject and the processual subject helps to navigate those criticisms.

So let's shelve the question of Weberman's generic subject for the time being, return to the quote that began this long exegesis, and try to sum up the process of subject formation that is Stoic conversion.

Think of this trajectory separating you from that towards which you wish to advance, or which you wish to reach. This trajectory of self to self, it is on this that one should concentrate all one's attention. Presence of self to self precisely on account of the distance that still remains between self and self, presence of self to self in the distance of self from self: this should be the object, the theme, of this turning back of the gaze which was previously directed on others and must now be brought back, not to the self as an object of knowledge, but precisely to this distance from the self insofar as one is the subject of an action who has the means to reach oneself, but above all whose requirement is to reach it. And this something one must reach is the self. (HS 214)

Essentially, the individual, having decided to be concerned for herself, delimits an aspirational or ideal self, based on certain principles of truth, usually formulated in the mode of prescriptions, such as "live as though you were already old."<sup>118</sup> In collaboration with others, the individual learns a pattern of behavior, of emotion, and of relationships to the self and others, characteristic of the self that has fully embodied this *logos*. She then attempts through practice to bring her conduct into line with this aspirational self. Of course how the aspirational self would act is not always easy to determine. While schools of philosophy did give general guidelines and prescriptions for behavior, the fact that such precepts needed to be molded to the individual and specific situation meant that a person might not always know exactly how she should behave in a particular situation.

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<sup>118</sup> This adage was a basic precept for Seneca.

This, we will see, is why the individual requires a group of likeminded practitioners, or at least a close philosophical confidante, to guide her in her attempts to understand and apply the *logos*. The individual begins the process of becoming an ethical subject in the moment of decision to care for the self because she decides to actively and intentionally care. As the passage says, she measures the distance from the ideal self "insofar as [she is] the subject of an action *who has the means to reach [her]self*." However, that is just the beginning of conversion.

In choosing to equip herself with the truth, she has already undergone a transformation in her mode of being from an individual who does not care, to a subject who does, a subject who is passive to one who is active. However, she is not yet a full ethical subject. In order to achieve this, she must spend her life training. She must subjectivate the truth so that her actions, attitudes, and relationships manifest as an emergence of the truth itself in action. The language of trajectory suggests spatiality, but in reality, the process is chronological and aspirational. In each moment of manifestation, one measures oneself against the aspirational self as provisionally determined from the compendium of true discourses in one's tradition. This is the overlapping of presence and distance the passage describes. It also inspires many of the exercises that comprise the *askēsis* that we will examine in the next chapter. One acts, and then later one examines one's acts and compares them to how the *logoi* suggest one should act in such a situation. However, both the act and the assessment actually represent constitutions of the subject. One reactualizes the truth in one's contemplation and thinks about how one might act differently in the future. Interestingly, this narrative of emergence is supported by the

work of neurobiologist Antonio Damasio. He states, "[a]t each moment the self is constructed from the ground up. It is an evanescent reference state, so continuously and constantly *reconstructed* that the owner never knows it is being *remade* unless something goes wrong with the remaking."<sup>119</sup> Of course, for Foucault, the point is precisely to short-circuit the naturalized re-making that is subjection, to force something to "go wrong" so that a person can reexamine their values, assumptions, practices, and norms and potentially transform them.

Naturally, it may seem as though there is still a unitary subject that is *doing* all of these things. Béatrice Han, for instance, sees a transcendental ego creeping back into Foucault's late work "because he presents the subject as forming itself by a process of reflection and action."<sup>120</sup> However, Gary Gutting counters that freedom and reflection need not be understood in grand philosophical terms, but may simply be understood in their common place usage; "They may, for example, represent the small spark of subjectivity in a context heavily constrained by the social system of power-knowledge."<sup>121</sup> I would argue, in addition, that Foucault uses subtle language that reflects the fact that the self is an emergence, problematizing his use of traditional categories like self-reflection and decision-making. For instance, in describing the work of conversion, he states, "it is necessary to accompany abstention with this work of thought on itself, of

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<sup>119</sup> Antonio Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York: J.P. Putnam's Sons, 1994), 239-40.

<sup>120</sup> Gary Gutting, "Foucault, Hegel, Philosophy," in *Foucault and Philosophy*, ed. Timothy O'Leary and Christopher Falzon (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2010), 33.

<sup>121</sup> Gutting, 33. He also notes that Foucault's late work frequently utilizes Platonic language that suggests strong autonomy. As I suggest above, this is in contradiction to language that does the opposite, thus it may be unintentional, particularly in the context of the lectures.

self on self" (HS 414). Thus, it appears that thought thinks itself and that the self might be understood as coterminous with the event of thought in the act of working on itself. In fact, Foucault conceives of thought as a form of action, a mental action, as we will explore further in chapter two (HS 339). These linguistic acrobatics illuminate the paucity of the language that Western philosophy has in order to speak about the subject. For Foucault there is no unitary subject, the manifestation of the subject in action during the process of subjectivation is actually the appearance of the truth in action. The point is to ingrain the truth so fully that the chosen truth defines the emergence, not some other portion of the matrix that makes up the form of the subject.

It becomes evident through Foucault's late interviews and essays that this exploration of conversion is not just an academic enterprise. In fact, conversion to the self is exactly what Foucault claims to be attempting in his own research and writing. Like the classic philosophers he admires, he seeks to manifest the truth of his project in his own life. In a 1980 interview, he states, "my books are for me experiences [...] an experience is something in which one seeks to transform oneself [...] I only write because I do not yet know exactly what to think about this thing I would very much like to think about" (E 860). In the essay, "The Use of Pleasures and Techniques of the Self," he muses, "[t]here are moments in life where the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks or perceive differently than one sees is indispensable for continuing to look and reflect" (UPTS 1362). Finally, he contends in his revised preface to *The Use of Pleasure*, no doubt in response to the charge that he constantly changes what he thinks, what is the point of writing a book if "it need not lead one to a place that one could not have

foreseen, and if it need not permit [the author] to establish a new and strange relationship with himself" (PR 1403). Foucault believes that philosophy must recall itself to this original purpose. Rather than an academic and abstract mode of thinking, the activity of philosophy is "the critical work of thought upon itself," and it consists not in "legitimizing what one already knows," but "in seeking to know how and to what degree it is possible to think otherwise" (UPTS 1362). By giving people an altered perspective on their reality, philosophical thought can permit them to "perceive the things they do from a different angle and under a clearer light [...] one finds oneself looking down on oneself. The voyage rejuvenates things and matures the relationship to oneself" (UPTS 1364). So, for Foucault, one might envision the moment of recognition of contingency as the initial moment of conversion, and the process of researching and writing, the "thinking otherwise," as the practice of conversion, the care of the self, understood as care for the activity of transforming the self, which alters Foucault's mode of being.

It will come as no surprise, however, that Foucault's own conversion does not correspond exactly to the type of conversion he recovers from the classic texts. As he says, "you can't find the solution of a problem in the solution of another problem raised at another moment by other people" (GE 256). One troublesome discrepancy that emerges is that unlike the Greek, Hellenistic, or Roman models of conversion that Foucault explores, which are guided by truths in the form of received traditions, Foucault's aspirational self does not seem to be guided by any rules that can serve as guidelines for other people. In fact, he says in "Friendship as a Way of Life," that although he urges homosexuals to create a gay way of life, he will not provide ideas for how to do that, nor

does he think that there should be a specific set of criteria for practice. He states, "the idea of a program and of propositions is dangerous. When a program is presented, it becomes law, it is an impediment toward invention [...] The program must be empty" (AMV 986).<sup>122</sup> Similarly, in discussing the role of the philosopher as regards political change, he states,

[t]he work of an intellectual is not to model the political will of others; by the analyses that he conducts in his own field, he reexamines the evidence and the postulates, shakes up the habits, the manners of action and thought, dissipates the assumed familiarities, sizes up rules and institutions and, by way of this reproblematicization (where he plays his specific role of intellectual) participates in the formation of a political will (where he has his role of citizen to play). (SV 1495-96)

Thus, he insists that one must create a way of life that is applicable to oneself, and can potentially influence others, but cannot be forced upon them. Of course, this does not mean that he has no guiding principles of truth in his own practice of self. As Edward McGushin notes, Foucault's notion of truth, "is not truth in the sense of a quality of correctness of a judgment; it is not a particular truth about some object to be known, [but rather] a fullness of being which offers itself only to those individuals who have performed the proper work on themselves."<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Paul Veyne tells an interesting anecdote as relates to this from Foucault's time writing about the Iranian Revolution. He relates the story as follows: "On his return [from meeting with the Ayatollah Khomeini, who was in exile in Paris], he said to me: 'You can understand my going: there is a man who, with a single word pronounced from afar, is able to launch hundreds of thousands of protesters against the tanks in the streets of Tehran.' Then he added, 'He spoke to me of his programme of government; if he took power, the stupidity of it would make one weep (he raised his eyes to heaven, in pity).' That is what I saw and heard." *Foucault: His Thought, His Character* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2010), 127.

<sup>123</sup> Quoted in Christopher Yates, "Stations of the Self: Aesthetics and Ascetics in Foucault's Conversion Narrative," *Foucault Studies* 8 (February 2010): 83.

For Foucault, one form this proper work takes is the attempt to "*se déprendre de soi-même*," or let go of himself.<sup>124</sup> Foucault says of his attraction to Blanchot, Bataille, and Nietzsche that they function to "drag the subject away from himself" (E 862), to enact for the individual a dissolution of his subjectivity. Similarly, he views his own books as experiences that "drag him away from himself and prevent him from being the same" (E 862). Getting away from oneself can be seen to have two meanings in terms of Foucault's understanding of classical conversion. First, it represents the initial move out of *stultitia* and the continual effort not to fall back in. In fact, in the interview where he references Bataille, Blanchot, and Nietzsche, he argues that their work contradicts the type of foundational subject that is the basis of contemporary *stultitia*. Thus, what Foucault primarily means by "*se déprendre de soi-même*" is this long and arduous elaboration of the self, the constant transformation of the self with an eye to subjectivating the truth (SV 1494). In fact, Frédéric Gros argues that it is this attempt to get away from oneself that inspired Foucault's exploration of the classical sources. He states, "what he asks of classical philosophy is to produce a certain number of effects of strangeness [...] it's a question of rendering us strange to ourselves, of showing the historicity of that which can seem the most ahistoric: the way in which, as subjects, we relate to ourselves."<sup>125</sup> Thus, the goal of introducing the philosophy of antiquity is to decenter the subject, pull her out of her traditional way of thinking and offer her a

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<sup>124</sup> Interestingly, the phrase "*se déprendre de quelqu'un*" can colloquially mean, "to fall out of love with someone," which suggests the provocative idea of falling out of love with oneself.

<sup>125</sup> Frédéric Gros, "Sujet morale et soi éthique chez Foucault," *Archives de Philosophie* 65, no. 2 (2002): 237.

different truth. However, there is also a second sense in which Foucault wants to get away from himself, and that is a persistent effort to question himself, his own practices, beliefs, and values. There is in his work a valorization of transformation for the sake of newness and possibility, and some argue that this fixation on transformation is, in fact, *stultitia*. Michael Ure, for example, charges Foucault with abandoning the "normative assumptions of the Hellenistic and Stoic traditions" in favor of a focus on aestheticization.<sup>126</sup> He concludes, "the limitless, perpetual self-transformation that Foucault champions must surely count as one of the pathologies that the care of the self is designed to cure, viz., the restlessness that Stoics refer to as '*stultitia*.'"<sup>127</sup>

Clearly, Foucault reads the classical sources in ways that are not faithful to their original purposes.<sup>128</sup> However, this is because he is fictioning the past as an intervention in the present. Given that Foucault's aspirational self is pragmatic rather than pursuing a traditional *telos* as in classical philosophy, it naturally responds to the effects it produces and thus can and should change. However, it will be my task to show throughout this project that Foucault succumbs neither to the nihilistic relativism with which his critics charge him,<sup>129</sup> nor to the *stultitia* that he sees in those around him. First of all, the process

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<sup>126</sup> Michael Ure, "Senecan Moods: Foucault and Nietzsche on the Art of the Self," *Foucault Studies* 4 (February 2007): 47.

<sup>127</sup> Ure, 47.

<sup>128</sup> He wouldn't be alone.

<sup>129</sup> Such charges have been made in their most thoughtful form by, for instance, Michael Walzer, "The Politics of Michel Foucault," *Dissent* 30 (Fall 1983), 481-90; Jürgen Habermas, "Taking Aim at the Heart of the Present," in *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, ed. David Couzens Hoy, trans. Sigrid Brauner and Robert Brown (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1986); and Charles Taylor, "Foucault on Freedom and Truth," *Philosophy and the Human Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,



of conversion, though in perpetual flux, seeks to give consistency to the self via an orientation to speaking and enacting the truth to which one adheres. As Réal Fillion argues, Foucault imagines care of the self as the creation of an ethical coherency through the subjectivation of the truth through practice.<sup>130</sup> Second, the process of subjectivation of truth will be guided by two values, freedom and care. Regardless of what specific issues Foucault is struggling with--how to conceptualize the demarcation of madness and reason, how to stop viewing one's sexual desire as the truth of oneself--regardless of what way of life he is arduously struggling to actualize, he creates unity in the process of transformation by acknowledging the radical contingency of historical experience and caring about it. Following the example of Seneca, he argues that "freedom is the ontological condition of ethics" (ESS 1531), not in the sense that one must struggle to free oneself from oppressive power, what he refers to as liberation, but in the sense that one must actualize one's freedom through a practice of the self in order to be capable of ethical action.<sup>131</sup>

The issue of the interaction between *stultitia* and care of the self raises a key point for Foucault, which is how subjection and subjectivation conspire in the formation of subjectivity. In "The Subject and Power," Foucault characterizes subjection as the ways in which norms, discourses, and relations of power form one's subjectivity, and

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1985). Of course others have made the charge with less acumen. For instance, Roger Kimball's review of James Miller's psychoanalytic pseudo-intellectual biography of Foucault, "The Perversions of Michel Foucault," *The New Criterion* (March 1993), accessed November 30, 2014, <http://www.newcriterion.com/articles.cfm/The-perversions-of-M--Foucault-4714>.

<sup>130</sup> Réal Fillion, "Freedom, Truth, and Possibility in Foucault's Ethics." *Foucault Studies* 3 (November 2005): 56.

<sup>131</sup> Yet, as we will see, one is only capable of action insofar as one is already free.

subjectivation as the active (trans)formation of the self through practice (SP 781). Although most scholars divide Foucault's work into roughly three periods, it is reasonable to note that there are two aspects to the creation of subjectivity, both of which are present in the late period.<sup>132</sup> In fact, the concept of *stultitia* that we see in the classical period certainly suggests that one is formed by power outside of one's control and that one must reject that power in order to reform oneself intentionally according to true discourses. Of course, it is not enough to say that one is subjected and then one frees oneself from subjection and forms oneself intentionally. Rather, Foucault argues in his late work that subjection and subjectivation happen simultaneously, as the individual interacts with her environment on conscious and unconscious levels (GE 1538). However, as we have seen in this chapter, what is key is that subjectivity occurs within an epistemic context, and is molded by it. The subject is no different. In general, before we come to a place where we can reflect critically on our own lives, we are already formed. According to McGushin, "[t]he pattern of my life, the form of myself is mostly preestablished and already waiting for me. This ready-made character of life comes from what Foucault calls disciplinary power or governmentality. As I pass through all of the institutions [...] that give form to my life, I find myself caught up in an intricate web of compulsion and choice, desire and necessity [...] All of these authorities and institutions train me to be."<sup>133</sup> In fact, Judith Butler notes that when self-forming takes place outside of the social bounds within which subjectivation usually occurs, at the limits of the livable, as Foucault would say, the self

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<sup>132</sup> Demonstrating this forms part of Edward McGushin's project in *Foucault's Askēsis*.

<sup>133</sup> McGushin, "Foucault's theory and practice of subjectivity," 132-33.

"risks its deformity as a subject, occupying that ontologically insecure position which poses the question anew: who will be a subject here, and what will count as life?"<sup>134</sup> Thus, despite the concurrence of subjection and subjectivation, care of the self is to some degree pitted against discipline and normalization. As Cressida Hayes and many others have pointed out, the goal of discipline is to increase capacities while also increasing governability. Thus, the straightforward disciplinary subject is "conformist, docile, [and] self-monitoring."<sup>135</sup> The upshot of this for Christoph Menke is that "the power to personally lead one's life cannot simply be added to the disciplinary subject's powers of execution and self-direction, but rather must proceed with them in tension."<sup>136</sup> However, it is this productive tension that allows for the constitutions of new ways of being. As Alexander Nehamas says of Socrates' role in the Platonic dialogues,

[h]ere then is another reason Socrates is crucial for those who want to practice the art of living. Self-fashioning always begins in the middle. It is only after one has become someone or other, once one realizes that one has already had a life consisting of all sorts of events that appear haphazard, disconnected, imitative, and insignificant, that one can begin to try to put them together and to become not just someone or other but oneself.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Butler, "What Is Critique?" 226.

<sup>135</sup> Cressida Hayes, "Subjectivity and power," in *Michel Foucault: Key Concepts*, ed. Dianna Taylor (Durham, UK: Acumen, 2011), 163. Obviously this is not a description of the effects of discipline in general, but a meditation on Foucault's work from, for instance, *Discipline and Punish*. The process of transformation represented by care of the self also requires discipline in the form of commitment and hard work.

<sup>136</sup> Christoph Menke, "Two Kinds of Practice: On the Relation Between Social Discipline and Aesthetics of Existence," *Constellations* 10, no. 3 (July 2003): 205-06.

<sup>137</sup> Alexander Nehamas, *The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), 187. Of course a Foucauldian would gloss this passage by reiterating that one *becomes* oneself, rather than *discovering* oneself and then attempting to be authentic to that self in a Socratic way.

For Foucault, then, Nehamas argues, the self is not a fiction--although he sometimes talks as though it were. Rather, "[w]hat he had tried to show is how different periods constitute subjects differently and how the subject is not the final ground of thought and history, but their complex product."<sup>138</sup> An examination of this issue helps us understand how Foucault's works are interlocked and how unraveling the concept of conversion can elucidate the process of Foucauldian subject formation in general.

In this chapter, I have tried to use Foucault's examination of imperial conversion to suggest that one of his main goals in working with the classical sources is to reimagine subjectivity as a process, understood as the constitution of the self or selves through action. This process requires a dynamic relationship of self as action to self as truth. The process begins in *stultitia*, the condition we are all in before we have even conceived that there might be another way to live. In order to be pulled out of this condition, an individual must be introduced to another truth and ultimately given the choice to start caring for herself. This will be the first level of care, concern. However, the process of conversion as we see here at the end of the chapter does not mean that we are no longer vulnerable to the forces of subjection. The path of care of the self is a long, difficult, and perilous road. However, it is one upon which we must embark in order to achieve the status of true ethical subject.

This insistence upon conversion speaks to our current predicament. When we eliminate the need for spirituality and we imagine the subject as a substance rather than a process, all we actually do is cede control of that process to forces outside of ourselves.

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<sup>138</sup> Nehamas, 177.

As McGushin states, subjectivity "is the *activity* through which the individual takes on this dynamic relationship to herself. When we lose sight of this, we start to accept a static, fixed idea of who and what we are, and then we are inclined to neglect the development of the active relationship, which is the real life and heart of subjectivity."<sup>139</sup>

The process of forming one's subjectivity does not stop when an individual stops actively caring about it. It simply develops willy nilly, buffeted by the winds of *stultitia*. Thus, in order to reimagine our relationship to each other and ourselves on a fragile planet, we must begin with an acknowledgment that we can be in control of our own paths.

In the next chapter, I move from this somewhat abstract examination of conversion to look at the subject which forms the heart of Foucault's discussion of the classical sources, the regime of daily practices that form *askēsis*, or training.

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<sup>139</sup> Edward McGushin, "Foucault's theory and practice of subjectivity," in *Michel Foucault: Key Concepts*, ed. Dianna Taylor (Durham, UK: Acumen, 2011), 129.

## Chapter Two: *Askēsis*

I must point out that having a self, a single self, is quite compatible with Dennett's notion that we have no Cartesian theater in some part of our brains [...] the self, that endows our experience with subjectivity, is not a central knower and inspector of everything that happens in our minds. For the biological state of self to occur, numerous brain systems must be in full swing, as must numerous body-proper systems.

--Antonio Damasio, *Descartes' Error*<sup>140</sup>

One of the main problems of moral philosophy might be formulated thus: are there any techniques for the purification and reorientation of an energy which is naturally selfish, in such a way that when moments of choice arrive we shall be sure of acting rightly?

--Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of the Good*<sup>141</sup>

During his discussion of the Cynics in the latter part of *The Courage of the Truth*, Foucault argues that the main question of classical ethics was not, what is the self? Rather it was, "what this care must be and what a life must be which claims to care for the self"

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<sup>140</sup> Antonio Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York: J.P. Putnam's Sons, 1994), 226-27.

<sup>141</sup> Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of the Good* (London: Ark Paperbacks, 1986), 54.

(CV 226)? In fact, the phrase that animates Foucault's late work, *epimeleia heautou*, means "care of oneself, attending to oneself, being concerned about oneself" (HS 4). This final meaning, care as concern, appeared in the first chapter, as the initial moment of conversion, when the individual comes to recognize her mode of being as problematic, and decides to begin the process of transformation. This concern animates the entire process of conversion. However, it does not help to describe the actual work that is denoted by the concepts of occupying oneself with oneself, or attending to oneself. In discussing conversion, Foucault states, "[t]hat the truth cannot be attained without a certain practice, or certain set of fully specified practices, which transform the subject's mode of being, the modify, transfigure, and qualify it, is a prephilosophical theme which gave rise to many more or less ritualized procedures" (HS 46). Foucault is suggesting that in the classical sources, a commonsense belief that one could not attain the truth without a transformation of the self led, within the context of philosophical schools, to certain regimes that were ritualized in the sense of being validated by tradition and animating communities of practice. Such practices were given loosely determined forms, but it was also built into the nature of the practice that they were tailored to the particular needs of the practitioner, thus they required intentional and reflective thought. Foucault describes this care when he says of techniques of the self<sup>142</sup> that "they permit individuals to perform, by themselves, a certain number of operations on their body, their soul, their thoughts, their behaviors, and in this manner produce in themselves a transformation, a modification, and to attain a certain state of perfection, of happiness, of purity, of

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<sup>142</sup> Foucault uses this phrase interchangeably with practices of self, and technologies of the self.

supernatural power" (SAS 990). Thus, techniques of the self form the daily operation of the self on the self, motivated by care, which allows subjectivation of true discourse to occur. As an ensemble, these practices are referred to as *askēsis*, or training (UP 104).

In this chapter, I first discuss the process by which the emerging self strives towards the aspirational self, what Foucault calls the subjectivation of true discourse. In Foucault's depiction, the subjectivation of true discourse involves habituation to ways of acting through practice. There are two important aspects to this process, the subjectivation and the true discourses themselves. In order to facilitate conversion, true discourses should be useful; they should translate immediately into precepts for action, thus guiding the individual's conduct. They should also be evocative, and thus memorable. They should jar the individual out of her former way of life, and be interesting and simple enough to be internalized as rules of action. Subjectivation entails the co-constitution of mind and body in *askēsis*. I contend that Foucault highlights the dual training of mind and body to demonstrate, first, that one can only subjectivate truth through persistent, daily practice; second, the mind is fundamentally embodied, thus practice must engage both mind and body; and third, care of the self is defined by a pleasure found in discipline and hard work. Finally, as I mentioned in chapter one, the goal of subjectivation is that the emerging self approximates as closely as possible the flexible but consistent conduct of the aspirational self, as determined by true discourses. In other words, the purpose of conversion in the Greek and Roman world is habituation to principles of truth so that one acts correctly almost as a reflex. However, this does not suggest that the subject is determined by the process of conversion because she still has



the ability to choose to engage in forming a new way of life through practice. Furthermore, care of the self mimics the structured creativity of language, setting parameters, but allowing for innovation.

The concept of *askēsis* is a crucial intervention in environmental activism for many reasons, but the most salient is the insistence that people's values and perspectives only change through what Arnold Davidson calls counter-conduct. In opposition to a common understanding of behavioral modification that suggests that education will naturally lead to understanding, and thus to change, Foucault's story suggests that people must use practice to change their values, beliefs, and assumptions. In the world of environmental activism, this means that types of mobilization that do not insist upon daily practice cannot succeed. Once we have accepted this fact, it becomes imperative to imagine ways to encourage alternate practices, and Foucault suggests here a number of ways to do so, especially in the realm of creating simple, effective, memorable precepts for action. On a more abstract level, I argue that people should not be worried about losing agency in the process of such subjectivation. Once we acknowledge that subjectivity occurs through subjection and subjectivation, we should view the intentional subjectivation of a true discourse as a calculated intervention in our way of life.

### *The Subjectivation of True Discourse*

Before we dive into the classical sources to understand exactly how subjectivation of the truth occurs, it would be a useful to attempt a basic definition of terms. First, what is specifically true about true discourse for Foucault? In terms of the classical sources,

true discourse is a discourse from a received philosophical tradition that has been proven over time to affect certain outcomes in peoples' lives. Thus true discourse must be transformative. It must change the perspective of the individual and call her from the values and norms of her surrounding society to a different mode of being. The subjectivation part of the subjectivation of true discourse basically means habituation to modes of action based on certain traditions of truth. This process explains how it is possible to imagine the subject as the manifestation of structure in action. Picture, for instance, a highly trained swordswoman. Through years of practice, she has established what people refer to as muscle memory. She parries the thrust of an opponent with little to no active reflection. However, in order to understand fully what Foucault is trying to achieve with his notion of the subjectivation of true discourse, we have to imagine that the swordswoman has an acquired, and seamlessly integrated, sense of all of the various skills that apply to her art; she anticipates the strategies her opponent might use and how she would respond to them. She implicitly takes into account all of the environmental factors that influence her performance--weather conditions, terrain, fatigue or other bodily states--and compensates for them in the moment. In a tradition such as samurai swordplay, she will also have learned certain ethical values, such as loyalty, mercy, or fair play, which influence how she engages with her opponent. As she becomes one with the truth of her craft, it comes to determine her way of being in the world.<sup>143</sup> Not only does her view of loyalty, fair play, and discipline influence how she behaves in the dojo, but also when she is helping her elderly neighbor cut the grass or when she is arguing for

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<sup>143</sup> An excellent example of this in the modern context is provided in the Jim Jarmusch film, *Ghost Dog*.

a certain policy at work. This is precisely what Foucault means by the subjectivation of true discourse, except that it is rules of correct behavior in a broader sense that manifest on their own in response to certain situations, creating for the individual a coherent way of life based on true principles.<sup>144</sup>

What is the nature of the true discourses that are subjectivated? In the classical period, of course, true discourses in the form of *logos* were received through a philosophical tradition. However, they possessed a special nature, that of spiritual knowledge. The characteristics that define spiritual knowledge, according to Foucault are that: (1) "the subject cannot properly know by remaining where he is," (2) "on the basis of this displacement of the subject [as a result of learning the truth] there is the possibility of grasping both the reality and the value of things," (3) spiritual knowledge must allow "the subject [to] see himself in the truth of his being," (4) "the effect of this knowledge on the subject is assured by the fact that the subject not only finds his freedom in it, but that he finds in his freedom a mode of being that is one of happiness and of every perfection of which he is capable" (HS 295). So spiritual knowledge functions to invite the individual to take care of herself by shifting her perspective on the world, giving her a more accurate view of herself and her reality, and ultimately offering a sort of fulfillment or salvation.

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<sup>144</sup> This closely resembles Aristotle (despite Foucault's likely protestations), who argued that moral virtue, or the lack of it, is a habitual disposition that forms the basis on which we choose to act. People can be given reasons to act correctly, taught the practical wisdom of it, but that is not powerful enough in itself to lead people to act correctly without training. Ian Burkitt discusses this issue in "Technologies of the Self: Habitus and Capacities," *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior* 32, no. 2 (June 2002), 225-26.

This does not mean that the knowledge that is being discussed here is only knowledge of virtue or modes of human action. For instance, Foucault indicates that natural science for the Epicureans "is not a branch of knowledge [*savoir*]. It is the knowledge [*connaissance*]<sup>145</sup> of nature, of *phusis*, insofar as this knowledge can serve as the principle of human conduct and as the criterion for bringing into play our freedom; insofar also as it can transform the subject [...] into a free subject, a subject who finds within himself the possibility and means of his permanent and perfectly tranquil delight" (HS 231). Thus, knowledge need not be specifically ethical in order to serve as a catalyst for transformation. It need only be applicable to human conduct and capable of shaking humans out of *stultitia* by providing a fresh perspective on the world. As Edward McGushin states, many "ancient philosophers developed their own forms of the contemplation of nature, but in each case they serve as aids for the formation of the self: freeing the self from its fears or compulsions, calming the mind disturbed by pressing problems, reinforcing a will constantly bombarded by frivolous demands, distractions, temptations."<sup>146</sup> As Foucault remarks of Demetrius the Cynic, he "contrasts two modes of knowledge [*savoir*]: one through causes, which he tells us is pointless, and another mode of knowledge, [...] a relational mode [...] the relation between gods, men, the world and things of the world on one hand, and ourselves on the other" (HS 226). If studying

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<sup>145</sup> Much has been made in Foucauldian secondary literature of the distinction between *savoir* and *connaissance*. It is generally agreed that *savoir* refers to abstract or general knowledge and *connaissance* to a specific or applied knowledge. While that is not always the case, it does seem to be the case here.

<sup>146</sup> McGushin, "Foucault's theory and practice of subjectivity," 139.

physics or biology helps humans to understand themselves as a part of a web of relationality or supports them in their care of self, that knowledge is spiritual.

The way in which this perspectival change affects the individual is described in a number of different ways. For Seneca, the "effect of this [spiritual] knowledge of nature is to establish the maximum tension between the self as reason and the self as point [in the world]" (HS 268). The natural sciences that Seneca refers to are physics, astronomy, and biology, the types of knowledge that demonstrate that humans are one small fragment of the greater universe. In that the Stoics believed that the divine spark is present in man in the form of reason, studying the natural world leads to a sort of double consciousness of the individual, first as a manifestation of divine reason and then in his existence as a single being in the world. Taking this larger view enables humans to "reach the point from which God himself sees the world, and without our ever actually turning away from this world, we see the world to which we belong and consequently can see ourselves within this world" (HS 265). Spiritual knowledge represents a complex relationship between autonomy and knowledge of the world, according to Foucault, "since it is this knowledge which allows him to ensure his independence [vis à vis external forces], and it is only once he has ensured it that he is able to recognize the order of the world as it stands" (GE 279) The question then arises, what will one see once he recognizes the reality of the world? For the Stoics, the answer is, "the pettiness and the false and artificial character of everything that seemed good to us before we were freed" (HS 265).

Rather than taking a macro view, Marcus Aurelius liked to practice a different perspectival shift by reducing individual events to their most basic parts. By breaking

down the activity of eating to its essential mechanical functions--for example, into chewing, the sloshing of saliva and gnashing of teeth making the food into an indiscriminate mush, the passage of the mush down a saliva coated tube of flesh, its further breakdown in the stomach through geysers of acid, and passage through the intestines to re-emerge as excrement--Aurelius attempted to develop an active disgust for this most basic, and often most pleasurable, of bodily functions (HS 290-93). Such was his method of realizing autonomy from the external world. Aurelius also ascribed to the spiritual truth of universal rationality, stating, in the words of Foucault, "if we try to grasp ourselves as reasonable and rational principle, we will then realize that we are no more than part of something, which is reason presiding over the entire world" (HS 294). Thus, through the exposure to spiritual truth, individuals are called upon to see themselves and their world differently.

We see, then, that spiritual knowledge should be relational and jarring. What other criteria are applicable? In order to achieve the aforementioned ends, spiritual knowledge should be useful. Foucault indicates that knowledge that is considered good is knowledge that has utility for the daily care of the self (HS 222-23). He reiterates this in his discussion of Cynicism in *The Courage of the Truth*, averring that since Cynicism is a preparation for a life of caring for the self, one must only study what is useful for this form of existence (CV 220). Useful knowledge is "immediately translatable [...] into prescriptions" (HS 226). To return to the idea of relationality, Foucault states that "[u]seful knowledge [...] is a relational mode of knowledge that is at once assertive and prescriptive, and is capable of producing a change in the subject's mode of being" (HS

228). Thus, the relationship we have to the truth requires that "what is given as truth is read immediately and directly as precept" (HS 226), that alters one's sense of herself in the world. Since one of the definitional aspects of spiritual knowledge is that the subject does not have access to it from where they are, such forms of knowledge necessarily begin to change the subject's positionality, both in terms of perspective and in terms of mode of being, as soon as she has them.

### *The Training of Mind and Body*

For Foucault, caring for oneself, the process of conversion, is an activity. The term, *epimeleia*, coming from the verb *epmelēsthai*, possesses a rich array of meanings having to do with exercise. In *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, Foucault argues, "[e]pimeleisthai [care of the self] refers to a form of activity, vigilant, continuous, applied, regular activity, much more than to a mental attitude" (HS 82). In "The Hermeneutic of the Subject," Foucault's summary of his year's lectures, he expands on this etymology, indicating, "[t]he very term, *epimeleia*, does not simply designate an attitude of conscience or a form of attention that one directed toward oneself; it indicates a regulated occupation, a work with its procedures and its objectives" (HDS 1174). Moreover, "*epimeleia* implies labor" (SS 70). This does not mean, of course, that the activities that are being discussed cannot be of a cognitive nature; it is simply the case that the two are not strictly delineated. For instance, "you have expressions that refer to the activity, to the attitude which consists in gathering oneself around oneself, in collecting oneself in the self, or again in establishing, installing oneself in the self as a

place of refuge" (HS 83). These are the types of expressions that we grappled with in the previous chapter, and it is tempting to think of them as poetic renderings of a certain attitude toward the self. However, as we can see, Foucault is keen to demonstrate that this is not the case for classical thinkers. Rather, a phrase such as "gathering oneself around oneself" describes a real-world practice of turning one's attention, persistently and vigilantly, from the unnecessary distractions of the outside world, and mustering the courage and will to orient oneself toward the self.

This activity, this labor, is referred to in the classical sources as *askēsis*, meaning exercise or training. It is through such training that true discourses are subjectivated. Of course training takes time. Foucault notes in *The Care of the Self* that for *epimeleia*, "[t]here must be time. And one of the big problems of this culture of the self is that of determining, in the day or in life, the part that is proper to consecrate to it" (SS 70). Some people reserve certain times of the day, similar to Muslim prayer. Some people occasionally interrupt their everyday activities to check back in with the self, and many people look forward to the time in their life, often old age, when they will be able to dedicate all of their time to care of the self (SS 70). As Foucault notes,

[t]his time [dedicated to care of the self] is not empty: it is populated by exercises, practical tasks, diverse activities. Care of the self is not a picnic. There is the care of the body, regimes of health, moderate physical exercises, the measured satisfaction of needs. There are meditations, readings, notes that one takes on books or on conversations one has heard, and that one rereads afterwards, the memorization of truths that one knows already but that it is necessary to appropriate better still [...] There are also interviews with a confidant, with friends, with a guide or director. (SS 71)

Thus, one of the crucial aspects of *askēsis* is to orient one's time around the many different types of practices that one uses to subjectivate truth in one's daily life.



*Askēsis* involves two distinct practices, *meditatio* and *gymnasia*, but both are conceived as exercising the body and the mind, or even more aptly the body/mind. *Meditatio* entails training oneself for action using one's imagination and *gymnasia*, from the Greek *gumnazein*, to exercise or train (HS 407), means training in a real situation, whether genuine or contrived (TS 37). In order to discuss the integration of the body/mind, Foucault examines the treatise of first-century Stoic, Musonius Rufus. Rufus argues that there are exercises that train the body, exercises that train the soul, and those which train both the body and the soul, but for his purposes, he is concerned with the latter two. He argues that training the body and the soul have two objectives. The first is courage, which Foucault defines as "resistance to external events, misfortunes, and all the rigors of the world" (HS 408). The second is training in *sōphrosunē*, or "the ability to moderate oneself" (HS 408). *Sōphrosunē* allows one to "measure, regulate, and master all the internal movements" (HS 408), and is therefore also conceptualized as freedom (UP 106).

Although the idea of *askēsis* grew out of ancient Greek military training, by the time of Rufus, in the first century AD, the emphasis has shifted. For Plato, it is the training in physical exercise, both for combat and competition, which establishes courage and moderation. Through preparations for war and athletic games, one will learn not to "be afraid of external adversity" (HS 409). Moreover, according to Plato, "athletic preparation involves of course many renunciations, many abstentions, if not abstinences, and sexual abstinence in particular" (HS 409). Thus, by training for combat, one will achieve self-mastery as well. For Rufus, several hundred years later, training in

endurance does not entail athletic preparation. Rather, "it is necessary to accustom oneself to bear hunger and thirst, to bear extreme cold and heat. One must get used to sleeping rough. One must get used to coarse and inadequate clothing" (HS 409). In fact, Seneca in his Letter 15 to his friend, Lucilius, is overtly critical of gymnastics. He says that increasing one's muscular form is an "occupation that is vain in itself [...] which exhausts the mind and burdens it with all the weight of the body" (HS 409). Instead, he trains his body in abstinence--sleeping on a pallet, wearing rough clothes, eating simple foods. This practice of abstinence reinforces Stoic values, allowing an individual to be "sufficiently detached to be able to treat the wealth and goods around [him] with the necessary indifference and with correct and wise nonchalance" (HS 411). Another exercise suggested by Epictetus is that when one meets a young girl in the street, one tries to eradicate one's desire for her. Thus, "[e]ven if she consents, even if she displays her consent, even if she approaches you, you must succeed in no longer feeling anything at all" (HS 413-14). These exercises then have a dual purpose. First, they activate the true discourses of the philosophical system, which suggest that one should be unmoved by external factors. However, they also train the body/mind in the courage and moderation that is necessary to the discipline of caring for the self.

A similar form of training takes place in the exercises designated as *meditatio*, which are imaginative, but also implicate the body. In the essay, "My Body, This Paper, This Fire,"<sup>147</sup> Foucault elaborates upon the effects of meditation:

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<sup>147</sup> Foucault's fascinating response to Jacques Derrida's critique of *The History of Madness*.

[a] 'meditation' [...] produces, like any discursive event, new utterances that bring with them a series of modifications of the speaking subject: by way of what he says in the meditation, the subject passes from obscurity to light, from impurity to purity, from the imposition of the passions to detachment, from uncertainty and disordered movements to the serenity of wisdom, etc. In the meditation, the subject is continually altered by his own movement, his discourse provokes effects within which he is gripped; it exposes him to risks, makes him pass through tests or temptations, produces in him states, and confers upon him a status or a qualification which he had not yet held at the moment of beginning. (CPF 1125)

Is meditation, however, only discursive? Foucault acknowledges that in Plato, cognitive exercises did suggest a separation of the soul and the body. In the *Alcibiades*, care consists largely of contemplating the soul in the divine element. In this way, "the soul will be able to discover rules to serve as a basis for just behavior and political action" (TS 25). However, Foucault indicates his preference for later techniques of the self that integrate the mind and the body by focusing almost exclusively on them in his elaboration of different types of *askēsis*. He spends nearly five pages, for instance, discussing the Stoic exercise of the *praemeditatio malorum*. Just as fasting, going without sleep, and wearing rough clothes trains one to endure physical hardship, the *praemeditatio malorum*, or meditation on future evils, trains one to endure sudden emotional or intellectual shocks, such as the death of a loved one or political exile. Seneca notes that in the absence of the proper equipment, the individual will be unprepared for events, and the "event will enter his soul, trouble it, affect it" (HS 450). In order to allow true discourse to equip us for this eventuality, then, we must prepare for evil (HS 450). This is the function of the *praemeditatio malorum*; "it consists in training oneself in thought to believe that all possible evils, whatever they may be, already have happened" (HS 451). One should not think of probabilities, but rather from the

perspective of inevitability. The second important stipulation is that one does not imagine these things happening in the future, but as happening right now, or already having happened. As Foucault states, "[t]his is not at all so as to actualize the misfortune and make it more real, but rather in order to encourage Lucilius to take the measure of the event and discover that in the end, it is unimportant and short-lived" (HS 453). Thus, we can see a sort of exercise in gaining perspective on our fears. Often when one anticipates an undefined future evil, one builds it up in one's mind, becoming more and more fearful of it. However, by imagining it already happening, one can move from the mode of anxiety into a sort of mode of problem-solving, asking oneself, If this were to occur, what would I do, how would I react? The appropriate reaction is that I would go on living; the pain will pass.<sup>148</sup> This relates to Foucault's definition of mediation cited above because during the thought exercise, the individual does not simply imagine the situation, but puts herself in the subject position of the person suffering from evil. Thus, as Foucault says, the subject is altered by the movement of her thoughts.

A second aspect of *meditatio*, the test exercise, functions as a way to activate true discourses through recalling them and applying them to genuine situations. Test exercises also have a diagnostic function. As Foucault notes, test exercises are those in which "one tries to measure where one is in relation to what one was, the progress already made, and the point one must reach" (HS 412). Thus, test exercises allow one to assess one's

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<sup>148</sup> Interestingly, however, Foucault notes that "[t]he Epicureans savagely opposed this exercise of the premeditations of evils, saying that we have enough problems in the present without additionally worrying ourselves about evils that, after all, could very well not happen" (HS 449). In place of these exercises, they preferred exercises that distracted one from fears about what might happen by training in recalling pleasure (HS 449-50). Either way, the purpose was to steel oneself to maintain one's tranquility and self-sufficiency in the face of external events.

progress towards achieving the aspirational self. In the language of the current section, they allow the individual to determine to what degree truth has become subjectivated in her actions. One of the most prominent of the test exercises is the Stoic *discriminatio*, or discrimination of representations that enter the mind. The purpose of this exercise, which can be engaged in actively, during a walk down the street, or more sporadically, during one's daily activities, is to examine representations that enter the mind,<sup>149</sup> distinguish them from one another and test whether they depend on oneself or not. If they do not, the individual discards them as unimportant, if they do, she considers which precepts of truth apply to them (SS 87-88). This exercise allows one both to practice discriminating between factors that are within one's control and those that are outside one's control, a distinction fundamental to Stoic self-mastery, and then to activate in the memory true discourses and apply them to real situations.

Other test exercises take the form of actively training to master a particular emotion. One sets a goal, as in the example of Epictetus, not to get angry--first for one day, then for two, then for several. At moments when one feels anger arising, one fortifies oneself with true discourses about the benefits of remaining tranquil and objective (HS 413). Similarly, exercises in non-curiosity enforce the true discourse that one cannot care for the self if one is distracted by a "malign, malicious and malevolent gaze directed at other people" (HS 212). Thus, the exercise in non-curiosity is both a willing of noninterest in the affairs of other people, as well as "an exercise of the subject's concentration, an exercise by which all the subject's activity and attention is brought back

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<sup>149</sup> It seems that by representations, he means thoughts or perceptions and the emotions that they generate.

to this tension [between self and self] that leads him to his goal" (HS 213). A good contemporary analogue to these practices is the Buddhist practice of meditation. Standard sitting or walking meditation uses the stillness of the body to calm the mind. A loose concentration on the breath allows thoughts to arise, be acknowledged, and then dissipate. However, meditation on the breath is also used frequently in quotidian situations, especially when powerful emotions arise. We can see a direct parallel, for example, in training against anger. When anger arises, the individual steps back and reactivates the teaching, in the case of Buddhism the transience of emotion and focus on the breath, in the case of the Stoics the teachings on the disadvantages of anger and perhaps also a focus on the breath or some other concentration point. In this way, the teachings reassert themselves and the mind and the body, both of which manifest anger, learn to react differently.<sup>150</sup>

Test exercises that take the form of a review of one's day form another part of the structure of *askēsis*, helping the individual to memorize true discourses and meditate on the best way to implement them in actual situations. Foucault spends a considerable amount of time on Seneca's examination of conscience, describing it as follows: "every evening, at the moment when he is going to sleep and there is silence and calm around him,<sup>151</sup> [he goes] over what he has done during the day. He must consider his different actions. He must, he says, pass over nothing. He must show no indulgence towards

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<sup>150</sup> See for instance the Dalai Lama's *Healing Anger: The Power of Patience from a Buddhist Perspective*, trans. Geshe Thupten Jinpa (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 1997).

<sup>151</sup> In this instance he does not refer to Seneca's specific phrase, "when his wife becomes quiet," as he frequently does.

himself" (HS 461). The purpose of this examination is twofold. First, it "is a memory exercise, not just with regard to what happened during the day, but with regard to the rules we should always have in the mind" (HS 463). Second, it is a test exercise because "one can measure one's progress [by evaluating the discrepancy] between rules one remembers and the actions one has performed" (HS 463).<sup>152</sup> Thus, the exercise is not just a test of memory, although memorization is crucial to the subjectivation of truth, rather it is an opportunity to examine one's actions and how fully they correspond to the way the aspirational self would have acted in that situation. Remembering the rules that apply to certain situations reinforces them in the mind and allows them to become stronger matrices of action.

A third type of body/mind exercise which Foucault identifies, and which corresponds closely with one of his own practices of self, is that of reading and writing, the construction of *hupomnēmata*, or notebooks in which one gathers bits of wisdom and precepts for living. Foucault focuses on techniques of reading and writing in several of his late essays and interviews, and seems eager to rehabilitate this practice from contemporary confessional writing, as well as standard types of academic writing.<sup>153</sup> He insists of the *hupomnēmata* that they "do not constitute an 'account of oneself' [...]. The movement they seek to affect is the inverse of this last one: the point is not to pursue the indescribable, not to reveal the hidden, not to say the unsaid, but, on the contrary, to collect the already-said, to reassemble that which one could hear or read, and this to an

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<sup>152</sup> Brackets in text.

<sup>153</sup> See for example, "On the Genealogy of Ethics" and "Writing the Self."

end which is nothing less than the constitution of oneself" (GE 273). Foucault does make a point of noting that reading and writing did not become major techniques of the self until the first century AD (RM 1519), when writing also became common for the types of administrative work to which Seneca compares *cura sui* (GE 272). However, at the time reading and writing did not just involve the transfer of information; both were thought of as material practices that affected the body/mind. Foucault notes, "[i]n the texts of Epictetus, writing appears regularly associated with 'meditation', to this exercise of thought on itself that reactivates what one knows, renders present a principle, a rule or an example, reflects on them, assimilates them, and prepares itself, thus, to confront the real" (ES 1236). Similarly R.B. Rutherford argues that, in the *Meditations*, "Marcus tends to be talking to himself. The aim [...] is therapeutic: to revive and bring home to himself, in suitably striking and memorable form, the moral truths that the author has accepted in the past."<sup>154</sup> Thus, writing has "an *ethopoetic* function, it is a vehicle for the transformation of the truth into *ēthos*," or way of life (ES 1237). So reading and writing are not preparatory to training; they form a part of it. Through rereading true discourse, one reactivates it in the mind and body, one imaginatively enacts various precepts, and through writing one can do the same,<sup>155</sup> as well as conceptualizing how they relate to one's own actions and manner of living. Although in our own world, we have become less convinced that an act like reading entails a specific practice of the body, this is to

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<sup>154</sup> Quoted in Michael L. Humphries, "Michel Foucault on Writing and the Self in the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius and the *Confessions* of St. Augustine," *Arethusa* 30, no. 1 (Winter 1997): 126.

<sup>155</sup> As anyone who ever had to write, "I will not be disruptive in class," one hundred times on the blackboard might know.



some degree rebutted by the way in which people comport themselves when engaging in critical reading and writing. Currently, I am sitting in Widener Library's Reading Room, where students come when they need to focus. Everything about the reading room locates and forms one's body--the silence pierced by what seem like deafening shufflings and footfalls, the rows of long tables, the hard, stiff-backed chairs. These factors are purposefully designed to affect the mind/body of the person who seeks them out, and it does seem conducive to concentration and critical thinking.

Foucault's recuperation of the assemblage of practices composing *askēsis*, then, serves several goals. First, it demonstrates that subjectivating true discourse, the only way to truly create a new way of life, demands daily practice in a number of different forms. One must both actualize truth in one's actions and also use practice to develop the discipline to continue on the path of conversion. It is no less true in our world that self-transformation requires both courage and discipline. At the very least, conversion to the truth requires a conversion to the self in the form a continual turning away from the outside world, with its glitter and distractions, in order to focus on the distance from the emerging self to the aspirational self. In our world of constant information and advertising bombardment, this simple act of turning away is a momentous task. Then we have imaginative and bodily practices that train the body/mind and solidify true discourse as a matrix of action. Finally, the test exercises allow the individual to reactualize truth, apply true discourses flexibly to real situations, and measure the distance between the form of the emerging self and the form of the aspirational self as evidenced in action. All

together, these activities form the process of care of the self, as the individual attempts to turn truth into a way of life. As Foucault says, this is no picnic.

The second reason for focusing on *askēsis* is to bring the mind and body into tension in the formation of the ethical subject. While many philosophers during the past century have grappled with the issue of embodiment, the Cartesian subject, with its dualism of mind and body, continues to be the norm in moral philosophy.<sup>156</sup> Foucault, on the other hand, highlights the body as integral to subjectivity.<sup>157</sup> Johanna Oksala summarizes his perspective in this way,

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<sup>156</sup> Glancing through the "table of contents" of companion volumes bringing together the seminal thinkers in contemporary ethics, little explicit attention is paid to embodiment, with such volumes focusing on traditional moral sub-fields, such as epistemology, metaphysics, and free will. For instance, Blackwell's *Ethical Theory: An Anthology* (2007), contains seventy-six different articles over nearly 800 pages, and not a single entry has "body," "embodiment," or anything relating to embodiment in the title. Whether coincident or not, there are also at least four articles that deal with some moral aspect of abortion, but none that address feminist perspectives on ethics. Similarly, in *The Continuum Companion to Ethics* (2011)--though it does include an article on feminist ethics--neither "body" nor "embodiment" appear in the index. This lack of attention to embodiment is despite a section devoted to "New Directions in Ethics." While it is obvious that such anthologies do not by any means exhaust the types of work being done on ethics, given their pretension to be reference works for the "central topics in metaethics and normative theory" (Miller, "Preface," xi), they can be viewed as indicators of the most widely accepted research foci in contemporary American moral theory.

<sup>157</sup> Many scholars, especially feminist scholars, have problematized and critiqued Foucault's understanding of the body as constituted. Judith Butler says, for instance, that despite his claim that there is "no materiality or ontological independence of the body outside any one of those specific regimes, his theory nevertheless relies on a notion of genealogy, appropriated from Nietzsche, which conceived the body as a surface and a set of subterranean 'forces' that are indeed repressed and transmuted by a mechanism of cultural construction external to that of the body" (Butler, "Foucault and the Paradox of Bodily Inscriptions," 602). As evidence, she points to his statement in *The History of Sexuality: Volume I* that "bodies and pleasures" should serve as a site of resistance against the normalizing forces of sexuality, as well as moments in "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," *Discipline and Punish*, and *Herculine Barbin* when "Foucault seeks recourse to a prediscursive multiplicity of bodily forces that break through the surface of the body to disrupt the regulating practices of cultural coherence" (Butler 607). Nancy Fraser also notices these moments, and argues that if Foucault believes that different bodies are formed by different configurations of knowledge and power, then he should not gesture to "the" body, as though it had some sort of pre-historical coherence (Fraser, "Foucault's Body-Language: A Post-Humanist Political Rhetoric," 64). On one level, it seems at though Foucault uses the phrase "the body" for similar reasons that he uses the phrase "the subject" or the fraught word "freedom," despite acknowledging that there are many subjects and many freedoms, because he has to use language and there aren't really good words to

[a]ccording to Foucault, we believe that the body obeys only the necessary and universal laws of physiology, and that history and culture have no influence on it. In reality, bodies are shaped by society: they are used and experienced in many different ways and their characteristics vary according to cultural practices. They are moulded by rhythms of work, eating, habits and changing norms of beauty. They are concretely shaped by diet, exercise and medical interventions. In short, they too have a history.<sup>158</sup>

The main message of *Discipline and Punish* is that norms and disciplines are inscribed in our bodies through practices. Drawing from this work, Clare Chambers argues that power forms subjects "at the level of the body as well as the level of the mind. When the body has been conditioned to obey a rule or act in a certain way, there is no need to seek compliance at the level of the mind as well, for compliance has been made habitual and does not need to be consciously directed."<sup>159</sup> The fact that subjectivity is shaped in an interaction between the body and the brain is supported by the work of Antonio Damasio, who demonstrates that the body is the ground both of the brain's experience of the world, and its experience of a unitary self. As we noted in the last chapter, Damasio contends,

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use. However, on another level, what Foucault seems to be signaling is not that the human body is a fiction, as though there weren't certain mammalian characteristics that define us as a species, but that the human body is malleable and its meaning constructed. The former conclusion is the one come to by Cressida Heyes in her work on body modification in *Self-Transformations: Foucault, Ethics, and Normalized Bodies*, and Clare Chambers in her discussion of bodily manipulation including genital mutilation in *Sex, Culture, and Justice: The Limits of Choice*. The latter point is the conclusion eventually arrived at by Butler; "Perhaps it is necessary to read the statement [that the body is constructed] in a self-referential way, that is, as asserting that any reference to 'the' body in its indefiniteness is of necessity a construction, one that is open to a genealogical critique" (Butler 602). Jana Sawicki helpfully explores the passage concerning bodies and pleasures, stating that Foucault did not believe that bodies or pleasures were somehow outside of power. Rather, "he was appealing to a pleasure that is less bound up with biopower and the *scientia sexualis* associated with it" Sawicki, "Foucault, Queer Theory, and the Discourse of Desire: Why Embrace an Ethics of Pleasures?" in *Foucault and Philosophy*, ed. Timothy O'Leary and Christopher Falzon (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2010), 191.

<sup>158</sup> Johanna Oksala, "Freedom and Bodies," in *Michel Foucault: Key Concepts*, ed. Dianna Taylor (Durham, UK: Acumen, 2011), 85.

<sup>159</sup> Clare Chambers, *Sex, Culture, and Justice: The Limits of Choice* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2008), 24.

"the self is a repeatedly reconstructed biological state."<sup>160</sup> Thus, subjectivity arises from "successive organism states, each neurally represented anew, in multiple concerted maps, moment by moment, and each anchoring the self that exists at any moment."<sup>161</sup> This theory provides a basis for understanding how the subjectivation of truth can occur through repeated practice of body and mind. It also suggests that subjection at the level of the body can only be countered through other types of bodily practice. Recall, for instance, Musonius Rufus' claim that "[v]irtue must go through the body in order to become active" (HS 408). Jason Springs avers that practices "manifest themselves as habits and dispositions that often simply are not amenable to adjustment on the basis of explication, criticism, and argument."<sup>162</sup> Iris Murdoch makes the obvious point that once in the grasp of a strong emotion, like the anger we discussed in Stoic and Epicurean *askēsis*, one does not simply decide to turn it off; "It is small use telling oneself 'Stop being in love, stop feeling resentment, be just.' What is needed is a reorientation which will provide an energy of a different kind, from a different source [...] Deliberately falling out of love is not a jump of the will, it is the acquiring of new objects of attention and thus new energies as a result of refocusing."<sup>163</sup> Clearly, this echoes the prescriptions of conversion to the self, and the *askēsis* that enables it. When difficult emotions arise, one refocuses one's attention and energy. When a body has been habituated to a certain norm

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<sup>160</sup> Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, 226.

<sup>161</sup> Damasio, 235.

<sup>162</sup> Jason A. Springs, "'Dismantling the Master's House': Freedom as Ethical Practice in Brandom and Foucault," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 37, no. 3 (September 2009): 438.

<sup>163</sup> Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of the Good*, 55-56.

through forms of practice, one subjectivates a different truth through different forms of practice.

Interestingly, Foucault's focus on the importance of the body for the cultivation of the mind and care of the self<sup>164</sup> has spawned a movement called somaesthetics, which seeks to study and rehabilitate this type of practice for the contemporary world. The main proponent of somaesthetics, Richard Schustermann, says in reference to Foucault's work, "[a] long dominant Platonist tradition, intensified by recent centuries of Cartesianism and idealism, has blinded us to a crucial fact that was evident to much ancient and non-Western thought: since we live, think, and act through our bodies, their study, care and improvement should be at the core of philosophy, especially when philosophy is conceived (as it used to be) as a special way of life, a critical, disciplined care of the self."<sup>165</sup> Schustermann praises Foucault for engaging with the body and practice on three levels.<sup>166</sup> Foucault was, "[t]he analytic genealogist, who showed how 'docile bodies' were systematically shaped by seemingly innocent body-disciplines to advance certain sociopolitical agendas, emerges as the pragmatic methodologist proposing alternative body practices to overcome the repressive ideologies entrenched in our docile bodies [...]. And boldly practicing what he preached, Foucault tested his chosen methods by

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<sup>164</sup> His is not the only theory cited of course. Schustermann mentions pragmatism, and various Eastern and classical philosophies, as well as more modern body-disciplines such as the Feldenkrais method.

<sup>165</sup> Richard Schustermann, "Somaesthetics and Care of the Self: The Case of Foucault," *Monist* 83, no. 4 (October 2004): 530.

<sup>166</sup> He compares him to John Dewey, another proto-somaestheticist.

experimenting on his own flesh and with other live bodies."<sup>167</sup> Interestingly, however, Schustermann also castigates Foucault's somaesthetic practice as being too focused on extreme bodily experiences, such as drug use and S/M. He argues that this is not just Foucault's personal preference, but represents "a pervasively devastating dichotomy drawn between the allegedly meaningless bodily pleasures of every day life (unimaginatively identified with food and drink) and those truly significant somatic pleasures defined by their violent intensity and identified with transgressive drugs and sex."<sup>168</sup> Schustermann wishes that Foucault had focused his rhetoric of care of self more on the everyday practices that form the heart of *askēsis*. When he says rhetoric, I assume he means that he wishes he had been more prescriptive about types of techniques that would have been useful for contemporary somaesthetic practice, because clearly Foucault was engaged in daily practices of writing, thinking, teaching and political activism, and promoted such activities in his work. However, it is also true that when Foucault talks about his practices of self publically, he does frequently talk about limit-experiences. Nonetheless, this brief digression into somaesthetics demonstrates that through the exploration of the connection between the mind and body in classical philosophy, Foucault opens up a space for reflection on this subject in individuals' current lives.

In addition to simply wanting to argue for the fact that bodies and minds are not made of different materials and that both *meditatio* and *gymnasia* are actions in the world, Foucault specifically needs to make this point in order to make sense of his own

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<sup>167</sup> Schustermann, 538.

<sup>168</sup> Schustermann, 542.

practices of the self--reading, writing and critical thought--and his insistence that "thinking otherwise" forms the basis of the actualization of freedom in the world. In fact, Foucault uses the classical understanding of meditation to argue that thought is an action that allows one to transform one's perspective and ultimately one's life. Foucault insists that for the Greeks and Romans, meditation is not analysis of a problem and an attempt to unravel or think through it. Rather it "involves [...] appropriating [a thought] and being so profoundly convinced by it that on one hand one believes it to be true and on the other one can also repeat it constantly, repeat it as soon as the necessity arises or the occasion presents itself" (HS 340).<sup>169</sup> In essence, this is not a "game the subject plays with his own thought [...]" but a game thought plays on the subject" (HS 340). Foucault then makes an interesting claim as relates to René Descartes, insisting that this is precisely why Descartes terms his work "meditations." The "meditative function" is an "exercise of the subject, who has been put in a fictional situation by thought where he tests himself" (HS 341). As such, Descartes does not simply think about all the things in the world that could be doubtful, rather through the successive stages of demonstrative meditation, he "puts himself in the position of the subject who doubts everything [...] he puts himself in the situation of someone setting out in search of that which is indubitable" (HS 341). Through the exercise, he comes to practice doubt, albeit rationally (CPF 1129). In the process of this type of meditation, "[t]he subject is shifted with regard to what he is through the effect of thought" (HS 341). Thus, "meditation implies a mobile subject, modifiable by the very effects of the discursive events that he produces" (CPF 1125).

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<sup>169</sup> Second brackets belong to the text.

Like the process of conversion to the self, Foucault argues that meditation unfolds in time, and each successive position taken by the subject allows for further developments of thought. Foucault further asserts that anyone reading Descartes' meditations in a serious way also proceeds through these successive subject positions. Clearly Foucault understands his own work as drawing readers through a sort of genealogical meditation, but this way of looking at Descartes' texts suggests that many works can be viewed in this way. What would it mean to read the work of Immanuel Kant, not as an abstract system of ethics, but as an exercise in being a Kantian subject? Claire Colebrook maintains that this is how contemporary readers should approach historical meditations; "if Aristotle's *Ethics* can be read this way--as a specific discursive practice that produces a particular kind of ethical subject--so can any other ethical theory, regardless of how transcendental or anti-naturalist it claims to be. The most transcendental ethical claims, such as those of Plato and Kant, could also be read as just such normative descriptions of the types of beings 'we' are or should become."<sup>170</sup> In addition, I would add, their writings are exercises in becoming such subjects. This gives a new twist to the pragmatist notion, not what does it mean, but what does it do?<sup>171</sup> Here, it is not what are the consequences of the theory in the world, but what does it do to its readers in the act of reading it?

Given this emphasis on thought thinking itself playing with the subject, it is clear that Foucault redefines thought outside the commonplace understanding of it as simple representations or perceptions that pass through the mind. On one level, as Timothy

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<sup>170</sup> Claire Colebrook, "Ethics, Positivity, and Gender: Foucault, Aristotle, and the Care of Self," *Philosophy Today* 42, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 45.

<sup>171</sup> Clare Colebrook discusses this distinction in "Ethics, Positivity, and Gender," 43.



O'Leary argues, thought stands in for the structures of experience as a whole, as the way in which knowledge, power, and subjectivity come to determine the ability of humans to be subjects.<sup>172</sup> On another level, thought is critical, or has the potential to become critical. As Foucault states in "Polemics, Politics, and Problematizations,"

what distinguishes thought, is that it is something totally different than the group of representations that underpin a behavior; it is something totally different than the domain of attitudes that can determine it. Thought is not what dwells in a behavior and gives it sense; it is rather what permits one to stand back in relation to this way of functioning or reacting,<sup>173</sup> to take it as an object of thought and interrogate it concerning its meaning, its conditions, and its ends. (PPP 1416)

Thought actualizes the subject's inherent freedom: "Thought is freedom in relation to what one does, the movement by which one detaches from it, constitutes it as an object, and reflects on it as a problem" (PPP 1416). Thought, thus defined, constitutes Foucault's philosophical work, and one of the main practices of self that he uses in his own subjectivation of truth. He argues that his thought "[is] a philosophical exercise; its game [is] to know to what degree the work of thinking its own history can free thought from that which it thinks silently and can permit it to think otherwise" (UPTS 1363).<sup>174</sup> What is interesting about this passage is that it suggests again that thought thinks itself, and that by confronting thought with its own history, thought itself can be convinced to be

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<sup>172</sup> Timothy O'Leary, "Foucault, Experience, Literature," *Foucault Studies* 5 (January 2008): 13.

<sup>173</sup> Or even more appropriately, the standing back itself.

<sup>174</sup> Ladelle McWhorter compares this concept of thought to Heidegger's concept of reflection. She quotes him as having said, "[r]eflection is the courage to make the truth of our own presuppositions and the realm of our own goals into the things that most deserve to be called into question [...] it is thinking that loves its own life, its own occurring, that does not quickly put a stop to itself as thinking intent on a quick solution always tries to do." From "Guilt as Management Technology: A Call to Heideggerian Reflection," in *Heidegger and the Earth: Essays in Environmental Philosophy*, ed. Ladelle McWhorter (Kirksville, MO: The Thomas Jefferson University Press, 1992), 2.

otherwise. This parallels the work of conversion; just as the self is called to reflect on its own structure in order to transform, thought too must double back critically upon itself. This also recalls the notion of meditation above in which the subject does not think objects, rather through imagination, thought rethinks the subject.

The third reason for focusing on *askēsis* is to demonstrate that discipline and pleasure are two sides of the same coin. For instance in reference to developing moderation, Foucault notes, "temperance [...] is an art, a practice of pleasure that is capable of using that which is founded on need in order to limit itself" (UP 77). One moderates one's pleasures, but not with the goal of lessening pleasure. For instance, the goal of Cynic food renunciation, unlike Christian asceticism, Foucault says, is to maximize pleasure. By having few wants, one finds great pleasure in simple things (CV 291). One derives pleasure both from the food one does eat and the practice of moderation itself. McWhorter proposes that pleasure for Foucault--the pleasure that serves as "the rallying point for the counterattack against the deployment of sexuality" (VS 208) "is not just a state of the body and/or mind that occurs following some particular accomplishment or stimulus. Pleasure is not just an outcome. Pleasure, like power, is creative."<sup>175</sup>

Of course, care of the self is also hard work. When one subjectivates a true discourse, like Judo or even S/M, it will be painful, especially at first. The body will be sore and the mind resistant to change. It is for this reason, Elizabeth Povinelli claims, that most people fail, because "they never confront the effort it takes to recoordinate the

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<sup>175</sup> McWhorter, "Guilt as Management Technology," 177.

habits of mind. Or they find it too exhausting."<sup>176</sup> Perhaps those people have not discovered the pleasure in discipline. For, there will be pleasure also, the pleasure of practice, of transformation, of belonging to a group, of perfecting one's skills. These pleasures must be present, at every step of conversion, to keep the individual involved. Many people know the feeling of accomplishment that follows a difficult session of training. One's body and mind are exhausted, but one feels joy. There is certainly a pleasure in achieving a goal, winning a tournament, throwing a beautiful pot, engaging in a mind-blowing sexual experience, but there is pleasure in the technique as well, in failure and success. Thus, Foucault insists upon the dual aspects of conversion, arduous labor and creative pleasure.

This joy may be what Foucault means when he talks about salvation. On a basic level, to be saved in the late imperial period<sup>177</sup> is to "be rendered inaccessible to misfortunes, troubles, and all that accidents and external events may produce in the soul. At the moment when one reaches the end, the object of salvation, one needs nothing and no one but the self" (HS 177-78). So in other words, salvation is the fulfillment of the aspirational self, the complete subjectivation of truth in the form of autarky and ataraxy. Foucault also wants to make it clear that unlike the Christian notion of salvation,<sup>178</sup> in this understanding of salvation, the process of achieving it takes place in the world throughout

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<sup>176</sup> Elizabeth A. Povinelli, "The Will to Be Otherwise/The Effort of Endurance," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 111, no. 3 (Summer 2012): 470.

<sup>177</sup> Foucault focuses on the late imperial period, rather than Plato, because he argues that while the concept of salvation does exist in Platonic thought, it "does not appear [...] to have a very particular or intense technical meaning" (HS 174).

<sup>178</sup> This is similar in many ways to the distinction Foucault makes between Christian conversion and late imperial conversion.

one's lifetime, and concerns no one but the self (HS 177-78). In addition, the form that salvation takes is described in multiple ways, all of which seem to touch upon a different aspect of the subjectivation of truth. Foucault summarizes it thusly, "someone is saved, when he is suitably armed and equipped to be able to defend himself if necessary. Someone who saves himself is in a state of alert, in a state of resistance, in a state of mastery and sovereignty over the self, which enables him to repel every attack and assault" (HS 177). So we see here the notion that one equips oneself with true discourses in order to be able to resist outside influence, as well as internal disorders. Next, "[s]imilarly 'saving oneself' means escaping domination or enslavement; escaping a constraint by which one is menaced, and being restored to one's rights, finding one's freedom and independence again" (HS 177). This corresponds to the notion that only the individual who is not influenced by external events and internal passions is truly free, and thus capable of acting correctly. "'Saving oneself' means maintaining oneself in a continuous state that nothing can change, no matter what events occur around one, like a wine is preserved, is saved" (HS 177). Lastly, "'saving oneself' means having access to goods you did not possess at the outset, enjoying a sort of benefit, which one gives oneself, of which one is himself the effective agent. 'Saving yourself' means ensuring happiness, tranquility, serenity, etc., for oneself" (HS 177). As Paul Rabinow avers, "[i]n sum, the verb denoted a type of activity: a pro-active taking care of, guarding, and perhaps nourishing the goods of one's own life, material and spiritual."<sup>179</sup> So we see in

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<sup>179</sup> Paul Rabinow, "Foucault's Untimely Struggle: Towards a Form of Spirituality," *Theory, Culture & Society* 26, no. 6 (November 2009): 39.

these definitions the two faces of conversion, discipline and pleasure. In some ways, this pleasure can be viewed simply as the access to truth, the truth that unfolds the more one subjectivates it.<sup>180</sup> It also suggests a joy in the relationship to self, the *gaudium* that Seneca describes. The person who is saved has achieved "a perfect satiety of" himself (HS 108). This does not mean, of course, that he is completely self-sufficient; conversion always takes place within community. Rather *gaudium*, the joy that attends the subjectivation of truth, comes from the process of conversion itself, from the discipline/pleasure of the practices that brings one's emerging self closer to the ideal self.

Interestingly, Pierre Hadot challenges Foucault's reading on this point. He insists, "Seneca does not find his joy in 'Seneca,' but by transcending 'Seneca'; by discovering that there is within him--within all human beings, that is, and within the cosmos itself--a reason which is part of universal reason. In fact, the goal of Stoic exercises is to go beyond the self, and think and act in unison with universal reason."<sup>181</sup> Hadot claims that because Foucault does not believe in universal reason and human nature, he simply brackets them. However, I would contend, with the support of William Connolly, that Foucault does understand the process of conversion to the self as opening the individual up to something beyond herself. What serves as the base for human existence?

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<sup>180</sup> The pleasure connected with conversion is yet another way that Foucault unwittingly recapitulates Aristotle. As Vicki Hearne notes, Aristotle "associated happiness with ethics--codes of behavior that urge us toward the sensation of getting it right, a kind of work that yields the 'click' of satisfaction upon solving a problem or surmounting an obstacle."<sup>180</sup> Vicki Hearne, "What's Wrong with Animal Rights: Of hounds, horses, and Jeffersonian happiness," *Harper's Magazine* (September 1991): 60.

<sup>181</sup> Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 207.

Freedom.<sup>182</sup> Connolly says that Foucault views practices of the self as opening the individual up to "a deep contingency, a lack of necessity in things, a background of emptiness--these themes, inserted into the agenda of genealogy, gesture towards the ontological universal Foucault would endorse [...] an emptiness with respect to an intrinsic order, an abundance with respect to any fixed organization of actuality."<sup>183</sup> Thus, while it is fair to say that Foucault's interpretation of Stoic salvation does not emphasize the transcendence of the self in a unity with universal reason, his interpretation does attempt to intervene in the present, in his constant practice of refusal, curiosity, and innovation.

### *The Empty Moment of Decision*

How does one know that one has subjectivated the truth? How does the individual act in the world once she has done so? About true discourses in the classical world Foucault states, "ancient ascesis does not reduce: it equips, it provides" (HS 306). In his lectures at the University of Vermont in 1982, he discusses this in more detail as it relates to Stoicism:

In the philosophical system dominated by Stoicism, *askésis*<sup>184</sup> [...] has for its final aim not preparation for another reality, but access to the reality of this world. The Greek word for this is *paraskeuazó* ('to get prepared'). It is a set of practices by which one can acquire, assimilate, and transform truth into a permanent principle

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<sup>182</sup> As we will explore in greater detail in chapter five.

<sup>183</sup> William Connolly, "Beyond Good and Evil: The Ethical Sensibility of Michel Foucault," in *The Later Foucault*, ed. Jeremy Moss (London: Sage Publications, 1998), 116.

<sup>184</sup> In quoted material I use the diacritical marks that are present--as in this case where an accent *aigue* has been substituted for a macron. In my own translations or use of the Greek words, I use the standard transliteration marks.

of action. *Aletheia* becomes *ēthos*. It is a process of becoming more subjective.  
(TS 35)

Here Foucault presents a description of the process of subjectivation of true discourse. One accedes to a certain form of truth and a relationship that takes the form of a relationship to oneself engendered by truth. Through practice one becomes prepared. The reality one creates through subjectivating truth opens up new avenues for thought. Truth rebounds upon the process of assimilating truth. Ultimately, truth becomes a permanent principle of action. In other words, the subject manifests in the world in a consistent manner as a function of the truth. *Aletheia*, truth, becomes *ēthos*, a way of life.

If *paraskeuazō* suggests getting prepared, how does this happen, and with what are individuals prepared? Foucault notes that in the classical sources, *paraskeuē* is described as "the soul's necessary equipment" (HS 397). While in the Greek period, *paraskeuē*, or preparation, occurred early in life, in the imperial period training continued throughout and until the end of life; "[t]he *paraskaié* will be nothing other than the set of necessary and sufficient moves, the set of necessary and sufficient practices, that enable us to be stronger than anything that may happen in the course of our existence" (HS 307). The use of the word "moves" clarifies the original meaning of *paraskeuē*, namely training for combat or for athletic contest. Foucault makes a point of noting that training for an athletic contest such as wrestling meant learning only the most important moves, the best ways to achieve victory. One did not waste time studying the minutiae, all the *possible* moves, but only those that provided the best equipment (HS 307). Recall that spiritual knowledge must be useful. If a type of knowledge does not help one care for the self, it is not necessary equipment. For Hellenistic and Roman philosophy, of course, the ultimate

goal is not to win in combat or contest, but to win the contest of life by being impervious to external influences that one cannot control. So what does the individual equip herself with? "[T]rue discourses. They are what permit us to confront reality" (HDS 1178). In "The Ethics of Care of the Self as a Practice of Freedom," Foucault states explicitly that "to take care of oneself is to equip oneself with truths: it is there that ethics is tied to the game of truth" (ESS 1532). Yet, true discourses are not intangible. Foucault notes, "it is necessary to understand discourses as statements with a material existence" (HS 308). This material existence is precisely the manifestation of the true discourse in the world through action and in the potential for action in the muscles and the mind.

In order for true discourses to become equipment for the self they must be ready at hand (HDS 1177). One important factor that makes the discourse ready at hand is how it is formulated. Seneca notes that a true discourse "must thoroughly penetrate us through its simplicity and reflected composition" (HS 383-84). As spiritual knowledge, it must be rational and persuasive at the same time (HS 309). Therefore, one important factor is the simplicity of the truths, both for the purposes of comprehension and for memorization. Second, the truths must motivate behavior. In other words, they cannot be abstracted from the person's life; they must apply directly to it. Foucault explains further what the classical philosophers meant by "at hand" in "Writing the Self." He states,

"At hand" then, not simply in the sense that one can recall them to consciousness, but in the sense that one must be able to utilize them, as soon as they are needed, in action. It's a question of constituting a *logos bioēthikos*, an equipment of helpful discourses, capable--as Plutarch says--of raising their voice and quieting the passions like a master can with one word quiet the barking of dogs. (ES 1238)



Thus, these individual true discourses, what Marcus Aurelius refers to as *parastēmata*, or precepts (HS 279), are "discourses existing in their materiality, acquired in their materiality, maintained in their materiality; [...] they are reasonable, they are true, and they are made up of acceptable principles of behavior" (HS 309). In relation to Aurelius's own practice, Michael Humphries argues, "[t]he written style of Marcus' *Meditations* exemplifies the Stoic principle of simplicity and applicability. In the *Meditations* he seeks to lay down a set of axioms that are 'brief and fundamental' [...] they should be memorable and capable of taking effect immediately in the aid and support of one's life."<sup>185</sup>

Furthermore, when these material discourses are subjectivated, they are "profoundly established in the soul, 'driven into it' says Seneca, and they thus form a part of ourselves: in brief, the soul makes them not only hers, but herself" (ES 1238). This explains why enacting the truth leads to a transformation of the subject. Foucault states, *askēsis* "is what permits one to become the subject of true speech and to find oneself, by this enunciation of the truth, transfigured [...] by the fact that he has spoken frankly" (HS 316). Humphries argues that individuals such as Marcus Aurelius and Seneca would have begun training in subjectivating true discourse early in life, in order to develop the skills necessary to do so; "As part of his education, Marcus would have been instructed to memorize and elaborate upon such sayings following a set pattern designed to develop his skills in writing, composition, and rhetoric, and to prepare him for the higher levels of

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<sup>185</sup> Michael L. Humphries, "Michel Foucault on Writing and the Self in the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius and the *Confessions* of St. Augustine," *Arethusa* 30, no. 1 (Winter 1997): 129. The internal quote is from the *Meditations* itself, section 4.1.

education."<sup>186</sup> This practice was also meant to develop moral character and skill in living.<sup>187</sup> Therefore, the subjectivation of true discourse is both material and ethical. So how should we understand it? Foucault states that having something at hand means "that it is necessary to have [the truth] somehow virtually in the muscles. It is necessary to have it in such a way that one can reactualize it immediately and without delay, in an automatic fashion [...] It is certainly so that [truth] can come to be integrated in the individual and command his actions, and become part in a way of his muscles and nerves" (HS 311). Thus, subjectivating true discourse means muscle memory, habituation, as we saw in the example of the swordswoman.

However, Foucault does not simply want to say that modes of action become lodged in the muscles or in the memory. Rather, true discourses alter the matrix of the soul, conceived of as body/mind, in that the true discourses become the scaffolding of the emerging self. According to Foucault, this can occur because the *logos* and the emerging subject are the same. He says, "when an event occurs, it is necessary at this moment that the *logos* becomes the subject of action himself, that the very subject of action becomes at this point the *logos*, so that without even having to murmur again the phrase, without even having to pronounce it, he acts as he must" (HS 312). Thus, "this learned, memorized, and applied truth [becomes] a quasi-subject that reigns sovereignly in us" (HDS 1181), and it can jump to the aid of the emerging subject (HS 310). For instance, while a person might give a moment's thought to jumping into an icy river after a

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<sup>186</sup> Humphries, "Michel Foucault on Writing and the Self in the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius and the *Confessions* of St. Augustine," 125.

<sup>187</sup> Humphries, 130.

struggling individual, she will automatically reach to catch her falling child because the *logos* of protecting her loved one has become fully subjectivated. This is the very nature of what Foucault calls the *paraskeuē*, or equipment: "it is [...] the form that true discourse must take in order to constitute the matrices of reasonable behavior. The *paraskeuē* is the permanent structure of transformation of true discourse, well-anchored in the subject in acceptable principles of moral behavior" (HS 312). In other words, as he says here and elsewhere, the *paraskeuē* enables the transformation of *logos* into *ēthos*. In fact, true discourses, properly formulated, "do not just train the convictions, but the acts themselves" (HS 309). "It is as matrices of action that the material elements of the reasonable *logos* are effectively inscribed in the subject" (HS 309). Thus, in the fully subjectivated self, there is no difference between the *logos* and the subject of right action. The end goal of this process is that when the true discourses are "present in the head, thoughts, heart, and very body of someone who possesses them, that person will act as if spontaneously" (HS 309). Donna Haraway gives an interesting example of this training towards disciplined spontaneity in her relationship with her dog.<sup>188</sup> She says,

[a]t first, the moves seem small, insignificant, the timing too demanding, too hard; the consistency too strict, the teacher too demanding. Then, dog and human figure it out, if only for a minute, how to get on together, how to move with sheer joy and skill over a hard course, how to communicate, how to be honest. The goal is the oxymoron of disciplined spontaneity. Both dog and handler have to be able to take the initiative and to respond obediently to the other. The task is to become coherent enough in an incoherent world to engage in a joint dance of being that breeds respect and response in the flesh, in the runs, on the course. And then to remember how to live like that at every scale, with all the partners.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Haraway trains Australian shepherds for skill-based shepherding competitions. This requires intimate relationships of understanding and discipline between dog and human. For two great reads, see *The Companion Species Manifesto* and *When Species Meet*.

An obvious criticism of this understanding of the subjectivation of truth is that Foucault's constituted subject, being determined, does not possess the free will necessary to make moral decisions. It is true, of course, that Foucault insists that all subjects are constituted by discourses and practices external to themselves, either through subjection or subjectivation. While the discourses that produce the subject are historically contingent and largely arbitrary, they nonetheless provide the conditions of possibility for the subject's conduct. The subjectivation of true discourse seeks to replace one set of habits with another, more intentional, set. While Foucault does call the individual to a continual vigilance concerning her behaviors and beliefs, he also indicates that the closer the emerging subject comes to the ideal subject, the more the subjectivated truth will emerge reflexively, without active thought by the individual. The goal is for "the *logos* [to become] the subject of action himself [...] so that without even having to murmur again the phrase, without even having to pronounce it, he acts as he must" (HS 312). Obviously the idea that the goal of ethical subject formation is to create a reflexive, unthinking reaction flies in the face of the importance of free will in the moment of ethical decision-making.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003), 62.

<sup>190</sup> In response to comments from my committee, it has become evident to me that my instinct to bring Foucault into conversation with analytic philosophers over the concept of determinism versus free will--a move Foucault himself would have found ridiculous given that he did not recognize analytic philosophers as philosophers per se--actually belied the fact that few scholars have paid much attention to the idea that subjectivation of true discourse ideally leads to a reflexive response at the moment of ethical action. While a number of thinkers have criticized his works focused on discipline for this reason, an issue I address here, none to my knowledge have examined the implications for agency of his attitude toward care of self. In fact, the only article I have found that seems to speak to this issue in a direct way, Neil Levy's, "Foucault as Virtue Ethicist," does not attend to the possibility that cultivating "virtue"

Foucault takes a different perspective, insisting that even if subjects are constituted by external factors, and, in fact, the goal of care of the self is just such a constitution, this construction does not presuppose determinism. Many scholars of Foucault highlight this fact. Judith Butler asserts, "to claim that the subject is constituted is not to claim that it is determined."<sup>191</sup> Todd May insists, "[h]e does not describe a type of force (God, the environment, genes) that necessarily controls human thought and behaviour. He depicts a historically contingent set of practices that come to have influence over our behaviour in this particular period. Because of this, there is no reason to believe that, if we understand our historical legacy, we cannot change it."<sup>192</sup> In fact, there is nothing ethically constraining about habits in general. From the perspective of sociologist Mikael Klintman, habits are necessary. They allow us to make decisions in reasonable amounts of time; they make us relatively predictable so that we can interact with others; and they "have evolved over millions of years, and often serve our primary motivations better than conscious reasoning."<sup>193</sup> More importantly, according to John Dewey they are all we have; "all habits are demands for certain kinds of activity: and they constitute the self--In any intelligible sense of the word will, they are the will. They

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might mean that one cultivates a mode of being that disallows ethical deliberation in the moment of action. Therefore, in what follows, I simply attempt to show that the intentional constitution of the subject through care of self does not mean a lack of freedom in determining the form of one's ethical conduct, but rather views cultivation itself as an ongoing practice of freedom.

<sup>191</sup> Quoted in David Weberman, "Are Freedom and Antihumanism Compatible?" *Constellations* 7, no. 2 (2000): 266.

<sup>192</sup> Todd May, "Foucault's Concept of Freedom," in *Michel Foucault: Key Concepts*, ed. Dianna Taylor (Durham, UK: Acumen, 2011), 77.

<sup>193</sup> Mikael Klintman, *Citizen-Consumers: Reducing Environmental Harm through Our Social Motivation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 39-40.

form our effective desires and they furnish us with our working capacities. They rule our thoughts, determining which shall appear and be strong and which shall pass from light into obscurity."<sup>194</sup> Thus, the question for Foucault, as for Dewey, is not whether ethics are habituated, but how we can make those habits better.

For Iris Murdoch, the answer is daily attention and practice. In discussing the issue of the freedom of the will, Murdoch muses upon "the strange emptiness which often occurs at the moment of choosing."<sup>195</sup> Rather than identify this emptiness with the perfect freedom of the will, she claims that by focusing only on the moment of decision, philosophers ignore all of the work that goes into building the moral framework of such a decision before the actual moment occurs. She describes this work as the work of attention, of learning to see the world clearly, and states, "if we consider what the work of attention is like, how continuously it goes on, and how imperceptibly it builds up structures of value round about us, we shall not be surprised that at crucial moments of choice most of the business of choosing is already over."<sup>196</sup> Like Foucault, she argues that such daily ethical work leading to a reflexive action does not negate freedom. In her words,

This does not imply that we are not free, certainly not. But it implies that the exercise of our freedom is a small piecemeal business which goes on all the time and not a grandiose leaping about unimpeded at important moments. The moral life, on this view, is something that goes on continually, not something that is

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<sup>194</sup> Quoted in Burkitt, "Technologies of the Self: Habitus and Capacities," *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior* 32, no. 2 (June 2002): 228-29.

<sup>195</sup> Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of the Good*, 35.

<sup>196</sup> Murdoch, 37.

switched off in between the occurrence of explicit moral choices. What happens in between such choices is indeed what is crucial.<sup>197</sup>

Murdoch also acknowledges that daily practices can reinforce a convincing but false picture of the world, i.e. *stultitia*, and bad ethical habits. She says, "I have been speaking, in relation to our example, of progress or change for the better, but of course such change (and this is more commonly to be observed) may also be for the worse. Everyday conversation is not necessarily a morally neutral activity and certain ways of describing people can be corrupting and wrong."<sup>198</sup> The way to combat this subjection or the subjectivation of dangerous truths is through attention, which Foucault might call thinking otherwise, or care of the self. Thus, she argues that goodness is the function of a "perfectly familiar form of moral discipline,"<sup>199</sup> albeit a "moral change and moral achievement [which is] slow."<sup>200</sup> She concludes by saying, "[i]f I attend properly I will have no choices and this is the ultimate condition to be aimed at."<sup>201</sup> Thus, Murdoch presents the philosophical elucidation of a process that she herself claims is fairly familiar. Anyone who has been around children knows that parents seek to instill certain principles of courtesy and respect for others as second nature, usually by activating precepts dialogically, such as the ubiquitous question, "what do you say?" to elicit a "please" or "thank you." Similarly, I have a number of friends who grew up in the south

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<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> Murdoch, 32-33.

<sup>199</sup> Murdoch, 38.

<sup>200</sup> Murdoch, 39.

<sup>201</sup> Murdoch, 40.

who reflexively call strangers "Sir" or "Ma'am." Yet, for some reason, the idea that individuals would assimilate all principles of moral action through the same daily practices strikes many moral philosophers as highly problematic.

Fortunately, similar cases of transformation within habituation exist, both in language and in human reasoning. Ian Burkitt notes that language persists at the level of the body, "for we do not have to think of each word or carefully formulate a sentence before we speak."<sup>202</sup> This does not mean, however, that the habituation of language does not allow for its creative use. In fact, this is precisely how languages evolve. Similarly, Antonio Damasio says about the limits of human thought,

although biology and culture often determine our reasoning, directly or indirectly, and may seem to limit the exercise of individual freedom, we must recognize that humans do have some room for such freedom, for willing and performing actions that may go against the apparent grain of biology and culture. Some sublime human achievements come from rejecting what biology or culture propels individuals to do. Such achievements are the affirmation of a new level of being in which one can invent new artifacts and forge more just ways of living.<sup>203</sup>

David Weberman relates these meditations directly to Foucauldian ethical freedom, stating,

the norms supplied by power/knowledge relations always enable, constrain and ultimately produce human actions similar to the way that natural languages enable, constrain, and produce what we can say or theoretical frameworks enable, constrain, and produce what we can observe. Power [...] always provides us with the material or tools (norms, concepts, critical skills) and situations for our choices and actions. It constrains the range of responses we might take (although, as with generative languages, the range might be infinite), but it does not have a

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<sup>202</sup> Ian Burkitt, "Technologies of the Self: Habitus and Capacities," *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior* 32, no. 2 (June 2002): 234.

<sup>203</sup> Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, 176-77. In a strange Foucauldian echo, he concludes, "[u]nder certain circumstances, however, freedom from biological and cultural constraints can also be a hallmark of madness."



lock on the eventual outcomes [...] We can respond to a power constellation either by acting on different options available within that constellation, even going so far as to reverse its operations by its own means, or moving into the orbit of a different constellation.<sup>204</sup>

In the subjectivation of truth, Foucault is promoting Weberman's second option here. Despite being habituated into a certain way of acting in *stultitia*, one can choose to train oneself to accede to a different constellation of power and knowledge. Alexander Nehamas concludes, therefore,

[t]he self may not be the final reality underlying history, but it is not exactly a fiction either; and though it is not ultimately (or 'metaphysically') free, it is not a puppet either. Moreover every form of power [...] contains the potential of its own undoing, since every prohibition [...] creates the possibility of a new transgression. Since power is productive, the subjects it produces, being themselves forms of power, can be productive in their own right.<sup>205</sup>

Clearly, such an argument, relying on the notion of creation and transformation within the framework of habituation, and founded in Foucault's belief, as we will see, that power and freedom are co-constitutive, will not satisfy most moral philosophers who feel strongly that free will in the moment of decision is crucial to ethical agency, but in the end, perhaps they should read the foregoing demonstrative meditation as an exercise in being a Foucauldian subject.

From the Foucauldian perspective, ethical transformation necessitates the subjectivation of true discourses that can guide the emergence of the subject in action. Just as in the case of the individuals whom Socrates calls to care for themselves, modern individuals, Foucault argues, are not *sui generis* ethical subjects, as Descartes would have them believe. In fact, having not taken a critical look at their own subjection, they may

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<sup>204</sup> Weberman, "Are Freedom and Antihumanism Compatible?" 257.

<sup>205</sup> Nehamas, *The Art of Living*, 177.

not even have the ability to discern the truth of their impoverished condition. How, then, could these poor souls, buffeted by the winds of external influences and internal passions, blind to the constructed nature of their reality and the radical freedom it belies, act ethically? The only way to become a full ethical subject is to embark on a process of transformation through practice. David Weberman says of contemporary ethical transformation, "[o]n Foucault's account, self-creation or care of the self is 'a sort of work, an activity; it implies attention, knowledge, technique' and a strategic search for new identities."<sup>206</sup> The only way for techniques of self to help the emerging subject progress towards her goal is if she can mobilize true discourses at necessary moments. The discourses must, therefore, be simple, easy-to-remember precepts for behavior, which can become the subject of action in appropriate situations. While in the classical sources, these true discourses would have been received traditions, the "already-said," Foucault notes that in the contemporary period they might not be. A function of their historical moment, they must respond to that moment. Thus, they may instead be the bubbling up of what Foucault calls "subjugated knowledges." The emergence of counter-discourses from the silenced voices of history, which as Paul Rutherford notes, represent "'an insurrection of [...] those 'naïve', 'disqualified', localized, non-scientific discourses which oppose the 'tyranny' of particular globalizing scientific disciplines."<sup>207</sup> Of course, as we have seen, a subjugated knowledge does not have to be non-scientific. The

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<sup>206</sup> Weberman, "Are Freedom and Antihumanism Compatible?" 267.

<sup>207</sup> Paul Rutherford, "Ecological Modernization and Environmental Risk," in *Discourses of the Environment*, ed. Éric Darier (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 113.

important issue is whether it allows one to think otherwise, whether the knowledge inspires a movement in the self.

In this chapter, I have attempted to delimit some of the crucial aspects of Foucault's interaction with Greek and Roman sources concerning *askēsis*. I have discussed the nature of the subjectivation of true discourse, and the fact that subjectivation occurs through habituation by practice, and that true discourses, in order to be easily subjectivated, must be simple, evocative, memorable, and prescriptive. I have shown that Foucault spends a significant amount of time in the lecture courses discussing various practices of self that fell under the rubric of *askēsis*, in order to argue for the importance of training the body and mind in such practices. Ultimately the goal of such training is that the discourses be ready at hand so that they can animate conduct at the moment they are needed. The ideal of subjectivation would be for the true discourse to actually manifest in the moment of action, for the subject and the truth to become one. I then respond to the objection that this would deny agency to the subject at the moment of ethical decision by showing that, for Foucault, freedom is a practice that is conterminous with the process of care of the self rather than a space of radical opportunity at the heart of the ethical moment. As I show in the conclusion, the focus on practice as a daily training of the body and mind radically disrupts the assumptions of most environmental activists, who assume that education is enough to convince people to change their behaviors. Thus, I believe that in order to achieve behavior change, activists should pay attention to both their strategies and the ways in which their true discourses are formulated, to make them simpler and more likely to become ready at hand.

So far, the discussion of conversion and care of the self has operated largely on the level of the individual. However, these practices take place in a web of relationality, from intimate relationships to schools of philosophy and communities of practice. Therefore, the next chapter widens the view to understand how care of the self relies on and contributes to intimate relationships.

### Chapter Three: Friendship

To be in love means to be worldly, to be in connection with significant otherness and signifying others, on many scales, in layers of locals and globals, in ramifying webs.

--Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto*<sup>208</sup>

Even today, behind every intense friendship lurks the shadow of sex, so that we no longer see the striking perturbations of friendship. The counter-conduct of friendship has become pathologized--the unruliness of friendship is but a form of abnormality.

--Arnold I. Davidson, "In Praise of Counter Conduct"<sup>209</sup>

Any attempt to understand the implications of Foucault's model of ethical subject formation confronts the issue of the ethical obligation to the other. Foucault has often been accused of a lack of attention to the other, a sort of ethical egoism that cuts off and shuts out the other, thereby doing violence to her. There are numerous charges of

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<sup>208</sup> Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003), 81.

<sup>209</sup> Arnold I. Davidson, "In Praise of Counter Conduct," *History of the Human Sciences* 24, no. 4 (October 2011): 34.

ethnocentrism, such as that leveled by Timothy Mitchell<sup>210</sup>; misogyny, such as the general claim by Meaghan Morris that "Foucault was 'a happily Eurocentric white male who was uneasy with women and ambivalent about feminism'"<sup>211</sup>; and general narcissism, as in the article critiquing aesthetics of existence written by Elaine Campbell.<sup>212</sup> While it is not within the scope of the present examination to assess these claims in the context of Foucault's personal or political life, in terms of his ethical theory, such accusations misunderstand his project, in that they rest on the traditional assumption of a sovereign self contemplating her responsibility to other sovereign selves. On the level of practice, Foucault will argue that caring for the self is the primary site of ethics--not only because one cannot act correctly toward the other or care for the other without first caring for the self, but because one's ability to subjectivate truth and to act in accordance with that truth, which forms the basis of ethics, can only happen in the emerging self's relationship to the aspirational self,<sup>213</sup> even though otherness composes it through and through. However, I contend that this does not mean that Foucauldian ethics occurs in an individualistic and atomizing mode. In fact, the practices that allow for the

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<sup>210</sup> Timothy Mitchell, *Questions of Modernity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

<sup>211</sup> Quoted in Clare O'Farrell, *Michel Foucault* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2005), 9. Of course there are many more nuanced and constructive critiques, for example, see Grace M. Jantzen, "'Promising Ashes': A Queer Language of Life," in *Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 245-253.

<sup>212</sup> Elaine Campbell, "Narcissism as Ethical Practice: Foucault, Askesis and an Ethics of Becoming," *Cultural Sociology* 4 (March 2010): 23-44.

<sup>213</sup> In contrast to the emerging self, the aspirational self is the ideal self that defines the way in which the subject would like to consistently act once she begins to care for herself. This aspirational self is constructed through the subjectivation of truth.

thinking otherwise that Foucault promotes must go through the relationship to the personal other and to the community.

In the present chapter, I argue that Foucault's understanding of the role of the other in the formation of the ethical self disrupts current conversations in moral philosophy in several ways. First, Foucault's understanding of the ethical primacy of the self navigates the delicate boundary between practical attention to the ethical transformation of the self and the responsibility to recognize the constitution of the self through the other. This promotes an ability to lay oneself bare to the forces that continually confront the self with their difference and respect that difference rather than submit to the dominative drive to assimilate it into the self. Second, in Foucault's emphasis on intimate and affective relationships, and the development of the self within community, he presents a reframing of the role of the intimate partner as a guide, support, and challenge to the self. Third, Foucault insists upon the importance of other individuals in helping the *stulta* learn to care for herself and the locating of the conversion to self in a community, but not a community based on pre-established identity, such as we see in communitarian ethics. Instead, as we will see, this community coheres loosely around the "future we" created by critique and the practice of freedom. In his distinction between love and care, Foucault enters the conversation concerning the proper role of affective modes ethics, arguing that love is a magnetic force that draws people to one another and to the truth, creating an affective support for the process of conversion. However, because love is neither positive nor negative, Foucault posits care as the aesthetic dimension of positive relationality. Finally, the chapter argues that Foucault does not adhere to the

notion that communities of practice must be linked together through shared norms, values, or traditions, but rather than communities coalesce around possible answers to the question of the present.

On a direct level, the elucidation of Foucault's thought on the other speaks to the atomized nature of much environmental activism that continues to presume that individuals can be encouraged to change behaviors through education and economic (dis)incentives. When we take Foucault's exegesis of the classical sources seriously, it becomes evident not only that the guide--what we will come to know in this and the next chapter as the parrhesiast--is crucial for pulling others out of *stultitia*, in an intensive and bodily way, but that the creation of new ways of being arise in the context of communities of practice that can offer support and provocation during the arduous course of conversion. On a more abstract level, Foucault's account sketches a middle way between the self and the other and corroborates the importance of affective states, such as love and care, for the creation of ethical selves.

### *The Ethical Primacy of the Self*

One of the main outcomes of the focus on conversion to the self is Foucault's insistence that care of the self must take precedence over care of others. Foucault argues in the beginning of *The Hermeneutic of the Subject* that care of the self has fallen by the wayside in Western philosophical thought due to the way in which the Christian renunciation of self has been taken up by secular ethics. He says, "[t]hese austere rules [of the classical care of the self] [...] we have reacclimated, transposed, transferred them



to the interior of a context which is that of a general ethic of non-egoism, whether it be under the form of a Christian obligation to renounce the self, or under the 'modern' form of an obligation vis-à-vis others--whether it is others, the collectivity, class, nation, etc" (HS 15). Due to this overarching principle of non-egoism, the idea of caring for the self, of residing in ourselves, sounds to us "like a sort of challenge and defiance, a will to ethical rupture, a sort of moral dandyism, the affirmation-defiance of an aesthetic stage and unsurpassable individual" (HS 14).<sup>214</sup> Thus, for Foucault, the neglect of care of the self is tied to a sort of rejection of the self and a move to figuring the other as primary in the ethical relationship.

In contrast, Foucault argues that in the classical sources care of the other depends upon care of the self. He states, "care of the self is ethically primary, insofar as the relationship to the self is ontologically primary" (ESS 1534), further explaining,

if you care for yourself as you should, that is to say if you know ontologically what you are, if you know also of what you are capable, if you know that it is in order to be a citizen of a city, a master of a house in an *oikos*, if you know what things you should fear and those which you should not fear, if you know what is appropriate to hope for and to which things, on the contrary, you should be completely indifferent, if you know finally that you should not have fear of death, well then, you cannot at this moment abuse your power over others. (ESS 1535)

So we see that for the Greek or Roman citizen to understand himself ontologically means to recognize that he is the subject of certain kinds of actions, those related to the city, to his family and household, and of course to the world of external representations, which he engages flexibly with the appropriate application of care or indifference. When

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<sup>214</sup> Insofar as we know that Foucault wants to refigure the dandy as a philosophical hero, we should acknowledge that he is using the term here in the way in which his detractors would do so.

Foucault says that caring for oneself makes it impossible to abuse one's power, he means that care of the self imparts the wisdom to know what proper government is and the restraint to enact it.<sup>215</sup> As Foucault states at the beginning of this paragraph, "the risk of dominating others and exercising over them a tyrannical power comes precisely from the fact that one has not cared for oneself and that one has become slave to his desires" (ESS 1535). Interestingly, Matthew Sharpe makes a similar point as relates to Kant's ethical practice of critique, stating, "just so, for Kant, a potential tyrant is s/he who has not tested her/his ideas by critique, and so can think to impose their unmastered claims about the whole monologically upon others."<sup>216</sup> Even in a world dominated by a morality of non-egoism, such as ours, this makes some sense. In order to have any perspective on the other that causes one to act ethically towards her, one must have learned to conduct oneself properly. To use a hyperbolic example, we would not necessarily expect a drug addict to think about others, to act ethically towards them. In fact, she might steal, lie, and destroy others' lives, at the behest of her addiction. In order to be able to even consider others, she must learn to care for herself. For Greek philosophers, being a slave to your passions was just such an extreme situation. A person might in fact be so beholden to their passions that they simply could not care for themselves, and thus could not exercise power over others in a just way.

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<sup>215</sup> Government is defined by Foucault as "the techniques and procedures by which one undertakes to conduct the conduct of others" (GSA 6). Of course, as we see in his late work, one can also govern oneself, and the government of oneself is inextricably tied to the government of others.

<sup>216</sup> Matthew Sharpe, "'Critique' as Technology of the Self," *Foucault Studies* 2 (May 2005): 111.

As a potent example of this principle, Foucault gives us the example of none other than the father of Greek philosophy, Socrates, as one who cares for himself over and above others. Foucault explains that twice in Socrates' life he chose to go against public opinion and political authority in order to be true to his own principles (GSA 292-293). During his trial, his accusers ask him why, if he is such a shining example of wisdom and truth, he has never come to speak before the Athenian assembly? He replies that the truth he has to speak is not popular and he would be putting himself at risk (GSA 291-292). So Foucault asks himself, why is Socrates willing to put himself at risk in the former two instances, but not in the latter? His answer is that the latter would be a voluntary act of exercising power over others, and "trying to exercise a certain ascendancy over others in order to speak the truth, that is politics, not philosophy" (GSA 293). In Plato's opinion, "[p]hilosophy has to play a certain role *in relation to* politics, it does not have to play a role *in* politics" (GSA 292, emphasis added). Alexander Nehamas argues concerning this episode that Socrates did not involve himself in the assembly out of fear, but not the fear of death precisely, rather a fear of having thrown away his life for no reason. He states, "because if [Socrates] had died he would have been useful neither to Athens, Foucault claims, nor--I add with Socrates--to himself. Socrates' voice kept him true to his 'divine mission'; that mission was personal: politics was irrelevant to it."<sup>217</sup> To use our more standard terminology, speaking before the assembly does not play a role in Socrates' care of self. However, when Socrates is called to take a specific action, to play a definitive role in his own field of social and political action, he must speak the truth, and be true to

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<sup>217</sup> Nehamas, *The Art of Living*, 163.

himself. Otherwise, "[h]e would himself commit an injustice. Out of care for himself, through being concerned about himself, and taking care of what he is himself, he refuses to commit this injustice" (GSA 296). Thus, Foucault concludes,

In the first case [speaking voluntarily in the Assembly], the philosopher *qua* philosopher does not have to prevent the city from committing stupidities or injustices. On the other hand, at the moment when he has to do something as someone who is part of the city [...] inasmuch as the injustice committed would be one that he himself would commit, either in his role as citizen or his role as subject, at this moment the philosopher must say no. The philosopher must say no and he must invoke his principle of refusal, which is at the same time a manifestation of truth. (GSA 294)

Thus, Socrates purports to have an ethical responsibility only to himself. While his actions might impact others and his city favorably, he does not engage in them for that reason, but because he refuses to commit an injustice towards the truth that allows him to function as an ethical subject and the ideal self that he has spent his life trying to achieve.

We can also see this primacy of care of self in Socrates' behavior following his trial. Faced with the death sentence, his followers urge him to flee, to go into exile. He refuses. They appeal to his love for his children; "How will you care for [your children] if you die" (CV 102)? However, he insists that his respect for the law must trump his obligations to others, for not doing so would be an injustice. It would undermine the laws of Athens, which are agents that allow individuals to care for themselves (CV 102). Here we have another instance of *epimeleia*, and the insistence that Socrates cannot be primarily concerned with the pain and loss that others might feel. He must be just to himself and care for himself, even and especially unto his own death. As Foucault notes, the practice of truth-telling and "this devotion to provoking others to take care of themselves just as he took care of himself, all of this forms a very tightly woven

ensemble whose threads intertwine throughout the series on Socrates' death (*Apology*, *Crito*, and *Phaedo*)" (CV 104). If he abandons his care of self in order to care superficially for others, he would actually be doing them a disservice--not to mention betraying a life of truth--by ceasing to be an example of how others should care for themselves. Foucault clearly views his own political choices in a similar way. Asked by an interviewer to identify the organizing principle of his political program, Foucault responds, "I would like to affirm that the coherence [of my politics] is of a strategic nature. If I struggle in such or such a way, I do it because, in fact, this struggle is important for me in my subjectivity" (SH 1486).

Clearly, then, Foucault is arguing that this principle of the preeminence of care of the self does not only apply to the Greeks. In fact, Foucault views the relationship to self as the determining relationship of ethics in general. In the fourfold model of ethics presented in the beginning of *The Use of Pleasure*, all four categories refer in an explicit way to the relationship to self. The ethical substance refers to "the part of the self [that is constituted] as the primary material of his moral conduct" (UPTS 1375). The mode of subjectivation is the way in which the individual "establishes his connection to [rules of conduct] and recognizes himself as tied to an obligation to implement it" (UPTS 1375). The practices of self are ways in which the self trains the mind/body in order to achieve the implementation of those rules, and the telos is the aspirational self that the emerging self hopes to reach through this practice. It is evident that the entirety of what Foucault conceives of as ethics is tied to the relationship to self, and to truth through the self as the

site of the subjectivation. As he repeats in the essay, "The Use of Pleasure and Techniques of Self,"

[a]ll moral action entails a connection to reality where it takes place and a connection to the code to which it refers; but it also implies a certain relation to self; this is not simply 'consciousness of self,' but the constitution of the self as 'moral subject,' insofar as the individual circumscribes the part of himself that constitutes the object of moral practice, defines his position in relation to the precept that he follows, settles on a certain way of being which will be valued as the moral accomplishment of himself, and in order to do this, acts on himself, undertakes to know himself, to control himself, to test himself, to perfect himself, to transform himself. (UPTS 1377)

While this fourfold model is put forward in the context of Foucault's work with the classical sources, there is little reason to believe that he intended it to be applicable only to them, and in fact some scholars have used these categories in order to explore other ethical contexts.<sup>218</sup> Thus, the relationship to the self that Foucault posits as primary in this description of care of the self applies also to his understanding of ethics in general. He contends in this same essay, "[m]oral action is inseparable from these forms of activity on the self" (UPTS 1377).

For many moral theorists, the basic, and troubling, outcome of this understanding of the ethical primacy of the self is that the individual has no fundamental ethical obligation to the other. The degree to which Foucault's perspective runs counter to prevailing ethical theories is demonstrated nicely in Neil Levy's article "Foucault as Virtue Ethicist." The passage bears quoting at length:

The Greeks, Foucault tells us, assumed that "the one who cared for himself correctly found himself, by that very fact, in a measure to behave correctly in relation to others and for others" (ECS: 7). This seems very strange to us. Surely ethics has as its subject matter, its very substance, the relation the self has to

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<sup>218</sup> For instance, Saba Mahmood's ethnographic study of women's piety movements in Cairo, in *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

others, not to the self? How ought we to understand the claim that, in ethics, the self and not the other is primary? It is easy to misunderstand Foucault's claims here. We might think, first, that he is claiming that while ethics is necessarily concerned primarily with the care for the other, this care is best secured by way of a detour through the self. If this were the case, then the relation to the other would remain primary, and the emphasis on the self would be relegated to a mere means. But Foucault explicitly denies that the relation to the other is primary in *any* sense: "One must not have the care for others precede the care for self. The care for self takes moral precedence in the measure that the relation to self takes ontological precedence" (ECS: 7). We cannot, therefore, interpret away Foucault's emphasis on the primacy of the care for the self in ethics. He does not mean it metaphorically, or strategically; he means, quite literally, that in ethics the relation to self is primary. Second, we might interpret Foucault as denying the importance of ethics. Perhaps he is giving Anscombe's narrative a Nietzschean twist: with the death of God and the subsequent undermining of the concept of ethical obligation, we should simply give up on the project of morality. We—we strong ones—should shake off its shackles, and realize our full potential, taking care of ourselves. But this interpretation, too, is in conflict with Foucault's explicit pronouncements. The care for the self does not *exclude* caring for others, but is its condition [...] How are these seemingly contradictory statements to be harmonized? How can the care for self be—ontologically and ethically—primary, yet still serve as the ground of an ethics which is nevertheless concerned for others?<sup>219</sup>

Levy's writing communicates shock: "*Surely* ethics has as its subject matter, *its very substance*, the relation the self has to others, not to the self?"<sup>220</sup> Unable to explain the matter away semantically or nihilistically, Levy resorts to virtue ethics, arguing that Foucault's concern, after all, is the individual's "character."

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<sup>219</sup> Neil Levy, "Foucault as Virtue Ethicist," *Foucault Studies* 1 (December 2004): 26-27.

<sup>220</sup> Levy, 26. Emphasis added. Other theorists act as though Foucault has unintentionally overlooked the entire history of Western ethics. Barry Smart, for instance, argues in his article, "Foucault, Levinas and the Subject of Responsibility," that because our ethical heritage is Kantian and Christian, we cannot accept an ethics based on giving priority to the self. He continues, "it is precisely the absence of any considerations of relations with and responsibility for others which makes Foucault's references to creating ourselves and the autonomy of personal ethics morally problematic." "Foucault, Levinas and the Subject of Responsibility," in *The Later Foucault: Politics and Philosophy*, ed. Jeremy Moss (London: Sage Publications, 1998), 88. Beyond the fact that Smart seems to ignore that there are other resources in the west for ethical thought beyond the Kantian and the Christian, he also seems to misunderstand the fact that it is *precisely* these strains of thought that Foucault is attempting to challenge by reading them against the ethical theories of Antiquity.

While Levy does note Foucault's concern for the ethical other, for many critics the primacy of the relationship to the self means a total lack of concern with the other. Johanna Oksala's paraphrases Foucault in the following way: "As long as I have given my subjectivity a beautiful, courageous or honourable form and my ethical subjectivity is intact, I can relate to anyone in any circumstance in an ethical way."<sup>221</sup> In rebutting this viewpoint, Oksala goes so far as to claim, "[a]lone on a desert island, I do not have ethical problems and I cannot constitute myself as an ethical subject even though I continue to engage in practices of the self."<sup>222</sup> It seems evident from our exploration of the goals of classical philosophy that at least for the Stoics, Epicureans, and Cynics, this is simply not true. One very much continues to have ethical problems in a state of solitude; in fact, in some ways, these are the most pressing ethical problems. For instance, one would continue to need to make peace with sickness, old age, and death. One should strive for autarky and ataraxy, to not be influenced by external events over which one has no control. I would add, in addition, that this particular claim demonstrates that, for Oksala, one does not practice ethics in relationship to the natural world. For surely one might argue that alone on a desert island, a person might still feel strongly about not wantonly devastating plant and animal life.

On a larger level, these types of criticism derive from a misunderstanding of the process of conversion and of Foucault's rendering of the processual nature of the subject. On a practical level, the relationship to self must form the heart of ethical transformation

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<sup>221</sup> Johanna Oksala, *Foucault on Freedom* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 196.

<sup>222</sup> Oksala, *Foucault on Freedom*, 204.



because one can only transform oneself. Certainly one can aid or inspire a transformation in someone else, but to actively try to force such a change would for Foucault be domination, not conversion. Nor is Foucault the only contemporary philosopher to make this argument. Thich Nhat Hahn insists upon the same practical reality, stating,

Among the three--individual, society, and nature--it is the individual who begins to effect change. But in order to effect change, he or she must have personally recovered, be whole. Since this requires an environment favorable to healing, he or she must seek the kind of lifestyle that is free from destructiveness. Efforts to change the environment and efforts to change the society are both necessary, but it is difficult to change the environment if individuals are not in a state of equilibrium.<sup>223</sup>

Thus, the first justification for Foucault's perspective derives from his understanding of the role of power in constituting the self.

The more difficult issue is the one that responds to the Levinasian criticism that a primacy of the self cannot be truly ethical because it denies fundamental responsibility for the other. Smart summarizes this stance well: "It is from the initial moral bearing of being, taking, or assuming responsibility for the other that a particular ethical practice of caring for the self follows."<sup>224</sup> In fact, Levinasian critics of Foucault insist that it is the relationship to the other that is, in fact, existentially primary. One cannot even become a self without passing through the ethical moment of taking responsibility for the other. In that my project here is not to unravel Levinas, but rather to understand how Levinasian critiques of Foucault misunderstand him, I am not going to challenge the claim of the existential priority of the relationship to the other by attempting to determine how such a

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<sup>223</sup> Thich Nhat Hahn, *Love in Action*, 123.

<sup>224</sup> Smart, "Foucault, Levinas and the Subject of Responsibility," 85.

moment occurs in a person's actual life, or what it might mean to take responsibility for someone when one has no sense of self. I argue simply that the way in which adherents of Levinas promote the importance of the moment of the self confronting the naked face of the other suggests too stark a demarcation between self and other.<sup>225</sup>

For Foucault, fundamentally, there is no difference between the self and the other. Both self and other--whether another person, truth, discourse, entity, or object--are processes in states of becoming other to themselves, momentary emergences made possible by inter-determined conditions of possibility. David Halperin supports this reading of Foucault, characterizing

Foucault's self as a site of 'radical alterity,' a 'not-self,' the cultivation of which requires '*se dépendre de soi-même*, to fall out of love with oneself, to get free of oneself, and to reconstitute oneself in a calculated encounter with otherness.' In his rendering of subjectivity [interjects Tom Roach], one does not relate oneself intersubjectively to the stranger within: The self is ontologically multiple, different from itself, radially variegated.<sup>226</sup>

The truth that the self attempts to subjugate is also in motion. As Roman Coles states in *Self/Other/Power*, "[i]n light of Foucauldian genealogies, difference appears everywhere, unstable, elusive--emblematic of the ineliminable excess through which beings escape from the clutches of identifying thought."<sup>227</sup> It is this very difference, nurtured by the co-constitution of beings, that allows for ethics.

Therefore, subject formation happens as a negotiation between subjection, in which the individual's matrices of possible action are formed by external forces of which

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<sup>225</sup> Which is ostensibly what Levinas was trying to overcome.

<sup>226</sup> Roach, *Friendship as a Way of Life*, 36. He is quoting David Halperin from *Saint Foucault*, 76-77.

<sup>227</sup> Roman Coles, *Self/Other/Power: Political Theory and Dialogical Ethics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 80.

she may or may not be unaware, and subjectivation, in which a person attempts to transform these matrices of action based on intentional practice. There is no subject understood as a sovereign self. Rather persisting and various emergences in action, taken as a whole, compose the subject. In the same vein, there is no other, given that subjectivity is entirely composed of otherness mediated by the body. Of course one might agree that, on some abstract level, the self and the other are constructed by external forces, and yet insist that there still exists the moment of the interaction of the two on the level of individuals. This is true. However, if we accept that both individuals are constructed by outside forces and various strains of truth, knowledge, and discourse, then the interaction between two people is also an interaction between these forces, on the level of the conditions of possible action and reaction. Moreover, the interaction itself is governed by structures of micro- and macro-power that both determine the possibilities of the interaction and work through the interaction to affect the matrices of action of each person. We could similarly imagine the interaction between two atoms that have the potential for affecting each other in a variety of ways. On one level, both atoms exist as independent entities. On another, they are just concepts we use to understand energy flow through a field.

Let us go back, for instance, to the moment in which the person who is already proceeding on the path of care calls someone else to care for herself. What is happening in this moment of true discourse confronting *stultitia*? Tom Roach says of this perilous moment at the heart of friendship, "[t]his itself is a part of the ethics of discomfort. The friend's role is actively to enhance the other's potential, to push the friend to become-

other."<sup>228</sup> The truth being subjectivated by one person is attempting to break through the ossified subjection of the other person. No matter how much true emotion and personal commitment is involved in this call, it is ultimately happening on the level of discourse and practice,<sup>229</sup> practice attempting to reform a body that has been subjected in certain ways, discourse that constructs the self rather than the self constructing it.

While such a perspective can be disconcerting for many ethicists, it opens up different ways of understanding and acting. For instance, the otherness that constitutes and confronts us need no longer be conceived of as another human being. It might, for instance, be nature. Christopher Yates argues, "the conversion to the self [...] involves an 'other.' However this 'other' is not a Text, a risen Lord, or a dogmatic body of revealed truth,<sup>230</sup> but it is, in keeping with the plane of immanence, *nature*. The question of the truth of the subject is posed and practiced through a turn toward the self in its relationship to the natural order."<sup>231</sup> Similarly, true discourse might come in the form of a piece of literature or another type of media. Timothy O'Leary argues in "Foucault, Experience, Literature" that literature can transform one's experience when it serves as an outside to the daily life of the reader.<sup>232</sup> Much like the true discourse that pulls one slowly out of *stultitia*, the outcome of such an interaction with the otherness of literature is tentative,

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<sup>228</sup> Roach, *Friendship as a Way of Life*, 9.

<sup>229</sup> Of course discourse can be material and immaterial. In this situation, the person being called might be equally moved by the lived example of her friend, as by her actual words.

<sup>230</sup> Although we probably should not reject these possibilities out of hand.

<sup>231</sup> Christopher Yates, "Stations of the Self: Aesthetics and Ascetics in Foucault's Conversion Narrative," *Foucault Studies* 8 (February 2010): 90.

<sup>232</sup> Timothy O'Leary, "Foucault, Experience, Literature," *Foucault Studies* 5 (January 2008): 22.

fragile, experimental, and transformation uncertain and incremental.<sup>233</sup> According to David Halperin, "it is no longer divinity but history that guarantees us our experiences of the Other at the core of our own subjectivity and brings it about that any direct encounter with the self must also be a confrontation with the non-self."<sup>234</sup> This would certainly apply to Foucault's own work in the archive and the thinking otherwise that he attempts to inspire in his readers by demonstrating the contingency of historical formations of knowledge and power. Finally, otherness might arrive in the form of experience itself, specifically the sorts of limit experiences that Foucault promoted as helping the subject to get away from himself.<sup>235</sup> Thus, it becomes evident that otherness is constitutive of the self, but otherness understood much more broadly than simply the face of the other person.

The second benefit of imagining the self and the other as intertwining processes is that it militates against an oppressive erasure of the other's difference, an assimilation of the other into the self. Literary theorist Doris Sommer argues in her essay, "Attitude, Its Rhetoric," that intimacy and empathy can harbor violence when they entail assimilation or the drive to create identity from difference. She says, "if we let them, absences can also fissure comprehension (which still means grasping, seizure) to release readers from the exorbitant (and unethical) but usually unspoken assumption that we should know

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<sup>233</sup> O'Leary, "Foucault, Experience, Literature." 22.

<sup>234</sup> David M. Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 105.

<sup>235</sup> This argument is put forward by Timothy O'Leary, among many others. O'Leary, "Foucault, Experience, Literature," 7.

Others enough to speak for them. Released and relieved from that obligation, we may wonder at the persistence of our desire to overtake otherness."<sup>236</sup> Thus, by naturalizing one's subjectivity into an identity, one denies its constitution by otherness, one refuses further transformation through the interaction with otherness, and one thus posits one's contingent self as transcendental and necessary.<sup>237</sup> To understand subjectivity as a process, both for oneself and for others, is to refuse the violence of assimilating otherness into one's established identity. One might still see "traces in the other of the sensibility one identifies in oneself and [locate] in the self elements of the sensibility attributed to the Other,"<sup>238</sup> but one does not view those elements as the unique possession of the self or the other. Rather one understands the elements that constitute the self as always external to the self, thus a part of the matrix the self shares with the world. As Paul Allen Miller states in *Postmodern Spiritual Exercises*, the other is "that which makes us who we are without ever being assimilable to our identity. The other thus becomes a way of refashioning the self through a recognition of the self's own constitutive emptiness, its primal lack, the Aristophanic cut that drives it to seek an ever absent completion."<sup>239</sup>

When we accept that we are simply other, insofar as one can be other without positing a mutually exclusive self, the entire framework of ethical responsibility for the

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<sup>236</sup> Doris Sommer, "Attitude, Its Rhetoric," in *The Turn to Ethics*, eds. Marjorie Garber, Beatrice Hanssen, and Rebecca L. Walkowitz (New York: Routledge, 2000), 206.

<sup>237</sup> Connolly, "Beyond Good and Evil," 115.

<sup>238</sup> Connolly, 123.

<sup>239</sup> Paul Allen Miller, *Postmodern Spiritual Practices: The Construction of the Subject and the Reception of Plato in Lacan, Derrida, and Foucault* (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2007), 228.

other shifts. It becomes obvious that to the degree that one can attempt to care, one must care for the aspirational self that is the subjectivation of truth. It becomes evident that care of self must be ethically primary, not because one rejects the other--as though one could--but because one has a primary relationship to the otherness that constitutes oneself, even if this otherness breaks into the naturalized matrices of the stultified self due to a call from an actual other. This relationship to otherness determines whether a person can care for herself, for the self she aspires to be, and thus whether she can act ethically.

### *Friendship*

Although it has previously been stated that someone must pull the individual out of *stultitia*, the discussion of care of the self thus far has centered on the relationship of self to self, as though conversion takes place in a vacuum. Foucault presumes that this is not the case. In fact, while discipline does require a personalized relationship to the truth in the form of a relationship to the self, this process takes place in and amongst others, initially in the form of intimate relations of friendship. Foucault ultimately argues, via the exploration of the relationship between the guide and the guided, that while care defines the practice of self, it is animated by love.

Foucault insists strongly throughout his late work that care of the self is not possible without an intimate relationship to another person. Frédéric Gros states that he argues vehemently against the charge that his ethics are solipsistic:

For Foucault, in fact, establishing a defined relationship to the self does not take place in a insurmountable solitude, does not operate in a solipsistic dimension [...]

one must even say that the fact of establishing a defined, steady relationship to the self presupposes the presence, the company, the guidance, the aid of the other, or many others. The techniques of self are always implemented through easily found social relationships, communities, groups, or even institutions.<sup>240</sup>

Fundamentally, another person is required at the very outset of the care of self, creating the cracks in one's matrices of action, pulling the individual out of the condition of *stultitia*, which the stultified self cannot do on its own. In Greek philosophy, this relationship often takes the form of that of master and student. In Plato, Foucault contends, "the care of the self is actually something [...] that always has to go through the relationship to someone else who is the master. One cannot care for the self except by way of the master, there is no care of the self without the presence of a master" (HS 58). In his exegesis of the *Alcibiades*, Foucault notes that the master here has three roles. First, he is the "model of behavior," transmitting through his example the types of behaviors and practices that the student will use to subjectivate truth. Second, he demonstrates "the mastery of competence," providing the student with knowledge, principles, and aptitudes that he will need in his process of conversion. Third, he is a master of dialogue, on the Socratic model, using his own skills and expertise to help the student discover his own ignorance and the path for correcting it (HS 123-24).<sup>241</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> Frédéric Gros, "Sujet morale et soi éthique chez Foucault," *Archives de Philosophie* 65, no. 2 (2002): 233.

<sup>241</sup> For Foucault, the Platonic model of recovering a truth that the individual once knew but has forgotten differs from the later Stoic, Epicurean, and Cynic models of creating oneself as a subject based on a truth that is outside oneself. He notes that this is a controversial point throughout Antiquity, stating, "I do not think it is ever completely clear or resolved in Hellenistic and Roman thought [...] whether the self is something to which one returns because it is given in advance, or if the self is a goal one must propose to oneself and to which one might finally gain access if one achieves wisdom" (HS 205). However, given Foucault's own rejection of the subject as possessing a deep truth that she must discover, it seems clear that the later understanding, self as creation, is more useful for his own thought.



In the imperial period, Foucault notes that philosophical guides are more frequently friends than masters in the traditional sense.<sup>242</sup> In the world of imperial Rome, care of the self was supported by a "whole bundle of customary relations of kinship, friendship, and obligation" (SS 73-74). On the one hand, friendship in the late imperial period differed greatly from our contemporary concept in that it was more structured, a "hierarchy of individuals tied to one another by a set of services and obligations" (HS 111). On the other hand, these relationships were nonetheless intimate and emotionally intense for being socially structured. As we have seen in our discussion of *stultitia*, the true friend is someone who throws a life preserver to a person floundering around in the world and tries to pull her out of her state of non-care (HS 129-30). The person who cares for the care that the other takes for herself must begin with a spirit of generosity and love because the act of calling someone to care for herself is both time-consuming and potentially dangerous. Even after this initial moment of evocation, the intimate relationship between the two people is crucial to the path of conversion. Foucault notes that in the imperial period, "[t]he other is indispensable for the practice of the self to arrive at the self at which it aims. This is the general formula" (HS 123). In contrast to Plato, the guide plays more the role of the meditator (HS 125). The friend intervenes in the relationship between the emerging self and the aspirational self, rather as a navigator resets a heading if a ship has gotten off course. This is necessary because individuals often cannot assess their own best interests. For instance, according to the second-century physician, Galen, "man loves himself too much to be able to cure himself of his passions;

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<sup>242</sup> Although exceptions to this rule do exist, as we see with Epictetus' Stoic school.

he had often seen men 'stumble' who had not agreed to give themselves up to the authority of another. The principle is true for beginners; but it is also true afterwards and until the end of life" (HS 477-78). The benefit of having a friend and interlocutor is that she can objectively assess your areas of strength and weakness with "neither a sentiment of indulgence nor a sentiment of hostility" (HS 379). However, this relationship is not simply practical, as a patient to a doctor, but tender and personal. Foucault notes Seneca's comment to his correspondent, Lucilius, "I claim you, you are my work" (SS73-74).

However, here we must acknowledge again the complexity of the relational structure. Even though the other in the form of a friend or intimate guide is essential for care of the self, Foucault still maintains that while the relationship to the other is practically necessary, it is not ethically primary. He states,

[i]nsofar as its objective is to establish the soul in a state of *makariotés*, and so in a state resting on ataraxy, that is to say the absence of inner turmoil, wisdom surrounds itself with friends because we find in these friends, and in the trust we put in their friendship, one of the guarantees of ataraxy and the absence of inner turmoil. You see then that the Epicurean conception of friendship maintains to the end the principle that in friendship one seeks only oneself or one's own happiness. Friendship is nothing other than one of the forms that one gives to care of the self. (HS 187)

So we see again, as we did in section one, that on one hand, the other person, the friend or guide, is the very basis upon which one can build the new matrices of the self. However, on the other hand, the purpose of this relationship is that one care for oneself, not for the other person specifically. If the process works as it should, the person will construct a way of life that reflects the value of the intimacy upon which it is based.

Indeed, this friendship cannot be just any relation; it must possess certain characteristics.<sup>243</sup> First, it is defined by *parrhēsia*.<sup>244</sup> The political import of *parrhēsia* will be the focus of the next chapter. Here, the goal is to highlight the importance of this concept for the creation of the intense, affective relationship that supports care. Essentially, for Foucault, *parrhēsia* means frank speech, and it is described as the "virtue, duty, and technique [that] must characterize, among other things and above all, the man who is responsible for directing others, and particularly for directing them in their effort, their attempt to constitute an appropriate relationship to themselves" (GOS 43). In actuality, *parrhēsia* cannot be undertaken alone; it is an activity involving another person (CV 6). This is due to the fact that *parrhēsia* is a pact. Just as the student must remain silent, in order that he can fully understand the true discourse of the other, the master "must use a discourse that obeys the principle of *parrhēsia*"<sup>245</sup> if he wants the truth that he says to become, finally, at the end of his action and his direction, the subjectivated true discourse of the disciple" (HS 348). *Parrhēsia* represents an ethics of speech in which both partners open their hearts, one to allow true discourse to flow out and the other to allow it to flow in (HS 132). Moreover, a relationship structured by *parrhēsia* does not

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<sup>243</sup> Anyone familiar with Aristotle's thought on friendship will recognize this strand of classical thought. Only certain types of friendships are useful for cultivating virtue.

<sup>244</sup> Foucault spends a significant amount of time defining and parsing this word. In Liddell and Scott's *Greek-English Lexicon*, a number of definitions are presented, including (1) "outspokenness, frankness, freedom of speech," (2) "license of tongue," and (3) "freedom of action" (Liddell and Scott, 1344). For the purposes of shorthand, Foucault frequently defines this word as frankness or freedom of speech (*franc-parler*). However, in the section on *parrhēsia*, it will become apparent that speaking the truth is also enacting the truth, gesturing to definitions one and three.

<sup>245</sup> *Parrhēsia* is spelled throughout Foucault's texts in a variety of ways. I will follow Foucault's spelling without boring the reader with an abundance of "sic"s. In my own writing, I follow the standard transliteration.

just have positive effects on the speaker and the listener, but can be beneficial to the entire community. Epicurean philosopher, Philodemus, says of *parrhēsia* that it "incites, intensifies, and animates, as it were, the benevolence (*eunoia*) of students towards each other by virtue of the fact of having spoken freely" (HS 372). Thus, within the Epicurean community, Foucault identifies two benefits of *parrhēsia*, "the transfer of *parrhēsia* from master to student; and, of course, the importance [...] of the disciples' friendship for one another because the disciples must save one another" (HS 372).

However, the very intimacy and vulnerability of the relationship characterized by *parrhēsia* can make it dangerous as well. According to Foucault, *parrhēsia* entails risk, primarily to the speaker, but also potentially to the hearer. The speaker risks telling the truth, and the listener risks hearing it. Foucault states, "the parrhesiast's truth--[when] it is accepted, [when] the other person facing him accepts the pact and plays the game of *parrhēsia*--can in this moment unite and reconcile, but it is only after having opened up an essential, fundamental and structurally necessary moment: the possibility of hatred and rupture" (CV 25-26). Thus, "the parrhesiast always risks undermining that relationship which is the condition of possibility of his discourse" (CV 13), at the risk potentially of his life. What does it mean to say that *parrhēsia* causes a moment of rupture? On one level, it is painful for the individual to confront her way of life critically. As Edward McGushin says, *parrhēsia* is painful for the listener "because such truths often threaten a comfortable position in life and demand a new responsibility."<sup>246</sup> On a deeper level,

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<sup>246</sup> Paraphrased in Zachary Simpson, "The Truths We Tell Ourselves: Foucault on *Parrhesia*," *Foucault Studies* 13 (May 2012): 101.

*parrhēsia* necessarily creates rupture in the subjective structure of the person being guided. It breaks apart the matrices by which she has been operating. It renders her world and herself momentarily unintelligible. This is the sense in which it is hazardous to the individual who listens.<sup>247</sup> If she cannot reconstruct her former subjective structure and she cannot or will not accede to the new one, she may be lost, unrecognizable, unable to make sense of herself.<sup>248</sup> Cressida Heyes speaks of this danger in relationship to her *parrhēsia* as a teacher. She states, "[w]e are not just showing our students how to be more free by opening their eyes to feminist politics, but rather we may be undoing the kinds of people they are without providing anything much of an alternative. This provokes (for them and for me [...]) significant anger, fear, and doubt."<sup>249</sup> Such a concern also lies at the heart of Judith Butler's account of ethical transformation. What if, in risking one's own desubjugation, one finds oneself unable to reassemble the pieces? If one cannot give an account of oneself that others can understand and accept?<sup>250</sup> Unfortunately, this risk cannot be eliminated without destroying the process of care of the self. As Paul Allen

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<sup>247</sup> Interestingly, according to Seneca, in the parrhesiastic relationship the burden of the truth lies with the teacher. If the student does not understand the truth, if it does not affect him in the way the teacher hoped, he has in some way failed. Foucault cites an interesting example of this in Seneca's own life. Speaking in the voice of Seneca, he says, "in the course of a discussion and an interview with a friend, I wanted to try to give him a moral lesson, to help him progress, to help him recover, well, [...] I hurt him" (HS 462). Seneca views this as his failure. He did not take enough account of the various dimensions of the situation to succeed in helping his friend.

<sup>248</sup> This recognition of the danger of radical transformation is one aspect that Foucault shares with Judith Butler's understanding of subjectivity in *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005). However, Butler stresses the failure of being recognized by others, whereas Foucault seems to be speaking of a sort of break down of ordering structure, leaving the individual in an existential schizophrenia.

<sup>249</sup> Cressida Heyes, "Interview: Changing the Subject," *Foucault Studies* 12 (October 2011): 119.

<sup>250</sup> Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005).

Miller notes, "[p]hilo-sophia is an activity of the soul, not a formula capable of producing invariable, predictable results. It is not a commodity that can be bought, sold or exchanged, but an interpersonal essay."<sup>251</sup> However, the attempt to forestall the type of fragmentation of concern to Butler and Heyes is one of the reasons why it is necessary that this moment of conversion take place within the security of a group committed to the same end. It provides the self who considers abandoning the comfort of her *stultitia* a supportive network of like-minded people who will keep her from drifting in a state of disorientation.

*Parrhēsia* is also risky for the speaker, as we have seen in the case of Socrates, but this is caused by a different rupture, the rupture of relationality between the two people. If the listener rejects the parrhesiasts' speech, and will not play the game, or if her moment of existential rupture causes a terrified and defensive return to the comfort of her previous way of life and system of values, the link of intimacy will be broken, and in some cases, she may react violently toward the parrhesiast.<sup>252</sup> This is the risk the parrhesiast takes, not an existential risk, because her true speech represents the enacting of the truth of her mode of being (HS 388), but a relational and bodily risk. It is not difficult to find historical examples, especially when a parrhesiast, like Gandhi or Martin Luther King, Jr., faces not only another person, but an entire system of oppression. It is

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<sup>251</sup> Paul Allen Miller, *Postmodern Spiritual Practices*, 203.

<sup>252</sup> Obviously the risk that the parrhesiast faces may not always involve physical violence. Foucault states in *Fearless Speech*, "[w]hen, for example, you see a friend doing something wrong and you risk incurring his anger by telling him he is wrong, you are acting as *parrhesiastes*. In such a case you do not risk your life, but you may hurt him by your remarks, and your friendship may consequently suffer for it." *Fearless Speech*, ed. Joseph Pearson (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2001), 16.

for this reason that Foucault claims that "[g]enerosity towards the other is at the very heart of the moral obligation of *parrhēsia*" (HS 369). Otherwise, how could we understand why persons would put themselves in these positions of vulnerability to one another? Unlike the flatterer, who attempts to manipulate the other in order to gain power over him, or the practitioner of rhetoric who deceives the other for the same reason, the *parrhēsiast* truly cares for the other, and specifically he cares for the care the person he guides may have for himself (HS 58). It also suggests that the parrhesiast should be attentive to the Greek notion of *kairos*, or the opportune time because it allows the parrhesiast to "[strike] a balance between achieving its maximum affect and losing the interlocutor's cooperation in the parrhesiastic game."<sup>253</sup>

It is not surprising given this intense emotional intimacy that the second characteristic of the relationship between guide and guided is an intimate relationship to the body. As we have seen, the development of the aspirational self through practice entails the transformation of matrices of action at the level of the body. The guide supports this conversion corporeally. Foucault is clear in distinguishing the role of the guide in the late imperial period from the role of the guide in the Platonic tradition. In Plato, the guide, knowing what the student does not know, leads him dialogically through his ignorance, initiating him through memory into truth. However, in this later period, "the master is no longer the master of memory [...] Henceforth the master is an operator in the reform of the individual and in the formation of the individual as subject. He is the mediator in the relationship of the individual to his constitution as subject" (HS 125).

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<sup>253</sup> Ian Cutler, *Cynicism from Diogenes to Dilbert*, 30.

According to Seneca, this operator does not give instruction; he does not educate. He "offers a hand, pulls out of, leads outside of" (HS 129). This is not simply a relationship of instruction, where one transmits knowledge. Rather "it is [...] a certain action that one will have carried out on the individual, the individual to whom one will offer a hand, and whom one will pull out of the state, the status, the mode of life, the mode of being which he is in [...]"<sup>254</sup> It is a sort of operation that is concerned with the mode of being of the subject himself" (HS 129-30). The interaction, therefore, between the guide and the guided is conceived as a bodily rescue and intervention.

Following from this, the actual presence of the two individuals, face to face, is the most effective method of guidance. According to Seneca, "[t]his particular interview, this tête-à-tête, which is at once a vivid and physical contact, is obviously the best form, the ideal form for a relationship of direction" (HS 385). Although the subject's main concern is his relationship to himself, the guide interjects himself, or more correctly himself as an embodiment of true discourse, into this relationship in order to correctly structure it, to put the subject back on the path if need be, to physically orient his body in order to reorient his soul. Even those techniques that seem to not involve a bodily intervention are still conceived of as doing so. Foucault spends a good amount of time explaining the technique of letter-writing in imperial care of the self, between for instance Seneca and Lucilius or Marcus Aurelius and Fronto. He claims of this letter writing, "[t]he letter renders the writer 'present' to the person whom he addresses. And present not simply by way of the information that he provides to him about his life, his activities, his successes

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<sup>254</sup> Ellipsis in text, designating a hole in the transcript.



and failures, his fortunes or misfortunes; present in a way that is immediate and quasi-physical" (ES 1244). This is because "[t]he letter that [...] works to subjectivate true discourse [...] also constitutes at the same time an objectivization of the soul" (ES 1245).<sup>255</sup> It brings the reader face to face with the other's soul, not in the sense of a Christian confession in which one bears one's soul, but in the sense of reading an inventory of one's goods or a report on the management of one's estate. The reader, in the role of guide, can see the contours of the matrices of action that form the soul as a subject of action. He can assess and help the other to assess the progress of self to self.

Finally, the third characteristic of friendship is that the intervention in the body and soul of the guided should be understood as having the ultimate goal of ensuring the autonomy of the disciple. Ultimately, guiding the other must be an art of persuasion that respects his freedom. One cannot force another person to care for himself. If a person refuses to be concerned for himself then he is incapable of care of the self. Moreover, Foucault notes that the Greek and Roman doctrine of mastering the self made it impossible to give your will over to another in the sense of allowing him to dictate your decisions. He notes, if a free citizen "comes to follow the will of someone in particular (doctor, orator, or teacher), it is because this person has rationally persuaded him to do so" (OS 964). Foucault notes that *parrhēsia* partakes of this will to persuade as well, stating, "[w]hat constitutes the field particular to *parrēsia* is this political risk of a

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<sup>255</sup> Paul Allen Miller supports Foucault's reading here against Derrida's contention that writing has no role in the ethics of antiquity as understood by Plato. He says, "[w]riting, rather than undermining the presence of the *logos* to itself or representing a form of discourse whose author is never present to defend the integrity of his intentions, actually renders the absent party present, according to Seneca." *Postmodern Spiritual Practices*, 188.

discourse which leaves room free for other discourse and assumes the task, not of bending others to one's will, but of persuading them" (GSO 105). Thus, *parrhēsia* is both an ethos and a *tekhnē*, "that was necessary, indispensable for transmitting true discourse to the one who needed it for the constitution of himself as the subject of sovereignty over himself and the subject of veridiction from himself to himself" (HS 356). In order that the emerging self be able to develop the correct relation to action and truth, the individual must progressively develop his freedom.<sup>256</sup> Tom Roach rephrases this goal in a way that recalls the connection between one's active freedom and the relationship with otherness. He notes, "[t]he ethics encouraged in those [classical] relationships demanded a simultaneous respect for the alterity of the other and a cultivation of the unknown in oneself."<sup>257</sup> In other words, *parrhēsia* only increases the autonomy of the self and the other by recalling the otherness of the truth at the heart of care of the self.

Beyond the importance of self-mastery, there are practical reasons for this autonomy as well. In that classical ethics functions on the basis of the importance of the opportune moment and the creation of balance within oneself, one cannot prescribe general rules for all cases. The subject must equip herself with the necessary true discourses and also be able to determine the most appropriate course of action for any given situation. This is an ethics of strategy, flexibility, and circumstance (UP 146). Surely, one might ask the advice of one's guide or a friend, but ultimately one acts alone

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<sup>256</sup> Recall Seneca's insistence that the individual in *stultitia* is not free because she is ruled by events and representations outside herself. In order to develop into an ethical self she must practice her freedom, becoming immune to things she cannot control.

<sup>257</sup> Roach, *Friendship as a Way of Life*, 113.

and thus must rely on oneself to make the correct decision. Freedom is crucial to the development of this ability.

Given the importance of an open and honest heart, an intimate bodily relationship, and a generous commitment to the other's freedom, it may come as no surprise that Foucault views this relationship as imbued with love. Foucault gives many specific examples of the importance of love in care of the self, but I will focus on two, Socrates and Alcibiades, and Marcus Aurelius and Fronto. In the case of Socrates, Foucault argues that he approaches Alcibiades at the cusp of his manhood, when his other admirers have fallen away. This demonstrates that he is not interested in Alcibiades' as a sexual object, but it also represents a critique of the pederastic system in Athens.<sup>258</sup> Ideally in the Greek system, the erotic love felt for a young boy should be sublimated into a concern for that boy's development. It must be a love for his soul rather than his body. Socrates argues that the reason that Alcibiades remains in ignorance and will not be able to govern others properly is because this pederastic system has failed (HS 38). Foucault states,

[I]ove for boys in Athens is not capable of honoring the formative task that is able to justify and found it. The adults, the men, pursue young men as long as they are in the brilliance of their youth. But here they abandon them at this critical age, precisely where they would need a guide to form them for this other thing, this new thing, this thing for which they have absolutely not been formed by their master: the exercise of politics. (HS 44)

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<sup>258</sup> Basically, the pederastic relationship implies the mentoring of young boys by older men. As Lucian argues, the importance of the male/male relationship as opposed to the male/female relationship "rest[s] implicitly on the opposition between the transmission of life through intercourse with the other sex and the transmission of 'techniques' and 'knowledge' through teaching, apprenticeship, and the relationship of disciple to master" (SS 288). However, the basic driver of these relationships came from erotic attraction. The introduction of the *aphrodisia* into such relationships rendered them extremely complex, if not controversial, as we see in Foucault's first volume on this subject, *History of Sexuality, Volume 2: The Use of Pleasure*.

Thus, Socrates steps in when these other men have abandoned Alcibiades in order to help him through this critical period. Foucault says of Socrates' love, "[t]he master is he who cares for the care that the subject takes of himself, and who finds, in the love that he has for his disciple, the possibility of caring for the care that the disciple takes of himself. By loving the boy in a disinterested fashion, he is thus the principle and the model of the care that the boy must have for himself as subject" (HS 58). However, "disinterested" here does not mean without *erōs*,<sup>259</sup> without sexual desire, it simply means that the guide should transform this *erōs* from a desire for the beautiful body of the young man to a desire for the beauty of his soul. In fact, Tom Roach suggests that Foucault imagines pederasty as the model of friendship. He states, "in this awkward relationship are to be found the roots of Foucault's definition of friendship as a desire-in-uneasiness."<sup>260</sup> In the classical world, it was thought that the *erōs* one developed with a young man during the dual process of courting and care could carry on into adulthood, after a change in the status of the younger partner, as *philia* (UP 261). A text of Philodemus demonstrates that this Socratic relationship continued into the imperial period. He states that in the Epicurean schools, "each [student] must have a *hēgemōn*, a guide, a director who insures his individual direction" (HS 132). Between the director and the directed there must exist "an intense affective relationship, a relationship of friendship" (HS 132).

However, Foucault notes that in this later period the erotic relationship between the partners is problematized, and the link between them begins to be characterized more

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<sup>259</sup> Platonic, in the common understanding of the word.

<sup>260</sup> Roach, *Friendship as a Way of Life*, 51.

as an intense friendship than the more structured pedagogical and pederastic relationship of the Greek period. Nonetheless, this friendship is also characterized in terms of love, as we see in the relationship between Marcus Aurelius and Fronto. Fronto is Marcus' tutor, and is several years older. Foucault is quick to point out that Fronto is not a philosopher, but a teacher of rhetoric. Nonetheless, Marcus writes letters to Fronto that basically serve as the examinations of conscience we see with Seneca and others. Foucault examines one of these letters in a lecture in his course *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*. He begins with the assertion, "affection is the base on which Marcus Aurelius and Fronto develop their relationship" (HS 152). He quotes the letter in its entirety, but points out the fact that Marcus concludes the letter by saying, "Good health, dear Fronto, you who are [...] my love, my delight. I love you" (HS 153). Since Fronto is not a philosopher and this care of self is not taking place within a professional or technical relationship, Foucault avers, "[i]n reality, what provides support is friendship, affection, the tenderness that, you can see, plays a major role" (HS 153). Throughout the letters, "it is a constant question of love for Fronto, of their reciprocal love, of the fact that they miss one another when they are apart, that they send each other kisses on the neck" (HS 153). However, Foucault insists that it is useless to speculate on the possibility of a sexual relationship here, given the historical irrelevance of such a question. Rather it must be imagined as "a relationship of affection, a relationship of love that consequently implies a whole heap of things" (HS 153). However, the most important thing to note is that, "it is totally normal to take [Fronto] as director outside of his qualifications as a philosopher [...] simply because he is a friend" (HS 157-58). Thus, we see that throughout the period of Foucault's research

into the classical sources the relationship between director and directed in care of the self was cemented by love in the form of intense, affective friendship.

Foucault suggests that the *erōs* that he describes in the relationship between Marcus and Fronto is necessary to the ability of an individual to care for himself throughout Antiquity. This is because care of the self is a practice of freedom that takes place in the absence of institutional structures, and, therefore, needs an animating force to help hold its various pieces together. Foucault notes,

between a man and a boy who are in positions of reciprocal independence and between those for which there is no institutional constraint, but an open game (with preferences, choice, liberty of movement, uncertain outcome), the principle of the regulation of behaviors is demanded of the relationship itself, of the nature of the movement that brings them together and the attachment that ties them reciprocally. (UP 163)

In terms of what *erōs* meant in the classical period, Foucault follows Plato (UP 305),<sup>261</sup> who conceptualizes *erōs*<sup>262</sup> as a movement generated in the soul. It was well known in the classical period, if not today, that love draws one to one's beloved.<sup>263</sup> Moreover, Plato insists that *erōs* does not just draw the lovers toward one another, but it draws them

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<sup>261</sup> It should be mentioned that the erotic love being discussed here and throughout is the love between a man and a boy. The love between men and women was not conceptualized by Plato as drawing one nearer to being or truth, or making possible a conversion of the soul (UP 296).

<sup>262</sup> Of course, in common parlance, we understand *erōs* as sexual love and *philia* as "platonic" love. These two things are intertwined in the classical period.

<sup>263</sup> Interestingly this understanding of love as movement also appears in two other seminal theorists of ethical love, Augustine and Paul Tillich. Eric Gregory says of Augustine's conception of love in *Expositions on the Psalms*, "Love is movement, and there are no idle souls." Quoted in Eric Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love: An Augustinian Ethic of Democratic Citizenship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 248. Tillich also describes love as "the moving power of life [...] being is not actual without the love which drives everything that is towards everything else that is." Paul Tillich, *Love, Power, and Justice: Ontological Analyses and Ethical Appraisals* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), 25.

toward each other insofar as it draws them both towards truth (UP 310). For example, in reference to the *Phaedrus*, Foucault paraphrases Plato: "Who wishes to follow the path of the dialectic, which will establish a relation with Being itself, cannot avoid having a relation to his own soul, or to the other's soul through love, which is such that his soul will thereby be modified and rendered able to accede to the truth" (GSO 335). Thus, through the love relationship with oneself and with the other, the soul is able to accede to a relationship with being, which for Plato also means truth. This also makes sense in terms of the *parrhesiastic* moment. When Socrates calls Alcibiades to care for himself, Alcibiades can tell him to go jump in a lake. He is a young, beautiful man with all the advantages of birth. It is only Alcibiades' love for his own soul, and love for and trust in Socrates, that convinces him to listen, that draws him into a relationship with the true discourse Socrates is trying to convey to him. Moreover, Plato also insists that because the movement that brings the lovers together is ultimately a movement towards truth, it upsets the strict dissymmetry of lover and beloved. If the young man is the more skilled at love, he can be the master of the truth, and convey this truth to his lover, regardless of his age (UP 311). Conversely, as in the case of *The Symposium*, the wisdom of the master can become the object of *erōs* for younger men, putting them in the position of pursuers, and the old, ugly man, as Foucault describes Socrates, in the position of the pursued (UP 312). Thus, we see love imagined as the force that draws people towards each other, the self, and truth.

This magnetic force of love plays a role in care of the self not only in the classical period, but in Foucault's thinking about his contemporary moment as well. This is

certainly the message of his late interviews and essays concerning male friendship. Foucault argues that outside of certain institutions, men do not have structured ways of being together; "They must invent from A to Z a relationship without form, which is friendship: which is to say all the things by which they can mutually give each other pleasure" (AMV 983). Naturally he insists that this friendship is different in character from friendship between women; "[w]omen have a right to the bodies of other women: dressing each other, embracing. Man's body is forbidden to other men in a much more drastic way" (AMV 985). Foucault states that from a young age, he had a desire for relationships with other boys, "[n]ot necessarily in the form of a couple, but as a question of existence: how is it possible for men to be together? to live together, to share their time, their meals, their room, their spare time, their sorrows, their knowledge, their confidences? What is it to be men, naked, outside of institutional relationships, family, profession, obligatory camaraderie" (AMV 982-83)? Contemporary friendship is, for Foucault, the opposite of an institutionalized relationship. He states in "Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity," "[t]he army, bureaucracy, administration, universities, schools, and so on [...] cannot function with such intense friendships. I think there can be seen a very strong attempt in all these institutions to diminish or minimize the affectional relationships" (SPPI 170). This statement echoes the passage in "Friendship as a Way of Life," where he says, "[i]nstitutional codes cannot validate these relationships with multiple intensities, variable colors, imperceptible movements, forms that change. These relationships create a short-circuit and introduce love where there should be only law, rule or custom" (AMV 983). This is because, as Foucault notes, what most people find



troubling about alternate sexualities are not the acts themselves (AMV 983). Homosexual sex has been around since time immemorial with varying types of response. Rather it is the homosexual way of life that is troubling, for the very reason that it disrupts the institutional arrangements that have cohered around heteronormativity. Foucault asserts, "that individuals begin to love each other, that's the problem. The institution is caught in a contradiction; affective intensities traverse it, at the same time they keep it going and disturb it" (AMV 983). For this reason, Foucault views becoming homosexual--not engaging in homosexuals acts, but creating a homosexual lifestyle--as a node of resistance in his time, and the launching point for the creation of new possibilities; "homosexuality is an historic occasion to reopen relational and affective virtualities, not because of the qualities intrinsic to the homosexual, but because of his 'slantways' position in some way, the diagonal lines that he can trace in the social tissue that permits the appearance of these virtualities" (AMV 985). In fact, Foucault does not think that only homosexuality can serve this function. Rather he advocates the creation of new and varied types of relationality;

[t]he right of relationality is the possibility of achieving recognition in an institutional field for individual relationships that do not necessarily come out of a recognized group [...] It is the question of imagining how the relationship between two individuals can be validated by society and benefit from the same advantages as those [...] that are recognized: marriage and kinship. (TSPS 1133)

The creation of new ways of life, the contemporary form of care of the self, is envisioned by Foucault as being strongly underpinned by love.

Foucault also views S/M practices as sites in which two or more individuals negotiate their respective freedoms through love, and ultimately such practices can

produce a way of life that challenges the ossified structures of normalized sexual pleasure. Counter to those who would say that S/M actually reinforces dominant gender tropes and the sexualized violence inherent in heteronormative culture, Foucault contends,

[w]e know very well that what all those people are doing is not aggressive; they are inventing new possibilities of pleasure with strange parts of their body--through the eroticization of the body. I think it's a kind of creation, a creative enterprise, which has as one of its main features what I call the desexualization of pleasure. The idea that bodily pleasure should always come from sexual pleasure as the root of *all* our possible pleasure--I think *that's* something quite wrong. (SPPI 165)

Moreover, Foucault notes, unlike typical sexual power relations, which tend to be "stabilized through institutions" and thus are difficult to change, in S/M power relations are fluid;

[o]f course there are roles, but everybody knows very well that those roles can be reversed [...] Or, even when the roles are stabilized, you know very well that it is always a game. Either the rules are transgressed, or there is an agreement, either explicit or tacit, that makes them aware of certain boundaries [...] It is an acting-out of power structures by a strategic game that is able to give sexual pleasure or bodily pleasure. (SPPI 169)

We have here an open game where individuals can learn to be in relationship to one another in reference to some greater truth. It might not be going too far to compare this to the pederastic relationship of which Foucault has so much to say. In both cases, you have two individuals who ostensibly are of different statuses and yet existentially are the same. Both individuals' freedom must be respected. Moreover, as described by Plato, true love develops here in reference to truth. The lovers learn to love one another properly by loving and being drawn to the truth, in a self-reinforcing cycle, except in this situation, newness emerges. Of course the love that exists between two practitioners of S/M may

not be the stuff of fairy tales,<sup>264</sup> but troubling love in this way might help us determine what that word might mean, if we persist in using it, as Foucault does, despite its normative connotations.

At the base of this focus on friendship as desire-in-uneasiness, is the idea of creating new ways of being. Foucault says that one must not discover that one is homosexual, but rather become homosexual; "homosexuality is not a form of desire, but something desirable" (AMV 293). The purpose of such a becoming is to discover "what relationships can be [...] established, invented, multiplied, modulated" (AMV 982)? It is for this reason that Foucault evinces a complicated relationship with gay activism. In an interview with a Belgian journal in 1981, Foucault states, "[f]or me, sexuality is a matter of a way of life, it refers to a technique of self [...] It is not at all necessary to proclaim it. I would even say that I often find that dangerous and contradictory. I want to be able to do things that I have the urge to do and that's what I do anyways. I don't need to publicly announce it" (I 1482). As we saw in the epigraph to this chapter, Arnold Davidson feels that the desire-in-uneasiness at the heart of friendship renders it pathological in contemporary society. He goes on to say "[a] behavior considered abnormal no longer possesses either an ethical value nor a political efficacy."<sup>265</sup> However, in terms of Foucault's own representation of the subversive effect of friendship, it makes more sense to say that it is, in fact, because homosexual friendship does not abide by society's norms of relationality that it can be so productive. Roach states, "[f]riendship, as I understand it

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<sup>264</sup> On the other hand, it very well may be.

<sup>265</sup> Davidson, "In Praise of Counter Conduct," 34.

and as I argue throughout, bespeaks the anarchical contingency of all relationality. In its very nature it is anti-institutional, indeed it cannot congeal into an epistemological object known as 'society.' It is excessive of self-identity, and hence, contrary to Aristotle's claim, structurally incapable of grounding social norms."<sup>266</sup> Thus, friendship is both non-institutional and non-institutionalizable. For Mark Kingston, friendship fosters "localised resistance to social normalisation," and serves to promote relational rights and different ways of coming together as individuals and communities, thus "rejuvenating the relational fabric of our society."<sup>267</sup> Kingston concludes that the task and obligation of friendship is similar to the task and obligation of critique outlined by Foucault in "What Is Enlightenment?" "In both cases we are given an opportunity, specific to this period in history to transform society and create a new and better way of life."<sup>268</sup> Thus, we see that friendship can catalyze both personal and political transformation.

This discussion of the strategic relationships of homosexuality and S/M necessitates a clarification of love as a factor in ethical subject formation. Basically Foucault views non-institutionalized relationships, such as that between two grown men, as the foundation of communities of practice that can break open the social field, leading to more fluidity, and thus more potential ways of being. However, as we have seen, because these relationships possess no institutional or naturalized foundation, love provides cohesion. As Paul Tillich says, love drives things together and holds them

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<sup>266</sup> Roach, *Friendship as a Way of Life*, 13.

<sup>267</sup> Mark Kingston, "Subversive Friendships: Foucault on Homosexuality and Social Experimentation," *Foucault Studies* 7 (September 2009): 15.

<sup>268</sup> Kingston, 16.

together.<sup>269</sup> For Foucault, this bond creates the crucible for transformation.<sup>270</sup> Love draws two people together and holds them together despite the fraughtness of speaking the truth to one another and the negotiations of their personal conversions. This explains a strange passage in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* where Foucault states, "conversion may take place in the form of a movement that pulls the subject away from his current status and condition (either an ascending movement of the subject himself, or else a movement by which the truth comes to him and enlightens him) [...] let's call this movement, in either of its directions, the movement of *erōs* (love)" (HS 17). He goes on to say that the other mode of conversion is *askēsis*, the work of self on self. Given that it is, in fact, conversion through *askēsis* that makes up the majority of his discussion of conversion in the classical period, why mention conversion through love here as though they were equally valid paths? The answer, I believe, is to view them not as two different types of conversion, but two complementary modes of conversion. It is *erōs* that pulls the subject out of his current status and condition, *stultitia*. *Askēsis* takes over as the daily work of conversion, but it is supported by *erōs*, initially love for the other, but increasingly love for the aspirational self, so that ultimately the subject can take the self as the sole object of pleasure and delight. Ultimately, however, love of the self is really love of the truth, since the self is nothing more than the emergence in action of the truth that one has

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<sup>269</sup> Tillich, 25.

<sup>270</sup> Interestingly, Catherine Pickstock makes a similar argument about *erōs* in Socratic dialogues, not with reference to Foucault, but in the service of queer theology. She argues that "[d]esire is a becoming or emerging, a wanting which leads us on [...] 'What any two desire in desiring a union is not merely this union, but always also the fruit of this union in whatever sense, something that is both of them and neither of them: a baby, a work of practice or understanding, a new ethos that others may inhabit,'" in *Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 16.

subjectivated. This love is what keeps one on the path despite all of the stresses and strains of that transformation. This reminds us, of course, of the intertwined emotions of joy and suffering that characterize the work of *asksēsis*. Joy and love bind the individual to their friend, during the pain of transformation, so that they can ultimately find joy in the truth, which is transformation itself.

However, it is important for our understanding of Foucault to parse the meaning of love. Throughout history, philosophers and theologians have attempted to understand the moral implications of love. One school of thought comes down to us from Augustine, who conceives of love as both good and bad.<sup>271</sup> In order to avoid the fleshy and egoistic complications of grasping love, Augustine argues that one must properly order one's loves, and that the love that is directed towards God, and not spent in self-love, is beneficial.<sup>272</sup> Some scholars interpret Foucault as thinking of love in the same way. For instance, J. Joyce Schuld argues in her book comparing Foucault and Augustine that for both, "[p]ower and love are each decidedly relational, omnipresent, and morally ambiguous elements of social relations."<sup>273</sup> However, I contend that Foucault does not dwell on the problem of differentiating good love from bad love. Foucault prefers to see love as neither good nor bad. It is physical, elemental. It draws one toward the other but does not determine the form of one's actions or one's relationship toward the self or the

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<sup>271</sup> Gregory, 21.

<sup>272</sup> Gregory, 22.

<sup>273</sup> Paraphrased in Matthew Chrulew, "Suspicion and Love," *Foucault Studies* 15 (February 2014):18. Chrulew also comes to the conclusion that Foucault's relationship with love is fraught.

other. Given that love cannot be depended on to produce positive behaviors, Foucault then proposes care as the mode of practice that defines ethics.

However, care also occupies a controversial place within the field of ethics because it can easily slip into an oppressive paternalism. Even so conscientious a progressive as Paul Tillich says of the relationship between love<sup>274</sup> and power,

[L]ove, in order to exercise its proper works, namely charity and forgiveness, must provide for a place on which this can be done, through its strange work of judging and punishing. In order to destroy what is against love, love must be united with power, and not only with power, but also with compulsory power [...] love's strange work, the compulsory element of power, is not only the strange but also the tragic aspect of love. It represents a price which must be paid for the reunion of the separated.<sup>275</sup>

Tillich tries to mitigate this by insisting that the "strange work of love" does not destroy the person who opposes love, but rather what in him is acting against love.<sup>276</sup> However, This distinction might be less than reassuring to the person who is suffering the compulsory power of love. Joan Tronto notes that frequently "the ethic of care is tempted by *paternalism* and *parochialism* [...] particularly if the model for care is understood as 'the metaphorical relationship of a mother and child'."<sup>277</sup> While many theorists of love, such as Tronto and Tillich, do not distinguish between love and care, rendering their vocabulary of love distinct from Foucault's notion of love as binding energy, it is reasonable to say that in the places where their ideas overlap with Foucault's concept of care, concern might arise regarding its potential for oppression.

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<sup>274</sup> This mode of acting that I call care, most others refer to as love.

<sup>275</sup> Tillich, 49-51.

<sup>276</sup> Tillich, 50.

<sup>277</sup> Quoted in Gregory, 171.

From Foucault's perspective, however, two aspects of the care of the self militate against this type of "loving unto death." First, the relationship of care, whether of self or other, cannot be ethical unless it respects and promotes the freedom of the other. In this formulation we can identify a link to Socrates' theory of the proper love relationship. Those older men who simply want to satisfy their own lusts are using the young men as objects, rather than caring for the care they take of themselves, which would be respecting their own ends. However, unlike many other ethical theories, the active promotion of freedom is the definition of ethics for Foucault, not a corollary to other duties or concerns.<sup>278</sup> Thus, the fact that this practice is guided by care, or perhaps more properly is careful, does not mean that it will care the person to death. For Foucault, once you have stopped actualizing freedom, it is no longer ethics. As Donna Haraway says, "[t]he recognition that one cannot know the other or the self, but must ask in respect for all of time who and what are emerging in the relationship, is key. That is so for all true lovers, of whatever species."<sup>279</sup> Thus, for lovers' love to be transformative and fulfilling for Haraway, it must involve care, which denotes respect for the free becoming of one's partner. Second, care here should be understood as a verb or an adverb, not a noun. Foucault's definition of care, therefore, aligns with that of psychologist, Carol Gilligan, who insists that care simply means to "move beyond 'the paralyzing injunction not to hurt

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<sup>278</sup> Foucault differs in this respect from the Kantian injunction to treat others as ends rather than means, or William O'Riordan's perspective on the Augustinian use of the neighbor, in which he says, "[i]nclusive' instrumentality, so to speak, does not treat the neighbor merely as a means because the neighbor's own end is respected in this sense of rightly 'using' the neighbor. 'Exclusive' instrumentality, the perverse form of love, manipulates the neighbor for the self's own ends and rejects the proper ordering of love" (Gregory, 343).

<sup>279</sup> Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto*, 50.



others to an injunction to act responsively toward self and others."<sup>280</sup> Foucauldian care is a verb; it is both the active concern for the self and the entire assembly of practices that train the self to embody truth, the regime of practices Foucault understands as *askēsis*. Care is the aesthetic dimension of practice, and it is that aesthetic dimension that determines whether a practice does or does not involve ethics.<sup>281</sup> In order to be correct, beautiful, and joyous, practices of the self and direction of the other must be undertaken in an attitude and embodiment of care in all of its many meanings--concern, precise and careful attention, and maintaining the well-being and freedom of that entity, its ability to care for itself. Certainly care cannot happen without love, without the glue that keeps a person inexplicably stuck to oneself or to another person, but love is not enough. It cannot animate action. That is why Foucault insists that in every moment we must care for ourselves, selves that are not in fact selves, but the world.

### *The Future We*

Thus far this chapter has focused almost entirely on the relationship to the self and the intimate personal relationship between two individuals. In this I follow Foucault whose exegesis of the classical sources concentrates almost exclusively on these intimate relationships, perhaps because he is convinced that they are the foundation of care of the

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<sup>280</sup> Quoted in Gregory, 161.

<sup>281</sup> This also suggests that care does not mean a sort of laissez-faire attitude toward the other. As we have seen great discipline is involved in care of the self, and partners guide each other and also call each other to account. Donna Haraway discusses the importance of caring relationships of practice in the context of her relationship of training her dog for skill-based competitions, stating, "I experience agility as a particular good in itself and also as a way to become more worldly; i.e., more alert to the demands of significant otherness at all the scales that making more livable worlds demands." *The Companion Species Manifesto*, 61.

self and thus the basis for larger communities of practice. However, Foucault's portrait of care of the self in the classical period does make explicit the vital importance of community. John Rajchman tells us,

[c]ommunity was a central question in Foucault's ethic: it was about the bonds we may have with one another, affective and political; it was about who we are and may be. In stressing 'subjectivity' and 'subjectivization' he did not intend to abandon a social or collective ethic in favor of an individual or private one. Rather, he wanted to rethink the great question of 'community': the question of how and why people band together, of how and why people are bound to one another.<sup>282</sup>

In terms of his understanding of community in the classical period, Foucault reminds his audience first of all that the classical world was quite different from our own in terms of relationality: "Generally, the societies of Antiquity remained societies of promiscuity, where existence was led 'in public.' They were also societies in which everyone was situated within strong systems of local relationships, family ties, economic dependencies, and relations of patronage and friendship" (SS 58). Foucault argues that classical philosophy contained no notion of individuality similar to our own, and thus care of the self necessarily took place in networks of relationality. He says so directly in many places. In *The Care of the Self*, he says, "[h]ere we touch on one of the most important points of this activity consecrated to oneself: it constituted, not an exercise in solitude, but a true social practice" (SS 72). In *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, he contends, "one cannot care for the self [...] according to the order and form of the universal. It is not as a human being as such, it is not simply by belonging to the human community, even if this membership is very important, that care of the self can appear,

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<sup>282</sup> John Rajchman, *Truth and Eros: Foucault, Lacan, and the Question of Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 99.

and above all that it can be practiced. It cannot be practiced except within a group, and the group in its distinction" (HS 114). Thus, not only must care of the self happen in a community, but in a specific community.

This insistence recalls our former discussion of conversion and *askēsis*. The process of conversion requires reforming the matrices of action of the subject according to a particular true discourse, and this is necessarily the true discourse of a philosophical tradition, and thus would be practiced within a philosophical school or sect. Acceding to the truth means belonging to this group and acknowledging the importance of the practices of the group in one's own conversion to the truth. As we saw in the previous section, each group, even those with similar *teloi* in mind, engage in different practices of the self. The Stoics, in order to achieve ataraxy and autarky, perform the *praemeditatio malorum*. The Epicureans view this practice as detrimental to care of the self. However, the individual's interaction with these true discourses should not be conceived of in a religious consumerism model, in which a person constructs their own practice of spirituality by choosing from the symbols, doctrines, and practices of different religious groups.<sup>283</sup> Members of a philosophical school might draw from varied sources of wisdom, but they are located in a common context that provides a regime of practice that has been validated by tradition. Moreover, communities of practice, as we have seen, require commitment and discipline. A person who moves from school to school without committing to one way of life remains on the cusp of *stultitia*, she has not yet developed

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<sup>283</sup> This contemporary phenomena and its consequences are described vividly in Vincent Miller's book *Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Practice in a Consumer Culture* (New York: Continuum, 2004).

the discipline to care for herself. Thus, acknowledging the truth of philosophy means not only agreeing to care for oneself and accepting the aspirational self as one's goal, but also putting faith in a certain set of practices to get one there, and recognizing that this practice can only be undertaken within the context of the group.

While Foucault does acknowledge the importance of community to classical care of the self and the various schools of philosophy, his main discussion of communities of practice occurs in the context of his own realm of experience. The direct examples he mentions in his late interviews and essays come primarily from social sub-cultures. He talks, for instance, about S/M, gay and lesbian communities, and drug cultures. Such communities appeal to him for a number of reasons. They lack strong institutionalization and they operate on the basis of fluid power relationships and flexible systems of rules. To begin with, this means they operate on the fringes of hegemonic institutions of socio-political power, allowing space for experimentation. In the S/M scene, as Foucault describes it, participants come and go, they can reverse roles, and challenge certain understandings of the purpose of their community. Yet, they are tied together by a common *ethōs*, a desire, as Foucault says, to invent "new possibilities of pleasure with strange parts of their body" (SPPI 165). Due to the fluidity of structure, the relationships in these communities are open and strategic. Therefore, they create space for the construction of new possible relationships, and the modes of living that might go along with them.<sup>284</sup> By fostering the trust necessary to allow for experimentation, Nancy Luxon

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<sup>284</sup> Ladelle McWhorter has imagined other ways in which these communities might form and the practices and *ethoi* they might produce in *Bodies and Pleasures*.

argues that communities of practice form "intermediate spaces" that provide the link between the care of the self and political change.<sup>285</sup>

Unsurprisingly, Foucault also discusses communities of practice in the context of political and social protest. He participated in the student riots of the late 1960s, organized and militated for the improved treatment and re-humanization of prisoners, and supported, materially and bodily, revolutionary struggles for freedom in places like Vietnam and Poland. Most controversially, Foucault witnessed and wrote about the Iranian revolution from the perspective of ethical and political transformation, viewing the Iranian protesters as a community of transformational practice. He acknowledges that the rhythms of the revolution revolve around Shi'ism, the dominant religion of Iran, but insists that they are not subsumed by it. Rather he focuses on the ways in which communal practice inspires, connects, and transforms people. For instance, he states, "[d]uring the day, in the mosques, mullahs fulminate against the shah, the Americans, the West and its materialism" (T 686). For those who are not able to attend the sermons, they circulate on cassette tapes throughout the country, creating a community of listeners and actors. While the revolution should not be viewed as animated only by Shi'ism, Islam gives the revolutionary community strength "because it is a form of expression, a mode of social relations, a basic, flexible, and broadly accepted organization, a general way of being, a way of speaking and listening, something that permits one to hear others and to desire with them, at the same time as them" (T 688). Thus, while many have criticized

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<sup>285</sup> Nancy Luxon, *Crisis of Authority: Politics, Trust, and Truth-Telling in Freud and Foucault* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 293-94.

Foucault for romanticizing a revolution that quickly turned oppressive, both internally and externally, and while we might equally say that he seems to be lumping extremely disparate groups together into one mass with voices raised in protest, Foucault's articles about the revolution provide one of the few examples in which he uses his understanding of care of the self not only to analyze a contemporary movement in the process of transforming its own way of life, but also transforming the world around it. Indeed, we see in this passage concerning Shi'ism most of the aspects of care of the self--mode of expression, of speaking and hearing the truth, form of relationship, basic but flexible organization, a way of desiring political change and a way of being with oneself and others. Perhaps then, we might imagine Foucault's somewhat romantic view of the revolution as a way of fictioning--unsuccessfully it seems--a political movement.

However, it is fair to say that Foucault's own practices of self took place much more frequently in the archives than behind the barricades, and, in regard to his understanding of philosophy in his own moment and for his own culture, one might ask, to what community do these practices belong? This seems like an appropriate place to address the criticism that Foucault does not possess criteria of judgment that help determine why certain configurations of power relations are better than others. In the interview, "Polemics, Politics, and Problematizations," Foucault notes that Richard Rorty has accused him of failing to situate his work within a "we," within a community composed of values and traditions that would define the conditions within which his own thought might be evaluated. At the base of this critique is Rorty's belief that the purpose

of ethics is to diminish human suffering and increase human equality.<sup>286</sup> Jason Springs quotes Rorty as saying about Foucault, "[y]ou would never guess, from Foucault's account of the changes in European social institutions during the last three hundred years, that during that period suffering had decreased considerably, nor that people's chances of choosing their own styles of life increased considerably."<sup>287</sup> Rorty is certainly not the only thinker to be put off by Foucault's relativism concerning ultimate values.<sup>288</sup> Claire Colebrook notes, "[b]oth [Alastair] MacIntyre and [Charles] Taylor lament the incoherence of contemporary moral discourse and argue that some shared and agreed upon ideal of a good life or social goods is essential to meaningful ethical debate."<sup>289</sup> In other words, without a shared vocabulary, an already established community, these critics contend that we cannot make any headway on ethical problems. What they do not acknowledge as a possibility is the fact that Foucault considers this shared vocabulary and established community as the ethical problem.

On a personal level, it is clear that Foucault does not believe that the job of the philosopher is to work within or establish shared norms. He says in an interview in 1983, "I would say that the work of an intellectual is in a sense to say that that which reveals itself as necessary need not be, or need not be as it is" (SPS 1268). In fact, Foucault views

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<sup>286</sup> Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999).

<sup>287</sup> Jason Springs, "'Dismantling the Master's House': Freedom as Ethical Practice in Brandom and Foucault," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 37, no. 3 (September 2009): 423.

<sup>288</sup> Some, like Jerold Abrams, seem literally flabberghasted by Foucault's lack of "universality and normative necessity." "The Aesthetics of Self-Fashioning and Cosmopolitanism: Foucault and Rorty on the Art of Living," *Philosophy Today* 46, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 187.

<sup>289</sup> Claire Colebrook, "Ethics, Positivity, and Gender: Foucault, Aristotle, and the Care of Self," *Philosophy Today* 42, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 47.

the goal of philosophy as "the displacement and transformation of categories of thought, the modification of received values, and all of the work for thinking otherwise, for being otherwise, for becoming other than what one is" (PM 929). This obviously refers back to the goal of his exegesis of the classical sources, which is to show that history need not have progressed as it did, and allow the contact between different philosophies to produce something new (ESS 1542). In this sense, Judith Butler notes that Foucault has a similar project to Theodor Adorno. She says of Adorno's philosophy, "[f]or critique to operate as part of a praxis for Adorno is for it to apprehend the ways in which categories are themselves instituted, how the field of knowledge is ordered, and how what is suppressed returns, as it were, as its own constitutive occlusion."<sup>290</sup> Perhaps it is for this reason that Foucault seeks to understand "our society and our civilization" not by discovering its deep truth, but "by way of its systems of exclusion, of rejection, of refusal, by way of that which they do not want, their limits, the obligation they have to suppress a certain number of things, of people, of processes [...] their system of repression-suppression" (CMF1052).

However, it quickly becomes evident that this rejection of traditional norms and established communities is not just a personal practice; rather, it undergirds the possibility of critique and thus the type of transformation that Foucault advocates. Paul Veyne states, "[a] calm, informed, contemplative critique, this causes one to doubt the truth of general comments about Power or Love (with capital letters). One may then move on to an active critique which, because it recognizes the changing realities behind

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<sup>290</sup> Butler, "What Is Critique? An Essay on Foucault's Virtue," 213.



such deceptive generalities, challenges their political legitimacy."<sup>291</sup> It is for this reason that Foucault takes aim at the holy cows of twentieth-century ethical and political theory, for instance, the issue of rights. In a 1982 interview, Foucault states, "[i]f what one wants to do is to create a new way of life, then the question of individual rights is not pertinent" (TSPS 1128). Duncan Ivison argues that Foucault's view on rights discourse derives directly from his rejection of universal moral laws and transhistorical forms of subjectivity. He states, "[t]he defender of natural rights is thus committed, at the least, to the possibility of the existence of 'objective' (that is, non-conventional) moral rules defining rights [...] Thus committed, the defender of natural rights also presupposes certain elements of the human condition that hold universally for all persons, no matter what their cultural or communal embeddedness."<sup>292</sup> Nancy Fraser actually gives a very succinct summary of Foucault's opposition to rights discourse in her critique in "Foucault's Body-Language: A Post-Humanist Political Rhetoric." Paraphrasing Foucault, she says, "'[r]ight' in other words, exactly because it is *anachronistic*, has the *contemporary* ideological function of masking disciplinary domination and thus contributes to it."<sup>293</sup> She is speaking here of course of Foucault's claim in *The History of Sexuality: Volume I* that the continued perception of power as juridical masks the effects of disciplinary and normalizing power, making us feel that now that we have cut off the

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<sup>291</sup> Paul Veyne, *Foucault*, 38.

<sup>292</sup> Duncan Ivison, "The Disciplinary Moment: Foucault, Law and the Reinscription of Rights," in *The Later Foucault: Politics and Philosophy*, ed. by Jeremy Moss (London: Sage Publications, 1998), 136.

<sup>293</sup> Nancy Fraser, "Foucault's Body-Language: A Post-Humanist Political Rhetoric," *Salmagundi* 61 (Fall 1983): 60.

head of the king, we are finally free.<sup>294</sup> Of course, being skeptical of the liberatory power of rights discourse does not mean that one might not utilize such a discourse strategically, which is after all the basis of Foucauldian concepts of resistance. Ivison argues that one might utilize a pre-established social acceptance of rights discourse in order to achieve a goal, without believing in the ontological foundation of such rights. He notes, "[a]ll rights talk, whether singular or natural, is to some extent tactical, for it is always a case of using it to pre-empt and/or facilitate a possible action or range of actions."<sup>295</sup> It is in this sense that Foucault agrees with Fraser's pragmatic statement, "[t]he standards we have are the standards we have."<sup>296</sup> Certainly one must begin where one is, but the goal of conversion is not to remain where one is and to naturalize that starting point, but to move beyond it by questioning the necessity of values and norms and identifying ways to transcend them. Richard Bernstein shows that Foucault's work does, in fact, assume a baseline episteme. He states,

Now the point I want to emphasize is that Foucault's rhetoric of disruption works because it at once presupposes and challenges an ethical-political horizon. He deliberately seeks to elicit conflicting responses in us, exposing fractures in 'our' most cherished convictions and comforting beliefs. I speak of an 'ethical-political horizon' because this horizon keeps receding. Foucault never quite thematizes this ethical-political perspective, and yet it is always presupposed. Without it the rhetoric of disruption would not work.<sup>297</sup>

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<sup>294</sup> See Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume I*, Part Five, "Right of Death and Power Over Life."

<sup>295</sup> Ivison, 142.

<sup>296</sup> Fraser, 68.

<sup>297</sup> Richard J. Bernstein, "Foucault: Critique as a Philosophic Ethos," in *Critique and Power: Recasting the Foucault Habermas Debate*, ed. Michael Kelly (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1994), 225.

Foucault supports this interpretation in the interview entitled "Is It Important to Think?" where he says, "[t]o begin from the outset by accepting the question of what reforms I will introduce is not, I believe, the objective that an intellectual should entertain. His role, since he works in the register of thought, is to see just how far thought can be freed so as to make certain transformations seem urgent enough so that others will attempt to bring them into effect, and difficult enough so that if they are brought about they will be deeply inscribed in the real."<sup>298</sup>

Thus, Foucault would agree with Fraser that we can only have the standards we have, and with Iris Murdoch's contention that "[w]e learn through attending to contexts, vocabulary develops through close attention to objects, and we can only understand others if we can to some extent share their contexts."<sup>299</sup> However, he would insist that we must disrupt those standards and develop new semantic contexts. Let's return to Rorty's critique that Foucault does not presuppose a "we." In response, Foucault states, "it seems to me that the 'we' cannot be prior to the question; it cannot be anything but the result--and the necessarily provisional result--of the question such as it is posed in the new terms in which it is formulated" (PPP 1413). In other words, problematization and the work of critique "renders possible the *future formation* of a 'we'" (PPP 1413, emphasis added). Timothy Rayner interprets this as meaning, "[a]s we learn how to think differently about ourselves, we learn how to relate to ourselves and create ourselves in radically different

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<sup>298</sup> Quoted in Paul Rabinow, "Foucault's Untimely Struggle: Towards a Form of Spirituality," *Theory, Culture, & Society* 26, no. 6 (November 2009): 31.

<sup>299</sup> She continues ruefully, "Often we cannot." *The Sovereignty of the Good* (London: Ark Paperbacks, 1986), 32.

ways. This is the new beginning that is promoted by Foucault's work. This new beginning is, in itself, the opening of a political community to come--a community devoted to a slow and arduous process of existential transformation."<sup>300</sup> Thus, Foucault imagines many different types of communities of practice growing up around questions that are currently being asked, groups of people making lives in the ruins of our most cherished convictions and comforting beliefs.

However, there is a way in which Foucault's work can be understood as speaking to another, nebulous but pre-existing, community, and that is the community of critique. In "What Is Enlightenment?" Foucault argues that critique "will separate out, from the contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think [...] It is seeking to give new impetus, as far and as wide as possible, to the undefined work of freedom" (QL 1393). For John Rajchman, the community of critique is "not the community of those a society excludes in order to function, but of all those who start to refuse their part in maintaining the specific form of thinking that defines it and then, of those who depart from it, taking their identities or forms of experience, in new directions outside its compass."<sup>301</sup> I take him to mean not that some of those who belong to the critical community might not be excluded from normality--clearly those who are excluded are the most likely to question a certain social arrangement--but that what defines the critical community is that individuals choose to

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<sup>300</sup> Timothy Rayner, "Between Fiction and Reflection: Foucault and the Experience Book," *Continental Philosophy Review* 36, no. 1 (March 2003): 41.

<sup>301</sup> John Rajchman, *Truth and Eros: Foucault, Lacan, and the Question of Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 104.

begin imagining other ways of living and relating to one another, and as he says, put those imaginings into practice. Roman Coles connects this community more explicitly to its origins in Foucault's thought when he brings us back to his engagement with Kant. Coles argues, "[t]he modernity Foucault describes in 'What is Enlightenment?' is characterized by the *belonging to the questioning of that to which we belong*. This is the 'task' to which we belong, a task we share as moderns."<sup>302</sup> Yet I would say that not all moderns, despite their potential for belonging to this community, actually do comprise its "we." Rather, one must choose to practice freedom in tandem with others.<sup>303</sup> As Coles states, "[i]t is because philosophers belong to 'a certain "we," a we corresponding to a cultural ensemble characteristic of [their] own contemporaneity' (p. 89), that their self understanding, self-direction, and self-creation are inextricable from an inquiry into their social present [...] the ontology of the present is an 'ontology of *ourselves*'--not of one self in isolation."<sup>304</sup> The basis, then, of the communities of practice that actually underpin the long and arduous work of self-transformation is the commitment to asking the question of the present, which Foucault describes throughout this work in so many different ways--as thinking otherwise, caring for the self, practicing freedom, conversion. Of course this is not to say that an individual belongs to only one community. Certainly they belong to any number of communities, many oriented around habits and practices and others around

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<sup>302</sup> Coles, 84. Italics are his.

<sup>303</sup> Judith Butler notes that the individual's "liberty emerges at the limits of what one can know, at the very moment in which the desubjugation of the subject within the politics of truth takes place, the moment where a certain questioning practice begins." Perhaps in the context of the community of critique, we could reformulate her question, not "[w]hat, given the contemporary order of being, can I be?" But rather what can *we* be? Judith Butler, "What Is Critique? An Essay on Foucault's Virtue," 221.

<sup>304</sup> Coles, 84. Italics his.

attempts to create answers to the questions of living. However, those who choose to practice care of self form a community of critique, not as card-carrying members, but as individuals who embrace the task of modernity, the task of questioning the present.

All of these ways of describing critique reiterate the first rule of conversion that Foucault outlines in his lectures: a person cannot know the truth by remaining where she is. Yet critique by itself is not enough. Critique is merely the first moment of conversion. It must lead to the search for a different way of being, the subjectivation of the truth of that different path. Thus, while Foucauldian conversion does entail an aspirational self, that self is pragmatic rather than teleological, seeking to produce new truths rather than recapitulate a received tradition.

Thus, Foucault's emphasis on affective relationships of truth and practice insists that one can only care for the self within community, and yet he does not determine what those communities might look like or value, or make communal identity a precondition of belonging.<sup>305</sup> Unlike moral theorists who prioritize autonomy--the duty of the individual to respect the moral law absent any sort of context--<sup>306</sup> Foucault insists that conversion can only happen within a community of support and challenge. These communities are themselves in constant transformation, like the S/M community, but must adhere to a certain number of basic principles in order to support care of self through practice. On the

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<sup>305</sup> As is often the case with communitarian ethical theories. For instance, Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).

<sup>306</sup> The most obvious example would be Kant, but any theory that prioritizes right over good, such as John Rawls, or understands the ethical subject as negotiating ethical decisions based on cost-benefit analyses, such as John Stuart Mill, divorce the subject from her context.

other hand, Foucault is not a communitarian.<sup>307</sup> Rather than stipulating that ethical values derive from the tradition of an established group with which subjects identify due to similar life experiences, Foucault posits the formation of communities oriented around future solutions to questions asked. For him, assuming the ethical priority of established social values plays right into the dominating power of norms and disciplines. While individuals must negotiate these values, structures, and practices, they cannot care for themselves by blithely accepting them as natural. Rather, by belonging to the community of critique, they can come to form other communities oriented around different values.

This chapter has covered much territory, from the existentially crucial way in which the subject is constituted through the other, through the intimacy of the guide and the guided, to the community of practice. I have argued that Foucault's belief in the ethical primacy of the relationship to self does not mean a disregard for the other. Rather because the self is comprised through external discourses and practices and the attitude of care requires that one not assimilate those strands into an ossified identity, Foucault's self respects the otherness of which it and everything else is composed. On a second level, the other is necessary for care of the self because the other pulls the self out of *stultitia* and serves as support and provocation during the process of conversion. This open and

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<sup>307</sup> The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy suggests that communitarianism arose as a reaction to John Rawl's 1971 work, *A Theory of Justice*. The entry suggests that four authors--Michael Walzer, Charles Taylor, Alasdair MacIntyre and, Michael Sandel--are at the forefront of this intellectual counter-movement. Although their work differs in many ways, they share three basic convictions: 1) political and moral reasoning can only have meaning within a social context, 2) the ethical subject is shaped within the context of a tradition of shared norms and values, and 3) thus, it is important to protect traditional communities of value against universalizing discourses like Rawl's, which they argue prioritize a sort of negative freedom over the constitutive moral education of traditional values and practices. "Communitarianism," Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, last modified January 25th, 2012, accessed November 30, 2014, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/communitarianism/>.

strategic relationship of friendship is animated by love and guided by care. Finally, this relationship of friendship is located within a larger community of practice. I have responded to the critique that Foucault does not locate his work within a community of shared values and norms by arguing that Foucault envisions his work as spawning numerous future communities that coalesce around answers to questions posed to the present. Given the provisional nature of these answers, these communities will be fluid and seeking, like the S/M communities Foucault describes.

In a world where the relationship between individuals and communities--as well as what a community consists of--are imagined in very specific ways, Foucault's emphasis on the importance of the other for the development of self provides a crucial intervention. Imagining the self as confronted by the truth and constituted by the other opens possibilities for reconceiving the other as other-than-human as well. It would come as no surprise to John Muir, Aldo Leopold, or any of the many promoters of wilderness experience that one might be pulled from *stultitia* by a grove of trees, a fierce summer storm, or a determined colony of ants harvesting their daily meal. As Peter Quigley states, "[i]f nature could be seen as a force that disrupts, overwhelms, undermines, explodes or otherwise 'makes strange' our ideological consensus, our anthropocentrism, then it is possible to see it as an agent of criticism and deconstruction, as well as reconstruction."<sup>308</sup> In other words, taking seriously the challenge of the outside means acknowledging that any other can introduce the difference that might be the ax for the

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<sup>308</sup> Peter Quigley, "Nature as Dangerous Space: Foucault's Challenge to Marxism, Liberal Humanism, and the General Call for 'Grounded Responsibility'," in *Discourses of the Environment*, ed. Éric Darier (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999), 198.



frozen sea inside us. On another level, as individuals trained to think of ourselves as autonomous economic actors, we must learn to think again within communities. Bill McKibben states, "Access to endless amounts of cheap energy made us rich, and wrecked our climate, and *it also made us the first people on earth who had no practical need of our neighbors.*"<sup>309</sup> McKibben here is mostly talking about needing to rediscover local communities for stability, support, and joy. Foucault's point is more basic. It is within and through communities that we become subjects of ethical action. Thus, in order to develop new ways of being, we must work to abandon our isolated, economic self and discover ways of being in community.

In the next chapter, I address the issue of political transformation. Thus far, it may seem as though care of the self takes place only in the personal sphere of everyday life, but Foucault envisions continuity between the conversion of the self and the transformation of the world. Thus, we will explore the link between the two, *parrhēsia*.

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<sup>309</sup> Bill McKibben, *Eaarth: Making Life on a Tough New Planet* (New York: Times Books, 2009), 133.

## Chapter Four: *Parrhēsia*

In *parrhēsia*, the speaker uses his freedom and chooses frankness instead of persuasion, truth instead of falsehood or silence, the risk of death instead of flattery, and moral duty instead of self-interest and moral apathy.

--Michel Foucault, "Discourse and Truth"<sup>310</sup>

In a radical abandonment to finitude, however, there is no choice but to live deliberately or die trying: In overcoming the fear of death, we become most dangerous, most creative, or both at once.

--Tom Roach, *Friendship as a Way of Life*<sup>311</sup>

Fictions are for finding things out.

--Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*<sup>312</sup>

As we have proceeded in our exploration of Foucault's story of ethical subject formation, we have examined increasingly wider circles of practice. First, we examined

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<sup>310</sup> Michel Foucault, *Fearless Speech* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2001), 19-20.

<sup>311</sup> Tom Roach, *Friendship as a Way of Life*, 146.

<sup>312</sup> Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction with a New Epilogue* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 39.

the crucial relationship of self to self in the process of conversion. Then we noted that the process of daily training that allows one to subjectivate true discourse requires the guidance and support of another person, the intimate relationship of friendship that contains both love and care. Finally, we have argued that care of the self must happen within a wider community of practice, whether that be a group of like-minded people, the lost voices of the archive, or a more nebulous community that begins the process of awakening by saying "no" to current regimes of truth and practice. In this section, the circle widens further, for the example of Foucault's life and the pressing question of human existence on a robust but changeable planet demand the examination of how the care of the self becomes the care of the world. Foucault ultimately chooses to use the example of the Cynics, specifically in their practice of *parrhēsia*, to demonstrate how living a life of truth produces transformation in one's society.

While we have touched on some aspects of *parrhēsia* in the relationship between the guide and the guided in the previous chapter, here we examine the political ramifications of this practice. I begin by arguing that *parrhēsia* is the mode of veridiction that allows one to subjectivate true discourse because it maintains a necessary consistency among belief, speech, and action. Thus, it is not just important to speak the truth to and for others, but also to and for oneself. Next, I explore Foucault's complex exegesis of the history of *parrhēsia* in order to demonstrate his belief that *parrhēsia* broke into two separate strands during the classical period--the intimate relationship of guidance and the speaking of truth to power. Foucault wants to show that the split left important holes in each practice, and he seeks a way to reintroduce social and political

transformation into late imperial *parrhēsia*. Ultimately, he does so through the figure of the Cynic. The chapter shows that the Cynic represents, for Foucault, a way to re-inject politics into the heart of care of the self. The Cynics, through a life of scandal, a life totally other to their society, and because of their love for humanity, use their care of self to care for the world.

In the present moment, how to connect personal and political transformation may be the most difficult and yet crucial question the environmental movement needs to solve. For McKibben, we no longer have the time for the slow evolution that *parrhēsia* represents. He states, "only Washington can change the price of energy and send a signal through the economy. And only Washington can credibly negotiate with the rest of the world to reach an international agreement."<sup>313</sup> While I appreciate his concern for the urgency of our environmental problems, from the perspective of Foucauldian ethical transformation, there is no option beyond personal transformation leading to societal transformation. Unilateral governmental action, which McKibben frequently promotes, would be a universalizing program with all the evils inherent to it. This chapter hopes to justify this belief and suggest ways in which care of self can lead to the creation of an other world.

### *Modes of Veridiction*

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<sup>313</sup> McKibben, *Fight Global Warming Now: The Handbook for Taking Action in Your Community* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2007), 20.

In order to understand the importance of the Cynics for Foucault's project, one must take a detour, as he does, through the concept of *parrhēsia*. In the final years of his life, Foucault evinces an interest in modes of veridiction, of which he says, "it is a question not of what forms of discourse are recognized as true, but under what form, in his act of telling the truth, the individual constitutes himself and is constituted by others as a subject holding a discourse of truth, under what form he presents himself, in his own and others eyes, as one who tells the truth" (CV 4).<sup>314</sup> Of course, in this age of rationalism and scientific objectivity, it might seem as though there is only one way of telling the truth, and it has little to do with the constitution of the subject in relationship to that truth. However, Foucault insists that in the classical world four modes of truth-telling existed--prophecy, the wisdom of the sage, *parrhēsia*, and technical instruction. In his attempts to define the parrhesiast through comparison with other modes of veridiction, Foucault begins with the prophet. Obviously, Foucault states, the prophet tells the truth. However, the prophet is an intermediary. He does not speak in his own name, but in God's. Another way in which the prophet is a mediator is that he speaks about the future, a realm that is hidden from humans. Moreover, there is no requirement that he speak plainly. In fact, the speech of the prophet is often cloaked in metaphor, and even when he seems to be speaking frankly one can always question his words (CV 16-17). The second mode of veridiction is that of the sage. "The sage [...] speaks in his own name [...] The wisdom he expresses really is his own wisdom" (CV 17). Like the parrhesiast, the sage's

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<sup>314</sup> Brad Elliott Stone notes that *parrhēsia* is practiced in the classical world in communities by the Epicureans, in public by the Cynics, and in private intimate relationships by the Stoics. Stone, "Subjectivity and Truth," in *Michel Foucault: Key Concepts*, ed. Dianna Taylor (Durham, UK: Acumen, 2011), 152.

mode of being corresponds to the truth that he speaks. He lives by the wisdom he preaches. However, Foucault insists that the sage has no obligation to speak. "[T]he sage is wise in and for himself" (CV 18). He speaks only when appealed to, which may explain why his answers are often "enigmatic and leave those he addresses ignorant or uncertain about what he has actually said" (CV 18). The path of the sage, of enlightenment or wisdom, does not generally partake of the close personal relationships that characterize care of the self. Moreover, the sage is to some extent, to use a Nietzschean phrase, beyond good and evil, without concern for the state of the world. Like the gods, his personal integrity does not rely on behaving in ways that are understandable to humans. Finally, Foucault identifies the mode of veridiction of the teacher or technician. This person is the master of a *tekhnē*, both theoretical knowledge and practical skill and has an obligation to transmit it to others in clear speech that they can understand. However, the technician does not risk anything when he speaks. His students come to him willingly and eagerly. His truth does not have the power to transform (CV 23-25).

We see from the negatives of these other images the outlines of the parrhesiast. Unlike the prophet, the parrhesiast must speak in his own name. The parrhesiast must also live the life he preaches, which the prophet may have no need to do, although frequently does. This makes him similar to the sage, and similar also in that both the sage and the parrhesiast are concerned with the world as it is, rather than a world in the future. However, the sage speaks in riddles. He has no obligation to spread the truth in a way that others understand. Moreover, he speaks of being in general, not the being of specific

individuals. The parrhesiast, in contrast, must speak the truth. The manifestation of his own truth occurs in the acting and speaking of that truth, and the parrhesiast speaks the truth to individual others, in the context of their individuality. Finally, unlike the technician, the parrhesiast must risk himself in his speech. His courage is defined by his exposure. The truth he declares must be the vehicle of transforming himself, transforming others, and transforming the world around him. Brad Stone argues that Foucault determines five crucial characteristics for the parrhesiast, "frankness, truth, danger, criticism and duty."<sup>315</sup> Of course, as Foucault acknowledges, these four models are not four different characters. They are modes of truth-telling that bond the subject to the truth in different ways and can inhabit the same person at different times.

However, only *parrhēsia* can serve as the mode of veridiction for a person engaging in care of the self, because only *parrhēsia* fulfills the requirements for the individual to subjectivate true discourse. Foucault states in *The Courage of the Truth*, "[p]arrhēsia is not a skill [...] It is a attitude, a way of being which is akin to virtue, a mode of action" (CV 15). *Parrhēsia* is a way of acting, a mode of life that binds the subject to himself in the enunciation of the truth. To bind the subject to himself means several things. First, as we recall from the chapter on *askēsis*, the subject strengthens the truth as a matrix of action both through practice in the world, or *gymnasia*, and through imaginative practice, or *meditatio*. *Parrhēsia* represents a combination of both of these forms. By speaking the truth, the parrhesiast reactivates the prescriptions of truth in her own mind, reaffirming them to herself as true and as good matrices for action. By

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<sup>315</sup> Stone, "Subjectivity and Truth," 149.

speaking the truth specifically to others, the parrhesiast acts upon these truths, concerned not only with communicating them plainly and clearly, but also appropriately for the situation and the audience. According to Foucault's reading of Diogenes Laertius, to live philosophically means demonstrating what is true through "the *êthos* of the scene, the *kairos* of the situation, and then doctrine," in other words through how one lives, the way in which one reacts to specific situations, and the the doctrines that one teaches (GSA 316). Second, Foucault notes that *parrhēsia* binds "oneself to oneself in the statement of truth" (GSA 64). This notion recalls the two selves present in the understanding of conversion to the self, the emerging self and the aspirational self. *Parrhēsia* binds the emerging self to the aspirational self through the practice of enacting the truth. In other words, it reaffirms the commitment on the part of the individual to continue to care for the self. This is even more important in light of the fact that *parrhēsia* is a practice of freedom. The decision to care for the self that necessitates *parrhēsia* puts the subject in a potentially perilous situation, insofar as he may be social ostracized, physically attacked, or emotionally rent due the practice of speaking the truth in the face of power. Yet, precisely this courage defines his freedom, as the freedom to be the truth he enunciates in the face of danger (GSA 63-64). Thus, I will argue that for the purposes of Foucault's model of ethical subject formation, not only is it impossible to practice *parrhēsia* without a coherence of action, belief, and speech, but one cannot fully subjectivate truth without *parrhēsia*.

One reason for this is that the subjectivation of truth involves making truth a way of life, and creating an *êthos* requires consistency. Karen Vintges argues that care of the



self, for Foucault, "is in fact a plea for a certain coherence of the self, [it] requires work on the self, organising the fragments."<sup>316</sup> She argues then that Foucault imagines identity not as something one discovers but as something one creates through training in consistency of action.<sup>317</sup> Thus, one might argue that the person practicing rhetoric, or flattery, another enemy of *parrhēsia*, cannot subjectivate the truth because they are inconsistent in their practice.<sup>318</sup> It is as if, for example, a ballerina sometimes practices her positions with good form, and sometimes with bad form. How will she be able to manifest the beauty of ballet if her body does not perform each step consistently? The entire purpose of *askēsis* is to practice care of the self based on the prescriptions of truth that guide the process, and only those, ideally reactivating them every minute of the day until they have become one with mind and flesh. Foucault reiterates the importance of consistency to care of the self when he asks, "how can the subject act as he must, be as he must, to the degree that he not only knows the truth, but that he speaks it, practices it, and exercises it" (HS 304).<sup>319</sup> Clearly emotion has a role to play here as well. As we

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<sup>316</sup> Karen Vintges, "Must We Burn Foucault? Ethics as Art of Living: Simone de Beauvoir and Michel Foucault," *Continental Philosophy Review* 34, no. 2 (March 2001): 171.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid.

<sup>318</sup> Foucault examines at length the historical confrontation of rhetoric and *parrhēsia*. Unlike the parrhesiast, the rhetorician pretends to speak the truth in an attempt to persuade, without necessarily believing that truth. He may very well know what he is saying to be a lie and that does not effect his ability to convey it (HS 365). Thus, he is patently not constituted as the person who tells the truth, either for himself or others. He is the person who uses a *tekhnē* in order to sway others.

<sup>319</sup> Paul Allen Miller notes that Slavoj Žižek critiques Foucault on this point, insisting, from a Lacanian, point of view, that no such subjective harmony can be achieved (Miller, 209). Žižek may be taking Foucault too literally here. Certainly he is not suggesting that an unassailable subjective coherency can be created through care of the self. Rather, the process seeks to achieve a certain subjective matrix to

discussed in the previous chapter, love is the force that draws one along the path of care of the self. This becomes evident in the practice of *parrhēsia* as well. Foucault writes of true discourses, "not only that I test them, that I consider them true, but also that I love them, that I am attached to them and my whole life is governed by them" (HS 387). This love one feels for the truth, simply because it is beautiful and pure, mirrors the love one must develop for oneself, the *gaudium* that relies on nothing but the beauty and simplicity of the care of self. Thus, in the practice of subjectivation of true discourse, one's emotions will also be reordered as one learns to value what is truly good, beautiful, and useful in life.

Naturally, one might argue that other modes of veridiction, the sage for example, also allow for the subjectivation of true discourse, and certainly the sage's life seems to demonstrate the enactment of the truth that he holds. Yet, at the same time, for Foucault ethics ultimately rests at the fulcrum of the care of the self, the care of the other, and the care of the world. Another way of thinking about this is Ian Cutler's suggestion that *parrhēsia* attempts to hold in tension *alētheia* (truth), *politeia* (politics), and *ēthos* (a way of life), while at the same time "insisting upon their irreducible distinctness."<sup>320</sup> The sage may live a life of wisdom, but his care of self is not strictly ethical. He is beyond good and evil, living a life with no direct social implications. Care of the self, in contrast, "is a manifestation of truth. It is a testimony" (GSA 315). The subject who enacts the truth and

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guide action. As in the case of the swordswoman or martial artist in chapter two, one simply hopes to use truth to give a consistent structure to one's life rather than imagining that the self thus becomes unified and unchangeable. Of course such a goal would be "an impossible dream."

<sup>320</sup> Ian Cutler, *Cynicism from Diogenes to Dilbert* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc. Publishers, 2005), 106.

witnesses to the truth must therefore proclaim the truth, if not with her mouth, then with her life, as we will see with the Cynics. According to Zachary Simpson, *parrhēsia* "functions as a means of externalizing our intent and positing a potential truth within discourse and action."<sup>321</sup> Moreover, the care of the self cannot function without the intimate personal relationship that we explored in the previous section, and this relationship relies on *parrhēsia*, because frank speech encourages trust, because it reinforces a strict discipline with oneself about one's behavior, and because it effectively communicates truth to others. As we saw in the section on spiritual knowledge, discourse only becomes true discourse when it is immediately transferrable into action--either in the form of training or in an actual situation. Since truth is subjectivated through action, it cannot be enigmatic. It must be clear. Given the paradoxical nature of the sage's practice, it cannot be fully intentional; it smacks of the sudden inbreaking of enlightenment rather than the measured subjectivation of truth through everyday practice. Thus, it offers little in the way of a pragmatic map for contemporary ethical subject formation.

### *Hollow Words*

Although Foucault often views Plato's philosophy as unhelpful for his own ethics, he does utilize Plato in order to give a specific example of this connection between speaking the truth and living the truth, with all of its political and social implications. In his exploration of Plato's letters in *The Government of Self and Others*, Foucault notes

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<sup>321</sup> Zachary Simpson, "The Truths We Tell Ourselves: Foucault on *Parrhesia*," *Foucault Studies* 13 (May 2012): 111.

that concerning the truth of philosophy, Plato's question is not "What is the reality that enables one to say whether what philosophy says is true or untrue?" Rather, his question is, "how, in what way, in what mode does philosophical truth-telling, the particular form of veridiction that is philosophy, inscribe itself in reality" (GSA 210)? Plato insists in his letters that philosophy cannot just be *logos*, or "hollow words" in relation to politics. The philosopher "must participate, put his hand directly to action (*ergon*)" (GSA 202). Nor is Plato referring here to the fact that care of the self for the Greek citizen means learning to govern oneself, so that he can govern others, although obviously this entails *ergon* as well. Rather, Plato is referring to his own obligation to speak the truth in relation to the Tyrant of Syracuse, Dionysius. This obligation comes directly from his own care of self, his own *parrhēsia*, because it derives from "the internal obligation for philosophy to be *ergon* as well as *logos*" (GSA 209). In other words, like Socrates at the moment of his suicide, Plato is concerned not with the other, in this case Dionysius, who rejects his *parrhēsia*, but in the consistency of his own subjectivation of truth. If one does not practice one's truth in reality, one cannot be said to subjectivate it, nor can one test the efficacy of various ways of enacting it.

As we noted in the previous chapter, the parrhesiast does not always have the responsibility to intervene in politics, but in this case, having been asked for his opinion by Dionysius, he has no recourse but to respond truthfully. Thus, we see at the very beginning of classical philosophy a necessary connection between care of self and politics. As Foucault notes concerning Plato, "[p]hilosophical truth-telling is not political rationality, but it is essential for a political rationality to be in a certain relationship,

which remains to be determined, with philosophical truth-telling, just as it is important for a philosophical truth-telling to test its reality in relation to a political practice" (GSA 266). In other words, Foucault, following Plato, comes down on the side of the pragmatist. One must test one's philosophical beliefs by their effects in the world. If one's own care of self does not lead to care of the world, it has failed this test of reality. In Foucault's words, "[i]t is by taking part directly, through *parrēsia*, in the constitution, maintenance, and exercise of an art of governing that the philosopher will not be merely *logos* in the political realm, but really *logos* and *ergon*, in accordance with the ideal of Greek rationality" (GSA 202).

Foucault contrasts this general perspective concerning philosophy as *ergon* with what he sees as an abandonment of the political sphere by contemporary philosophy. He states, "[f]or a long time it was believed, and it is still thought that, basically, the reality of philosophy is being able to tell the truth about truth, the truth of truth" (GSA 211). Basically he is saying that at some point philosophy stopped interacting with the real world and turned in on itself in an impotent quest to find Truth.<sup>322</sup> For Foucault, by contrast, the reality of philosophy "is demonstrated by the fact that philosophy is the activity which consists in speaking the truth, in practicing veridiction in relation to power" (GSA 211). Mirroring Plato's *parrhēsia*, Foucault insists, "it is possible to ask from governments a certain truth as concerns final plans, the general choice of their tactics, and a certain number of particular points concerning their program: this is the

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<sup>322</sup> Such a quest can be seen in the quasi-mathematical theorems of analytic philosophy. As we know, Foucault thinks that no such ontological truth exists.

*parrhesia* (frank speech) of the governed" (EE 1552-53). So, antiquity can teach us that "[t]he reality, the test by which, and through which, philosophical veridiction will manifest itself as real is the fact that it addresses itself, can address itself, and has the courage to address itself to whoever exercises political power" (GSA 210). Can we imagine the technician risking himself to challenge power? No. The sage might stand up against power, but to what end? Simply to baffle it with riddles? Surely the prophet might stand up to power, and yet, as Foucault notes, he does not speak in his own name, but in the name of God, and thus while he very well might risk himself, there is no necessary coherency between his government of self and the attempt to govern others. Therefore, Foucault hopes to recuperate *parrhēsia*, along with conversion and *askēsis*, for modern philosophy. He says,

[p]hilosophy as exteriority with regard to a politics which constitutes its test of reality, philosophy as a critique of a domain of illusions which challenges it to constitute itself as true discourse, and philosophy as ascesis, that is to say as constitution of the subject by himself, seem to me to constitute the mode of being of modern philosophy, or maybe that which, in the mode of being of modern philosophy, takes up the mode of being of ancient philosophy. (GSA 326)

In attempting to recuperate *parrhēsia*, Foucault has a problem. During the period stretching from pre-Socratic Greece to Imperial Rome, *parrhēsia* lost its positive political meaning, and became what we have already described, the basis of the intimate relationship between two people during the process of caring for oneself. According to Foucault, this occurred because *parrhēsia* came to be seen as incompatible with democracy. Foucault argues, "[a]lêtheia, politeia, êthos:<sup>323</sup> it is the essential irreducibility of these three poles, their necessary and mutual relationship, and the structure of the

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<sup>323</sup> Truth, politics, and way of life.

reciprocal appeal of one to the other, that has underpinned, I believe, the very existence of all philosophical discourse from Greece to the present" (CV 62). Yet the question of who can tell the truth in the socio-political field is a fraught one (GSA 281-282).

In the pre-Socratic period, *parrhēsia* was practiced as the ascendancy of certain citizens and a protest against others' misuse of power. For citizens of Athens, such as Pericles, "[w]hat constitutes the field particular to *parrēsia* is this political risk of a discourse which leaves room free for other discourse and assumes the task, not of bending other's to one's will, but [of] persuading them" (GSA 98). In this period, "[p]arrēsia was a right to be preserved at any price, a right to be exercised to the fullest possible extent, it was one of the forms in which the free exercise of a free citizen manifested itself--[taking] the word 'free' [in] its full and positive sense, that is to say: a freedom which gives one the right to exercise one's privilege in the midst of others, in relation to others and over others" (CV 34).<sup>324</sup> This political *parrhēsia* described by Euripides represents "a movement which, beyond pure and simple membership of the body of citizens, puts the individual in a position of superiority in which he will be able to take charge of the city in the form and through the exercise of true discourse" (GSA 144). The leader who successfully used *parrhēsia* in the public sphere demonstrated through living a virtuous life that his speech was also true and should be adhered to in the course of the life of the city.

Already by the time of Socrates, this political function of *parrhēsia* had begun to break down. Foucault notes that in the fourth century BC, "*parrēsia* appeared much less

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<sup>324</sup> Brackets in text.

as a right to be exercised in full freedom than as a dangerous practice with ambiguous effects, and which should not to be exercised without caution or limits" (CV 34). This is due, according to Foucault, to the fact that the parrhesiast is not listened to in the democratic assembly, and he risks his life by speaking. No longer is *parrhēsia* the freedom of the virtuous man to speak the truth to the assembly and thus demonstrate his ability to lead. Rather, it has become the responsibility of the individual who cares for himself to speak the truth when and where it supports his own care of self. Just as we cannot imagine Pericles playing the gadfly, we cannot imagine Socrates playing the general.<sup>325</sup> In fact, Socrates' *daimon* has commanded him not to try to tell the truth in the realm of politics. Rather he is obligated to engage in *parrhēsia* in private, as a private citizen speaking to other citizens. One reason for this is the fact that *parrhēsia* at this time has become what it will be from this point forward, a pact between individuals. The speaker agrees to take a risk, and there must be some chance that the person to whom he speaks will listen. As Foucault argues, "[p]hilosophy can only address itself to those who want to listen. A discourse that is nothing but protestation, contestation, shouting, and anger against power and tyranny would not be philosophy" (GSA 217). *Parrhēsia* cannot truly be *ergon* unless there is a real possibility that it will be effective. "The philosopher who speaks without being listened to, or again who speaks under the threat of death, does not really do anything other than speak into the wind and the void" (GSA 217). This

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<sup>325</sup> Alexander Nehamas makes the interesting point about Socrates that because we know almost nothing of his actual life, he functions for Foucault as an archetype of care of self. He states, "It makes his role as prototypical artist of life less determinate and therefore more broadly applicable. We can write more of ourselves into him" (*The Art of Living* 187). Mark Jordan argues that Socrates as archetype occurred also in Antiquity, with those who knew much more about his life. Compare, for instance, accounts of him in Plato and Xenophon.



makes sense if we remember that *parrhēsia* is the enactment of one's matrices of truth in relation to other people. Since the true precepts that one is habituating rely on the principle of flexibility and particularity toward the situation, to speak needlessly to people who will not listen is not only useless, it actually enforces behaviors contrary to true discourse. Foucault argues that *parrhēsia* fails in the Athenian democracy not because the democracy has failed, but because democracy itself refuses to allow for the ascendancy that superior virtue confers upon an individual. Indeed, there is a "necessary, indispensable, and fragile caesura that true discourse cannot fail to introduce into a democracy" (GSA 168) because, "[t]he truth can be told in a city and political structure only by way of the marking, maintenance and institutionalization of an essential division between the good and the bad" (CV 44).

Several correctives arise during this period to attempt to circumvent this caesura, but Foucault rejects them as impractical for his contemporary world.<sup>326</sup> What Foucault

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<sup>326</sup> Plato tries to deal with this problem by speaking directly to the soul of the prince, at least in Letter 7, the letter discussed by Foucault (CV 660-61). Here he seeks to bring into concert the philosophizing subject and the subject who was governing properly in the person of the prince through a certain type of pedagogy (GSA 264-65). The other option is to recover the second classical meaning of *parrhēsia*, which is frank speech as reproach. Foucault examines the tradition of simply speaking truth to power, despite the inability to change anything through this speech act, in his examination of Euripides' *Ion*. Here, Creusa remonstrates with Apollo, who impregnated her and then abandoned her, hoping their son would die. When he does not, Apollo tries to murder him (GSA 122-24). Creusa here has no hope of moving Apollo to correct these injustices; she simply speaks because she has nothing left to lose, nothing but her tears. Thus, she becomes the model for an agonistic discourse. As Foucault says, "[t]he only means of combat for someone who is at once the victim of an injustice and completely weak is an agonistic discourse, but one constructed around this unequal structure" (GSA 124). We might say that the only truth she can speak that represents the truth of her being is reproach. Although this may not lead to a change in the behavior of those in power, it is necessary in an effort to limit their injustice or their madness. In the face of this madness, the parrhesiast "will get up, stand up, speak, and tell the truth [...] he will tell the truth against the master's foolishness, madness, and blindness, and thereby limit the master's madness. From the moment when there is no more *parrhēsia*, men, citizens, everyone is doomed to the master's madness" (GSA 148). However, for Foucault, neither of these options serve as models in the face of the paradox of *parrhēsia* and democracy, the first because we cannot return to a world of

will propose instead is the efficacy of the personal and intimate mode of *parrhēsia*, what we explored in the previous section. One reason for his preference for this mode is his belief that its historical context, Imperial Rome, represents the pinnacle of the care of the self, as well as being an analogue to our own time. As he says, "[i]t is this period [the first and second centuries AD] that I would like to select, because it appears to me to be a veritable golden age in the history of care of the self" (HS 79). Although *parrhēsia* took many forms in this world, including teacher-student and philosopher-patron relationships, Foucault focuses mainly on the less institutionalized and more fluid relationship between friends. In this case, *parrhēsia* speaks to the individual's soul, rather than to the *polis* as it had done in pre-Socratic days. Foucault says that during the imperial period, "there developed something very new and very important, which is a new ethic, not in the order of discourse in general, but of verbal relationship with the Other" (HS 158). This non-structured relationship with the other allows for the direction of conscience both for the other and for oneself. More than political *parrhēsia* it corresponds to the real work of the subjectivation of true discourse. However, Foucault notes that while this practice of self takes place between two people, it is also "integrated, mixed, interlaced with a whole network of diverse social relations" (HS 197). Foucault's focus on these interpersonal relationships of care suggests their usefulness for his own thought in the present. Clearly, the open and strategic relationship of friendship forms one of the only long lasting platforms for the contemporary individual to learn to care for herself. While we do have

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prince's and kings, and the second because it may have effects in the world in terms of limiting power, but it does not explicitly allow *parrhēsia* to contribute to care of the self.

modern masters and teachers in the form of self-help experts, a whole thriving industry of them, they suffer from many of the same problems as classical charlatans, using flattery and lies to extract money from suffering individuals, failing to practice what they preach in the form of a true parrhesiast, unable to really care for others in the intimate and generous way that is necessary for the long work of conversion to the self. So we see in the love between Seneca and Lucilius and Marcus and Fronto a possible way forward and way out.

However, this story is of course not one of an uncomplicated march into the future because something has been lost in this period; in the turn to the self, these imperial philosophers have largely turned away from the world. Politics has dropped out. In the Greek city-state, care of the self was viewed as preparatory for political governance (HS 428). However, in the late imperial period, this becomes reversed, and there is what Foucault terms an auto-finalization of the self (HS 429). No longer concerned with how to live the good life, individuals become focused on how to create the correct relationship with themselves (HS 171). This is represented for instance in Epictetus' depiction of Zeus as the model of care of self. For Epictetus, Foucault notes,

*epimeleia heautou* in its pure state, in its total circularity [...] is what characterizes the element of the divine. What is Zeus? Zeus is the being who lives for himself, lives in total independence; reflecting on the nature of the government that he exercises, on himself and on others; conversing with his own thoughts; talking with himself; this is the portrait of the sage; this is the portrait of Zeus. (HS 439-40)

However, this is actually confusing the parrhesiast with the sage, according to Foucault. Zeus need not have any relationships with those around him in order to achieve perfect care of self; he is self-sufficient. The world here is not a test of the efficacy of the

philosophy one practices, but a testing ground for the self. This may seem like the same thing, but it is not. In the first case, the individual remains open to continual transformation as she is impacted by the effects of her philosophical activity in the world. In the second, the suffering and difficulties of the world are viewed as ways to retreat more fully into the aspirational self, of creating stronger philosophic ramparts. The feedback loop has weakened. In other words, in the first and second century AD, "people had dropped interrogations on the truth and on political power and wondered about questions of morality" (RM 1518). As we know, many philosophers, including Seneca, suggest that one must retire from politics and public life in order to be able to care for the self at all. So here we have a situation in which one cares for the self for oneself. One finds one's reward in the self that one has cared for. "In a word, the care of the self that was for Plato clearly open to the question of the city, others, *politeia*, *dikaiosunê*, etc., appears--at first glance at least, in the period of which I speak, 1st-2nd century--to be closed upon itself" (HS 171).

Foucault insists that the thinkers of late Antiquity did not view this autofinalization as problematic. He asks the questions: If life is lived as a constant test of self, and the world should be understood as simply the location of this test, what is the test for? To what end the creation of an adequacy of self to self? He responds that thinkers such as Seneca and Epictetus "didn't theorize the question: 'What does this life as preparation prepare one for'" (HS 427-28)? They were not interested in this question. This is immediately problematic for Foucault because Christianity ultimately was interested. The life as test is preparation for immortality. However, I would suggest that

the erasure of politics from the heart of care of the self is problematic for Foucault for two other reasons. First, the vacuum left by the auto-finalization of self is filled by the law. If previously the relationship of self to self was mediated by the city, with the advent of Christianity it comes to be mediated by the law, according to Foucault. As we will explore in our final chapter on freedom, Foucault will argue that all relationships are now mediated by law, one of the least creative modes of relationality. Perhaps equally as important, autofinalization weakens the links to the community. In the imperial period Foucault identifies much less discussion of the community of practice, and more emphasis on the intimate relationship between friends. While this intimate relationship remains crucial for Foucault in attempting to discuss care of the self in his own time, he needs to recuperate the emphasis on community as well because this type of relationality allows for the circularity of transformation to be productive, and it insists upon a commitment to improve the world, for oneself and for others.

### *The Barking of Dogs*

Both fortunately and unfortunately, as Foucault frequently notes, we cannot return to the world of the Greeks, with their strict hierarchies and legion of effectively subhuman laborers. Nor obviously would we want to. Most of us do not live in small, tight-knit communities; we live in a roiling and complex cosmopolitan world reminiscent of the imperial period. So, if Foucault wants to retain the mode of *parrhēsia* that adheres to intimate personal relationships and yet recover the mediation of politics, are there resources in Antiquity to model such a possibility? As it turns out, there are: the Cynics.

According to Ottavio Marzocca, "while the *polis* began its decline and the Macedonian monarchy announced the victory of the empire over the urban context of politics, the Cynics established their parrhesiastic way of living and expressing themselves in the city's public squares, in that political space par excellence that politics itself was abandoning or was reducing to the position of a pure exhibition of sovereign power. The figure of the Cynic philosopher [...] reanimated the site of politics."<sup>327</sup>

Perhaps the first thing to say is that Foucault acknowledges that the Cynics are not generally thought of as pivotal figures in the philosophy of Antiquity. Despite the fact that his last year of lectures at the Collège de France focuses on the figure of the Cynic, he says, Cynicism "remains, at least from a certain point of view, marginal and borderline" (CV 310).<sup>328</sup> However, from Foucault's perspective, the Cynics represent the second crucial way that *parrhēsia* appears in the imperial period. The first is "the courage to tell the truth to someone who wants help and guide his ethical formation" (CV 310). This is the relationship of friendship and soul service that we have been discussing. The second is "the courage to manifest, to and against all, the truth about himself, to show what he is" (CV 310).<sup>329</sup> This could be seen as an offshoot of the second classical version of *parrhēsia*, speaking truth to power, but without this speaking being a last resort. This

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<sup>327</sup> Ottavio Marzocca, "Philosophical *Parrhēsia* and Transpolitical Freedom," *Foucault Studies* 15 (February 2013): 134.

<sup>328</sup> Interestingly, Foucault does not have time to actually elaborate this point in his lecture. Rather this is taken from a brief appendix tacked onto the end of the transcript of his final lecture for the year, and seems to be taken from his own notes.

<sup>329</sup> Again, these points appear in the notes following the final lecture of the year, rather than having been communicated in the lecture itself. The editors obviously felt, however, that given the concluding nature of these remarks, they would be important to include in the written account of the course.

second type, Foucault argues, is the *parrhēsia* primarily manifested by the Cynics, and, according to Foucault, only the Cynics. We see here that Foucault is reframing classical philosophy for his own purposes, taking a group that he himself suggests was not central, and making them central to his own thought. Arnold Davidson says that Foucault focuses on "the apex of philosophical counter-conduct, namely Cynic *parrhesia* and the Cynic way of life."<sup>330</sup> It is this type of move, an aberrant interpretation perhaps, that has led to significant criticism on the part of classicists and other historians throughout Foucault's career.<sup>331</sup> However, here, like in most of the other cases of creative history that he vociferously defends, Foucault views the interpretation of history as a form of creation. He says in "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,"

[i]f interpretation were the slow exposure of the meaning hidden in an origin, then only metaphysics could interpret the development of humanity. But if interpretation is the violent or surreptitious appropriation of a system of rules, which in itself has no essential meaning, in order to impose a direction, to bend it to a new will, to force its participation in a different game, and to subject it to secondary rules, then the development of humanity is a series of interpretations. (NGH 86)

Foucault is speaking here of the genealogist's task, to uncover power struggles in history and the ways in which they have been covered over. However, it becomes evident in his later work that his own interpretations seek to force the system of rules to play a new game, leading hopefully to new developments in the history of humanity.

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<sup>330</sup> Arnold I. Davidson, "In Praise of Counter Conduct," *History of the Human Sciences* 24, no. 4 (October 2011): 38.

<sup>331</sup> Two excellent examples are Martha Nussbaum, "Affections of the Greeks," *The New York Times* (November 10, 1985): accessed November 30, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/books/00/12/17/specials/foucault-use.html>; and Mark Poster, "Foucault and the Tyranny of Greece," in *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, ed. David Couzens Hoy (Cambridge, MA; Blackwell, 1999), 205-220.

Why does he find the Cynics so appropriate to this task? First, the Cynics take the concept of philosophy as critique of society to the extreme. While care of the self always possessed a critical function, this aspect intensified in the imperial period (HS 90). Across philosophical schools, society was portrayed as inherently corrupting, misleading individuals literally from the moment of birth. As Cicero writes in his *Tusculan Disputations*, "[a]s soon as we are born and we are admitted into our families, we find ourselves in a entirely false environment where the perversion of judgments is complete, so much so that we can say that we have suckled error with our mothers' milk" (HS 92). Similarly, Foucault says of the individual in *stultitia*, "the subject is less ignorant than malformed, or rather deformed, vicious, taken by bad habits. This is above all founded on the fact that the individual, even at the start, even at the moment of birth, even as Seneca says, when he is in the womb of his mother, has never naturally had the relationship to rational will that characterizes correct moral action and the morally valid subject" (HS 125). Due to this, "care of the self must completely reverse the system of values conveyed and imposed by the family" (HS 93). The Cynics felt this even more keenly than others. One of the main precepts of Cynicism was to "change the value of the currency" (CV 221). This was understood as "changing the custom, breaking with it, breaking the rules, habits, conventions and laws" (CV 224). The Cynic's struggle with his own passions and appetites

is also a battle against customs, against conventions, against institutions, against laws, against the whole of a certain state of humanity [...] Cynic combat is an explicit, intentional, and constant aggression directed at humanity in general, humanity in its real life, and with the horizon or objective of changing it, changing its moral attitude (its *êthos*) but, at the same time and thereby, changing its habits, conventions, and ways of living. (CV 2257-58)



This struggle against *stultitia* is not in and of itself different from the perspective of contemporaneous philosophical schools. However, the Cynics took their critique one step further and waged war on philosophy itself.

The basic premise of classical thought was that philosophers live the true life (*alēthēs bios*). "True," in this case, means several things according to Foucault. First, it is "that whose being is not only not hidden or concealed, but also whose being is not altered by any element that is foreign to it at which, thus, alters and ends up concealing what it is in reality" (CV 201). Second, truth means being "straight, conforming to rectitude, with what is right" (CV 2). Finally, truth is "that which exists and maintains itself in the face of any change, that which maintains itself in its identity, immutability, and incorruptibility" (CV 202). Based on these principles, Plato outlines the true life. It is the life of non-concealment, "a life which can face the full light of day and manifest itself without reticence to the sight of all" (CV 204). "[T]he true life is a straight life, that is to say a life that conforms with the principles, the rules, the *nomos* [law, custom]" (CV 206). The true life is unvariegated, because a "life without unity, [a] mixed life, [a] life dedicated to multiplicity, is a life without truth" (CV 205). Finally, "the true life is one which avoids disturbance, change, corruption, and the fall, and which maintains itself without change in the identity of its being" (CV 207). The true life possesses unity because it is based on the subjectivation of true discourse. Plato is not talking about a unitary subject that never fundamentally changes, but a life based on adherence to true principles that do not change. This definition, proposed by Plato, carried over into the imperial period as the basis of the philosophical care of the self.

Foucault argues that the Cynics interpret these precepts both literally and radically, which of course amount to the same thing viewed from different perspectives. "[B]y pushing these themes to their extreme consequence, they reveal a life which is precisely the opposite of what was traditionally recognized as the true life" (CV 209). For instance, for the Cynics, "non-concealment, far from being the revival and the acceptance of those traditional rules of propriety which mean that one blushes to commit evil before others, must be the blaze of the naturalness of the human being in view of all" (CV 234). What this means in practice was that Cynics live their entire lives exposed to the public. They sleep and eat in public, which given the social customs of the time is already improper, but moreover, they excrete, masturbate, and engage in sexual intercourse in public, scandalizing their fellow citizens. Thus, "Cynicism, in applying the principle of non-concealment literally, exploded the codes of propriety with which this principle remained, implicitly or explicitly, associated," even for other philosophers who agree with the principle (CV 235). Similarly, we see the notion of the unalloyed, unvariegated life manifested bodily in the form of Cynic poverty, as utter poverty represents the condition of complete autarky and ataraxy for the Cynic. In the view of Hellenistic and Roman society, however, poverty and especially begging were extremely shameful, and few philosophers of the Stoic or Epicurean schools would agree that it possessed any benefit for care of self. As Foucault notes, "[a]*doxia* is the bad reputation, it is the image that is left to one when one has been insulted, despised, and humiliated by others, none of which, obviously, ever had any positive value for the Greeks and the Romans" (CV 240). Thus, by transcending shame, Cynics challenge social value to its roots. A final example

is the idea of the straight life. For most imperial period philosophers "[t]he straight life was a life conforming to nature, but it was also a life in conformity with the laws, or at least certain laws, rules, and customs that were conventional between men" (CV 242). However, the Cynics rejected this definition, indexing straightness entirely to nature.

Foucault says,

[n]o convention, no human prescription may be accepted in the Cynic life if it does not conform exactly to what is found in nature, and in nature alone. Thus, the Cynics, of course, reject marriage, reject the family, practice, or claim to practice, free union. Thus they reject all taboos and conventions concerning food. Diogenes supposedly tried to eat raw meat. It even appears [...] that he died from trying to eat a live octopus, which choked him. (CV 243)

Thus, Cynicism represents the scandalous reversal of the aspects of the true life, and involves "practicing the scandal of the truth in and through one's life" (CV 161). This puts other philosophers in a strange position. On the one hand, they recognize their own precepts in Cynicism, and yet are repulsed by the caricature that is made of it. This may be one of the reasons for the vicious philosophical denunciations of Cynicism. Foucault notes, "[w]hatever zeal ancient philosophers had for arguing with each other, with whatever severity they opposed certain philosophical schools, like, for example, the Epicureans, I do not believe that any portraits of the philosopher reach the level of violence as those that are presented of Cynicism" (CV 182). Foucault attributes this to a visceral reaction to the perceived perversion of the philosopher's own basic truths. As he says, Cynicism is

[t]he broken mirror in which every philosopher can and must recognize himself, in which he can and must recognize the very image of philosophy, the reflection of what it is and what must be, the reflection of what he is and would like to be. And at the same time, in this mirror, he sees something like a grimace, a violent, ugly, unsightly deformation in which he cannot in any case recognize either himself or philosophy. (CV 214)

In fact, it is this very paradox that so intrigues Foucault. He says,

the Cynic constitution of the philosophical life as scandal is the historical mark, the first manifestation, the point of departure for what has been, I believe, the great exteriorization of the problem of the philosophical life in relation to philosophy, to philosophical practice, to the practice of philosophical discourse. This is why Cynicism interests me and what I would like to try to mark off with it. (CV 218-19)

Despite, as he has noted, its liminal place in classical philosophy.

For Foucault, the life of scandal is tied directly to the manifestation of *parrhēsia* in the discourse and body of the Cynic. Foucault notes that despite the vociferous criticisms of the Cynics, the term *parrhēsia* was frequently applied to them in the texts of Antiquity. This *parrhēsia* had less to do with their soul-service or individual guidance of others and more to do with their corporeal presentation. As Foucault states, "there is not only a relationship of conformity of conduct, but of physical conformity, of corporal conformity, so to speak, between the Cynic and the truth" (CV 283). What this meant was that "cynicism makes life, existence, *bios*, what could be called an alethurgy, a manifestation of the truth" (CV 159). In this sense, the life of non-concealment did not represent a philosophical ideal for the Cynic, as it did with other philosophical schools. Rather, the life of non-concealment "is the shaping, the staging of life in its material and everyday reality: under the actual gaze of others, of all others, or at any rate of the greatest possible number of others" (CV 233). In essence, the life of the Cynic is the subjectivation of truth laid bare to the eyes of all, made public in every aspect of its practice. Unlike Stoic care of self, in which one might recount one's actions, successes, and failures to a close friend and seek his guidance in improving the correspondence between the actual self and the aspirational self, the Cynic puts himself in the hands of

all, supporters and detractors, and makes them his guides and his test. A good example of this alethurgy is Cynic poverty. While all philosophical schools in the imperial period engaged in exercises in poverty, for example sleeping for several days on a bare pallet, or eating the slaves' food and giving them their own, they did not idealize poverty as such, but simply used it to cultivate an indifference to, and thus self-sufficiency from, wealth. The Cynics, in contrast, literalized autarky as "an elaboration of oneself in the form of visible poverty" (CV 238). For the Cynic, this "mode of life (staff, beggar's pouch, poverty, roaming, begging) has very precise functions in relation to [his] *parrhēsia*, [his] truth telling" (CV 157). First, insofar as his literal condition of poverty manifests the truth of his commitment to living a natural life, poverty represents the "condition of possibility on relation to truth-telling" (CV 157). Second, the Cynic mode of being functions to strip away everything that is unnecessary, pointless obligations, customs, and beliefs (CV 158). By cultivating poverty, the Cynic both prepares and allows himself to embark on more rigorous discipline. Finally, "this mode of life, in its independence, its fundamental freedom, reveals what life really is, and, consequently, what life ought to be" (CV 158). When the Cynics indicate that this life is the ultimate form of freedom, they are indicating not just a distancing and autonomy from conventions and external events over which they have no control, but the very freedom of animality, in the sense of having no ties or obligations, no fear of death or deprivation, a complete animalistic sovereignty.

In fact, this animality, for which the Cynics are so often castigated, is viewed as an ideal and a test. As Foucault says, "[a]nanimality is a way of being with regard to oneself, a way of being which must take the form of a constant test" (CV 245). Ian Cutler

adds, "[t]he Cynic claims all acts--right down to his bodily functions--as a language of criticism."<sup>332</sup> Cutler concludes that Cynics may not have promoted animality simply because it accorded more strongly to their beliefs about nature, but also because harnessing animality allowed them to parody civilized society: "What is clear, is [Diogenes'] ability to exploit a huge credibility gap in behavior between, on the one hand, people's appetite for instant gratification and hedonism, and on the other their sham sophistication and moralizing idealism."<sup>333</sup> Thus, by living life as the scandal of the truth, the Cynics highlight the inadequacy and hypocrisy of social norms. Jason Springs argues that living a norm in a different way exposes it: "this entails the expressive capacity of making explicit the norms implicit in the practices and subjecting them to examination and criticism. Such critical explication makes those norms candidates for inspection and revision."<sup>334</sup>

Although the Cynic lifestyle lays its adherents open to humiliation and a bad reputation, the Cynics themselves view these humiliations as exercises in cultivating self-discipline and detachment. According to Foucault, "this dishonor is actually sought after by the Cynics; through the active seeking of humiliating situations which are valuable because they train the Cynic in resistance to everything to do with opinions, beliefs, and conventions" (CV 241). Ian Cutler agrees with this, stating, "Diogenes seems to be putting forward a positive alternative to the fragile civilized existence to which

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<sup>332</sup> Cutler, *Cynicism from Diogenes to Dilbert*, 36.

<sup>333</sup> Cutler, 41.

<sup>334</sup> Jason Springs, "'Dismantling the Master's House': Freedom as Ethical Practice in Brandom and Foucault," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 37, no. 3 (September 2009): 437.

conventional society clings [...] The Cynics were not abject, they were simply beyond abjection."<sup>335</sup> Moreover, the suffering body and soul allow for the subjectivation of truth, the truth of the illusory nature of suffering. Foucault states, "[h]e has suffered, endured, and deprived himself so that the truth takes shape, in some way, in his own life, in his own existence, takes shape in his own body" (CV 160). One manifests the courage of the truth and thus engages in *parrhēsia*, as Foucault claims, because "one risks one's life, not simply by telling the truth, to tell it, but by the very way in which one lives. In all the meanings of the French word, one 'exposes' one's life" (CV 216). This recalls Foucault's focus on the work of Nietzsche, Bataille, and Blanchot, who attempt to activate the truth of their own desubjectivation by trying to achieve a way of life that is "as close as possible to the unlivable. What is required is the maximum intensity, and, at the same time, impossibility" (E 862).

Of course, one might ask, how is this different from the martyr, from the Christian renunciation of self? According to Foucault, the main difference is that the Cynic does not attempt to destroy the self. The return to animality, patently unChristian to begin with, is the construction of a true self, a self as truth, which corresponds more fully to nature (CV 245). Similarly, the Cynic's practices of renunciation are not intended to destroy pleasure, but to enhance it. "[W]hat Cynicism seeks to do is to reduce one's diet, reduce what one eats and drinks to the basic things that give the maximum pleasure with the minimum cost, minimum dependence" (CV 291). Moreover, like Socrates, Cynics view *parrhēsia* as a divine mission. Foucault says of Socrates, "if Socrates occupies

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<sup>335</sup> Ian Cutler, *Cynicism from Diogenes to Dilbert*, 25.

himself with others, it is evident that he is not occupying himself with himself, or in any case, that he neglects, in favor of this activity, a whole series of other activities that are generally thought of as interesting, profitable, favorable" (HS 9). However, we know that these things that Socrates gives up--power, wealth, a life of political activity--are not activities that would have been allowed by his care of self in the first place, and thus they should not be thought of strictly as sacrificial. Socrates is given a task by the god at Delphi, and though this eventually leads to his death, Socrates cannot have lived otherwise and still have been faithful to the truth that he subjectivates, to his role as parrhesiast. The Cynics should be viewed in the same way. Iris Murdoch suggests, "[t]hat moral improvement involves suffering is usually true; but the suffering is the by-product of a new orientation and not in any sense the end in itself."<sup>336</sup> Thus, although his life is difficult and requires a strong commitment, even to the point of being potentially sacrificial, Foucault notes, "in this sacrifice of oneself, the philosopher actually finds his joy and the fulfillment of his existence" (CV 256). In fact, a true Cynic does not view the deprivation of social ties, status, food, and habitation as a sacrifice because these things are of no value to him. The shrugging off of these things rather represents his freedom and strength. As Foucault says, his is "that sovereignty which manifests itself in the radiance of the joy of someone who accepts his destiny and consequently knows no lack, sorrow, or fear" (CV 282). Being visible for others, in the full glory of his naturalness is, for the Cynic, "the concrete form of freedom" (ESS 1533).

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<sup>336</sup> Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of the Good*, 68.



However, despite the sometimes aggressive rejection of social norms, Cynics engage in their struggle because they love humanity. Demetrius the Cynic teaches, "the world is a common habitat in which all men are joined together to constitute precisely this community" (HS 225). Although different from the personal dyad that characterizes Stoicism, the Cynic bond to the other is no less intense. As Foucault notes, "[a]n individual bond with individuals, but with all individuals, is what characterizes, in its freedom as well as in its obligatory form, the Cynic's tie to all the other men who make up humankind" (CV 277). Thus, although the Cynic's *parrhēsia* is often in the form of "insult and denunciation," it is not directed explicitly toward individuals, but toward power (GSO 287). The goal of the Cynics' *parrhēsia*, according to Foucault, is to "trouble the individual in his mode of existence, to force him, pull him, push him, to adopt another mode of existence" (HS 148). Cutler notes, "Cynicism does not claim to make sense of the human world; its mission is to shake it up--sometimes violently--and to expose it for the unpredictable and often ugly beast that it is. Cynicism merely points to the world in which humans themselves, through their misguided belief that the world can be shaped to their will--create the very chaos and disorder they seek to control."<sup>337</sup> This is reminiscent of Socrates in his role as the gadfly. In reference to Socrates' care of self and others, Foucault notes, "the care of oneself is a sort of thorn which must be planted there, in the flesh of men, which must be driven into their existence and which is a principle of agitation, a principle of movement, a principle of permanent anxiety in the course of existence" (HS 9). Because of this aggressiveness and disregard for the way others see

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<sup>337</sup> Cutler, *Cynicism from Diogenes to Dilbert*, 51.

them, Cynics can be portrayed as brutal and uncaring, says Cutler, "even when the opposite is actually the case."<sup>338</sup>

In this mode of existence that is oriented toward care of others, the Cynic is regarded in two ways. First as a dog. The Greek word *kynikos* derives from the word for dog, *kyon*, and originated as a denunciation of the Cynic lifestyle. Arnold Davidson states, "[t]he Cynic discourse that challenged all of the dependencies on social institutions, the Cynic recourse to scandalous behavior that called into question collective habits and standards of decency, Cynic courage in the face of danger--all of this parrhesiastic conduct could not but result in the association of this behavior with 'dog-like' conduct."<sup>339</sup> However, Foucault notes that the Cynics embraced the name. From his own perspective, the Cynic considers himself a dog because he is discriminating, *diakritikos*, he quickly separates friend from foe. Also he is *phulaktikos*, a guard dog. He does not only determine friend and foe, good and bad, he warns those he loves of the approach of a foe, even one they might believe is their friend--such as wealth, possessions, and fame (CV 224). As Foucault says, the Cynic is of service because "he battles, because he bites, because he attacks" (CV 257). The Cynic is also conceived as a scout for the main rest of humanity. Foucault notes that Epictetus uses the term scout in his portrait of the Cynics, a term usually reserved for military discourse. Here the philosopher is a "scout in the game of tests, sent in advance to confront the roughest enemies, and who returns to say that the enemies are not dangerous, or not very

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<sup>338</sup> Cutler, 157.

<sup>339</sup> Arnold I. Davidson, "In Praise of Counter Conduct," 38. For this reason, Davidson concludes, "Cynic provocation stands as an emblem of the risks and the intensities of counter-conduct" (38).

dangerous, not as dangerous as one believed, and to say how one can conquer them" (HS 423). Similarly, Foucault notes, "[t]he Cynic's function [will be to locate] the enemy armies" and scout out the best locations, the best strategic points of attack that "will benefit us in our struggle" (CV 154).<sup>340</sup> According to the Cynic, this task of serving humanity through exposing oneself to danger, of being the vanguard in the struggle against the enemy, is assigned by God (CV 270). Thus, the Cynic in his physical and existential performance of *parrhēsia* both forges a path through the wilderness of social convention and superfluous desires and needs, and attempts to drive those he loves to that path through his barking and biting.

Another useful aspect of Cynic life from Foucault's perspective is that they prioritize ways of being over doctrines. Unlike most philosophical schools, Cynic care of self and others does not occur in a closed community or sect that is attempting to convey specific precepts. Rather Cynicism "would be a sort of militancy in the open, that is to say a militancy addressed to absolutely everyone, a militancy which precisely does not require an education (a *paideia*), but which resorts to a certain number of violent and drastic means, not so much in order to train people and teach them, as to shake them up and convert them, convert them abruptly" (CV 262). So, to begin with, we have here an intense dramatization of the *parrhēsiatic* moment whose purpose is to spur conversion. The Cynics do not wait for the appropriate time, place, or attitude toward the other. They have no regard for the *kairos*. They fling themselves at anyone who can hear, hoping to create a crack in some of their listeners' matrices of truth. At this same moment, and

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<sup>340</sup> Brackets in text.

because of their wide-reaching and aggressive stance, they risk derision and bodily harm at all times. In addition, Foucault notes that the Cynics had little regard for the importance to philosophy of *paideia*. Unlike Seneca and Epictetus, the Cynics are not learning about the stars, about the physical world, about history. "In fact, for the Cynics, the function of philosophical teaching was not essentially to pass on knowledge but, especially and above all, to give to the individuals that it formed a training that was at once intellectual and moral. It was a matter of arming them for life so that they were thus able to confront events" (CV 189). Of course, as we know, all philosophical schools hoped to train their adherents to prepare them for future events. What is different here is that Cynic teachings did not dwell on doctrines, but rather highlighted episodes in individuals' lives; their teachings revolved around what Foucault calls the philosophical hero (CV 195). Cutler indicates that this mode of philosophy also derives from the teachings of Socrates, but came down from him, not through Plato, but through another of his students, Antisthenes, who was revered as the founder of Cynicism. In contrast to Platonic thought and the philosophies that arose from it, Cynicism thus "rejects systems, categories, and universal truths--not least with regard to its own philosophy."<sup>341</sup> In that the Cynic lives a life of total non-concealment, it is immediately evident what one must do in order to train oneself; one must give away one's possessions and live a life of radical poverty; one must return to a pure state of animality free of shame, fear, and sorrow. This return to basics indicates a belief in the total corruption of society. Through the preaching of a certain model of existence, Cynics hope to strengthen humans to

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<sup>341</sup> Cutler, *Cynicism from Diogenes to Dilbert*, 12.

combat this moral enfeeblement (CV 194). Thus, Foucault recognizes in the *parrhēsia* of the Cynics the emergence of the philosophical hero. Foucault emphasizes that this hero is neither the sage, nor the Christian holy man. Rather "the philosophical hero modeled a number of existences, represented a sort of practical matrix for the philosophical attitude" (CV 195).

It makes sense that Foucault, though potentially uncomfortable with the aggressiveness and lack of attention to particularity of Cynic *parrhēsia*, would find this model valuable in several ways. First, he would be sympathetic to the idea of the philosopher as vanguard. It is clear that Foucault views his own role and the role of true philosophers as that of shaking up the complacent assumptions of those around them. However, he does not believe that philosophers should give prescriptions about how everyone should live. As he states in "Truth, Power, Self,"

We know very well that, even with the best intentions, those programs become a tool, an instrument of oppression [...] My role--and that is too emphatic a word--is to show people that they are much freer than they feel, that people accept as truth, as evidence, some themes which have been built up at a certain moment in history, and that this so-called evidence can be criticized and destroyed. To change something in the minds of people--that's the role of an intellectual. (TPS 10)

Yet, despite claims to the contrary, Foucault is also not an elitist. He believes, like the Cynics, that a philosopher need not have specialized training or a certain level of education to engage in care of the self. Indeed, he asks why all people cannot practice an art of existence. Thus, his conception of the vanguard is not tied to an intelligentsia, but to a group of people who demonstrate the courage to explore different modes of existence, i.e., the critical community. It is the obligation of these people through the corporal and verbal manifestations of *parrhēsia*, through a combination of the two

models of parrhesiastic truth-telling, to show others that the enemy is less dangerous than they believed, that they are freer than they feel. In this way, Foucault argues, we can begin to reconceptualize the history of philosophy as "a form at the same time ethical and heroic" (CV 196).

Of course, one might ask, how does this reintroduce justice and politics into the vacuum left by the autofinalization of the self? The final and perhaps most important example provided by the Cynics is "the theme of a life whose otherness must lead to a change of the world" (CV 264). This other world should not be conceived of in the Platonic or Christian sense of an after life or an ideal world beyond this world. Rather "it is a question of another state of the world, another 'catastasis' of the world, a city of sages in which there would no longer be any need for Cynic militancy" (CV 288).<sup>342</sup> Thus, the Cynics conceive their mode of being "as the practice of combativeness on the horizon of which is an other world [*un monde autre*]" (CV 264). In *Courage of the Truth*, Foucault asks himself, in regards to this Cynic mode of being, "must not the philosophical life, the true life, necessarily be a life which is radically other" (CV 228)? About a hundred pages later he answers his question in the affirmative: "what I would like to stress in conclusion is this: there is no establishment of truth without an essential position of otherness; the truth is never the same; there can be truth only in the form of the other world and the other life" (CV 311).<sup>343</sup> Thus, "the practice of self will have as its major function, or as

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<sup>342</sup> This is also from a section appended to the transcript, taken from "the manuscript."

<sup>343</sup> Also appended.

one of its major functions, to correct, to repair, to reestablish a state which for that matter may never have in fact existed, but for which nature suggests the principle" (HS 93-94).

How can we know that Cynic transformation of the world forms an integral part of Foucault's model of ethical subject formation? We know because he lives these precepts in his own life and promotes them in his work. In his examination of the Cynics, Foucault notes that the point of their other life is to "get back to what [the world] is in truth" (CV 289). This would have been based on the Cynic belief in natural law. However, for Foucault there is no abiding truth to the world, or some idyllic state of reality to which we can return. Rather, the purpose of transformation for Foucault is to continue to open up possibilities, to activate freedom, to seek the new. Ian Cutler notes that the Cynics believed in circular, rather than linear, history; thus, "[e]ach individual and each generation have the same opportunity for success or for failure as the next."<sup>344</sup> Foucault may have taken this challenge to heart, for he frequently acted the Cynic in his own life. Paul Veyne says of Foucault, he "was not afraid of rows and insisted that courage is always physical: courage means a courageous body."<sup>345</sup> One might recall, for example, Foucault's clashes with police at the Vincennes campus in Paris. According to Richard Wolin,

In January 1969, during the first of many campus battles to come, Foucault had his first lesson in streetfighting. With a small group of Vincennes professors, including his partner Daniel Defert, he helped mount an occupation of one of Vincennes' main buildings. When the riot police arrived with truncheons and tear-gas grenades to evacuate the protestors, Foucault was among the very last to

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<sup>344</sup> Ian Cutler, *Cynicism from Diogenes to Dilbert*, 16.

<sup>345</sup> Paul Veyne, *Foucault*, 139.

leave. Fearless, he retreated up the staircase, barricading the way behind him and hurling missiles below.<sup>346</sup>

Moreover, Foucault, like Diogenes, also seeks to upturn social norms. In "Friendship as a Way of Life," Foucault argues that one goal of becoming homosexual is to eventually impact the lives of heterosexuals as well. Concerning this article, Mark Kingston writes, "Foucault welcomes the disruption of the social order because it is only through such disruption that we can rejuvenate the impoverished relational fabric of our society. He is also quite confident that the general challenge to the normalisation of relationships does not represent a true threat to the stability of society."<sup>347</sup> Foucault makes this clear when he says in the interview, "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress,"

[f]or centuries we have been convinced that between our ethics, our personal ethics, our everyday life, and the great political and social and economic structures, there were analytical relations, and that we couldn't change anything, for instance, in our sex life or our family life, without ruining our economy, our democracy, and so on. I think we have to get rid of this idea of an analytical or necessary link between ethics and other social or political or economic structures. (GE 261)

Clearly, Foucault is not against challenging those larger structures, but he wants to make clear that we cannot foresee the effects of transforming our own lives. Thus, he is all for a performative challenge to social norms values, particularly those growing out of "our bourgeois way of life" (CMF 1061). He says in a fascinating interview with students at the University of Buffalo, "it is good to transcend [these norms and values] in the form of

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<sup>346</sup> Richard Wolin, "Michel Foucault: Biopolitics and Engagement," *theologie.geschichte* 7 (2012): accessed October 13, 2014, <http://aps.sulb.uni-saarland.de/journals/index.php/tg/article/viewArticle/478/517>.

<sup>347</sup> Mark Kingston, "Subversive Friendships: Foucault on Homosexuality and Social Experimentation," *Foucault Studies* 7 (September 2009): 13-14.



a game, in a ludic and ironic form; it is good to be dirty and bearded, to have long hair, to look like a girl when you are a boy (and vice versa). It is necessary to put into play, to show, to transform, and to reverse the systems that we calmly put in order" (CMF 1061). Thus, he demonstrates a preference for Cynic modes of practice in his own life.

His work also subscribes to the Cynic mode of shaking up his audience and leaving them to determine how to subjectivate his truth in their own lives. According to John Muckelbauer, Foucault's writing should not be understood as being about resistance, but as itself *being* resistance; "it would make sense to read his books less as instructions for how to resist than as maps or diagrams of this encounter, the encounter between Foucault and the technologies of power deployed in the production of historical truth."<sup>348</sup> Mark Jordan makes a similar argument in "Foucault's Ironies and the Important Earnestness of Theory," where he argues that rather than writing queer theory, Foucault, in *The History of Sexuality: Volume I*, tells an ironic story about sexed bodies, enacting a mode of distancing from, or ironizing, our most cherished truths.<sup>349</sup> In many ways, it is a Cynical book, an act of *parrhēsia* that "begins by mocking its most earnest readers."<sup>350</sup> Jordan's and Muckelbauer's close readings recall Ian Cutler's description of the devices of the Cynic: action, laughter, silence. He says that, in literary form, the *parrhēsia* of the Cynic seeks to "touch the reader's emotions and imagination in some way to produce a

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<sup>348</sup> John Muckelbauer, "On Reading Differently: Through Foucault's Resistance," *College English* 63, no. 1 (September 2000): 84-85.

<sup>349</sup> Mark D. Jordan, "Foucault's Ironies and the Important Earnestness of Theory," in *Foucault Studies* 14 (September 2012): 7-19.

<sup>350</sup> Jordan, 8.

reaction (anger, surprise, laughter, outrage, etc.), and second, as a consequence of this reaction, produce some critical thinking."<sup>351</sup> What does this pronouncement remind one of, if not Foucault's famous laugh in the preface to *The Order of Things*, where in a properly parrhesiastic, but nonetheless beautifully wrought, passage he says,

[t]his book first arose out of a passage in Borges, out of the laughter that shattered, as I read the passage, all the familiar landmarks of thought—our thought, the thought that bears the stamp of our age and our geography—breaking up all the ordered surfaces and all the planes with which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things and continuing long afterwards to disturb and threaten with collapse our age-old definitions between the Same and the Other.<sup>352</sup>

In ever-tighter circles, Foucault describes his own reaction to the Cynic shock of Borges' piece, and at the same time models and enacts such a moment of *parrhēsia* for his reader.<sup>353</sup>

In his own work, Foucault continually seeks to inspire these moments of shock, anger, silence, even confusion, which tends to be productive of the other three. As he states concerning his own project, "[t]he work of thought is not to denounce the evil that secretly inhabits all that exists, but to sense the danger that menaces all that is habitual, and to render problematic all that is solid. The 'optimism' of thought, if one wants to employ this word, is to know that there is not a golden age" (AGE 1431). Nonetheless, we must start from where we are, on our "specific ground of [...] historical rationality" (PTI 148). For his world, this ground is the Enlightenment, and coincidentally Foucault

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<sup>351</sup> Cutler, 147.

<sup>352</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage, 1994), xv.

<sup>353</sup> I will force my readers to return to *The Order of Things* to read Borges' quote, thus encouraging a parrhesiastic moment.

views its legacy, like the Cynics, as a restless questioning. As he states in "What Is the Enlightenment?" "[f]or the attitude of modernity, the high value of the present is fundamentally tied to a restlessness to imagine it, to imagine it otherwise than it is, and to transform it not by destroying it but by capturing it in what it is. Baudelairean modernity is an exercise where the extreme attention to the real is confronted by the practice of a freedom that at once respects this reality and violates it" (QL 1389). This paradox speaks of the Cynic attitude toward the world, by bringing it to a crisis, the Cynic, the artist, the philosopher reveals what is real about the world, and yet violates that reality, as the Cynic breaks the mirror of philosophic truth, and thus transfigures it.

Foucault highlights the role of the artist in this transfiguration, indicating the modern artist's rejection of conventions, his changing of the currency, and also the importance of *parrhēsia* to the mode of being of the artist. As he states about nineteenth-century artists such as Baudelaire, "[t]he artist's life must not only be sufficiently singular for him to be able to create his work, but his life must be, in some way, a manifestation of art itself in its truth" (CV 173). Here we have the example of artists who have no immediate concern for their political world, and yet through their bodily and existential *parrhēsia* are able to shake up and transform the political and social landscape. He makes a similar comparison in his discussion of philosophers/artists such as Nietzsche, Bataille, and Blanchot. He says, for them "experience is to try to achieve to a certain point a life which is as close as possible to being unlivable. What is required is the maximum intensity, and at the same time, impossibility" (E 862). The purpose of this experience is to pull the subject away from himself, and for Foucault this is the purpose of his own

research and writing. "I have always conceived [my books]," he says, "as experiences specifically aimed at dragging me away from myself, at preventing me from being the same" (E 862). So here we have an allusion to philosophers who cultivated lives that were nearly unlivable connected to one of Foucault's own practices of self, and specifically a practice of self, writing and publishing, that represents his own *parrhēsia*. He even refers to his books in this article in a Cynic mode, as "gestures made in public" (E 866).

In the process of dragging himself away from himself, of living an other life, Foucault intends in his own care of self to help give birth to an other world. In response to those who argue that his histories are not accurate and thus not true, he responds.

I practice a sort of historical fiction. On one hand, I know very well that what I say is not true. A historian can very well say of what I have written, 'It is not the truth.' I've done a history of the birth of psychiatry. I know very well that what I have done is, from a historical point of view, partial, exaggerated. Maybe I've ignored certain elements that would have contradicted me. But my books had an effect on the way in which people perceived madness. And thus my book and the thesis I developed there have truth in reality today. I try to provoke an interaction between our reality and that which we know of our past history. If I succeed, this interaction will produce real effects on our present history. My hope is that my books assume their truth once they are written and not before. (FE 859)

In addition to being perhaps the most trenchant response to a criticism of manipulating one's sources ever written, and the statement of a massively ambitious intellectual and political program, this passage outlines the purpose of the life of care of self. Through the practice of *parrhēsia*, Foucault hopes to affect his own history. In fact, Zachary Simpson notes that when Foucault says, "fictions are experiments [expérience] in truth," "expérience" in French has the sense of "experience" and "experiment."<sup>354</sup> Thus, one

might experience different forms of truth at the same time that one experiments with them. Donna Haraway contends, along with Foucault, "[l]ike facts, fiction refers to action, but fiction is about the act of fashioning, forming, inventing, as well as feigning or feinting."<sup>355</sup> Drawn from a present participle, fiction is in process and still prone to falling afoul of facts, but also liable to showing something we do not yet know, but will know."<sup>356</sup> By imagining another world and living another life, Foucault hopes to bring that world into reality. The purpose of his books is not to highlight some truth, but to create in his readers, "an experience that allows a transformation, a transformation of the relationship that we have to ourselves and to the world where, until then, we had recognized ourselves without problems" (E 864-65). Timothy O'Leary plays on the dual sense of fiction as creative writing and world making when he says, "fiction (in the broadest sense) relates to reality by opening up virtual spaces which allow us to engage in a potentially transformative relation with the world; to bring about that which does not exist and to transform that which does exist." It is for this reason that Foucault contends, "the truth of my books is in the future" (FE 860).

For Foucault, neither the *parrhēsia* of the intimate guide nor that of the barking dog is sufficient in themselves to open possibilities for new ways of life. Few are likely to follow the life of the Cynic, with its near superhuman discipline and embrace of social rejection. Nonetheless, the Cynic remains necessary to the world as a demonstration of

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<sup>354</sup> Zachary Simpson, "The Truths We Tell Ourselves: Foucault on *Parrhesia*," *Foucault Studies* 13 (May 2012): 104.

<sup>355</sup> In is in this sense that Foucault's fictions are gambles.

<sup>356</sup> Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto*, 203.

the arbitrary and dangerous effects of social customs and values. Equally necessary is the intimate relationship of the community of practice. Cut adrift from the biological certainty that characterized the precepts of the Cynics, new ways of life must grow up around groups committed to positive ways of imagining. While these groups may never rely on the time-tested truths of classic schools of philosophy, they must be anchored in intimate relationships between people and commitment to ways of being that encourage others to view the world around them as full of possibility. The Cynic can tear down, but he finds it difficult to build. Nonetheless, he teaches us the importance of telling the truth with the body, in the world, as a witness to other possibilities. In his relentless courage and generosity, he gives humanity what no lesser man could give: freedom.

In this chapter, I have shown the centrality of the practice of *parrhēsia*, to the subjectivation of true discourse and to the reintroduction of ethics into the heart of the public square through the figure of the Cynic. For Foucault, the Cynic functions as the scandal of the truth, which calls into question social norms and values for the purpose of caring deeply for those he berates and ridicules. Sovereign in his abjection, rich in his poverty, disciplined in his animality, the Cynic abruptly shakes the individual out of her *stultitia*, with the laughter that shatters. The recovery of such a figure may be crucial for environmental activism, which finds itself caught between political gridlock and personal inertia. By promoting the parrhesiast as the lynchpin that connects personal and social transformation, Foucault's intervention can reinvest everyday care of the self with a greater purpose, the creation of another world.

In my next and final chapter, I spiral back out to a more abstract, but no less pertinent, aspect of Foucault's concept of ethical subject formation. In fact, in many ways, this issue grounds and animates the process of transformation. It is the fraught concept of freedom.

## Chapter Five: Freedom

La liberté est la condition ontologique de l'éthique. Mais l'éthique est la forme réfléchie que prend la liberté.

--Michel Foucault<sup>357</sup>

Freedom's just another word for nothin' left to lose. Nothin' don't mean nothin' honey if it ain't free.

--Kris Kristofferson and Fred Foster<sup>358</sup>

The quotation that serves as the first epigraph for this chapter--"Freedom is the ontological condition of ethics. But ethics is the reflective form taken by liberty" (ESS 1531)--has caused much consternation in the thirty or more years since Foucault pronounced it. Much ink has been spilled debating what freedom means for Foucault, and

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<sup>357</sup> "L'éthique du souci de soi comme pratique de la liberté," in *Dits et Écrits II: 1976-1988*, ed. Daniel Defert and François Ewald (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2001), 1531.

<sup>358</sup> The lyricists who wrote the song, "Me and Bobby McGee," later popularized by Janis Joplin.



whether it is an empty concept.<sup>359</sup> However, what is hard to debate is that, despite all of its semantic baggage, freedom is a key term in the ethical thought of Michel Foucault. This chapter explores this most fraught concept. I begin by reiterating the importance for Foucault of the stylized nature of ancient ethics, arguing that Foucault seizes on this facet of care of self as a way to think himself out of the trap of the contemporary impoverishment of relationality. Second, I argue, as many have, that Foucault's concept of freedom actually refers to an ontological condition of reality. Given the radical contingency of historical epistemes and their coincident ways of being, and the tendency of power relations to solidify and thus become potentially dangerous or oppressive, Foucault argues that practicing freedom leads to the increased fluidity of power, providing more opportunity for alternate ways of being. Like the cracks and fissures that begin to form as an ice sheet breaks down in the summer months, eventually leading to relatively free-flowing ocean, the care of the self and its communities of practice create fissures in social assumptions and norms, allowing more freedom of movement for everyone. Lastly, I address how this concept of historical contingency applies to the subject as agent. In other words, what defines individual freedom for Foucault? Essentially, he insists that freedom is not a state of being of a person, nor is the desire for freedom an ontological characteristic of human nature. Rather, freedom is practiced in

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<sup>359</sup> In fact, the topic of freedom might be one of the most commonly explored issues in Foucault's work, following close on the heels of power. A cursory search of Harvard's online library catalogue using the words "Foucault" and "freedom" retrieves eleven separate monographs with those words in the title. Jana Sawicki has several good articles on this topic, including, "Feminism, Foucault and 'Subjects' of Power and Freedom," in *The Later Foucault: Politics and Philosophy*, ed. Jeremy Moss (London: Sage Publications, 1998), 93-107.

local contexts, within specific relationships of power. Individual freedom is not understood as freedom *from*, but as freedom *for*, specifically for thinking and living otherwise. Thus, we return full circle to the title of the dissertation; the freedom of the individual for Foucault is the freedom "to become again what we never were."

The issue of freedom is crucial for environmental action for several reasons. First, Foucault's conception of freedom challenges the neoliberal characterization of freedom as freedom of choice. As I have noted, Foucauldian freedom is not freedom *from*, but freedom *for*. Therefore, the myriad choices presented to us as American consumers only serve to distract us from the actual practice of freedom. Second, the idea of opening possibilities for newness to emerge in the world, for melting ossified powers relations and allowing for a freer flow of power in society, encourages experiments in living, such as those proposed by radical environmentalists like Anthony Cheney, who says in his green manifesto, "Certainly, at the very least, an openness to *other* ways is another vital and necessary means of opening up radical kinds of imaginative space."<sup>360</sup> If the goal is to reorder the foundational assumptions of our society, we cannot pursue an incrementalist approach, but must engage in profound experiments in living.

### *The Poverty of the Law*

As we have seen in the other chapters, care of the self in the classical period revolved around an intentional, reflective, and disciplined transformation of one's life based on acquired principles of truth. Foucault makes a point of noting the use of *tekhnē*,

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<sup>360</sup> Weston, *Mobilizing the Green Imagination*, xiv.

meaning art or craft, to describe the process of converting to the self. He also says on numerous occasions that care of the self in the contemporary period cannot have a strict ethical or political goal, certainly not one that is applicable to all people. Rather, as he says, "the program must be empty" (AMV 986). In many ways, his focus on the stylized nature of classical ethics is a commentary on the centrality of the law as an orienting mechanism in Foucault's own time. He notes in the methodological section of *The Use of Pleasure* that all types of morality have two parts, the code and forms of subjectivation in relation to the code, the second of which he properly thinks of as ethics. Some groups focus more on elaborating the code, and some on elaborating practices of self by which one negotiates and internalizes the basic values of the code (UP 41-42). The moral systems of classical Greece and Rome fall into the latter category. For instance, in discussing the free male citizen's sexual behavior outside of marriage, Foucault states that it was not regulated by law or custom. Rather, it was simply thought of as good to restrain oneself, or in other words to practice the *aphrodisia* in a different way after marriage, without there being any sort of precise limitation on the man's behavior (UP 193). The issue of pederasty is similar if more complex. Foucault notes that pederasty was not simply problematized because it was considered wrong or sinful. Although the love of young boys in itself was not forbidden, it was nonetheless dangerous in many ways that had to do with the general attitude towards practicing the *aphrodisia*, complicated by the status of the young man as on the cusp of being a non-viable sexual object (SV 1490). Foucault does note that the overarching goal of care of the self and moderation of *aphrodisia* was to master one's passions so that one was not enslaved by

them (UP 108) and that the pedagogical and psychagogical relationship between teacher and student did involve certain rules of behavior (HS 350). However, this was ultimately oriented toward the person being guided gaining the ability to act freely, rather than submitting to certain laws or rules. Thus, the goal of such guidance is to communicate the persuasiveness of the truth (OS 291). Like a doctor, the guide must convince his interlocutor of the best course of action, both to preserve his freedom and also because ethics can only be practiced in the specific context of a person's daily life. Thus, it cannot follow a universal law, but must be flexible and strategic (UP 146).

Foucault argues the same concerning the philosophies of Imperial Rome. For the Stoics, he says, "the experience of the self is not a discovering of the hidden truth inside the self<sup>361</sup> but an attempt to determine what one can and cannot do with one's available freedom" (GE 276). In contrast to the modern regime of discipline and biopower, Foucault notes concerning classical ethics,

I do not think that one can find any trace of what could be called 'normalization,' for example, in the moral philosophy of the ancients. The reason is that the principal objective, the essential target sought after by this morality was of an aesthetic order. First, this genre of morality is essentially a problem of personal choice. Then it is reserved for a small number of people; it is not a question of providing a model of behavior for the whole world [...] The reason that one would have made this choice was the will to have a beautiful life and to leave for others the memory of a beautiful existence. (AGE 1429)

Thus, the practice of ethics was a way of making use of one's rights, power, authority, and freedom (UP 34). Many classicists, such as Pierre Hadot, have challenged this individualistic portrayal of classical ethics, arguing that in classical societies that were extremely tight-knit, rules and proscriptions for conduct did in some cases heavily restrict

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<sup>361</sup> And, I would add, a measuring of that truth against the law or norm.

one's ability to act, and thus the individual could not be seen as totally free to stylize his life any way he saw fit. However, Foucault counters by arguing that, nonetheless, practices of care of the self were not unified, universal, or normatively required. There were a number of different religions and philosophical schools, and they all had their own physiognomy, their own cosmology, and their own values (UP 31-32). Thus, the key for Foucault seems to be the fact that classical forms of austerity and care of the self did not "tend to subject all individuals in the same way [...] under a universal law" (UP 83).

This contrast becomes evident as Foucault begins to describe the ways in which rules for conduct became linked to universal law through the imperial period and into the early Christian period. In Stoic thought, for instance, care of the self comes to be informed and motivated by the idea that a piece of the divine principle resides in each person in the form of reason, and thus people are required to act in a certain way by virtue of being reasonable (SS 128-29). For instance, he says of the Stoic doctrine concerning marriage, "vis-à-vis oneself, it is the obligation to give one's existence a universally valuable form, and vis-à-vis others, it is the necessity of offering them a model of living" (SS 210). This is one of the ways in which Foucault views Stoicism as a transition point between Greek philosophy and Christian thought. According to Paul Allen Miller, "[t]he Stoics, starting from Plato's initial model, offered an alternative form of self-relation both to the Christian archetype and to that described later and implicitly denounced in Foucault's middle works such as *Surveiller et punir* and *La Volonté de savoir*. It was this alternative model on which Foucault concentrated during the final

years of his life."<sup>362</sup> In the transformation of these rules into the dogma of Christianity,<sup>363</sup> Foucault argues that the relationship between people comes to be subsumed into a relationship to the scriptural law. Thus, rather than ethics involving a flexible practice of freedom, ethics is conceived of as obedience to the will of God which is also understood in the form of law (CT 320). Barry Smart says of Foucault's interpretation, "[i]n Christianity, codes of behavior predominate; emphasis falls on the enforcement of rules and values and the penalization of infractions. In turn, subjectivation, the forming of individuals as ethical subjects, occurs basically in a quasi-judicial form, in which the ethical subject refers his conduct to law(s) to which submission is required."<sup>364</sup> Since the partners in a marriage, for instance, become under Christianity more focused on fulfilling their obligations to the Christian law than to each other, the relationship becomes more static (UP 326-327). In the ensuing centuries, obedience to the law comes to constitute the only possible relationship to oneself, to others, and to the truth (HS 390).

Naturally one might take issue with Foucault's schematic portrayal of the centrality of the law in Christianity. However, like most of Foucault's hyperbolic claims, this one is meant to provide a bridge to his contemporary concerns. Foucault argues that in his historical moment, subjectivity is largely constructed through knowledge of self and obedience to the law (HS 305). This has grown out of the way in which disciplinary

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<sup>362</sup> Paul Allen Miller, *Postmodern Spiritual Practices*, 180.

<sup>363</sup> Foucault acknowledges in theory, if not in practice, that Christianity, like any religion has been at different times and in different inflections more and less concerned with the moral code as opposed to the practices of self that make up what he calls ethics (UP 42-43).

<sup>364</sup> Barry Smart, "On the Subjects of Sexuality, Ethics, and Politics in the Work of Foucault," *boundary 2* 18, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 206-07.

and normalizing power individualizes people and subjects them to measurement. Such individualizing tactics support a person's right to be unique, but only through separating her from others and her community, and substituting truth as adherence to the law for the realization of truth in the relationship of self to self (SP 781, 785). In other words, the person seeks a constant knowledge of her deepest truth in order to be able to measure it against the dictates of the law, one of the many ways in which Foucault sees techniques of discipline growing out of Christian forms of governmentality.<sup>365</sup> Moreover, according to Wendy Brown, the governmental rationality that grows out of the imbrication of state power and pastoral power allows disciplinary norms to utilize the legitimacy of the law, thus obviating their need for institutional violence.<sup>366</sup> While the lessening of violence might initially seem like a positive change, one of Foucault's main contentions in *The History of Sexuality: Volume I* is that the invisibility of power allows it a much wider purview in our lives; "power is tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself. Its success is in proportion to an ability to hide its own mechanisms" (VS 113). Thus, the goal of Foucauldian self-constitution, according to Reiner Schürmann, is "the polymorphous fight against social totalities."<sup>367</sup> He quotes Foucault as saying, "[t]he

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<sup>365</sup> In *The Care of Self*, Foucault defines Christian ethics as a relation to the self defined by "a characterization of the ethical substance based on finitude, the Fall, and evil; a mode of subjection in the form of obedience to a general law that is at the same time the will of a personal god; a type of work on oneself that implies a decipherment of the soul and a purifying hermeneutics of the desires; and a mode of ethical fulfillment that tends toward renunciation of the self" (SS 317).

<sup>366</sup> Wendy Brown, "Genealogical Politics," in *The Later Foucault: Politics and Philosophy*, ed. Jeremy Moss (London: Sage Publications, 1998), 43-44.

<sup>367</sup> Reiner Schürmann, "On Constituting Oneself as an Anarchistic Subject," *Praxis International* 6, no. 3 (1986): 306.

whole of society' is precisely that which should not be considered except as something to be destroyed."<sup>368</sup>

If individuals can only relate to one another, to their world, and to themselves through the law, then myriad possible forms of relationality are reduced to only one. Foucault says of this predicament, "we live in a legal, social, and institutional world where the only possible relationships are very few, very schematized, and extremely impoverished" (TSPS 1128). Moreover, in a world in which people relate to norms, while looking to law for salvation, many people try to challenge oppressive regimes and other types of intolerable power without ever escaping from subjection to law and norm. Cressida Heyes says of body modification as a possible technique of self,

[w]hen I think back on all the examples I adduce--transsexuality, dieting, and cosmetic surgery--all in their discursive ideals involve the cultivation of a body oriented towards an end point, understood through the language of authenticity and perfectibility [...] The normalized trajectory is already mapped out, and whether or not they actually succeed in progressing along it, the possibility of being open to self-creation--to thinking oneself differently than the norm predicts--is foreclosed.<sup>369</sup>

Given a historical moment characterized by reduced relational possibilities, ossified political structures, and the practically inescapable logic of the law, Foucault argues that the ground of resistance is the relationship of self to self, which he describes as ethics. He argues that instead of thinking the subject juridically, we must find a way to think her ethically; "the notion of governmentality allows us, I believe, to emphasize the freedom of the subject and the relationship to others, that is to say, that which constitutes the very

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<sup>368</sup> Quoted in Schürmann, 306.

<sup>369</sup> Cressida Heyes, *Self-Transformations: Foucault, Ethics, and Normalized Bodies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 119.



material of ethics" (ESS 1548). Arnold Davidson, in his astute piece on the notion of conduct and counter-conduct, emphasizes this point, stating that because contemporary moral and political philosophy tend to subordinate conduct to the law, counter-conduct has the ability to short-circuit the law, discipline/normativity, and institutions.<sup>370</sup> As we will recall, this is precisely the claim that Foucault makes concerning the transversal power of homosexuality, that the affective intensities of gay life unbalance institutions, cut them on the diagonal, taking whole structures and disrupting them (AMV 983).

Foucault's return to the more free-form ethics of the classical period intends, then, to provide a counterpoint to what he views as the predominance of law and norm in his own period. Like all of his works, this is a project of destabilization through the illumination of historical contingency. He states,

[w]hat I would like to show you instead is that the law itself comprises one part, as episode and transitory form, of a much more general history, which is that of the techniques and technologies of practices of the subject in regards to himself, techniques and technologies that are independent of the form of the law, which have priority over it. Basically, the law is only one of the possible aspects of the technology of the subject in regards to himself. (HS 109)

Foucault would rather return to the notion of ethics as a practice of freedom, and in order to do so, it is necessary to move away from obedience to the norm masked as law. Foucault states, "insofar as I believe that one of the meanings of human existence--the source of human freedom--is never to accept anything as definitive, untouchable, obvious, or immobile. No aspect of reality should be allowed to become a definitive and

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<sup>370</sup> Arnold Davidson, "In Praise of Counter Conduct," *History of the Human Sciences* 24, no. 4 (October 2011): 31, 33.

inhuman law for us."<sup>371</sup> Therefore, on a basic level, Foucault focuses on the flexibility and stylization of ethics in the classical sources in order to demonstrate another set of techniques by which one might subjectivate the truth through care of the self. However, he is not just offering different possibilities for ways of living. His critique is tied to what he views as an oppressive social situation, a situation of impoverished relationality and limited existential mobility, a situation in which by fixating on themselves as juridical subjects individuals are abdicating the ability to be ethical subjects. All of which points to the non-activation of freedom, an elemental freedom that nonetheless must be manifested through practice.

### *Freedom as Radical Contingency*

Throughout the chapters, I have gestured towards two Foucauldian concepts--relations of power and governmentality--without fully exploring them. I turn to these issues more directly now because of the way in which they impact Foucault's concept of freedom.

By the end of his life, Foucault began to view power relations and government as basically the same thing: a type of human relationship (OS 979) in which one structures the field of possible actions of others (SP 790). Foucault clarifies, "what defines a relationship of power is that it is a mode of action which does not act directly and immediately on others. Instead, it acts upon their actions: an action upon an action, on

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<sup>371</sup> Dianna Taylor, "Practices of the self," in *Michel Foucault: Key Concepts*, ed. Dianna Taylor (Durham, UK: Acumen, 2011), 182. This quote is translated by Taylor from a 1980 interview entitled "Power, Moral Values and the Intellectual," available in the Foucault archive at IMEC.

existing actions or on those which may arise in the future" (SP 789).<sup>372</sup> The distinction that Foucault wants to make here is between physical force, domination, and exerting power over another's actions. For instance, if someone pushes me off a cliff, that is not power; that is physical force/violence. If the same person drives a herd of wildebeests towards me, necessitating that I either jump from the cliff--into an appropriately raging river--or risk being trampled by the wildebeests--she is exerting power over me. The issue of domination is more complicated. Foucault does acknowledge that many people exist in situations of structural violence where their abilities to engage in certain types of actions are pervasively and permanently constrained.<sup>373</sup> He says of this, "[w]hen an individual or social group freezes a field of power relations, rendering them immobile and fixed and preventing all counter-movement--by instruments which can be economic, political, or military--one has before one what can be called a state of domination" (ESS 1530). So, if for instance, rather than pushing me from the cliff, or creating an extreme wildebeest challenge, the fact that I had to jump off the cliff was a social norm incumbent upon me due to some circumstance--for instance that, as a woman past childbearing years I need to sacrifice myself in order to provide more resources for productive members of

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<sup>372</sup> He also likes to use the term "conduct"--as when he says, governmentality "meant studying the techniques and procedures by which one undertakes to conduct the conduct of others" (GSA 6)--likely because of the semantic richness of the word.

<sup>373</sup> Clare Chambers argues that Foucault's distinction between power and domination is similar to Hannah Arendt's differentiation between power and violence, in that "power always operates with the consent of those who submit to it." *Sex, Culture, and Justice: The Limits of Choice* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2008), 31. However, I would argue that the notion of consent is somewhat too strong to make sense of the co-constitution of power and freedom. In many situations of power, one might demonstrate one's freedom by engaging in counter-conduct to a form of government, which suggests precisely that one does not consent to it. Thus, for Arendt, unlike Foucault, power is positive when it is a function of collective agreement. For Foucault, power is never solely positive or solely negative.

my community--, if this norm was so pervasive and unchallenged that the thought of challenging it never crossed my mind, I might be in a state of domination. Jason Read suggests a less arbitrary example of domination in the form of neo-liberal political quietism. Given the way in which neo-liberal governments convert political activism into consumerism, "individualized/market-based solutions appear in lieu of collective political solutions [...] which offer the opportunity for individuals to opt out rather than address political problems."<sup>374</sup> It is actually unclear for Foucault whether this example--or my original one--would actually count as domination rather than just an extreme form of subjection. In fact, the ground he concedes to domination is pretty slim. In "The Care of the Self as a Practice of Freedom," he says, "[e]ven when the relation of power is totally unequal, when one could truly say that that one person has total power over another," the person still has the possibility of "killing himself, jumping out of the window, or killing the other person" (ESS 1539).

What is key to our understanding here, however, is that relations of power are only operative when both parties are free, free in the limited sense of being capable of action. As Foucault states in "The Subject and Power," it is not a relationship of power unless it is recognized that the person over whom someone exercises power is also a person who acts (SP 789). Naturally what this means is that the person being governed is likely attempting to counter-govern, either by resisting the way in which she is governed or by attempting to exercise her own power over her partner. Thus, Foucault claims, "I think

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<sup>374</sup> Jason Read, "A Genealogy of Homo-Economicus: Neoliberalism and the Production of Subjectivity," *Foucault Studies* 6 (February 2009): 35.

that resistance is a part of this strategic relationship of which power consists. Resistance really always relies upon the situation against which it struggles" (SPPI 168). Thus, power and freedom are co-constitutive. As Ladelle McWhorter presciently notes, this is both good news and bad news;

As a point where force meets force, power and resistance occur simultaneously. Each force resists the other, even as it presses the other back, deflects, or gives way to it. There is nothing particularly progressive or anti-oppressive about resistance *per se* then [...] We do not need to simply resist oppressive networks of forces; we need to oppose them, counter them, disrupt them, and displace them.<sup>375</sup>

However, this co-constitution also points us to the second important point here, which is that both people are affected by their strategic dance as well as by the norms and discourses that shape them. Paul Veyne says of Foucault's "discourses", they are "spectacles through which, in every age, people have perceived everything, and have thought and acted. They affect both those that dominate and those who are dominated; they are not lies invented by the former in order to fool the latter and justify their domination."<sup>376</sup> Thus, not only are power and freedom co-constitutive of social worlds, but individuals in relationships of power act upon one another at the same time that they are acted upon by discourses and practices of power of which they are unaware. It is in this way that individuals can function as transfer points for power.

In his later work, Foucault links this analytics of power to the care of the self via the concept of governmentality. He states in his lecture course, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, "[i]f one understands by governmentality a strategic field of power relations in

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<sup>375</sup> Ladelle McWhorter, "Post-Liberation Feminism and Practices of Freedom," *Foucault Studies* 16 (September 2013): 68.

<sup>376</sup> Veyne, *Foucault*, 28.

their mobility, transformability, and reversibility, then I do not think that reflection on this notion of governmentality can avoid passing through, theoretically and practically, the element of a subject defined by the relationship of self to self" (HS 241). We see here a direct connect to Foucault's understanding of power relations as mobile and reversible. Moreover, Foucault understands governmentality as the interaction between techniques of mastery of the self and governing others (TS 19). As we saw in the chapter on friendship, the ethical primacy of the self implies a strong link between the way in which one cares for oneself and how one can interact with others. Foucault also claims, "government of the self and others, and the relationship of self to self [...] it is around these notions that one should be able [...] to connect the question of politics and the question of ethics" (HS 242). The reason this is the case, as we have seen both in the section on community and in the chapter on *parrhēsia*, is because the link between care of the self and political action runs through critique. Foucault insists that the idea of critique grew out of the increase in government, both pastoral and state, in the Middle Ages, through the Renaissance, and into the Enlightenment. He insists that critique developed "for the most part, but not exclusively, of course, in relation to the Scriptures" (WC 46-47), as Reformation Christians pushed back against the government of the Catholic Church and insisted upon creating their own relationship to the Bible and other foundational aspects of Christianity. Thus, Foucault claims that not wanting to be governed is not some originary aspiration, some basic aspect of human nature that is resistant to any sort of government. Rather, critique corresponds to local contexts, the desire "not to be governed *like that*, by that, in the name of those principles, with such

and such an objective in mind and by means of such procedures, not like that, not for that, not by them" (WC 43-44). Like resistance, critique operates in an established context, using the tools at hand. If government subjugates individuals to certain forms of power and truth, then critique desubjugates them by questioning those things; "critique will be the art of voluntary insubordination, that of reflected intractability" (WC 47). Some critics have asked whether it is possible to achieve any sort of radical transformation by operating within oppressive relationships of power.<sup>377</sup> Audre Lorde, for instance, contends that one cannot dismantle the master's house with the master's tools, and the attempt to utilize repressive discourses to examine those same discourses will only lead to the most incremental change.<sup>378</sup> Jason Springs responds to this concern by arguing that, for Foucault, political action "is reframed by the recognition that freedom is an ever-unfinished but ever-possible practical project made possible by normative constraints presently available, rather than the absence or alleged eradication of those constraints."<sup>379</sup> Essentially Foucault is an incrementalist, not because of some conservative predisposition,<sup>380</sup> but because he simply does not believe in a space free of normative constraints. For him, yearning for a space outside of power is both pointless and

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<sup>377</sup> Jana Sawicki describes the feminist critique as follows, "the most trenchant criticisms of Foucault by feminists identify two major defects in his work: his rejection of modern foundationalist epistemologies (and thus humanist philosophies of the subject), and the related question of the adequacy of his politics of resistance, (Who resists power? To what end should resistance aim? Can Foucault envision possibilities of collective resistance?)" "Feminism, Foucault and 'Subjects' of Power and Freedom," in *The Later Foucault: Politics and Philosophy*, ed. Jeremy Moss (London: Sage Publications, 1998), 96.

<sup>378</sup> Quoted in Jason Springs, "'Dismantling the Master's House'," 420.

<sup>379</sup> Springs, 446.

<sup>380</sup> Although clearly given his understanding of his own positionality, he was probably both conservative and radical. At least his wide array of critics thought so.

dangerous, in the sense that it allows one to mask the actual power at play in the quest for such a place of total liberation (QL 1394). John Muckelbauer rightly contends, then, that "[r]esistance is a much more intricate and diffuse process, one that is enabled through experimental encounters with power rather than grounded in consensus."<sup>381</sup> The purpose of critique is not to burn down the master's house and everything with it. For instance, Foucault states concerning his critique of rationality that his goal is not to cause the collapse of reason, but to enable "other forms of rationality to be created, created constantly" (SPS 1266-67). As Judith Butler notes, "not only is it necessary to isolate and identify the peculiar nexus of power and knowledge that gives rise to the field of intelligible things, but also to track the way in which that field meets its breaking point, the moments of its discontinuities, the sites where it fails to constitute the intelligibility for which it stands."<sup>382</sup> Although such interventions, such voluntary insubordination, may operate on a local and strategic level, as we saw in the last chapter, Foucault still believes that such action can have dramatic effects on one's social world.

What should be fairly obvious by this point is that, on the level of reality, Foucault views freedom as the manifestation of the radical contingency of history. Such a perspective animates his methodology, both on a personal and on a pedagogical level. He says of genealogical critique in "What Is Enlightenment?" genealogy "does not deduce from the form of what we are what it is impossible for us to do or know; rather it will separate out from the contingency of what we are, the possibility of no longer being,

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<sup>381</sup> John Muckelbauer, "On Reading Differently," 90.

<sup>382</sup> Butler, "What Is Critique?" 222.



doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think" (QL 1393). Throughout his work, Foucault strives to demonstrate the contingency of historical epistemes and forms of power, knowledge, and subjectivity, both to demonstrate the radical freedom of being, and to enact it. In order to achieve change in the realm of politics, one must first "dig deeply to show how things are historically contingent, for such and such a reason intelligible but not necessary" (AMV 986).

Many scholars of Foucault have picked up this line of his thought. Johanna Oskala says, "[f]or Foucault, freedom refers to the indeterminateness of the constitutive matrix and to the contingency of all structures. It is the virtual fractures that appear in the invisible walls of our world, the opening of possibilities for seeing how that which is might no longer be what it is. Freedom does not mean that everything is possible, but neither is the present a necessity."<sup>383</sup> Sergei Prozorov judges rightly that freedom, then, is the paradoxically slippery foundation that simultaneously makes possible the establishment of a positive order and also its transgression.<sup>384</sup> John Rajchman connects this contingency to subjectivity by stating,

[t]he existence of freedom (that we are not under the sign of a unique necessity) resides in the fact that no historical determination of our being is absolute, that any such determination is exposed to events that interrupt it, transform it, and reinterpret what it is. The experience of freedom is the experience of such an event that frees our relation to the practices and the thinking that have historically limited our experience.<sup>385</sup>

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<sup>383</sup> Johanna Oksala, *Foucault on Freedom* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 208.

<sup>384</sup> Sergei Prozorov, *Foucault, Freedom and Sovereignty* (Hampshire, UK: Ashgate, 2007), 10.

<sup>385</sup> John Rajchman, *Truth and Eros: Foucault, Lacan, and the Question of Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 110.

Wendy Brown chooses, instead, to explore the importance of this understanding of freedom for politics. She states,

rather than promising a certain future, as progressive history does, genealogy is deployed to *incite* possible futures. Openings along fault lines, and incitements from destabilized (because denaturalized) configurations of the present comprise the stage of political possibility. But in so doing, these openings and incitements dictate neither the terms nor the direction of political possibility, both of which are matters of imagination and invention.<sup>386</sup>

Interestingly, Paul Veyne says of Foucault that this commitment to the radical contingency of history led him to value all thought, even the most unbelievable or potentially dangerous. In his words, for Foucault,

[n]othing is in vain, the products of the human mind are nothing but positive, since they have existed; they are interesting and as remarkable as the products of Nature, the flowers and the animals that show what the latter is capable of. I can still hear Foucault talking to me, with pleasure, sympathy, and respectful admiration, about St. Augustine and his constant flow of ideas: ideas clearly all the more admirable in that, being hard to believe, they indicate just how far the human mind is capable of venturing.<sup>387</sup>

For Foucault then, his political, philosophical, pedagogical, and personal lives were all oriented around the exploration of freedom in the form of contingency.

Does this mean, then, that Foucault believes that freedom simply exists in the same way everywhere? Yes and no. Freedom as possibility certainly occurs everywhere. At any time, the contingency of thought, action, and being might become evident to us. However, our examination of Foucault's theory of power suggests that a certain field of power relations can be more or less free in the sense of actualizing contingency. Foucault says of the idea of liberation, "[t]he important question it seems to me, is not to know

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<sup>386</sup> Wendy Brown, "Genealogical Politics," 37.

<sup>387</sup> Paul Veyne, *Foucault*, 40. In fact, as Mark Jordan points out, this is the spirit animating the pleasure Foucault takes in Borges' Chinese encyclopedia.

whether a culture exempt from restrictions is possible or even desirable, but if the system of constraints within a society functions to leave individuals free to transform this system" (CA 1146). He imagines the virtual cracks that Butler talks about as opening up spaces of freedom, "understood as space for practical freedom, which is to say possible transformation" (SPS 1268). As we will see, Foucault views freedom as a practice of individuals, rather than something they hold. So here he will say that in these cracks, at the limits, when different types of power collide in a field, spaces are opened for individuals to practice freedom, to transform themselves and their world.

Foucault often describes freedom using metaphors of fluidity. When power relations are too rigid and cannot be transformed, the society is static and power relations are immobile, irreversible. When freedom begins to be practiced, power relations become more fluid, and more cracks and fissures appear in a society's norms, discourses, and practices. This is why he frequently refers to practices of power and truth as games, because games have rules, but are more fluid and flexible, responding to the desires and needs of the participants. He says of the concept of the game, "[w]hat is true for writing and for a love relationship is also true for life. The game is worthwhile insofar as we don't know what the end will be" (TPS 9).<sup>388</sup> This game of course can only be played at a local level, using the pieces one already has. Foucault says, "[o]ne escapes the domination of truth not by playing a game totally foreign to the game of truth, but by playing it differently" (ESS 1543). James Faubion makes the point then that Foucault

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<sup>388</sup> In another interview, Foucault makes the point slightly differently; "the more open the game, the more fascinating and alluring" (ESS 1548).

views ethics, in its role of increasing freedom through critique and care of the self, as "the primary site of cultural invention."<sup>389</sup> Of course, as Ian Cutler notes in his history of Cynicism, for every crack that appears in a field of power, there is a person who wants to fill it with something. He avers, "[t]he snag is that having created some space in which to think, there are always those who cannot bear the silence--silence which can often be felt as tension--and who on viewing the blank canvas of ideas have the irresistible urge to fill it in."<sup>390</sup> From Foucault's perspective, this might not be a terrible thing. If spaces of freedom are opened in order to transform society, they ultimately they need to be filled in with ways of being. The goal for Foucault is that they are filled in with something new. He states in an unpublished essay, "[w]hat is good is something that comes through an innovation. The good does not exist...in an atemporal way."<sup>391</sup> However, Cutler's point is taken. Sometimes sitting with the silence a little longer than is comfortable is more productive of newness, and more likely to lead to other silences, than just talking thoughtlessly.

If Foucault's notion of the production of freedom relies on constantly reactivating the contingency of reality through problematizing, denaturalizing, creating critical juxtapositions, and then using spaces of freedom to create newness, the obvious question

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<sup>389</sup> James D. Faubion, "Toward an Anthropology of Ethics: Foucault and the Pedagogies of Autopoiesis," in *The Ethical*, eds. Edith Wyschogrod and Gerald P. McKenny (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 160.

<sup>390</sup> Ian Cutler, *Cynicism from Diogenes to Dilbert*, 173.

<sup>391</sup> This essay, entitled, "Power, Moral Freedom, and the Intellectual," was recovered by Dianna Taylor from the Foucault archive at IMEC, and is quoted in her introduction to *Michel Foucault: Key Concepts*, ed. Dianna Taylor (Durham, UK: Acumen, 2011), 8.

arises: why do this? Why is the creation of new ways of thinking, being, and acting so important to Foucault? Faubion makes the important point that invention for Foucault is not necessarily ethical or unethical, but that it is ethically relevant.<sup>392</sup> Clearly this is the case because the fact that Foucault sees everything as potentially dangerous certainly does not diminish in his mind the importance of continuing to innovate. I have come to think of this ethical relevancy in terms of resilience. A system is deemed resilient if it can cope with, adapt to, and shape change. Ecological economist Carl Folke states, "[t]he degree to which the social-ecological system can build and increase the capacity for learning, adaptation and responding in a manner that does not constrain or erode future opportunities is a central aspect of resilience."<sup>393</sup> On the one hand, then, systems that can cope with change are more stable. The term system may cause confusion here in that resilience could suggest that the preservation of a bounded system is a good in itself. However, an ecosystem is a system in continual transformation, with parts interacting in ways that cause ripple effect throughout. Over time, a ecosystem characterized by a certain set of environment factors may change into a different system, such as when a pond fills in with sediment and becomes a marsh and then a meadow. However, the ecosystem when unstable can become a wasteland, leading to an impoverishment of its abilities to support many different forms of life. Similarly, if one strand of power or knowledge, or one relationship or institution, becomes radically problematic in a stable

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<sup>392</sup> Faubion, 160.

<sup>393</sup> Carl Folke, "Social-Ecological Resilience and Behavioural Responses," in *Individual and Structural Determinants of Environmental Practice*, ed. Anders Biel, Bengt Hansson, and Mona Mårtensson (Hants, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2003), 228-29.

human system, it will not throw the entire system into a tailspin, in the way, for instance, that the blow to German national pride post-World War I led the country into several decades of destructive soul-searching.

However, perhaps more importantly, the concept of resilience pre-supposes change and seeks ways for a society to adapt to change without forestalling future opportunities for change. What this means from a Foucauldian perspective is that a society with a richness of different ways of life and opportunities for transformation of values and norms is in general less oppressive, in the sense that if a person comes to find their local situation intolerable, they will be more likely to be able to try to alter the structures that create that situation. In other words, fluid power relationships are less determinative. Moreover, to return to Paul Veyne's astute comment on Foucault's love of different forms of thought, just like nature given a free hand creates more remarkable plants and animals than any human could ever conceive, a society given the opportunity to transform freely can create ways of being, types of thought, forms of freedom that we at this moment cannot even imagine. In Foucault's words, "I think that there are more secrets, more possible freedoms, and more inventions in our future that we can imagine" (TPS 15).

### *What Is Autonomy?*

To understand reality as radically contingent is one thing, but what does it mean for the freedom of the individual? In chapter one we showed that the ethical subject, though not a substance, still fulfills the basic definition of a generic subject in that individual

Foucauldian subjects possess beliefs, desires, and consciousness, of the world and of themselves. They establish the sense of unity and continuity through time that grounds their understanding of themselves as having a past, present, and future, and they make decisions and carry out intentional actions.<sup>394</sup> Moreover, through an engagement with Iris Murdoch we argued in the second chapter that although subjects develop the ability to act in correct ways by training themselves such that the actual moment of ethical decision is erased, this does not mean that those actions are determined because freedom lies in the choice to begin training and continue training the self on a day to day basis. Finally, we have highlighted through the previous chapters the importance of the concepts of freedom and autonomy to individuals practicing care of the self in the classical period. Nonetheless, something is amiss for many scholars about the way in Foucault understands not freedom in general, but specifically freedom in relationship to the individual.

Part of this anxiety originates in Foucault's rejection of humanism. In late interviews, Foucault says of humanism, "it is too supple, too diverse, too inconsistent to serve as an axis of reflection" (QL 1392). He seems to feel this way about most grand theories, but singles out humanism because it has been historically considered positive: "the 'best' theories do not constitute an effective enough protection against disastrous political choices; certain grand themes like 'humanism' can be used for whatever purpose" (PE 1404). In fact, Foucault thinks that the humanist understanding of freedom both limits its possible expressions and masks types of power that legitimize themselves under

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<sup>394</sup> This basic definition comes from Weberman. "Are Freedom and Antihumanism Compatible?" 255-271.

the banner of freedom. Sergei Prozorov notes, "the very incontestability of freedom renders it inherently ambiguous, which opens an infinite range of possibilities for its abuse, under the guise of a self-assigned responsibility to promote human freedom."<sup>395</sup> Prozorov is thinking here of the ways in which discourses of freedom can legitimize both state and insurgent violence. However, it would be equally fair to argue that in the neoliberal state, discourses of entrepreneurial freedom mask the ways in which the state privatizes political dissent and hides coercive forms of power behind the illusion of choice.

Foucault also tends to look askance at the search for a deep truth in interiority that underlies much humanist thought. For instance, he says of Sartre,

[t]he theme of authenticity refers, explicitly or not, to a mode of being of the subject defined by its adequacy to itself. But it seems to me that the relationship to the self must be able to be described according to a multiplicity of forms of which authenticity is only one of the possible modalities [...] the practice of the self is a complex and multiple domain. (AGE 1436)

Of course, Foucault does not simply reject the concept of autonomy, as we have seen in his work with the classical sources. Rather he redefines the word. We can oppose to humanism, he says, "the principle of a critical and permanent creation of ourselves in our autonomy: that is to say, a principle that is at the heart of the historical consciousness that the *Enlightenment* had of itself" (QL 1392). In an interesting sleight of hand then, Foucault sets the Enlightenment against humanism, a movement which is often seen to be its heir. Amy Allen concludes, "Foucault's aim is not to reject autonomy on the basis of its connection to disciplinary power but rather to *problematize* it, where this means to

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<sup>395</sup> Sergei Prozorov, *Foucault, Freedom and Sovereignty*, 1.



reveal both that autonomy is made up of contingent practices with a specific history, enabling us to see *that* it can be changed, and how it has been constituted, enabling us to see *how* it can be changed."<sup>396</sup> It seems evident then that while Foucault does not accept humanism as a useful narrative for thinking about subjects, neither does he reject autonomy.

The other reason that Foucault's understanding of human freedom feels uncanny is because of the understanding of freedom prevalent in neoliberal discourse. Ottavio Marzocca argues that there are two strains of liberal freedom: "on the one hand, the desire *not to be subjugated*, which requires participation in the government and the capacity to govern oneself, on the other hand, the desire *not to be hampered*, which requires, above all, that governments not govern too much and let the governed freely see to their interests."<sup>397</sup> Marzocca contends that the second strain has largely won out, leading to the privatization of freedom. Clare Chambers also asserts that neoliberals tend to conflate personal choice with freedom and justice. If a person's choice of behavior, way of life, or beliefs are not hampered in an obvious way, then those choices are imagined to be free regardless of the subtle social norms and practices that constrain them.<sup>398</sup> In contrast, pace Charles Taylor, Foucault clearly does not think of power as

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<sup>396</sup> Amy Allen, "The Entanglement of Power and Validity: Foucault and Critical Theory," in *Foucault and Philosophy*, ed. Timothy O'Leary and Christopher Falzon (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2010), 87.

<sup>397</sup> Ottavio Marzocca, "Philosophical *Parrhêsia* and Transpolitical Freedom," *Foucault Studies* 15 (February 2013): 139.

<sup>398</sup> Clare Chambers, "Creativity, Cultural Practice, and the Body: Foucault and Three Problems with the Liberal Focus on Choice," in *Sex, Culture, and Justice: The Limits of Choice* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2008), 21-44.

solely repressive or of freedom as a space outside of power.<sup>399</sup> In fact, in regards to the freedom of classical philosophy, Foucault clearly states that this is not a negative freedom; "in its full and positive form, it is a power that one exercises over oneself in the power that one exercises over others" (UP 109). Here Foucault is discussing the connection between self-government and the government of others, but he also conceives of the care of the self--in the discipline, reflection, and concern it necessitates--as a way of achieving freedom by retraining he self to operate according to an intentional set of rules (ESS 1531-32).

Foucault connects this type of positive freedom to his contemporary context by way of Kant, and the interplay between critique and achieving self-mastery. Critique is connected here to "a certain decision-making will not to be governed [...] both an individual and collective attitude which meant, as Kant said, to get out of one's minority (WC 67). Obviously, we start here with a negative freedom, as does Foucault when talking about domination. However, rejecting the authority of the sovereign, or religion, or in the case of the classical period the corrupt values and norms of society, is not enough to allow for freedom. Benda Hofmeyr notes, Foucault's "later works are essentially dedicated to the political task of reinvesting the individual with the capacity for action--to change itself and the world in which it lives. And this ability to change

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<sup>399</sup> Taylor argues in a 2005 interview that Foucault was a defender of negative liberty, which seems to misunderstand both Foucault's analytics of power and his concept of freedom. Alain Beaulieu, "A Conversation with Charles Taylor," *Symposium* 9, no.1 (Spring 2005): 116. The rejection of a space outside of power is also at the heart of Foucault's debate with Jürgen Habermas. He says of the idea of communicative rationality, "the idea that it is possible to have a state of communication such that games of truth can circulate without obstacles, without constraints, and without coercive effects seems to me on the order of utopia" (ESS 1546).

oneself, and by extension the society in which you live, is rooted in the ability 'to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently'."<sup>400</sup> For Christoph Menke, this means that knowing that gives way to knowing how, as the individual creates through its relationship to itself the ability to act in the world through its own harnessed power.<sup>401</sup>

Occasionally, scholars seem to conflate the freedom of the individual in Foucault with freedom as contingency. For instance, David Weberman contends that, for Foucault, "an 'individual subject' is free insofar as s/he faces 'a field of possibilities in which several ways of behaving, several reactions and diverse comportments, may be realized'."<sup>402</sup> However, this confuses the freedom available to the individual with the freedom inherent in the field of power relations, enacting a return to the liberal concept of freedom through choice. Obviously, Foucault himself supports such reading when he says things like, "freedom is defined not as a right to be free, but as capacity for free action" (GSA 286). However, when Foucault talks about a field of possibilities, he is not specifically talking about the possibilities open to an ethical subject at the moment of decision. As we saw in chapter two, a person who has subjectivated the truth will have no decision to make at the moment. Rather, Foucault is describing the degree of fluidity of the field of power relations, the ability of an individual to embark on a path of conversion and the

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<sup>400</sup> Benda Hofmeyr, "The Power Not to Be (What We Are): The Politics and Ethics of Self-Creation in Foucault," *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 3, no. 2 (July 2006): 217.

<sup>401</sup> Christoph Menke, "Two Kinds of Practice: On the Relation Between Social Discipline and Aesthetics of Existence," *Constellations* 10, no. 3 (July 2003): 201.

<sup>402</sup> Weberman, "Are Freedom and Antihumanism Compatible?" 256. Similarly, Christoph Menke views the stylization of the self as "developing subjects who are able to lead autonomous lives or make personal decisions." Menke, "Two Kinds of Practice," 203.

contingent plurality of possible outcomes. When he talks about free action, he means the freedom of the individual to act in accordance with the truth they are attempting to subjectivate. As he says in "What Is Enlightenment," our focus must be "the current limits of necessity," which means not what is necessary for us to become autonomous subjects, but what is no longer necessary (QL 1391). Essentially, states Todd May, Foucault's freedom "no longer simply concerns what we might be free from, but more significantly what, given current constraints, we might be free for."<sup>403</sup> For this reason, Foucault characterizes "the philosophical *ethos* proper to the critical ontology of ourselves as a historico-practical test of the limits that we can cross, and thus as the work of ourselves on ourselves as free beings" (QL 1394). The goal of becoming autonomous is not freedom of choice in the minutia of our daily lives, but freedom of choice in the coherent construction of those lives themselves. As Reiner Schürmann says, "[i]t is not a decontextualized self of inwardness, but a self that becomes autonomous as it makes the possibilities that are held out in its narrow sphere of freedom, and epochally opened up; its own."<sup>404</sup>

So, then, for Foucault, what does freedom mean for an individual? First of all, freedom is not a possession or something that happens to a person, but rather a practice. He says in "The Ethic of Care of the Self as a Practice of Freedom," "what is ethics if not the practice of freedom, the reflective practice of freedom" (ESS 1530)? John Rajchman

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<sup>403</sup> Todd May, "Foucault's Concept of Freedom," in *Michel Foucault: Key Concepts*, ed. Dianna Taylor (Durham, UK: Acumen, 2011), 79.

<sup>404</sup> Reiner Schürmann, "On Constituting Oneself as an Anarchistic Subject," *Praxis International* 6, no. 3 (1986): 304.

interprets this as meaning, "*practices* of freedom are what people try to make of themselves when they experience the existence of freedom in the history that has formed them."<sup>405</sup> Arnold Davidson concurs, stating, "counter-conduct [i.e. the practice of freedom] is an activity that *transforms* one's relationship to oneself and to others; it is the active intervention of individuals and constellations of individuals in the domain of the ethical and political practices and forces that shape them."<sup>406</sup> In these interpretations, we can see played out all of the material presented in the previous chapters. As Rajchman points out, practices of freedom occur when a person becomes aware of the existence of freedom in their own history. This is why Foucault focuses on doing genealogies of the present that demonstrate the contingency of our being, our history, and our values. The practice of freedom also transforms one's relationship to oneself and others. In fact, care of the self, from the moment one decides to be concerned, is a practice of freedom, of the arduous discipline of being otherwise, and this will clearly affect one's relationship to others. Interestingly, Ladelle McWhorter understands the circular way in which practices of freedom operate on the self as protective. She says,

[u]nlike normalizing, disciplinary practices, which increase capacities but simultaneously increase docility (obedience, inhibition, etc.) and leave disciplined bodies vulnerable to a variety of forces,<sup>407</sup> practices of freedom increase capacities while decreasing docility; developed capacities strengthen embodied resistance. Thus practices of freedom help protect their practitioners from the damaging effects of oppressive forces but practices of freedom are also, and more importantly, transformative and creative.<sup>408</sup>

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<sup>405</sup> John Rajchman, *Truth and Eros: Foucault, Lacan, and the Question of Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 110.

<sup>406</sup> Davidson, "In Praise of Counter Conduct," 32.

<sup>407</sup> Like the individual being buffeted in the winds of *stultitia*.

Davidson also notes that practices of freedom are engaged in individually and in groups, in the communities of practice we explored in chapter three. Finally, practices of freedom intervene in the society of the person who engages in them, the basic premise of chapter four. I would go further to say that practices of freedom not only respond to the experience of freedom as radical contingency, they also turn that freedom from possibility to actuality in the moment of practice, and they increase the awareness and possibility of such contingency, thus allowing others to have an experience of it. In this way, practices of freedom increase the actual freedom (as potentiality) inherent in a field of relations of power because they bring into relief the contingency of events, highlighting that things can be otherwise.

This focus on freedom as a practice also explains why Foucault downplays liberation in favor of freedom. In the opinion of Sergei Prozorov, when freedom is linked to the absence of formal oppression, it "begins to be conceived as an abstract endowment, a constitutionally guaranteed right, rather than a concrete experience or practice."<sup>409</sup> As a result, in formally free societies, Prozorov claims, little to no attention is paid to the ways in which people continue to be subjected. While Foucault does, of course, acknowledge a qualitative difference between authoritarian and democratic societies, he insists that he is suspicious of the idea of liberation. He says, "there is the risk of returning to the idea that there exists a nature or a human depth that is located behind a certain number of historic,

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<sup>408</sup> Ladelle McWhorter, "Post-Liberation Feminism and Practices of Freedom," *Foucault Studies* 16 (September 2013): 70. Cressida Heyes makes the similar point that "one can look at the skills one has developed through being disciplined and turn them against the institutions that cultivated them in the first place." Heyes, "Interview: Changing the Subject," *Foucault Studies* 12 (October 2011): 115.

<sup>409</sup> Prozorov, *Foucault, Freedom and Sovereignty*, 3.

economic, and social processes, masked, alienated or imprisoned in the mechanisms and by the mechanisms of repression," which would obviously suggest that by releasing a person from these mechanisms, you can discover her true self (ESS 1528-29). Thus, liberty is not a total release from power, but rather, "it is a practice. It can always thus exist in a certain number of projects that aim to modify certain constraints, to render them more supple, or even break them, but none of these projects can, simply by their nature, guarantee that people will automatically be free, the freedom of men is never assured by the institutions and laws that have the function of guaranteeing it" (ESP 1094-95). Liberation only creates new systems of power relations; these must be maintained through the practice of freedom (ESS 1530). Without a focus on practice, individuals might be tempted to view liberty negatively as the simple elimination of obvious restraints to their free choice or action, without ever realizing the impact of more effective and insidious forms of power in their lives.

When individuals practice freedom, according to Foucault, it takes an experimental form. Foucault insists, for instance, "[s]exuality is something that we ourselves create--it is our own creation, and much more than the discovery of a secret side of our desire. We have to understand that with our desires, through our desires, go new forms of relationships, new forms of love, new forms of creation. Sex is not a fatality; it's a possibility for creative life" (SPPI 163).<sup>410</sup> Todd May suggests,

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<sup>410</sup> In fact Foucault contends in "An Aesthetic of Existence," sexuality "has become one of the most creative sources of our society and our being [...] a process of our having to create a new cultural life underneath the ground of our sexual choices" (EE 163-64), and so the creativity of sexuality is not necessarily in creating new desires, but new pleasures and forms of intimacy and community.

for Foucault freedom is a matter of experimentation. To open up 'a space of concrete freedom' is not to figure out who we might be and then go there; it is to try to figure out different possibilities for our lives, different possible 'transformations', to see where they might lead. To live freely is to experiment with oneself, not always knowing whether one is getting free of the forces that have moulded one, nor [...] being sure of the effects of one's experimentation. It is to try to create a life from within a space of uncertainty, having some knowledge of how one has been made to be.<sup>411</sup>

For Foucault the key is not to know where one is going, because there are so many possible destinations of which we are not currently aware. Rather, "one must have a demanding, prudent, 'experimental' attitude; one must at each instant, step by step, confront what one thinks and what one says and what one does and what one is" (PE 1404). Experimentation does not intend to destroy reality, but simply to navigate between the truth of one's circumstances and the practice of freedom (QL 1389). Thus, Amy Allen concludes, "[r]ather than understanding autonomy as freely bending oneself to the moral law, Foucault understands it as freely calling into question that which is presented to us as necessary, thus opening up the space for the transgression of those limits on our experience that turn out to be both contingent and linked to objectionable forms of constraint."<sup>412</sup>

This brings us to two key questions: if practicing freedom means experimenting with one's life without any sense of where one might be heading, why would one do such a thing, and how can we determine whether new forms of life are better or worse than old forms? Although many theorists have charged Foucault with lacking normative criteria

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<sup>411</sup> Todd May, "Foucault's Concept of Freedom," in *Michel Foucault: Key Concepts*, ed. Dianna Taylor (Durham, UK: Acumen, 2011), 80.

<sup>412</sup> Amy Allen, "The Entanglement of Power and Validity: Foucault and Critical Theory," in *Foucault and Philosophy*, ed. Timothy O'Leary and Christopher Falzon (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2010), 92-93.



for judging between different forms of power, and thus offering no clear reason to challenge power at all,<sup>413</sup> I find Nancy Fraser's critique in "Foucault on Modern Power: Empirical Insights and Normative Confusions" to be both thoughtful and thought-provoking. In this essay, Fraser argues that Foucault calls for a resistance to domination and subjection, and yet provides no values that suggest why one should do so. "Why is struggle preferable to submission? Why ought domination to be resisted?" she asks.<sup>414</sup> After a thorough exploration of Foucault, she ultimately concludes that Foucault is presupposing the very liberal norms that he is criticizing, a result of the fact that he himself is located within the Western normative tradition, the very same charge that Jürgen Habermas makes when he calls Foucault crypto-normative.<sup>415</sup> So how might Foucault respond to this accusation?

On one level, to insist that a person must have a fully thought out motivation for resistance seems like an over-intellectualization of what actually happens on the ground. John Muckelbauer argues that such critiques of Foucault presuppose that

political resistance is a program, that it is fundamentally one thing requiring a list of determinable criteria [...] For these scholars, reading Foucault on the problem of resistance means, first, assuming the preexistence of a unified understanding of resistance, and second, attempting to discover where he does or does not comply with the necessary check list of criteria.<sup>416</sup>

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<sup>413</sup> For an overview of such critiques, see *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, ed. David Couzens Hoy (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1996).

<sup>414</sup> Nancy Fraser, "Foucault on Modern Power: Empirical Insights and Normative Confusions," in *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse, and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 29.

<sup>415</sup> Jürgen Habermas. *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, trans. F. G. Lawrence (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1990).

<sup>416</sup> Muckelbauer, "On Reading Differently," 90.

However, it is clear that for Foucault resistance is a local and ad hoc affair. Paul Veyne says of Foucault's own practice of freedom, "[h]e took militant action against the high-security quarters in French prisons, which he considered 'intolerable' and 'when a thing is intolerable, you cannot tolerate it' was the conclusion he drew in order to cut short philosophical commentary on his own political idiosyncrasy."<sup>417</sup> However, need this be considered idiosyncratic? Timothy O'Leary also highlights intolerability as the spur to ethical action,<sup>418</sup> and it matches up nicely with what Veyne has told us about Foucault, about his appreciation for the fecundity of human thought, about his non-judgmental stance towards other viewpoints. It also finds support in the work of Judith Butler, who argues that often a person comes to critique simply because her life under the current regime of power and knowledge has become unlivable. If one's life is unlivable, one does not require normative criteria by which to justify resistance. If Foucault chose to focus on madness, discipline, and sexuality because he found them in some way personally intolerable, would it be so strange that he would suggest resisting them? Perhaps it is true, as Fraser speculates, that he actually did approach power strategically and not normatively.<sup>419</sup> Why else would he contend that everything is dangerous and our main task is to determine the most pressing danger? Veyne says of critique that to challenge political legitimacy must "be a personal decision, for the new system of government will be just as arbitrary as the last one--not that this is a consideration that has ever stopped

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<sup>417</sup> Veyne, *Foucault*, 120.

<sup>418</sup> O'Leary, *Foucault and the Art of Ethics*, 172.

<sup>419</sup> Fraser, "Foucault on Modern Power: Empirical Insights and Normative Confusions," 28.

anyone from going ahead."<sup>420</sup> Thus, if a person finds the situation that they are in intolerable, they will likely resist, without going through an intellectual exercise that determines whether they should or not.

There are positive outcomes of this perspective from a Foucauldian point of view. First of all, it situates resistance where it lives--in local, strategic battles. A person tends not to find something sufficiently intolerable to do something about it unless it touches her where she is. Second, it militates against the universalization of programs and norms, something we know that Foucault is very much against. Naturally people engaged in a struggle, when presented with the opportunity to bring people over to their side, will attempt to utilize shared norms in order to convince others of the rightness of their cause. However, as we noted in chapter three, this use of shared concepts and values will always be strategic. Finally, I would add that such a perspective militates against progressive triumphalism. Often, as progressives, when we feel that our society has been liberated from the bonds of religious, patriarchal, or class oppression, we deny the rights of others to feel differently. In her classic 1991 article, "Representing Fundamentalism: The Problem of the Repugnant Culture Other," Susan Friend Harding argues that the fundamentalist is the other that we are allowed to hate, to mock, to lack empathy for. Since they have rejected our progressive practices and values, we are free to assume that they have no practices or values worth acknowledging either.<sup>421</sup> However, by imagining

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<sup>420</sup> Veyne, *Foucault*, 38-39.

<sup>421</sup> Susan Friend Harding, "Representing Fundamentalism: The Problem of the Repugnant Culture Other," *Social Research* 58, no. 2 (Summer 1991): 373-393.

power struggles as strategic, we are called to complicate this self-righteous attitude.<sup>422</sup> From a Foucauldian perspective, it does not matter whether the oppression felt by the Bible-believing Christian is legitimate or illegitimate. They feel that their lives have become intolerable, and they are resisting. According to McWhorter, acknowledging their struggle does not mean we have to give up our own. That is the nature of a war. When Bible-believing Christians attempt to dehumanize homosexuals and constrain their abilities to live fulfilling lives, they must be resisted; a counterattack must be staged to tear down heterosexist institutions and practices. We should not, however, pretend that we are divested of responsibility for governing them in ways they do not wish to be governed.<sup>423</sup> Power cuts both ways, and when progressives govern others via their own principles, that government can and does feel oppressive to them. Thus, the notion that the basis of resistance is intolerability gives us pause to reconsider what resistance means, and for whom.

That said, it is clear that Foucault is a child of his age--as he would be the first to insist--and not immune to the influences of the Western normative tradition. Charles Taylor states, "'the underlying ideal' (or *telos*) of Foucault's later reflections, in terms of the history of ideas, seems to be patently un-Greek; indeed 'some variant of that most invisible, because it is the most pervasive, modern good, unconstrained freedom.'"<sup>424</sup>

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<sup>422</sup> According to Nancy Fraser, Foucault "says he has substituted the perspective of war, with its contrast between struggle and submission, for that of right, with its contrast between legitimacy and illegitimacy." Fraser, "Foucault on Modern Power: Empirical Insights and Normative Confusions," 28.

<sup>423</sup> Ladelle McWhorter, *Bodies and Pleasures*, 191.

<sup>424</sup> Quoted in Matthew Sharpe, "'Critique' as Technology of the Self," *Foucault Studies* 2 (May 2005): 113.

Leaving aside that freedom is only un-Greek if you conceive it in a certain way, this seems like a fair pronouncement. Foucault is supremely interested in increasing freedom, both the freedom of the epistemic field and the freedom of individuals to create newness there. Cressida Heyes notes,

the kind of genealogical critique Foucault offers always appeals to its audience's shared values--or freedom as autonomy in particular--while showing that a particular practice of power fails to live up to them in ways we have not recognized [...] Foucault consistently resists a theory of the subject in favor of the pragmatic recognition that making power more flexible and multivalent will open up new possibilities for thinking and acting: a project we are already tacitly inclined to consider politically valuable, albeit for reasons that are very much contingent on our historical and political location.<sup>425</sup>

The first part of this quote suggests that Foucault might be focusing abstractly on a particular type of power and showing that it does not live up to our shared value of freedom as autonomy, but what I am arguing here is that Foucault makes a claim about the oppressiveness of disciplinary and normalizing power, not from an abstract location, but from the site of his own situated body, and in the hope that by demonstrating its effects he might alert others to the contingency of their own subjectivity. Ultimately the goal is what Heyes discusses in the second half of this passage, to open up new possibilities for thinking and acting. As Dianna Taylor notes, the practice of freedom "is the practice of navigating power relations in ways that keep them open and dynamic and which, in doing so, allow for the development of new, alternative modes of thought and existence."<sup>426</sup> In order to engage in this one must challenge ossified modes of thought and

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<sup>425</sup> Cressida Heyes, "Subjectivity and power," in *Michel Foucault: Key Concepts*, ed. Dianna Taylor (Durham, UK: Acumen, 2011), 169. She attributes this reading to Thomas Flynn.

<sup>426</sup> Dianna Taylor, ed., introduction to *Michel Foucault: Key Concepts* (Durham, UK: Acumen, 2011), 4.

practice. "[E]ffective' navigation of power relations involves critically analyzing our present condition in order to identify norms and practices that reinforce the status quo to the point where prevailing modes of thought and existence come to be seen as given, as what must be."<sup>427</sup>

Acknowledging that one of Foucault's normative criteria is existential freedom also answers the question of how the pragmatic, experimental self can determine whether the new way of life it has created is beneficial or not. Obviously the first determinate would be: is it more tolerable for me? Then this must be tested against one's social reality to see if it promotes other's practices of freedom as well. Karen Vintges highlights this aspect of his thought, saying, "Foucault's interpretation of contingent self-understandings may imply a pluralism when it comes to ethos, but his 'normative modernist' commitment sets limits on their content: a Nazi ethos, for instance, is excluded. One moral code can be distilled from the later Foucault's work, namely, freedom for all persons for self-creation."<sup>428</sup> We can see then how such a practice might function in a pluralist democracy. Christopher Falzon states,

[h]istorical dialogue is a process that exceeds what can be rationality determined by its participants. Frameworks of rational justification themselves emerge within it. In this dialogical context, critique can take the negative form of calling attention to the finitude of existing forms, but with positive consequences. It is motivated by a situation in which prevailing ways of doing things have become contested in practice, and serves to facilitate that contestation. It is not critique itself but the larger contestation it promotes that will determine what changes ultimately come about.<sup>429</sup>

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<sup>427</sup> Taylor, "Introduction," 5.

<sup>428</sup> Karen Vintges, "Must We Burn Foucault? Ethics as Art of Living: Simone de Beauvoir and Michel Foucault," *Continental Philosophy Review* 34, no. 2 (March 2001): 173-74.

This reiterates the argument in the last chapter about how *parrhēsia* can function in a democracy given the aporia that ethical distinctions introduce into the egalitarian structure of democracy. Through the figure of the Cynic, we saw that ethics is connected to politics through living the scandal of the truth, a radical critique of society that ripples out, inciting communal and then social transformation. Falzon determines, "[c]ritique finds justification as a means of facilitating ongoing dialogue in the face of domination," and from the perspective of Foucauldian freedom a society is better if it has more dialogue and less domination.<sup>430</sup> Moreover, individuals involved in care of the self are ultimately better able to engage in democratic dialogue. Jerold Abrams claims, "this experimental private sphere is the very root of democracy, because it produces individuals who are at home with the experimental method, and who come to the democratic 'table' well-equipped with the experimental attitude which contributes so much to democratic thinking."<sup>431</sup> Thus, it would be best if society molded citizens "who enjoy the experimental method, who are at home with contingency, and the forming of contingency into coherent and creative wholes."<sup>432</sup> In such a society, according to Foucault, "[t]he good is defined by us, it is practiced, it is invented. And this is collaborative work."<sup>433</sup>

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<sup>429</sup> Christopher Falzon, "Foucault, Philosopher of Dialogue," in *Foucault and Philosophy*, ed. Timothy O'Leary and Christopher Falzon (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2010), 241.

<sup>430</sup> Falzon, "Foucault, Philosopher of Dialogue," 242.

<sup>431</sup> Jerold J. Abrams, "The Aesthetics of Self-Fashioning and Cosmopolitanism: Foucault and Rorty on the Art of Living," *Philosophy Today* 46, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 190.

<sup>432</sup> Abrams, 190.

Thus, we return full circle, to finally explain the title of the dissertation. In the lecture course, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, Foucault states, "[t]o become again what one never was, this is, I think, one of the elements, one of the fundamental themes of this practice of self" (HS 92). Foucault says this in the context of a discussion of Seneca and likely means that one can become the ethical subject that one always was and yet never was because of one's previous malformation. However, this statement has been taken up by scholars as defining Foucault's concept of care of the self. Prozorov states, freedom for the individual means "the potentiality for (not) being (other than) what one is."<sup>434</sup> Yet, Prozorov makes the astute point here that the goal is not simply to be other than what one is, in a continual pointless refashioning. Rather freedom is the

*potentiality for being otherwise* [...] To speak of 'being otherwise' is therefore not to advocate, let alone prescribe transformation, but rather to accentuate the utter contingency of any positive identity, which is nothing other than an actualisation of one potential among others, which thereby retreat into the past as something that 'could have been.' Being what one is is therefore revealed as also irreducibly potential, as something that could have been otherwise."<sup>435</sup>

One does not need to become otherwise to actualize one's freedom then. One must simply recognize that the self one has is only one among many possibilities. Although one might argue that "experienc[ing] ourselves as other than what we have been made to be"<sup>436</sup> is already experiencing oneself otherwise, pointedly other to naturalized assumptions about human nature and transcendental subjectivity. To subjectivate the truth of an unknown

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<sup>433</sup> Quoted in Taylor, "Introduction," 9.

<sup>434</sup> Prozorov, *Foucault, Freedom and Sovereignty*, 8.

<sup>435</sup> Prozorov, 8.

<sup>436</sup> Ladelle McWhorter, quoted in Cressida Heyes, *Self-Transformations*, 119.



*telos* requires a commitment to this sort of potentiality. Elizabeth Povinelli states concerning Foucauldian *parrhēsia*,

[t]he kind of truth-telling that interests Foucault is a kind of practice that opens the field of truth and in the process exposes the truth and the subject to a number of permutations whose effects the subject cannot yet know [...] The kind of performative that interests Foucault opens the very orders that provide the conditions on which performativity as such depends, leaving subjectivity, referentiality, and world dangling.<sup>437</sup>

Nor can we even assume at the end of the day that freedom means what we imagine it to mean. Eduardo Mendieta echoes Foucault's pronouncement of the multiplicity of possible freedoms, when he says, "[f]reedom is never one, it is never stable, it is never *a priori*, nor is it ever transcendental. It is always contingent, it is always practiced, it is always discursive and relational, it is intransigent and recalcitrant. It is always to be achieved, sustained, preserved and wrested from the games of power in which it always circulates like blood in a living organism."<sup>438</sup> To become again what we never were, for Foucault, is not to become a master, or autarkic, or even a full subject, it is to become free. Free is what we always have been and yet never have been. To become so, we must be so.

I will conclude here with a quote, discovered quite by chance, as things are, in a pleasurable turn through Frank Kermode's *The Sense of an Ending*. It comes from a book written in 1934, by the great Spanish writer, philosopher, and hunter, José Ortega y Gasset. If Michel Foucault never read *History as a System*, it is clear that its truth was part of him nonetheless.

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<sup>437</sup> Povinelli, "The Will to Be Otherwise/The Effort of Endurance," 459.

<sup>438</sup> Eduardo Mendieta, "The practice of freedom," in *Michel Foucault: Key Concepts*, ed. Dianna Taylor (Durham, UK: Acumen, 2011), 123.

It is too often forgotten that man is impossible without imagination, without the capacity to invent for himself a conception of life, to 'ideate' the character he is going to be [...] Among ... possibilities I must choose. Hence, I am free. But, be it well understood, I am free *by compulsion*, whether I wish to be or not ... To be free means to be lacking in constitutive identity, not to have subscribed to a determined being, to be able to be other than what one was...<sup>439</sup>

This chapter has explored Foucault's understanding of freedom to highlight several things. First, Foucault promotes an aesthetic practice derived from his reading of the classical sources as a corrective to what he views as an impoverishment of relationality in the contemporary world: the filtering of all other relationships through the relationship to the law and the norm. Second, Foucault's analytics of power relations suggest that power and freedom are co-constitutive. Power can only exist because subjects are free, in the sense of having the capacity for action. However, Foucault does acknowledge that some fields of power relations are characterized by less domination than others. He describes this freedom using metaphors of fluidity. The more free a field of power relations is, the more easily it can be transformed. In this way, Foucault figures the freedom of history and society as a radical contingency. Finally, Foucault redefines autonomy. He argues that human autonomy is not freedom from power, but freedom for change, the freedom to embark on a path of conversion. Ultimately, freedom is not something that individuals possess, but something they practice.

This understanding of freedom allows us to challenge the supposed freedom of the neoliberal subject, whom I have referred to here as *homo economicus*. Although neoliberalism portrays the modern subject as free because she is not overtly controlled by

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<sup>439</sup> Quoted in Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction with a New Epilogue* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 140-141.

governmental regulation and interference in her everyday life, looking at this issue through a Foucauldian lens shows us that this is a particularly insidious form of power that both masks its own strategies and forestalls collective action by conceptualizing each individual as an autonomous "entrepreneur." In the final, concluding, chapter, I explore some of the interventions I have discussed throughout the dissertation, proposing ways that Foucault's understanding of ethical subject formation might help environmental activists formulate better strategies for inspiring change.

## Conclusion: Towards a Cynic-al Activism

Any thinking that threatens the notion of human being as modernity has posited it--as rationally self-interested individual, as self-possessed bearer of rights and obligations, and active mental and moral agent--is thinking that threatens our very being, the configurations of subjective existence in our age. Those configurations of forces will resist this thinking.

--Ladelle McWhorter, "Guilt as Management Technology"<sup>440</sup>

[O]ur global campaign was the largest thing the environmental movement had ever seen; we'd built the first big green movement for the Internet age. The Keystone fight had demonstrated that we could rally people to go to jail. [But] we were losing. Badly. There were more carbon emissions and higher temperatures every year.

--Bill McKibben, *Oil and Honey*<sup>441</sup>

At the beginning of *The Courage of the Truth*, Foucault makes a point of differentiating the parrhesiast from other truth-tellers, such as the prophet, the sage, and the technician. Ultimately, he depicts the parrhesiast as the link between personal

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<sup>440</sup> Ladelle McWhorter, "Guilt as Management Technology: A Call to Heideggerian Reflection," 6-7.

<sup>441</sup> Bill McKibben, *Oil and Honey: The Education of an Unlikely Activist* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2013), 139-40.

transformation, community transformation, and eventually social transformation. Thus, by way of transition into environmental concerns, one might ask: is McKibben a parrhesiast, and does it matter?

McKibben does, in many ways, fit Foucault's basic definition of parrhesiast. Zachary Simpson summarizes the parrhesiast by saying, "[p]arrhesia seemingly demands a continuous conversion of the self in which 'one's style of life, one's relation to others, and one's relationship to oneself,' are altered in order to align with the truths and fictions one announces."<sup>442</sup> In McKibben's case, many of his books take the form of experiments in living that transform his real life. Previous to beginning his first book on climate change, he and his wife moved far out into the woods of the Adirondacks of New York State.<sup>443</sup> Subsequent books focused on various aspects of his daily life. In one, he watches hundreds of hours of television, recorded in one twenty-four hour period from the largest cable news network in the United States, and analyzes what is on and what it does to us.<sup>444</sup> *Hundred Dollar Holiday* evolves from a campaign at his church, and in the book he argues both for rediscovering the religious purpose of Christmas and creating more joy, reflection, and relaxation through decreased consumerism.<sup>445</sup> All of these books follow, at least implicitly, Foucault's prescription that writing a book should be a transformative practice of self. In *Long Distance: A Year of Living Strenuously*, McKibben undertakes to

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<sup>442</sup> Simpson, "The Truths We Tell Ourselves," 114.

<sup>443</sup> Bill McKibben, introduction to *The Bill McKibben Reader: Pieces from an Active Life* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2008), 3-4.

<sup>444</sup> Bill McKibben, *The Age of Missing Information* (New York: Plume, 1992).

<sup>445</sup> Bill McKibben, *Hundred Dollar Holiday: The Case for a More Joyful Christmas* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998).

become a competitive cross-country ski racer in order to understand his own body and boundaries. He says, "mostly it was curiosity that drove me. By year's end I hoped I'd have more sense of what life lived *through the body* felt like."<sup>446</sup> He reflects later on in the book about how the year of training and racing has pushed him beyond himself, forced him to risk himself in a way that most people avoid; "Growing older, it seemed to me, usually involved figuring out how *not to risk your ego*, how not to put yourself on the line. You found that comfort zone, that suburbia of the mind and heart, and you stayed safely inside of it."<sup>447</sup> McKibben, therefore, risks himself in bodily, social, and subjective ways during the writing of his books. Furthermore, the books are experience books in the Foucauldian sense, in that they both promote certain truths and enact the practice of those truths through a rendering of McKibben's own experience, whether it is ski-racing, tending bees, or mulling over a passage in the bible.

Two other factors support the view that McKibben practices physical and written *parrhēsia*. First, the truths he promotes are frequently critical of and counter to the norms of his society. In *The Age of Missing Information*, McKibben challenges the cultural hypnosis promoted by television, calls his readers to examine the ways in which television structures our consciousness of time, space, event, and relationships, and urges them to rethink the world and their place in it through counter-conduct, such as hiking and other interactions with nature. In *Maybe One*, he makes the controversial argument that the earth cannot support more people, and it is individual families' responsibility to

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<sup>446</sup> Bill McKibben, *Long Distance: A Year of Living Strenuously* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), 18.

<sup>447</sup> McKibben, *Long Distance*, 88.

voluntarily reduce reproduction.<sup>448</sup> In recent years, however, he has focused on challenging the sacred cow of American culture, economic growth. Seeds of this critique are evident in his early works, but it is in 2007's *Deep Economy* that he begins to argue strongly that economic growth is neither necessary to human happiness, nor feasible for our planet's future. He recapitulates this argument in *Eaarth*, where he says, "[w]e'll need to figure out what parts of our lives and our ideologies we must abandon so that we can protect the core of our societies and civilizations. There's nothing airy or speculative about this conversation; it's got to be uncomfortable, staccato, direct."<sup>449</sup> In other words, McKibben--like Seneca, Diogenes, and Foucault--stakes both personal and social transformation on confronting the naturalized assumptions of his society.

This leads to the second factor that defines McKibben as a parrhesiast: his courage. As Foucault notes, *parrhēsia* requires courage because a person must risk herself, either her relationship to the person whom she is trying to direct, or her personal safety. McKibben demonstrates the intimate form of courage in his relationship to his readers. He attempts to tell them the truth of their situation, and risks them turning away and refusing to hear. He acknowledges this when he says, concerning his critique of growth as a solution to climate change, "[that we cannot grow our way out of this

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<sup>448</sup> While such a claim is controversial from the standpoint of governments controlling intimate aspects of their citizens' lives (China's one-child policy, for instance), even the push for voluntary cuts has led to claims of racism on the part of developed countries. In the words of Catriona Sandilands, "population discourse at this historical juncture relies on the bifurcation of the world into two: 'good' ecological citizens, who have listened to and understood the call for limits and do not require (further) regulatory intervention, and unruly bodies, who have not, might not, and/or do" (Sandilands, "Sex at the Limits," 86.) McKibben counters, "environmental destruction is the result of an equation: population times level of consumption times efficiency of consumption equals impact," and we need to address all of them. McKibben, *The Comforting Whirlwind*, 43.

<sup>449</sup> Bill McKibben, *Eaarth: Making Life on a Tough New Planet* (New York: Times Books, 2009), xiv.

problem] is a dark thing to say, and un-American, so I will try to make the case carefully."<sup>450</sup> He demonstrates physical, Cynic courage in his own activism against fossil fuel extraction and consumption. Near the beginning of the ongoing fight against the Keystone XL pipeline--with which oil companies seek to bring tar sands oil from Canada to the gulf for processing, thus making the extraction of the oil more profitable--McKibben was arrested with around seventy other people outside of the White House during a protest. He describes this ordeal in an article for *Rolling Stone Magazine*, "The Keystone Pipeline Revolt: Why Mass Arrests Are Just the Beginning," noting that he and his fellow protesters were held for three days, without charge, in fairly onerous conditions. One of the most poignant moments is when McKibben describes his days in custody at the Central Cell Block--two men per cell, constant light, little food, concrete slabs for beds--and then states, "[w]e counted ourselves lucky, however, when we found out that the 20 women under arrest had been left in a single cell without beds of any kind, huddled together to keep warm as guards blasted an air conditioner at them."<sup>451</sup> While giving up one's freedom for three days does not compare to the dangers faced by a parrhesiast like Martin Luther King Jr.,<sup>452</sup> it still takes courage, as McKibben notes, to

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<sup>450</sup> Ibid, 53. This is also evident in the vociferous condemnation of McKibben by conservative and pro-business groups, a dangerous position in its own right.

<sup>451</sup> Bill McKibben, "The Keystone Pipeline Revolt: Why Mass Arrests are Just the Beginning," *Rolling Stone Magazine* (September 28, 2011): accessed November 26, 2014, <http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/the-keystone-pipeline-revolt-why-mass-arrests-are-just-the-beginning-20110928>.

<sup>452</sup> Which does not mean, of course, that McKibben does not try to make such a connection. See for instance, "God Within the Shadows," in *The Bill McKibben Reader*, 237-250.



move out of your comfort zone and risk yourself in order to speak the truth, especially for a man who proclaims himself "risk-averse."<sup>453</sup>

Despite these factors, McKibben lacks the consistency required of a parrhesiast. For one thing, his experiments in living do not follow a clear trajectory, but seem to represent disconnected attempts to test himself or struggle with an intellectual problem. For instance, despite the many moments of introspection he has during his year of training in *Long Distance*, wondering whether his physical transformation might have other effects on his life--he asks himself, for instance, if his current fixation on himself "might someday yield a man who could more reliably put himself second"<sup>454</sup>--he ends the book without having come to any conclusions about how his experiment has impacted his life. Thus, although he does not lack for discipline and his experiments do have unintended effects on his life,<sup>455</sup> he does not integrate these into any sort of consistent practice of self that corresponds to certain truths. While this may impede his own transformation, it is particularly problematic for his potential role as parrhesiast because he cannot serve as a coherent example of living a life based on discourses of truth that are immediately accessible to others.

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<sup>453</sup> McKibben, *Oil and Honey: The Education of an Unlikely Activist* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2013), 206.

<sup>454</sup> McKibben, *Long Distance*, 54.

<sup>455</sup> For instance, he writes an article on a seven-month experiment in eating locally and concludes at the end, "this winter has permanently altered the way I eat." McKibben, "A Grand Experiment," in *The Bill McKibben Reader*, 134. He seems, in fact, to have a penchant for experiments, and frequently writes about various experiments in living, both his own and others. A good example of the latter is *Hope, Human and Wild: True Stories of Living Lightly on the Earth* (St. Paul, MN: Hungry Mind Press, 1995).

Another, perhaps related, issue is that he does not pay sufficient attention to the *kairos*, the strategic flexibility of the parrhesiast in choosing the correct moment and method of speaking to the other in order to persuade them of the need to care for themselves. For Foucault, the parrhesiast is the exemplar of the fact that "[t]he philosophical life is a manifestation of truth. It is a testimony" (GSA 315). One important aspect of the communication of truth is having the wisdom to know how to speak to the person you are trying to convince. Recall Seneca in his nightly examination of self, noting, "in the course of a discussion and an interview with a friend, I wanted to try to give him a moral lesson, to help him progress, to help him recover, well, [...] I hurt him" (HS 462). Seneca is communicating the crucial point that the truth is not a blunt instrument. The means to the end of convincing the other to care for herself must derive from a deep and perspicacious contextual knowledge of the situation. For McKibben, a lack of attention to *kairos* may come from the nature of his medium. He is, after all, writing popular books and articles that need to appeal to a large number of people as well as the demands of his publishers. However, a more important factor is that he does not believe that people need to be persuaded in the way suggested by Seneca. Rather, he believes that simply telling people facts will allow them to come to the rational decision to change their behaviors. He says this again and again, but a good example is "Speaking Up for the Environment," where he says, "I know how it was supposed to work: people would read my book and demand change from their leaders, and that would be that."<sup>456</sup> In other words, simply present the facts and the urgency of the problem, and rational people

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<sup>456</sup> Bill McKibben, "Speaking Up for the Environment," in *The Bill McKibben Reader*, 348.

will change. Even when he says, "*Most* people have to be persuaded, and persuaded quickly, to change,"<sup>457</sup> he is not talking about Foucauldian persuasion, but a combination of showing people their responsibility for the crisis and certain types of governmental-policy changes. Despite the continued failure of his message to inspire the types of changes he feels are necessary, his tactics do not change dramatically. Thus, his inattentiveness to the *kairos* marks him as an ineffective parrhesiast.

Upon reflection, it seems as though this inconsistency may actually derive from a competing mode of veridiction: prophecy. As Foucault notes, the prophet also speaks the truth, but he does so in a voice that is not his own, which suggests both that he does not necessarily need to practice what he preaches nor attend to the importance of the *kairos*, since God decides the moment and the mode of speaking the truth. Speaking in the voice of God, the prophet calls attention to the unraveling of the present and speaks to the coming salvation (CV 16-17). It would be extreme to say that McKibben believes that he speaks in the voice of God, but his tone is nonetheless prophetic, in the tradition of a Hebrew prophet such as Amos who militated for social justice, called fellow believers to recognize the hubris of rejecting God's omnipotence, and prophesied a divine judgment. One of McKibben's persistent themes is Job and the voice from the whirlwind, which calls humans to understand that they are not the center of the universe.<sup>458</sup> For instance, McKibben insists, concerning the Christian concept of stewardship, "the consensus, as I understand it, is that at the very least most interpreters agree that God, who after all had

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<sup>457</sup> McKibben, *The End of Nature*, 204.

<sup>458</sup> See Bill McKibben, *The Comforting Whirlwind: God, Job, and the Scale of Creation* (New York: WB Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994).

gone to the trouble of creating myriad species and who had called them 'good,' did not understand dominion to include thoughtless destruction for short-term gain."<sup>459</sup> Of course, in contrast to a prophet like Amos, who focused largely on the brutality of man towards other men, McKibben imagines the sins of his contemporaries as sins of omission towards nature.<sup>460</sup> Nonetheless these sins demonstrate a human rejection of God's omnipotence,<sup>461</sup> and result in the wanton destruction of his creations, both human and more-than-human.

Of course, no prophecy would be complete without pronouncement of the coming judgment, and the theme of apocalypse supports the conclusion that McKibben's veridiction tends towards the prophetic. Given that one of his main rhetorical tactics is to convey the immensity and urgency of climate change, nearly every book contains at least one section describing extreme weather events and other catastrophes. His article about Hurricane Katrina, however, is notable, understandably, for its apocalyptic fervor. Entitled "Year One"--as in year one of our new, unpredictable, dangerous planet--, the article juxtaposes images of floating corpses with depictions of drastic reductions in Arctic ice shelves with dramatic projections of future "environmental refugees"--150 million by 2050 according to environmental researcher, Norman Myers.<sup>462</sup> The idea that humans have altered the environment so dramatically that we now live on a different planet is a

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<sup>459</sup> Ibid, 34-35.

<sup>460</sup> Unless he is talking about corporations and the people that run them.

<sup>461</sup> He says in *The End of Nature*, "[i]n a sense we turn out to be God's equal--or, at least, his rival--able to destroy creation," 71.

<sup>462</sup> Bill McKibben, "Year One," in *The Bill McKibben Reader*, 86-87.

significant apocalyptic theme in his work. It features prominently in his first book, *The End of Nature*--where he states, "[b]y changing the weather, we make every spot on the earth man-made and artificial. We have deprived nature of its independence, and that is fatal to its meaning. Nature's independence *is* its meaning; without it there is nothing but us."<sup>463</sup> It also functions as the premise of his 2009 work, *Eaarth*, which argues that because we now live on a different planet, we need a new name for it. This apocalyptic rhetoric is unproductive according to Anthony Weston, who states, "[a]n enthusiastic tour of looming catastrophe after looming catastrophe only disempowers us more thoroughly."<sup>464</sup> Michael Pollan, a prominent environmental activist in his own right, agrees. He notes in a review of McKibben's work,

[his] biggest contribution to environmental thinking in "The End of Nature" was to unwittingly expose the harmfulness of this idea, which deserves much of the blame for America's schizoid, all-or-nothing approach toward the environment; we possess the unique ability to worship Edenic wilderness while paving over everything else. Once you conclude, with McKibben, that all of nature is fallen—that even the rain falling upon Yosemite "bears the permanent stamp of man"—you are left with his counsel of despair: "If nature has already ended," he wrote, "what are we fighting for?"<sup>465</sup>

Frank Kermode notes that another a typical outcome of apocalyptic rhetoric is that its hyperbole causes individuals to simply ignore it; "[w]hen you read, as you must almost every passing day, that ours is the great age of crisis--technological, military, cultural"<sup>466</sup>--

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<sup>463</sup> McKibben, *The End of Nature*, 58.

<sup>464</sup> Anthony Weston, *Mobilizing the Green Imagination: An Exuberant Manifesto* (Gabriola, BC: New Society Publishers, 2012), 2.

<sup>465</sup> Michael Pollan, "It's Not the End After All," *Los Angeles Times* (November 26, 1995): accessed November 29, 2014, <http://michaelpollan.com/articles-archive/its-not-the-end-after-all/>.

you may well simply nod and proceed calmly to your business; for this assertion, upon which a multitude of important books is founded, is nowadays no more surprising than the opinion that the earth is round."<sup>467</sup> Of course, McKibben might counter, actually the *eaarth* is round.

At this point, it is fair to ask, why does it matter? So McKibben is more prophet than parrhesiast. So his strategies for achieving transformation are not working. So what? The short answer is, we need him. McKibben occupies an important position in terms of affecting change in the way activists do business. He is prominent enough to have a wide audience--something that cannot be said for a radical philosopher like Anthony Weston--and he is on the cusp of embodying a Foucauldian attitude towards ethical transformation, even if he does not realize it. Thus, he is ripe for a deeper immersion in the principles of parrhesiastic action.

Moreover, environmental action needs a parrhesiast to challenge the most basic assumptions of our society and pull us out of our *stultitia*. At this point, attitudes towards the environment are essentially dominated by the logic of the economic market. In his article on the Foucauldian exploration of neoliberalism, Jason Read states, "[n]eoliberalism entails a massive expansion of the field and scope of economics [...]" everything for which humans beings attempt to realize their ends, from marriage, to crime, to expenditures on children, can be understood 'economically'; according to a

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<sup>466</sup> He might be forgiven for not mentioning "environmental." Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* was published five years before this work, in 1962, but the idea of irrevocable environmental apocalypse had not yet entered widespread public consciousness.

<sup>467</sup> Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*, 93-94.

particular calculation of cost for benefit."<sup>468</sup> Jana Sawicki argues, thus, that neoliberalism inculcates a new subject, "the self as entrepreneur, or *homo economicus*."<sup>469</sup> She continues, "[w]ithin this regime of power/knowledge, individuals are encouraged to differentiate themselves, be responsible for themselves, and govern themselves within a legal and social framework structured to regulate and promote competition."<sup>470</sup> It is not surprising that within this system, the more-than-human world comes to be viewed as another resource or impediment to achieving one's desired goals, and that it must be treated with the same cost/benefit attitude as every other aspect of one's life. As the founders of The Dark Mountain Project, Paul Kingsnorth and Dougald Hines, describe it, all the stories of human progress,

tell of humanity's original transcendence of its animal beginnings, our growing mastery over a 'nature' to which we no longer belong, and the glorious future of plenty and prosperity which will follow when this mastery is complete. It is the story of human centrality, of a species destined to be lord of all it surveys, unconfined by the limits that apply to other lesser creatures. What makes this story so dangerous is that, for the most part, we have forgotten that it is a story.<sup>471</sup>

One of the main problems with neoliberal subjectivity, then, is that it has become naturalized. In fact, many scholars, inside economics and out, believe that *homo economicus* is our fundamental human nature.<sup>472</sup> Such a logic tends to neutralize ethical

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<sup>468</sup> Jason Read, "A Genealogy of Homo-Economicus: Neoliberalism and the Production of Subjectivity," *Foucault Studies* 6 (February 2009): 28.

<sup>469</sup> Jana Sawicki, "Queer Feminism: Cultivating Ethical Practices of Freedom," *Foucault Studies* 16 (September 2013): 82.

<sup>470</sup> Ibid.

<sup>471</sup> Paul Kingsnorth and Dougald Hine, "*Uncivilisation: The Dark Mountain Manifesto*" The Dark Mountain Project, accessed June 9, 2014, <http://dark-mountain.net/about/manifesto/>.

and political critique. As Melissa Orlie notes, "[t]he commodification of ethics and politics, coupled with the fantasies of personal and collective power they facilitate, generates a subjectivity with fantasies of itself as an ethical and political actor. But this fantasized subjectivity has at best tenuous relations to collaborative political practices and little sense of its actual material effects."<sup>473</sup>

Even worse, without a persistent attitude of hyper-vigilance, the types of actions taken to counter perceptions of and behaviors vis-à-vis the environment can be both ineffective and even detrimental. Despite attempting to think outside the system,<sup>474</sup> philosophers and activists can end up reproducing the forms of normalization that Foucault alerts us to in his work on biopower.<sup>475</sup> According to Timothy Luke, many activists and organizations think they already possess or can easily discover all the knowledge they need to solve environmental crises; "And since these eco-knowledges exist, all that existing state regimes need to do is to mobilize the moral-political will to operationalize this knowledge about how geo-power works: forcing the rich to become frugal, transferring resources to the poor, enhancing citizen participation in collective

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<sup>472</sup> This concept, derived from neoclassical economics, has been challenged in recent years by branches of the field such as behavioral economics, which argue that humans are not inherently rational actors.

<sup>473</sup> Melissa A. Orlie, "The Desire for Freedom and the Consumption of Politics," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 28, no. 4 (July 2002): 411-12.

<sup>474</sup> More often than not, they do not attempt to do so, charges Paul Kingsnorth. In his experience in the environmental movement, "we kept pretending that if we just carried on campaigning as usual," the future would somehow become "bright, green, comfy and 'sustainable'." Kingsnorth, "Why I stopped believing in environmentalism and started the Dark Mountain Project," *The Guardian* (April 29, 2010): accessed November 30, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2010/apr/29/environmentalism-dark-mountain-project>.

<sup>475</sup> See for instance, the lecture course, *The Birth of Biopower*.



decision making, slowing population growth everywhere."<sup>476</sup> He wonders, however, who produced this knowledge and to what end? Éric Darier is even more explicit. He states, "[c]urrent environmental concerns could be seen as an extension of 'biopolitics,' broadened to all life forms and called 'ecopolitics' [...] On this scenario, the normalizing strategy of ecopolitics is the most recent attempt to extend control ('management') to the entire planet."<sup>477</sup> Such management can have extremely negative consequences for "deviants" who cannot or will not be normalized into the current regime of environmental knowledge. We see this in Catriona Sandilands' critique of strategies for population control cited above. She also notes that the fixation on preserving pristine wilderness, in the United States and elsewhere, can be used as a "violent rationale for the dispossession of peoples and livelihoods."<sup>478</sup> Jake Kosek, in his book about political battles over forests in New Mexico, makes the same point about John Muir's commitment to "untouched" wilderness, stating, "[a]lthough he depicted it otherwise, John Muir's unblemished wilderness was, in fact, a space of violent, racially-driven dispossession, one of a series of removals, massacres, and impoverishments that had reduced the Native American population in California from 250,000 to 16,000 within half a century."<sup>479</sup> Of course, as

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<sup>476</sup> Timothy W. Lukes, "Environmentality as Green Governmentality: Geo-Power, Eco-Knowledge And Enviro-Discipline As Tactics Of Normalisation," in *Discourses of the Environment*, ed. Éric Darier (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Inc., 1999), 139.

<sup>477</sup> Éric Darier, introduction to *Discourses of the Environment*, ed. Éric Darier (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Inc., 1999), 23.

<sup>478</sup> Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands, "Melancholy Natures, Queer Ecologies," in *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire*, eds. Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010), 337-38.

Kosek notes, it is not just fantasies of the wild that lead to these types of dispossession. Much of his book focuses on the ways in which the scientific management of timber resources by the United States forest service comes into conflict with local populations in their lives in and with the forest.<sup>480</sup> Vicki Hearne makes a similar point about the inherent dangers of militant animal rights rhetoric, such as that of Peter Singer. She notes that frequently such thinkers are not actually engaged with the lifeworlds of the animals they want to protect. In her words,

Animal-rights publications are illustrated largely with photographs of two kinds of animals--"Helpless Fluff" and "Agonized Fluff," the two conditions in which some people seem to prefer their animals, because any other version of an animal is too complicated for propaganda. In the introduction to his book *Animal Liberation*, Peter Singer says somewhat smugly that he and his wife have no animals and, in fact, don't much care for them. This is offered as evidence of his objectivity and ethical probity. But it strikes me as an odd, perhaps obscene, underpinning for an ethical project.<sup>481</sup>

Naturally, she does not say this to justify the many types of genuine cruelty that are inflicted on animals, but simply to urge her readers to question an ethical argument whose logical outcome is that things would be easier if there were no animals at all. Ladelle McWhorter also questions the simple inversion of the culture/nature binary hierarchy, arguing "[a] return to nature in our day and age is just another gesture in the general movement away from that which dies. Nature is now the eternal; culture that which passes away."<sup>482</sup>

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<sup>479</sup> Jake Kosek, *Understories: The Political Life of Forests in Northern New Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 156.

<sup>480</sup> Ibid. See chapter two, "Sovereign Natures," 62-102.

<sup>481</sup> Vicki Hearne, "What's Wrong with Animal Rights: Of Hounds, Horses, and Jeffersonian happiness," *Harper's Magazine* (September 1991): 61.

The point clearly is not to throw up our hands and give up on attempting different strategies for change, but rather that Foucauldian skepticism about the potential dangers of different programs must animate alternate ways of being in and with nature. As Darier writes, "[a]s there are no absolute external referential categories, it is not possible to evaluate in the abstract the degree of 'greenness' of any act of resistance. However, since any action is situated in a specific context of power relations, it is possible to know if, tactically and at a given time, a Green act of resistance merely legitimizes the existing system of power relations or if it undermines it."<sup>483</sup> Thus,

Green ethics based on resistance must be understood as an aesthetic of human existence rooted in a permanent, radical questioning and requestioning of the broader conditions which result in humans seeing the world as they see it, so as to think differently from the way they now think. It is through this process of constant hyper-criticism and "tactical hyper-activism" (Gandal 1986: 122) that one can question the conditions which account for one's subjectivity, and start to imagine and build new kinds of subjectivities.<sup>484</sup>

It is in the spirit of such hyper-vigilant ethical transformation that I offer the following provisional Foucauldian interventions into environmental activism, using Bill McKibben as a foil. I do not seek to present an exhaustive analysis of such an intervention based on my exegesis of Foucault's late work, but rather gesture towards some avenues for the development of further thought.

### *Turning Our Lives Around*

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<sup>482</sup> Ladelle McWhorter, "Culture or Nature: The Function of the Term 'Body' in the Work of Michel Foucault," *Journal of Philosophy* 86, no. 11 (November 1989): 613.

<sup>483</sup> Éric Darier, "Foucault Against Environmental Ethics," in *Discourses of the Environment*, ed. Éric Darier (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Inc., 1999), 233-34.

<sup>484</sup> Darier, "Foucault Against Environmental Ethics," 234.

While McKibben acknowledges the necessity of the radical transformation of human behaviors, values, and perspectives towards nature, he fails to articulate this consistently throughout his work. On the one hand, he makes strong statements such as, "[w]e'll need to figure out what parts of our lives and our ideologies we must abandon so that we can protect the core of our societies and civilizations,"<sup>485</sup> and "[i]n the real world, the very necessary task of recycling is at best calisthenics for the marathon we must run. Realism, sadly, demands that we recognize the need for deep and fundamental change--for recycling our cars into buses and bicycles."<sup>486</sup> He concedes, in fact, "the sacrifice demanded may be on a scale we can't imagine and we won't like."<sup>487</sup> On the other hand, he often downplays the scale of change required. In his handbook for environmental action, the most direct expression of his strategies for combatting climate change, he says, "[w]ill our lifestyles have to change enormously? Probably not. Most of the first cheap and easy steps won't involve enormous change."<sup>488</sup> Of course, this latter perspective is fairly typical of mainstream environmental groups. According to Anders Biel, activists frequently focus on encouraging people to buy green products because it is considered a "minor sacrifice" compared to a dramatic change in behavior like taking the bus to work instead of driving.<sup>489</sup> However, coming from McKibben it sounds absurd.

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<sup>485</sup> McKibben, *Eaarth*, xiv.

<sup>486</sup> McKibben, *Hope, Human and Wild*, 225-26.

<sup>487</sup> McKibben, *The End of Nature*, 14.

<sup>488</sup> McKibben, *Fight Global Warming Now*, 16.

Later in the very same handbook, he insists, "climate change is a crisis and it requires a new way of living our lives, for centuries to come."<sup>490</sup> Given his dire predictions concerning the fate of the planet in the face of global warming, and his courage in taking on the untouchable issue of economic growth, it is disingenuous to suggest to his readers and followers that change will be easy, even at first. Moreover, this strategy has proven itself ineffective. As Aldo Leopold presciently notes, "by making conservation easy, we [make] it trivial."<sup>491</sup>

McKibben's perspective on the possibility of personal change derives from a certain understanding of human nature as composed of good and bad aspects, the latter of which frequently predominate. In despair over the difficulty of change, he states,

[w]e could, perhaps, figure out some way to drastically trim our ways of life and our numbers. But our impulse will be to adapt not ourselves but the earth. We will, I think, try to figure out a new way to continue our domination, and hence our accustomed life-styles, our hopes for our children. This defiance is our reflex. Our impulse will be to spurn the doomsayers and to press bravely ahead into some new world.<sup>492</sup>

From his perspective, this is just human nature; "[e]xtreme anthropocentrism is simply the reality of human behavior. If it was between giving up a small part of our daily comforts and the extinction of penguins, the Antarctic would be an empty sheet of ice."<sup>493</sup>

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<sup>489</sup> Anders Biel, "Environmental Behavior: Changing Habits in Social Context," in *Individual and Structural Determinants of Environmental Practice*, eds. Anders Biel, Bengt Hansson, and Mona Mårtensson (Hants, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2003), 22-23.

<sup>490</sup> McKibben, *Fight Global Warming Now*, 166.

<sup>491</sup> Aldo Leopold, "The Land Ethic," in *The Ethics of the Environment*, ed. Robin Attfield (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), 104.

<sup>492</sup> McKibben, *The End of Nature*, 150.

<sup>493</sup> *Ibid* 152.

However, there are moments when he brushes against the idea that the logic of *homo economicus* is not part of our nature, that our subjectivities have been formed through habituation. He says, for instance, "consumerism--consumption--is by now an ideology, nearly a faith. It's barely a choice; it's deep in your bones, the way that religion was deep in the bones of your average fourteenth-century peasant."<sup>494</sup> However, he cannot come all the way to meet someone like Melissa Orlie, who argues, "[t]he citizens of late modern American political capitalism are consumers and commodity consumption is increasingly our principal practice of self [...] Through commodity consumption, we at once gain access to social powers and become subject to them."<sup>495</sup>

Rather, McKibben prefers to imagine that human nature is both good and bad, and that we simply need to find a way to develop those parts of ourselves that value things other than money. He says, "[v]ery few of us are pure *homo economicus*; we do certain things for the joy of it even though they're economically inefficient. Bake bread say."<sup>496</sup> As an example of how alternate values can be promoted, he cites the social experiment of Curitiba, a medium-sized city in Brazil, which underwent significant transformation in the 1990s under the leadership of Jaime Lerner. Using his power as mayor, Lerner pushed through a number of innovative city programs--often in the face of serious opposition--and was ultimately successful, in McKibben's eyes, in decreasing the city's carbon footprint while increasing quality of life. Reflecting on this experiment, McKibben says,

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<sup>494</sup> McKibben, *Maybe One*, 114.

<sup>495</sup> Orlie, "The Desire for Freedom and the Consumption of Politics," 400-01.

<sup>496</sup> McKibben, *Hope, Human and Wild*, 166.

"But does it *really* work? Have any of these changes really changed *people*? Or maybe *change* is the wrong word. Has it managed to bring out the part of their nature, the part of all of our natures, that likes the public world, the world of parks and plazas and barrooms and theaters, that likes to rub shoulders with the rest of the city?"<sup>497</sup> McKibben seems hopeful that this can happen on a grand scale. In *Hope, Human and Wild*, he downplays the need for us to transform our desires and insists, "I don't even think we need to 'change' ourselves. All of us have more than one kind of desire already within us; it's just that we've built our economy and society around one particular set of instincts, and ignored the others. But we could find those others again; they are not so deeply buried."<sup>498</sup> At the same time, he fears that the negative part of our natures is difficult to overcome; "When the choices are about values, we generally pick the easiest and cheapest way, the one that requires thinking the least. Inertia is our value above all others."<sup>499</sup>

Obviously, from a Foucauldian perspective, the lack of attention to the need for conversion renders McKibben's project essentially unethical. As Éric Darier states, "for Foucault, for an action to be ethical, 'it must not be reducible to an act or series of acts conforming to a rule, a law or a value' [...] Simple compliance with an environmental code of conduct is not alone sufficient to make an individual an ethical subject."<sup>500</sup>

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<sup>497</sup> Bill McKibben, "If You Build It, Will They Change?" in *The Bill McKibben Reader*, 208.

<sup>498</sup> McKibben, *Hope, Human and Wild*, 208.

<sup>499</sup> Bill McKibben, "The Cuba Diet," in *The Bill McKibben Reader*, 124.

<sup>500</sup> Darier, "Foucault Against Environmental Ethics," 226.

Moreover, an increased awareness of nature does not in itself move humans in the right direction. Rather "this 'awareness' must also lead to self-formation as an 'ethical subject'" through practices of self.<sup>501</sup> If one believes that one possesses an innate nature, and that one must simply uncover, or cultivate, the good parts of it, then one obviously will not be attentive to the ways in which one's desires, norms, values, and beliefs are formed by quotidian practices like consumption. Why does this matter for McKibben? What would be achieved by letting go of the idea of a substantive subject, and envisioning ethical transformation as a process of conversion?

First, much of McKibben's inconsistency concerning the need for radical change would fall away. If one is asked to reorient their subjectivity from that of *homo economicus* to something radically different, the idea that buying eco-friendly dish soap is a sacrifice falls away. Will our lives need to change? Yes, on the most basic level. Will it be hard? Yes, and it should be because the path of conversion is long and arduous. Yet, it is also filled with pleasure, freedom, and joy. McKibben could, thus, follow his apocalyptic rhetoric to its logical conclusion; "If industrial civilization is ending nature, it is not utter silliness to talk about ending--or, at least, transforming--industrial civilization."<sup>502</sup>

The second outcome would be that the paradox of *homo economicus* being not necessary but somehow inevitable resolves itself. While individuals may very well value things other than wealth, the problem with consumerism as an ideology is that it shapes

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<sup>501</sup> Ibid, 227.

<sup>502</sup> McKibben, *The End of Nature*, 186.



every other part of our lives. If, as Orlie insists, the logic of commodity capitalism has infiltrated all of our other relationships and practices, then the desire to bake bread or rub shoulders with the rest of the city may very well play into the logic of cost-benefit in insidious ways. McKibben is aware of this problem. He addresses it in the essay, "Consuming Nature," when he talks about his desire to eliminate the black-fly plague that descends on his Adirondack town in early summer. He writes, "it is no real stretch to say that the drive to eliminate blackflies from the small rural town where I live is simply one more manifestation of our deep consumer urge. We want to consume bite-free air; we want to consume our cedar decks and our pools and our gardens free of any complication or annoyance."<sup>503</sup> However, despite his acknowledgement of the constructedness of *homo economicus*, McKibben doubts our ability at this point to "truly shake our conditioning."<sup>504</sup> "How else would we behave?" he asks, "From 'real needs'?"<sup>505</sup> Even the logic of "real needs" also assumes that our desires are not constituted, that we have real needs we can discover. Unwittingly, McKibben himself offers a possible alternative. He says, "of course in other times and other places, people have managed to put other things at the center of their lives--their tribe or community, their God, nature, or some amalgamation of the three."<sup>506</sup>

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<sup>503</sup> McKibben, "Consuming Nature," in *The Bill McKibben Reader*, 21. This logic of the consumption of nature, which McKibben astutely depicts, also animates the wilderness preservationists who prefer not to have their wilderness cluttered up with the people who actually live there.

<sup>504</sup> Ibid.

<sup>505</sup> Ibid.

<sup>506</sup> Ibid.

What if we simply spent our lives putting one of those back into the center and see what happens? Zachary Simpson notes that the care of the self involves not just "truthful engagement with others, but the constructive telling of fictions to both oneself and others that would produce the effects of truth."<sup>507</sup> Understanding that our subjectivity is constituted frees us up to tell ourselves another story and to bring that truth into being. The point is we cannot change the world without changing ourselves on a basic level. As Thich Nhat Hanh avers,

[m]any people are aware of the world's suffering, and their hearts are filled with compassion. They know what needs to be done, and they engage in political, social, and environmental work to try to change things. But after a period of intense involvement, they become discouraged, because they lack the strength needed to sustain a life of action [...] If we change our daily lives--the way we think, speak and act--we change the world. The best way to take care of the environment is to take care of the environmentalist.<sup>508</sup>

Thus, viewing activism as a conversion to the self makes clear the necessity of questioning all of our naturalized assumptions. Of course doing so requires an ability to withstand uncertainty. This is why William Connolly says of Foucault that one of his basic techniques of self was "[a]ctive cultivation of the capacity to subdue resentment against the absence of necessity in what you are and to affirm the ambiguity of life without transcendental guarantees."<sup>509</sup>

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<sup>507</sup> Simpson, "The Truths We Tell Ourselves," 100.

<sup>508</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh, *Love in Action: Writings on Non-Violent Social Change* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1993), 132. It would be hard to find a more insightful diagnosis of McKibben's personal frustration.

<sup>509</sup> William Connolly, "Beyond Good and Evil: The Ethical Sensibility of Michel Foucault," in *The Later Foucault*, 110.

Attentiveness to the importance of conversation also brings to the fore the idea that we may not know the answers to the questions of environmental crisis. That in the process of caring for the self we may discover answers to questions that we did not even know were questions. Such a perspective animates much radical thinking concerning animals. Donna Haraway argues that in relationship to dogs we are called to do "precisely what most of us don't even know we don't know how to do--to wit, how to see who the dogs are and hear what they are telling us, not in bloodless abstraction, but in one-on-one relationship, in otherness-in-connection."<sup>510</sup> A similar point is made by Jim Cheney and Anthony Weston in their article, "Environmental Ethics as Environmental Etiquette: Towards an Ethics-Based Epistemology." They counter the traditional epistemology behind environmental ethics,<sup>511</sup> by insisting that environmentalists need an ethics-based epistemology rather than the converse. For our purposes here, the main point is that ethics

is not an attempt to respond to the world as *already* known. On the usual view, for example, we must first know what animals are capable of, then decide on that basis whether and how we are to consider them ethically. On the alternative view, we will have no idea of what other animals are actually capable--we will not readily understand them--until we *already* have approached them ethically--that is, until we have offered them the space and time, the occasion, and the acknowledgement necessary to enter into relationship.<sup>512</sup>

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<sup>510</sup> Haraway, *Companion Species Manifesto*, 45.

<sup>511</sup> They contend that this epistemology has four basic features: "(1) *Ethical action is a response to our knowledge of the world [...]* (2) *The world is readily knowable--at least to the extent required for ethical response [...]* (3) *Ethics is inherently an incremental and extensionist business [...]* (4) *The task of ethics is to sort the world ethically --that is, to articulate the nature of things in ethical terms.*" Jim Cheney and Anthony Weston, "Environmental Ethics as Environmental Etiquette: Towards an Ethics-Based Epistemology," in *Environmental Ethics: Convergence and Divergence*, 3rd Edition, eds. Susan J. Armstrong and Richard G. Botzler (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2004), 95-96.

<sup>512</sup> *Ibid* 96-97.

This is similar to the logic behind one of Foucault's critiques of humanism: that it forestalls our ability to imagine other freedoms because we do not know what possibilities the future holds until we embark on the path of transformation. Thus, Anthony Alessandrini concludes that we should stop trying to work within the discourse of extending rights--a contention with which Cheney and Weston would certainly agree. He concludes, "perhaps what we need instead is a new concept of ethical relationships, not between 'men', or even between people, but between would-be subjects that have not yet come into existence."<sup>513</sup> Perhaps it is not too much of a stretch to imagine those subjects as more-than-human.

The final pragmatic reason for Bill McKibben to embrace the idea of conversion is because it is the lynchpin of Foucault's understanding of care of the self and thus none of his other insights can operate well outside of it. If you believe that you can be an ethical subject without spiritual practice,<sup>514</sup> then you will not work to assimilate new truths through a regime of daily practice; you may not be as concerned with the importance of intimacy and community to the formation of your ethical self; you might believe, as McKibben does, that the only way to achieve social change is through top-down action. In short, in order to reconceptualize new strategies for effective environmental action, the idea that we cannot continue to operate as we have, that we cannot know the truth while remaining *homo economicus*, is a prerequisite.

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<sup>513</sup> Anthony C. Alessandrini, "The Humanism Effect: Fanon, Foucault, and Ethics without Subjects," *Foucault Studies* 7 (September 2009): 78.

<sup>514</sup> Spiritual in the Foucauldian sense.

*That Is Not How Brains Work*

There are many points at which the concept of *askēsis*, as the daily work of subjectivating truth through practice, can intervene in current environmental activism. In the interest of space, however, I will focus here on just two. One is extremely basic. Attitudes, values, and beliefs change through practice, not vice versa. The second is related but more specific. In order that truths can be subjectivated to the degree that they become second nature, they must be formulated in ways that make them easy to memorize and mobilize when the need arises.

Despite his own experiments in living, McKibben, like most environmental activists, believes awareness plus urgency equals change. He makes this clear in his lament concerning why no one has done anything about climate change over the past twenty-five years, despite his constant jeremiads. Most recently in *Rolling Stone* he writes, "[i]n a rational world, no one would need to march. In a rational world, policymakers would have heeded scientists when they first sounded the alarm 25 years ago."<sup>515</sup> Similarly, in the aptly titled, "Maybe We Should Call it something Scarier," he says, "[m]aybe the problem is with the name. 'Global Warming' just doesn't sound that bad. That's the only explanation I can think of for how unworried we are by the onset of the greenhouse effect."<sup>516</sup> Finally, he devotes a section in his activism handbook to

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<sup>515</sup> Bill McKibben, "A Call to Arms: An Invitation to Demand Action on Climate Change." *Rolling Stone Magazine* (5 June 2014): 47.

<sup>516</sup> McKibben, "Maybe We Should Call It Something Scarier," 71. He suggests, instead, "*El Piquante Grande*," "*Le Chaleur Enorme*," or maybe "Hell on Earth" (Ibid 73).

climate change facts,<sup>517</sup> arguing, "[i]f people know that something is wrong and dangerous, why don't they organize to do something about it? One of the most common reasons is the sense that they don't know enough."<sup>518</sup> However, if McKibben's own experience of people being relatively unconcerned about climate change is not evidence enough, psychologists have conducted studies to determine whether behavior change is actually related to education. It is not. Mikael Klinton highlights one of these studies and states, "[t]he result suggests that public divisions over climate change stem not from the public's incomprehension of science but from a distinctive conflict of interest,"<sup>519</sup> which he characterizes as objective evaluation of scientific findings versus the desire to be accepted by one's community.<sup>520</sup> Interestingly, Anders Ljungdalh notes a similar finding in an article on the concept of *stultitia* in diabetes treatment; "diabetics report that they have benefitted from the course [educating them in ways to manage their condition]. However they do not seem to change their lifestyle."<sup>521</sup> Thus, evidence suggests that educating people about an urgent problem does not necessarily lead them to change their behaviors. What, then, accounts for this persistent belief that education leads to change?

From the perspective of neurolinguist, George Lakoff, it is because progressives are committed to an outdated model of how the brain works. He discusses this issue in his

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<sup>517</sup> He pretty much gives a run down of the facts in every piece he writes.

<sup>518</sup> McKibben, *Fight Global Warming Now*, 1.

<sup>519</sup> Mikael Klinton, *Citizen-Consumers: Reducing Environmental Harm through Our Social Motivation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 51.

<sup>520</sup> Foucault would likely recognize the latter as the power of normalization.

<sup>521</sup> Anders Kruse Ljungdalh, "Stultitia and Type-2 Diabetes: The Madness of Not Wanting to Care for the Self," *Foucault Studies* 16 (September 2013): 159-60.

2008 monograph, *The Political Mind: Why You Can't Understand 21st-Century Politics with an 18th-Century Brain*. Lakoff argues that progressives accept the traditional theory of rationality dating back to the Enlightenment that suggests that "reason is conscious, literal, logical, universal, unemotional, disembodied, and serves self-interest."<sup>522</sup> However, Lakoff's research into cognitive linguistics suggests the opposite, that reason is metaphorical, instantiated in the brain and thus bodily, particular, largely unconscious, animated by emotion, and not always geared to serve one's self-interest, unless one's predominant interest is to maintain the coherency of one's deep metaphorical frames despite all evidence to the contrary.<sup>523</sup> The upshot of this in terms of moral action and transformation is that "the forms of unconscious reason used in morality and politics are not arbitrary. We cannot just change our moral and political worldviews at will. There are patterns of moral and political thought that are determined by how we function with our bodies in both the physical and social worlds."<sup>524</sup> Ultimately, Lakoff argues that in order to change people's minds one has to change their brains by restructuring the neurons that correspond to basic metaphors.<sup>525</sup> One way to accomplish this is through repetition of

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<sup>522</sup> George Lakoff, *The Political Mind: Why You Can't Understand 21st-Century Politics with an 18th-Century Brain* (New York: Viking, 2008), 2.

<sup>523</sup> Lakoff suggests that this may in fact be humans' deepest desire, given their extreme investment in ignoring all evidence that conflicts with their established worldviews.

<sup>524</sup> Lakoff, 11.

<sup>525</sup> Iris Murdoch had this intuition years before. In 1970, she writes, "[t]he development of consciousness in human beings is inseparably connected with the use of metaphor. Metaphors are not merely peripheral decorations or even useful models, they are fundamental forms of awareness of our condition: metaphors of space, metaphors of movement, metaphors of vision" (*The Sovereignty of the Good* 77).

counter-metaphors.<sup>526</sup> Moreover, he agrees with Foucault's explication of true discourse, in that the most persuasive counter-metaphors are simple, easy to remember, and emotionally potent, exactly like our contemporary "war on terror" metaphor. In fact, Lakoff argues that conservatives are much better at framing debates and mobilizing potent metaphors because progressives think that all they need to do is "give people the facts and the figures and they will reach the right conclusion."<sup>527</sup> Thus, they avoid talking about values and mobilizing emotion. According to Lakoff, the "very idea of 'changing brains' sounds a little sinister to progressives--a kind of Frankenstein image comes to mind. It sounds Machiavellian to liberals, like what Republicans do."<sup>528</sup> For this reason, Lakoff argues, progressives lag behind conservatives in the framing of important political and moral debates.

Thus, counter-framing represents a discursive practice of self that should be integrated strongly into a regime of conversion. Furthermore, these discursive practices need to be supported by bodily practices. True discourses are habituated through practice. Neither is this insidious brainwashing. In fact, humans cannot function without some level of habituation. In the words of Klintman,

[r]outinization and habits help us make decisions in reasonable time, typically without having processed every single piece of data [...] Furthermore, as has been previously pointed out about changes of habits, we tend to follow the habits of people in groups we belong to or wish to belong to. Habits make us at least partially predictable as humans, a prerequisite for the stability of social collaboration and communities.<sup>529</sup>

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<sup>526</sup> Foucault would view this as a discursive practice of self.

<sup>527</sup> Lakoff, 11.

<sup>528</sup> Lakoff, 12.



Habit allows humans to function in the everyday world without being paralyzed by constant sensory input. As William James noted in 1890, "[t]here is no more miserable human being than one in whom nothing is habitual but indecision, and for whom the lighting of every cigar, the drinking of every cup, ... are subjects of express volitional deliberation."<sup>530</sup> Moreover, habits enforce group belonging and aspirational belonging. Thus, according to Klintman, our basic social motivations are often expressed without much deliberate thought.<sup>531</sup> Like Foucault, in the effort to change Klintman encourages us to view both speaking and doing as practices. His point is to say that given the growing concern about environmental issues, many individuals are becoming habituated to saying they care about the environment, without actually doing anything about it.<sup>532</sup>

Many environmental groups encourage the strengthening of this habit with what McKibben calls "one-click" activism. He says, "[g]otten an email from a big organization lately? Did they ask you to 'take action' by signing an online petition or contributing money? We call that one-click activism, and not only is it a limited use of the Web, it squelches as much momentum as it creates."<sup>533</sup> In contrast, McKibben promotes actions that are located in and thus reinforce communities, protests with emotional depth, and

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<sup>529</sup> Klintman, *Citizen-Consumers*, 40.

<sup>530</sup> Quoted in Anders Biel, "Environmental Behaviour: Changing Habits in a Social Context," in *Individual and Structural Determinants of Environmental Practice*, eds. Anders Biel, Bengt Hansson, and Mona Mårtensson (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), 14.

<sup>531</sup> Klintman, 40.

<sup>532</sup> Klintman, 73-74.

<sup>533</sup> McKibben, *Fight Global Warming Now*, 135.

experiences that take individuals outside of their comfort zones. He discusses a three-day march across Vermont to protest global warming, and says,

[w]e also knew we were affecting *ourselves* in interesting ways. The act of walking--the physical challenge, the opportunity to see the state in which we live at a much slower pace than when zipping around in cars, and the chance to talk for hours on end with inspiring and dedicated companions--was about as fulfilling and exciting as any endeavor we had been a part of.<sup>534</sup>

However, despite McKibben's clear attempt to think outside the box, his reliance on protest means that those who follow him are left with little sense of how they might practice his truth in their daily lives. One might say he falls into the trap of "one march" activism. For instance, he makes much of the willingness of protestors to go to jail over the Keystone pipeline, but does not indicate how this might spur other types of transformation. His comparison of this action to the civil rights movement is specious because for most African-Americans protesting segregation was not something they did once in a while at a march or sit-in. Those public events were the politically-visible manifestation of their daily struggles.

In fact, despite acknowledging, "[w]hat you do everyday, after all, is what forms your mind,"<sup>535</sup> McKibben can be dismissive of quotidian behavior change.<sup>536</sup> In fact, he frequently refers to the time he spends participating in others transformative practices as vacations, as though he were a "care of self" tourist. In discussing the run-up to his Divest campaign, he writes, "in the midst of hectic preparations, I gave myself a vacation and

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<sup>534</sup> Ibid, 71.

<sup>535</sup> McKibben, *The Age of Missing Information*, 28.

<sup>536</sup> I will discuss this further when we come to the issue of *parrhēsia*.

spent a morning with Kirk, helping feed beehives so they'd be set for winter."<sup>537</sup> He describes a visit to poet, Gary Snyder, in the same way: "We drank tea and talked--about fellow writers we both loved, such as Wendell Berry and Terry Tempest Williams; about the woods east and west, about words and gods and hopes and fears."<sup>538</sup> What does not come through in these narratives is that such a life is not a vacation. Kirk Webster, McKibben's friend and an apiarist on the cutting edge of organic beekeeping, lives an extremely spartan, intentional, disciplined life. McKibben describes his ethos at one point as "basically Amish." Because McKibben is not engaged in the daily practice and dedication it takes to lead Webster's life, or the mediative life that Gary Snyder leads in his Southwest Zendo, it is easy for him to think of it as easy, as a vacation. In fact, McKibben is still very much a part of the system he critiques, as he acknowledges when he reflects upon and then justifies the irony of flying around the world to protest fossil fuel use.<sup>539</sup> In a world where people seek fame, have ambition, and want to be in the thick of things, one could argue that McKibben's life of activism is easier than living a life of simplicity and humility.

If McKibben really wants to encourage the types of local communities and alternative practices he identifies as crucial to human social transformation, he has to learn to value the arduous task of daily cultivation, and promote it to others.<sup>540</sup> He

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<sup>537</sup> McKibben, *Oil and Honey*, 211.

<sup>538</sup> *Ibid*, 111.

<sup>539</sup> *Ibid*, 15.

assumes that people are already engaged in such practices, such as when he says, "[d]ay to day [...] resistance is rightly scattered, local and focused on the more mundane: installing a new zoning code, putting in a solar farm, persuading the church board to sell its BP stock. But sometimes [the movement] needs to come together and show the world how big it's gotten."<sup>541</sup> However, in reality, he does not emphasize those boring quotidian practices in ways that inspire others to break free from their inertia. To be fair, this may be because he feels that the things people should do to transform their own lives are fairly obvious. He says in *The Comforting Whirlwind*, "[n]one of what I have to say will come as any great surprise to anyone--most of the recipes for environmental improvement are widely known if little followed."<sup>542</sup> As I have just argued, however, this stems from the fact that he is largely still operating on the commonsense assumptions of American culture, and thus cannot imagine more profound, potentially more challenging and inspiring ways of life.

McKibben could take a lesson from the founder of the Slow Food movement, Carlo Petrini, whose goal is to reeducate people into the everyday pleasures of the table. Petrini describes his strategy explicitly in the movement's manifesto; "the strategy to follow is a large-scale campaign of consumer education, so that, despite the din of the market place, everyone will be in a position to choose a proper, healthy, honest, and

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<sup>540</sup> Of course, he does reflect on this in this memoir as he traces the ways in which he stumbled into being the leader of a huge global movement, sort of against his will. "I'm a bit of a coward," he tells us in order to explain his reluctance to be in the spotlight (206). I am certainly not downplaying how difficult it would be to be engaged in the types of activism he is--although from a Foucauldian perspective a transformation must combine discipline with joy--but rather want him to recognize that many paths of personal change are equally difficult, and to acknowledge and accept the necessity of that fact.

<sup>541</sup> McKibben, "A Call to Arms," 49.

<sup>542</sup> McKibben, *The Comforting Whirlwind*, 43.

enjoyable mixture of foods for himself or herself."<sup>543</sup> The translator uses the word "education," but it is clear that Petrini has a different kind of education in mind. He says, "[i]f hamburgers are being consumed mechanically and giving the same stimulus again and again to the sense organs of the young, then we have to undertake a campaign of permanent education of the taste buds."<sup>544</sup> This education seeks "to train the senses, refine perception, restore atrophied dimensions of sensory experience."<sup>545</sup> The true discourse he espouses does not simply ask individuals to slow down. Rather it encourages the development of new ways of being; it highlights

more important dichotomies, like carefulness and carelessness or attentiveness and haste: attentiveness to the selection of ingredients and the sequence of flavors, to how the food is prepared and the sensory stimuli it gives as it is consumed, to the way it is presented and the company with whom we share it. There are endless degrees of attentiveness [...] The real difference in quality among these experiences does not lie in how much time is devoted to them, but in the will and capacity to experience them attentively.<sup>546</sup>

Of course, such attentiveness does not come naturally; rather it must be developed through daily training of both mind and body. In fact perhaps no modern practice of self defines the intertwined roles of mind and body in *askēsis* so well as the cultivation of taste.

A focus on the daily subjectivation of the truth through practice, as demonstrated in the Slow Food movement, solves a key conundrum for McKibben. On the one hand, he

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<sup>543</sup> Carlo Petrini, *Slow Food: The Case for Taste*, trans. William McCuaig (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 3.

<sup>544</sup> Petrini, 17-18.

<sup>545</sup> Petrini, 69.

<sup>546</sup> Petrini, 33.

assumes that a love of nature is innate. For instance, in *The Age of Missing Information*, an excursion in the outdoors is the obvious, soul-cleansing foil to watching eight hundred hours of television. Similarly, in an article entitled, "Human Restoration," he describes the moment when a group called the Defenders of Wildlife brought a pair of wolves into a large hotel conference room; "suddenly everything changed. A cold front blew in, cutting the damp human-flavored air."<sup>547</sup> He is certainly not the only thinker to believe that humans have an innate appreciation of nature. Iris Murdoch writes, "[i]t is so patently a good thing to take delight in flowers and animals that people who bring home potted plants and watch kestrels might even be surprised at the notion that these things have anything to do with virtue. The surprise is a product of the fact that, as Plato pointed out, beauty is the only spiritual thing which we love by instinct."<sup>548</sup> However, latter in the same article about the reintroduction of wolves into the Adirondacks, McKibben notes that wolf tourism in Italy has become a huge industry, with hundreds of thousands venturing into the night for "howling parties." From this he concludes that wanting wildlife around is "*about you*. The wolf becomes one more thing to experience, to own in some way or another."<sup>549</sup> Such a statement would seem to suggest that even those individuals with a professed love of nature may be constituted in their relationship with it by the very factors that imperil it. To push back even more, what does it mean to love beauty instinctually? Or perhaps more to the point how do we know what beauty is?

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<sup>547</sup> Bill McKibben, "Human Restoration," in *The Bill McKibben Reader*, 27.

<sup>548</sup> Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of the Good*, 85.

<sup>549</sup> McKibben, "Human Restoration," 38.

Where McKibben sees a majestic creature that puts in relief his own place in the universe, others see a dangerous and aggressive hunter, preying on their livestock and possibly their children.<sup>550</sup> However, if we acknowledge that an appreciation for nature with all the potential spiritual benefits it entails must be learned through practice, this problem begins to seem solvable. Moreover, it opens up a discussion about how to cultivate such an ability to see and be with nature. The sooner we can get to the nitty gritty of determining which practices will best instantiate certain ways of being, the better off we will be.

Therefore, one intervention that Foucault's story makes in environmental activism is that strategists need to do a better job of formulating a regime of daily practice that jolts individuals out of their *stultitia* and allows them to subjectivate true discourse. As McKibben himself points out, "as every great teacher of every great faith has told us, what we do and see each day is what shapes us, not how we behave or pretend to behave on special occasions."<sup>551</sup> As Cheney and Weston note, we may not even be able to evaluate our perspectives, relationships, and beliefs without first changing our values. For Vicki Hearne, training a dog means learning to be with her on her own terms; "Obedience is reciprocal; you cannot get a response from a dog to whom you do not respond accurately."<sup>552</sup> Such a relationship of mutual awareness cannot develop in sporadic interactions, through ecotourism for instance, but must develop through intensive being

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<sup>550</sup> McKibben calls this the "Red Riding Hood crowd" (38).

<sup>551</sup> McKibben, *The Age of Missing Information*, 220.

<sup>552</sup> Hearne, "What's Wrong with Animal Rights," 63.

together. Practices come first, then other skills develop. Edward McGushin makes a similar point about the daily practice of the artist. He states, "[i]ntent, idea and vision are the results of practice and art, not the causes of it. The vision of the artist is itself transformed, deepened, expanded or intensified by the actual labour. In effect the artist is a work of art just as much as the object she produces."<sup>553</sup> It is certainly in this way that we can understand Foucault's contention that individuals should make their lives into works of art, not so that their lives are beautiful, but so that they can live their lives beautifully, with vision, with intent.

Such a commitment to daily practice might mitigate one of the problems I mentioned above, the problematic fetishization of the purity of the wild and its concomitant, and paradoxical, connection to eco-tourism. As Sylvia Bowerbank states, "[t]hose two weeks in the wilderness may be more precious to us than the other fifty; however, given our daily practices, do they constitute who we really are as subjects?"<sup>554</sup> The Foucauldian perspective says, no, they do not. Finally, attention to daily practice may be the only way to combat the pervasiveness of our society's economic logic. Anders Biel notes the paradox of trying to promote behavioral change through economic signals; namely, if individuals do not already value the environment enough to buy sustainable products, there is no real way to help them develop that value within the current system.<sup>555</sup> He suggests that this is because the new values conflict with old, pre-

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<sup>553</sup> McGushin, "Foucault's theory and practice of subjectivity," 137.

<sup>554</sup> Sylvia Bowerbank, "Nature Writing as Self-Technology," in *Discourses of the Environment*, ed. Éric Darier (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Inc., 1999), 172-177.



established habits that must be eliminated first.<sup>556</sup> This reminds us of Foucault's point that the Cynic life of scandal does not only allow the Cynic to speak the truth about herself, but serves, in the very materiality of her body, to counter the customs and values of her society. From the perspective of Arnold Davidson, using counter-conduct to fiction future truth is the only viable way to create a new way of life. One cannot work within the system; "[t]he armature of economic neo-liberalism [...] cannot concede any space to the idea of counter-conduct; counter-conduct becomes inconceivable, since conduct as such is a concept fully integrated into a scientific-epistemological field [...] In this setting, counter-conduct is nothing more than a form of irrationality."<sup>557</sup> McKibben himself has suffered from charges of irrationality. He says, "'[u]nrealistic' and 'radical' are two of the words often used to discredit environmentalists who try to move beyond the most obvious and easy applications of common sense."<sup>558</sup> Perhaps he should stop trying to legitimize his perspective within a system that can only see it as a form of irrationality, and truly embrace his radicalism, just as the Cynics embraced life as a scandal of the truth.

If we take for granted the importance of daily regimes of practice that subjectivate true discourse, a number of strategic avenues open up. The one I wish to discuss here is the importance of true discourse as the equipment of the soul. As I described in chapter two, in order for true discourses to become equipment for the self they must be ready at

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<sup>555</sup> Biel, "Environmental Behaviour: Changing Habits in a Social Context," 16.

<sup>556</sup> Biel, "Environmental Behaviour: Changing Habits in a Social Context," 11.

<sup>557</sup> Davidson, "In Praise of Counter Conduct," 37.

<sup>558</sup> McKibben, *The Comforting Whirlwind*, 31.

hand (HDS 1177). One important factor that makes the discourse ready at hand is how it is formulated. Seneca notes that a true discourse "must thoroughly penetrate us through its simplicity and reflected composition" (HS 383-84). As spiritual knowledge, it must be rational and persuasive at the same time; in other words, "what is given as truth is read immediately and directly as precept" (HS 226). Truths should be simple and straightforward, both for the purposes of comprehension and for the purposes of memorization. Without memorization, the truth cannot aid a person in the moment she needs it. Second, truths must motivate behavior. Thus, they cannot be abstracted from the person's life; they must apply directly to it. Foucault explains further what the classical philosophers meant by "at hand" in "Writing the Self." He states,

"At hand" then, not simply in the sense that one can recall them to consciousness, but in the sense that one must be able to utilize them, as soon as they are needed, in action. It's a question of constituting an equipment of helpful discourses, capable--as Plutarch says--of raising their voice and quieting the passions like a master can with one word quiet the barking of dogs. (ESS 1238)

Furthermore, these material discourses are "profoundly established in the soul, 'driven into it' says Seneca, and they thus form a part of ourselves: in brief, the soul makes them not only hers, but herself" (ES 1238). To return to Lakoff, memorizing and employing certain precepts materially changes the structure of our brains, thus becoming in every sense a part of ourselves. Just as a dancer develops muscle memory and can perform certain moves with little conscious thought, Foucault wants to say that humans can develop ethical memory, in which certain actions come to be performed automatically. In fact, for Foucault, true discourses alter the nature of the body/mind, such that they consistently structure the individual's actions. Thus, "this learned, memorized, and

applied truth [becomes] a quasi-subject that reigns sovereignly in us," and it can jump to the aid of the emerging subject (HDS 1181; HS 310).

The idea that the meat of philosophy is true discourses that one subjectivates through practice and that the ability to engage in such subjectivation depends on the way that such discourses are formulated is lost on the majority of environmental philosophers and activists. This is potentially an outcome of the model of the brain under which they are operating. Some people might argue that using such precepts to alter behavior is akin to brain-washing. Some, but fortunately not all. A counter-example is Michael Pollan's 2008 book, *In Defense of Food*. Pollan begins with a simple precept for navigating the confusing world of modern food production and consumption. "Eat Food. Not too much. Mostly plants."<sup>559</sup> This guideline is fairly straightforward--especially as he begins to unravel what he means by food--and easy to remember. I memorized it almost immediately. In his book, Pollan suggests that having strayed from our alimentary traditions, we need to develop a system of simple rules from various cultures, common sense, and a critical examination of our industrialized food system. Following the publication of *In Defense of Food*, he solicited ideas for such rules via *The New York Times* website, and was buried in an avalanche of emails.<sup>560</sup> In 2009, he distilled these ideas into an "eater's manual," entitled *Food Rules*, in which he sets out sixty-four brief and often funny rules to help guide his readers' eating habits. Some of the rules are about

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<sup>559</sup> Michael Pollan, *In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto* (New York: Penguin Books, 2008), 1.

<sup>560</sup> He posts some of his favorites on the *New York Times* website. See "Food Rules: Your Dietary Dos and Don'ts," *The New York Times* (October 11, 2009); accessed December 2, 2014, [http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2009/10/11/magazine/20091011-foodrules.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2009/10/11/magazine/20091011-foodrules.html?_r=0).

changing one's purchasing habits, such as rule #15, "Get out of the supermarket whenever you can"--which encourages individuals to participate in alternative networks of food production through shopping at local farmer's markets and patronizing small-scale artisans. Others urge us to question what we are putting in our bodies in the first place, such as rule #13, "Eat only foods that will eventually rot."<sup>561</sup> Pollan wrote *Food Rules*, he states, to supply us with broad guidelines that should make everyday decision making swifter and easier.<sup>562</sup> Thus, he seems fully cognizant that if he wants to help his readers change their lives, he needs to target their everyday practices and give them simple, evocative rules to support them in their efforts to transform those practices. In fact, the rules are flexible enough to be extremely useful when trying to quiet the barking of dogs.

In contrast, McKibben's pithy phrases, when he provides them, are memorable, but not generally practicable. For instance, in his handbook for environmental action, he states, "Screw in a light bulb, then screw in a new federal energy law."<sup>563</sup> Such a phrase is motivating, but useless in helping an individual subjectivate a larger truth because it does not provide a general yet flexible guide for action. The first part is too specific; the second too broad. In fact, McKibben does frequently employ truths that could easily become precepts, such as, "You are not the center of the universe." For instance, he says in *The Comforting Whirlwind*, "What is a suburb but a physical manifestation of ease,

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<sup>561</sup> Spoiler: Not Twinkies™.

<sup>562</sup> Michael Pollan, introduction to *Food Rules: An Eater's Manual* (New York: Penguin Books, 2009), 1-4.

<sup>563</sup> McKibben, *Fight Global Warming Now*, 21.

unreality, and human-centeredness?"<sup>564</sup> Even 350.org's most current mass-action, the effort to exert pressure to force various institutions to divest from fossil fuels, could easily become a precept of everyday life. "Divest." In every moment of the day, as much as you can, divest from fossil fuels. This does not have to mean returning to an Amish lifestyle, which is probably what McKibben fears, but rather simply using a true discourse to reflect upon your actions and engage in alternate practices. If you are considering whether to get in the car and drive the half-mile to the store, or to walk over, in that moment, you might "divest." This would also allow us to connect our personal behaviors to the policies we are demanding from institutions. What would be required on the part of McKibben is simply a reframing of the message, not a complete revolution in thought.

The fact that activists do not generally attempt to give their supporters these type of evocative, prescriptive, flexible rules explains why people have a difficult time translating "one-click" or "one-march" action into personal transformation. Activists do not attempt to formulate their truths as prescriptions that are simple, memorable, and compelling, and there is little to no stress on assimilating those truths so that they can be ready at hand. Thus, in the face of an overwhelming effort by corporations, nation-states, and other actors to subject individuals to the logic of economic growth, productivity, and consumption, environmental counter-discourses do not give individuals anything to hold onto, rules that they can activate in difficult moments, or review and reactivate in thinking about their behaviors and choices. What we desperately need is motivational

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<sup>564</sup> McKibben, *The Comforting Whirlwind*, 84.

counter-framing, the "Divest" to our society's "Just Do It." Certainly nudging individuals to change behaviors via non-linguistic cues can help. It has been demonstrated, for instance, that putting a trash can on a street corner reduces litter. However, the purpose behind subjectivating a true discourse, such as "Divest," is that it is a provocation to reflect on daily practice. Intentional conversion requires rules to live by.

Imagine a world in which when a person begins exploring McKibbens's website, she sees prominently displayed a section of rules for living in a world in peril. In the resources menu, next to "T-shirts," "Fonts," and "Make a Poster," she might see "Truths to Live By." Assuming that she will do this work herself, that she will take the broader message and distill it down to something that is evocative and memorable--as I just did with the message of Divest--is to misunderstand *stultitia*. A person cannot pull themselves out on their own. They need to be introduced to the truth, in the form of precepts, both at the beginning and throughout their conversion to the self. Unlike the sage who speaks in riddles and expects the individual to figure it out on their own, the parrhesiast knows that it is her responsibility to speak clearly and frankly, to lend a hand in the form of *logoi* that can become inscribed in the self, as the self. Whether the parrhesiast must be a real person or people in a face-to-face community is a real question. It seems as though Foucault believes that his *parrhēsia* can shine through his written work. On the other hand, he seems frustrated by the lack of interaction in his lectures at the Collège de France. In order for the parrhesiast to reset a person's navigation during the journey of conversion, it seems like she would need to be persistently and intimately involved in the life of the person she is trying to guide.

### *The Political Is Personal*

The issue of the role of the parrhesiast segues directly into one of the main points of dispute between Foucault and McKibben. Foucault argues that changing society in a top-down fashion leads to oppression and abuse of power. He is highly suspicious of universal programs, and actively avoids telling people how they should live. When a person cares for herself and creates a new way of being, this practice increases freedom in her field of power relations, allowing others to create newness in that context. However, if she attempts to force her mode of existence on others, she disallows their freedom and forestalls creativity. Thus, the best way to change society is through personal transformation. As Benda Hofmeyr notes, "[i]ndividual action [...] has the potential of causing a chain reaction or ripple effect through the social fabric."<sup>565</sup> As I have already noted, McKibben feels strongly that we have run out of time for this kind of approach to social change. He writes in *Oil and Honey*, "You can weatherize your house, and your brother-in-law may see it and decide to follow suit, and then maybe he'd buy a Prius and then his neighbor would...If we had a hundred years, that's how it should work, the slow graceful cultural evolution to a new world. But chemistry and physics aren't giving us a hundred years."<sup>566</sup> While I appreciate his sense of urgency, there is an unresolvable paradox in his way of thinking, at least in American democracy as it exists now.

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<sup>565</sup> Benda Hofmeyr, "The Power Not to Be (What We Are): The Politics and Ethics of Self-Creation in Foucault," *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 3, no. 2 (July 2006): 229.

<sup>566</sup> McKibben, *Oil and Honey*, 109.

In our democracy, changes in governmental policy usually occur when constituencies militate for them. This is why McKibben called his supporters to New York in September, to show world leaders that an immense number of people are concerned about climate change, thus giving them "permission to actually lead"<sup>567</sup> In his mind, your typical concerned citizen is pitted against "the richest enterprise in human history"--the fossil fuel industry,<sup>568</sup> which pours money into anti-climate change propaganda and lines politicians' pockets, ensuring that nothing will change on the governmental-level. For this reason, his main tactic is "to go straight at the fossil fuel industry,"<sup>569</sup> thus the Divest campaign. He states, "'We need to take away their social license, turn them in to pariahs, and make it clear that they're to the planet's safety what the tobacco industry is to our individual health."<sup>570</sup> However, this logic ignores the fact that your normal American is highly dependent on fossil fuels,<sup>571</sup> and thus tacitly, if not overtly, resists the kinds of dramatic change that McKibben seeks because they cannot envision how else their lives might work. Obviously McKibben is aware of this paradox. He says, "since modern Westerners are a kind of machine for burning fossil fuel, since virtually everything we do involves burning coal, and gas, and oil, since we're *wedded to*

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<sup>567</sup> McKibben, "A Call to Arms," 47.

<sup>568</sup> Ibid, 46.

<sup>569</sup> McKibben, *Oil and Honey*, 140.

<sup>570</sup> Ibid, 228.

<sup>571</sup> Not to mention that despite making the tobacco industry a pariah, the most recent statistics suggest that 18% of Americans still smoke.



petroleum, it's going to be a messy breakup."<sup>572</sup> Yet, he continues to believe that political action is the best way to achieve radical social change vis-à-vis fossil fuels. This contradiction is demonstrated by the following sentence from *Eaarth*, "Everyone has to keep voting for politicians who will raise the price of gasoline high enough to cause most of us to park our cars and take the bus."<sup>573</sup> Logically, this makes little sense. Who would vote for a politician who would force them to make a change in their behaviors to which they did not already feel committed? The person who will vote for a politician who puts high taxes on gasoline or shuts down the Alberta tar sands is a person who either does not understand how these policies will effect her actual life--which probably means a speedy reversal in voting patterns once it becomes evident--or a person who already takes the bus, who is already engaged in alternate practice in her daily life. Surely, the immense power of the fossil fuel industry is a problem, but a greater problem is this assumption that individuals can affect governmental change on this issue without engaging in personal change first. As Melissa Orlie states, "[i]n my political judgment, we can and must return to the political and ethical importance of practices of individual conduct because our everyday conduct may be the missing link and source of disjuncture between our professed convictions and our actual political prospects."<sup>574</sup>

Even *if* an enlightened despot could change society by fiat, Foucault would argue that such a program risks becoming oppressive, forestalls ethical transformation, and

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<sup>572</sup> McKibben, *Maybe One*, 109.

<sup>573</sup> McKibben, *Eaarth*, 56.

<sup>574</sup> Orlie, "The Desire for Freedom and the Consumption of Politics," 397.

closes down space for unforeseen ways of being. In fact, McKibben's most salient example of social transformation involves just such an enlightened despot: Curitiba, Brazil under its resourceful and innovative mayor, Jaime Lerner.<sup>575</sup> To use one of his examples, in the early 1970s, Lerner decided to make the center of the city a pedestrian mall. He apparently did so abruptly, against the protests of the city's business leaders and without really informing anyone of when it was happening. McKibben states, "[w]hen shopkeepers arrived on Monday to open their stores, they were outraged to find all the parking gone."<sup>576</sup> Quickly, these merchants realized that the foot traffic increased their revenues, and the outrage dissolved. When a local automobile club decided to protest by retaking the cobblestoned lanes for cars, they found that city workers had laid out newsprint and paint along the centers of the streets, and hundreds of children were happily crouched there, playing.<sup>577</sup> McKibben goes on to detail all of the positive effects on the city due to Lerner's decision, the foremost being creating more of a sense of community. I, like McKibben, support pedestrianism, and it is clear that only a city's government can rip up a street and create a plaza.<sup>578</sup> Moreover, there will always be protests against such decisions, and that does not mean that pedestrians should bow to the will of the automobile club. However, McKibben may be asking the wrong question

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<sup>575</sup> McKibben also uses Cuba and Kerala, India as examples, but given the problematic nature of the first, and the extreme difference in context of the second, Curitiba seems the most productive example.

<sup>576</sup> McKibben, "If You Build It, Will They Change?" 203.

<sup>577</sup> Ibid, 204.

<sup>578</sup> Although, individuals have themselves engaged in guerilla tactics to calm traffic and make roads safe for pedestrians. See "Placemaking," accessed December 2, 2014, <http://www.paintthepavement.org/placemaking>.

about this transformation. He says, "Have any of these changes really changed *people*?"<sup>579</sup> His article and subsequent work on Curitiba suggests that they have, and let's assume that is the case. What exactly does that mean? Can a government change people's values by creating conditions in which they are forced to engage in alternate practices? Probably. Does that make them ethical subjects? From a Foucauldian point of view, probably not. As I noted in chapter three, "care of the self is ethically primary, insofar as the relationship to the self is ontologically primary" (ESS 1534). In other words, from Foucault's perspective, becoming an ethical subject must be something an individual chooses to do, through a life of arduous subjectivation of true discourse. This is the primary reason why the parrhesiast must persuade his friend. A person can be introduced to true discourse, but she cannot be forced to care for herself. In order to practice care of the self she must be able to apply true discourses freely and flexibly to her daily life.

From McKibben's standpoint, this may not matter. His goal is to drastically reduce fossil fuel use. If this happens through government fiat, that seems fine with him. The fact that the government is then taking over the job of ethical formation for individuals may not matter. However, from a Foucauldian perspective, this is problematic in several ways. First, such a program risks becoming oppressive. Imagine for instance if the United States government enacted a one-child policy similar to that of the Chinese. As Éric Darier says, "to Foucault [...] there is no fixed, certain strategic position that a group or individuals can adopt. All the choices present dangers--which have to be

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<sup>579</sup> McKibben, "If You Build It, Will They Change?" 208.

reappraised constantly as the configuration of the 'field of power' changes."<sup>580</sup> Second, such a policy distracts from developing strategies for encouraging people to care for themselves, which would allow each person to become a critically thinking, potentially innovative member of society. This in turn reduces the freedom in the society's field of social relations. The more experimentation each individual is doing, the more openness to difference and transformation in her society, and the more likely that entirely different ways of being, ones of which we cannot even conceive, might arise. The issue of social engineering is an extremely interesting one for me. I have not done enough research to have a solid opinion about whether a program like Lerner's is actually counter productive. It is possible that by forcing people into practices outside of their normal range of behavior, a government might in fact spur critical thought in their citizens. Darier argues, for instance, "[h]ousehold recycling can be one technical alternative which transforms individual subjectivity from 'wasteful' consumer to recycling or Green consumer. However, it could also lead one to re-question the entire process of consumerism and why and how individuals are seduced by it."<sup>581</sup> However, what I can say with confidence is that this would be just the beginning, the moment of being pulled out of *stultitia*. The path of care of the self requires a commitment to persistently question one's way of being, of being attentive to its potential dangers.

### *Fuck for Forest*

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<sup>580</sup> Darier, "Foucault Against Environmental Ethics," 222-23.

<sup>581</sup> Darier, "Foucault Against Environmental Ethics," 234.

The other important intervention that arises from Foucault's engagement with *parrhēsia* is the importance of the Cynic as the figure who shakes others out of their complacency through his aggressive critique of social norms and embrace of scandal. McKibben often mentions philosophical heroes of the type described in *The Courage of the Truth*.<sup>582</sup> Among them are Thoreau, Jesus, Gandhi, Francis of Assisi, and Edward Abbey. He clearly understands the value of a life of *parrhēsia* in relation to these figures. He says of Gandhi, "Wilderness and Gandhian nonviolence were the two most potentially revolutionary ideas of the twentieth century, precisely because they were the two most humble: they imagine a whole different possibility for people."<sup>583</sup> Yet, despite acknowledging that "[t]he challenge [Thoreau and Gandhi] presented with the physical examples of their lives is much more subversive than anything they wrote or said: if they could live those simple lives, it's no use saying we could not,"<sup>584</sup> he frequently insinuates the impossibility of taking them as exemplars by describing such figures as crackpots and radicals. He says, for instance, "[m]any of those who take the biocentric view are, of course, oddballs, the sort who would walk two thousand miles instead of flying, (Prophets, true or false, are inevitably oddballs. There's not much need for prophets who are in synch with their society) and theirs is, admittedly, a radical idea, almost an

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<sup>582</sup> Clearly, the figures I mention here are not strictly "philosophical," but rather religious or spiritual. However, I use the term philosophical hero because there is a confluence between the hero as Foucault describes him and McKibben's understanding of these figures, despite his Christian orientation.

<sup>583</sup> McKibben, *Wandering Home*, 101.

<sup>584</sup> McKibben, *The End of Nature*, 192-93.

unrealistic idea."<sup>585</sup> He says of the Christian idea that money cannot buy happiness, "it has been mostly saints and cranks who have upheld this view, and while we may pay homage to Francis or Thoreau, we are likely to act as if we really think they are nutty exceptions to a general rule."<sup>586</sup> Then there is this statement, coming from a self-described Bible-school teacher, "The gospel is too radical for any culture larger than the Amish to ever come close to realizing."<sup>587</sup> In this way, a man who rebuts people who call him radical and unrealistic by saying that we live in a radical time,<sup>588</sup> seems to undermine his own discourse by portraying the philosophical heroes of our culture as precisely radical and unrealistic.

As Anthony Weston argues, what we need now are more radicals willing to take chances with their lives, more crackpots and oddballs. Of course, such individuals and groups do exist, ranging from the tame to the somewhat extreme. I have already talked briefly about the global Slow Food movement, but one of the things about it that is so inspiring is the connection Petrini makes between the cultivation of attention and taste, and wider social transformation. His manifesto claims,

The pleasures of the table are the gateway to recovering a gentle and harmonious rhythm of life. Go through it and the vampire of advertising will lose its power over you. So will the anxiety, conformism, and suggestive power of the mass media, that the shifting winds of fashion impose. Let go of standardized, sterile models. Freedom to choose could raise the quality of life and bring pleasure within reach of large masses of mankind.<sup>589</sup>

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<sup>585</sup> Ibid, 174-75.

<sup>586</sup> McKibben, *The Comforting Whirlwind*, 22.

<sup>587</sup> Bill McKibben, "The Christian Paradox," in *The Bill McKibben Reader*, 224.

<sup>588</sup> McKibben, *The Comforting Whirlwind*, 31.

The goal of the Slow Food movement is, in fact, nothing short of transforming "the way people function in the worlds of production, distribution, and consumption."<sup>590</sup> On the other end of the spectrum is a group like Fuck for Forest, which stages sexual encounters in nature, sometimes on camera, sometimes off, in order to promote sex-positive attitudes and raise money for preservation. David Bell says of the group, it

downplays its provocative intent<sup>591</sup> arguing instead that it wants public sex and nudity to be seen as natural, not shocking. Yet in mobilizing the naturalness of sex and 'nature fucking' politically or counter culturally, FFF draws on a strong lineage of nature-based sex radicalism (or sex-based nature radicalism), with the nature of sex staged as a critique of both sex-negative and nature-destroying human cultures. Reconnecting to sex here renaturalizes humanity, too, by reminding us of our own embodied naturalness.<sup>592</sup>

Perhaps a comparison between the ladies and gentlemen of FFF and the commitment to public sex of a figure like Diogenes is a stretch. However, the strategies at work are the same. Ian Cutler suggests that the main Cynic devices are action, laughter, and silence. He suggests that modern Cynics try to "touch [their audience's] emotions and imagination in some way to produce a *reaction* (anger, surprise, laughter, outrage, etc.), and second, as a consequence of this reaction, produce some critical thinking."<sup>593</sup> Cutler also suggests that the Cynics may have embraced animality because it allowed them to parody the conventions of society. FFF embraces this perspective when they write on their website,

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<sup>589</sup> Petrini, 24-25.

<sup>590</sup> Petrini, 14.

<sup>591</sup> Although you do have to be eighteen years old to enter their website, <http://www.fuckforforest.com/>

<sup>592</sup> David Bell, "Queernaturecultures," in *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire*, ed. Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010), 137.

<sup>593</sup> Cutler, *Cynicism from Diogenes to Dilbert*, 147.

"[s]ex is often shown to attract us to buy all kinds of bullshit products and ideas, so why not for a good cause? We think it is important to show a more liberal relationship to our bodies, as a contrast to the suppressed world we live in."<sup>594</sup> Thus, the group uses explicit, public sex to call attention to a social field of power where sexual expression is conceived of as wrong, while at the same time sex is used to motivate commodity desire.

To return to McKibben, given his prominence as an environmental activist, taking a radical existential stand could have real effects in society. At the very least, he should not downplay the important function of those people who do have the courage and fortitude to challenge society's norms and values. It may be true that the lives of philosophical heroes go "too against the grain of the culture for more than a noble few to follow."<sup>595</sup> Nonetheless, those individuals deserve respect and admiration. Like Thoreau, Gandhi, and Martin Luther King, Jr., they should be held up as models we desperately want to follow. Foucault shows that the Cynic concept of *parrhēsia* meant that an *other* life could lead to an *other* world. Society is transformed when an individual's care of self becomes a community of practice, becomes a world beyond our imagination. As Ladelle McWhorter says, "[w]hat is good is that accidents can happen and new things can emerge..., what is good is that the world remain open to deviation."<sup>596</sup>

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<sup>594</sup> "About FFF," Fuck for Forests, accessed December 2, 2014, <http://www.fuckforforest.com/en/about.html>

<sup>595</sup> McKibben, "Job and Matthew," 192.

<sup>596</sup> Quoted in Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands, introduction to *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire*, eds. Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010), 30.



Moreover, Foucault shows us that this practice of conversion, though arduous, is also joyous. Anthony Weston says of environmental activists,

even the most forward-looking green thinking today frames alternatives almost entirely in the modes of constraints, limits, and minimization. Bill McKibben, for example, probably the contemporary environmental writer most concerned with offering some kind of hopeful alternative, still frames the best possible outcome as, in his words, just 'relatively graceful decline.'<sup>597</sup>

He is referring here to McKibben's *Eaarth*, where he suggests we must find words to replace "growth" in our vocabulary. He says, "Durable, Sturdy, Stable, Hardy, Robust. These are squat, solid, stout words. They conjure a world where we no longer grow by leaps and bounds, but where we *hunker down*, where we *dig in*."<sup>598</sup> It might, thus, be fair to be skeptical when McKibben says that the new world will not be without its beauties and joys. "Hunkering down" does not really suggest the blossoming, creativity, and celebration that a life of discipline with and through other beings might entail. The joy found for instance in engaging with an animal on its own terms, learning mutual respect and admiration, or the feeling of deep belonging that comes from developing knowledge of a place, in a place, from community meaning a group with a common way of life, tied to where they are.<sup>599</sup> Richard Shustermann says of somaesthetic practices of self,

[t]he best forms of pragmatic somaesthetics combine such delights of self-surrender with the strict disciplines of somatic self-control (of posture, breathing, movement, etc.). Such disciplines not only prepare and structure ecstatic experience but they provide a controlled field where the inspiring energy of peak experience can be deployed and preserved in systematic practices that promote

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<sup>597</sup> Weston, *Mobilizing the Green Imagination*, 18.

<sup>598</sup> McKibben, *Eaarth*, 102.

<sup>599</sup> Noël, Sturgeon, "Penguin Family Values: The Nature of Planetary Environmental Reproductive Justice," in *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire*, eds. Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010), 121.

the reachievement of these peaks in healthy contexts. This ensures that soaring self-surrender can fall back on a safety net of disciplined self-mastery in preparation for a further leap.<sup>600</sup>

All of this is a technical way of saying that philosophers have known from time immemorial that the deepest pleasures of life are intertwined with self-discipline. What if environmental activists told their followers, this transition will be difficult *and* it will be the most joyous, beautiful, rewarding experience of your life? Rather than doing away with economic growth and hunkering down, let's reimagine our economy so that we can unlock human potential that we do not even know we have. Foucault is often portrayed as a pessimist, but an eternal optimism about people animates his work on care of the self.

Given McKibben's Christian commitments, I will end with the story of the sorrowful man that I used as an epigraph for the chapter on conversion, because McKibben's reaction to the Biblical parable suggests how a Foucauldian intervention might transform his practice. In the story, a young man approaches Jesus, tells him that he already keeps all the commandments, and asks him what else he must do to enter the kingdom of heaven. Jesus replies, "[i]f you would be perfect, go sell, what you possess, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come and follow me."<sup>601</sup> The young man, hearing this, goes away sorrowful, "for he had great possessions."<sup>602</sup> McKibben interprets this parable by suggesting that, like most people, the young man is sorrowful because he views giving away his possessions as a renunciation. He wants to

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<sup>600</sup> Shustermann, "Somaesthetics and Care of the Self: The Case of Foucault," 545.

<sup>601</sup> Quoted in McKibben, "Job and Matthew," 186.

<sup>602</sup> Ibid.

be perfect, but he cannot bring himself to part with these things.<sup>603</sup> Eventually McKibben comes to realize that we must follow Jesus' proposal, for the sake of the planet and everyone else on it. However, he still doubts his own ability to "go very far down that road," the road that Jesus suggests to the young man.<sup>604</sup> It is not until the very end of the essay that McKibben mentions that in the gospel of Mark, the evangelist adds one clause to Matthew's account, "And Jesus looking upon him loved him."<sup>605</sup> He describes this addition as a tenderness that makes the story seductive, that keeps it in one's mind. I view it as seven words that give a radically different meaning to this episode. Jesus as parrhesiast is faced with a man subjected by the values of his society, values that Jesus patently thinks false, a fact that he demonstrates with his words, his actions, his very life. Because he loves him, Jesus offers the young man a beautiful gift, the truth. This is your chance, he says, to rid yourself of all these things of the world that have no meaning, to embark with me on a journey of transformation, to be at the vanguard of creating another world, to gain the kingdom of heaven. In this portrayal, following Jesus is not a renunciation, not part of a cost-benefit analysis, it is a chance to transform into something beyond conception, it is a joy and a struggle, a sacrifice that is also a pleasure and a practice of freedom. Foucault's message in the last years of his life is not new. It has been

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<sup>603</sup> Ibid, 187.

<sup>604</sup> Ibid, 192.

<sup>605</sup> Ibid.

echoed down the centuries by McKibben's "saints, cranks, and gurus."<sup>606</sup> If we would change the world, we must change ourselves. This is the world's gift to us.

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<sup>606</sup> Ibid, 192.

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