

Live Thinking, or the Psychagogy of Michel Foucault

[T]here is no first or final point of resistance to political power other than in the relation one has to oneself.
—Foucault

What does it mean to think? Foucault has never dealt with any other problem.
—Deleuze

*O*n the penultimate day of his penultimate series of lectures at the Collège de France, titled *The Government of the Self and Others*, Michel Foucault considers the role of *psychagogy* as a philosophical and political practice, a practice that links politics and philosophy in a relation of intimate exteriority. Focusing on Plato’s *Phaedrus*—in which Socrates famously distinguishes between rhetoric and philosophy as competing practices—Foucault recognizes in Socrates’s discourse a “double characterization” that binds both speaker and listener in relation to each other, to themselves, and to the truth. This soulful bond *is* Socratic philosophy, Foucault argues, insofar as it simultaneously and inextricably engenders both dialectical *and* psychagogical effects:

Knowledge of Being through the dialectic and the effect of discourse on the being of the soul through psychagogy are linked. They are intrinsically linked and linked by an essential bond since it is through the movement of the soul that the latter will be able to accede to knowledge of Being, and since it is in the knowledge of what is that the soul will be able to know itself and recognize

what it is, that is to say, related to being itself. [. . .] Dialectic and psychagogy are two sides of one and the same process, of one and the same art, of one and the same tekhnē, which is the tekhnē of logos. Like the philosophical logos, the philosophical tekhnē of logos is a tekhnē which makes possible at the same time both knowledge of the truth and the practice of ascesis of the soul on itself. [. . .] [T]he mode of being of philosophical discourse is characterized by the fact that, on the one hand, knowledge of the truth is not just necessary to it, it is not just its precondition, but is a constant function of it. And this constant function of the relation to the truth in discourse, which is the dialectic, is inseparable from the immediate, direct effort which is brought about not just on the soul of the person to whom the discourse is addressed, but also to the person giving the discourse. And this is psychagogy. (334–35)

Psychagogy bespeaks the way that philosophy as a *tekhnē* of *logos* transforms the soul—the psyche—of both philosopher and interlocutor. It exists as the other face of the dialectic, or indeed as its twin, incorporating the dialectic’s dialogic dynamic, thereby rendering it philosophical rather than simply rhetorical. Philosophy requires psychagogy insofar as philosophy seeks to disclose something like the “truth.” Whatever truths philosophy limns, it has psychagogy to thank for them.

Psychagogy works on the soul by conducting the soul toward a new relation to itself, by conducting it toward a new, more “truthful” relation to being. Moreover, it manifests this truthfulness through the lives of those whom it governs by letting their thinking live. Needless to say, psychagogy does not possess the recognition factor that its etymological confrere, pedagogy, retains. An archaic concept dating back at least to Empedoclean if not Pythagorean discourse (Petit), psychagogy barely bears on contemporary thinking about the relation between politics and philosophy, let alone on our thinking about the dynamic between politics and philosophy as matters of thought (perhaps even as their most vital matter). Yet, despite our general unfamiliarity with the concept, we might consider that psychagogy constitutes a form of *live thinking* that still offers critical resources for individual and collective existence. Moreover, we might need to consider that by the end of Foucault’s life, Foucault’s own thinking about politics—whatever else it may have been—evinces a kind of psychagogy.

When Foucault introduces his reflections on psychagogy in *The Government of the Self and Others*, he does so to address “the problem of psychagogy and education in terms of politics,” a problem that itself follows from “the problem of the formation and conduct of souls, which is indispensable to politics” (196). Foucault first refers to psychagogy explicitly, albeit briefly, in the previous year’s lectures, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, in order to distinguish between pedagogy and psychagogy: “If, then, we call ‘pedagogical’ this relationship consisting in endowing any subject whomsoever with a series of abilities defined in advance, we can, I think, call ‘psychagogical’ the transmission of a truth whose function is not to endow any subject whomsoever with abilities, etcetera, but whose function is to modify the mode of being of the subject to whom we address ourselves” (407). He then notes that while in antiquity psychagogy concerned the parrhesia—the “true speaking,” the *vrai dire*, the *franc parler*—of the philosopher, Christianity subsequently cloaked psychagogy with its own problematic of guidance and obedience, converting it into confession. In other words, Christianity converts psychagogy into a matrix of institutions, practices, and discourses through which the confessing subject is bound to the truth of its utterance as the truth of its “psychagogized soul” (408). Despite the confessional veil with which Christianity later covered it, however, Foucault underscores that in its earlier Greco-Roman incarnations, the truth function of psychagogy lay as much on the side of the one who conducts as on the side of the one conducted:

In Greco-Roman philosophy [. . .] the person who must be present within the true discourse is the person who guides. And he does not have to be present in the form of the utterance’s reference (he does not have to speak about himself), and he is not present as the person who says: “This is what I am.” He is present in a coincidence between the subject of enunciation and the subject of his own actions. “This truth I tell you, you see it in me.” That’s it. (409)

“That’s it” translates the French idiom *Voilà*, and with this *Voilà*, Foucault abruptly ends his lecture for the day; in so doing, he idiomatically introduces a bit of semantic indeterminacy into his discourse. While Foucault is not necessarily referring here to his own philosophical practice—since his enunciation ostensibly refers to Greco-Roman philosophy and he represents his use of the first-person pronoun as quotation so that when he says “I” he seems to be speaking through or as another—he is also not necessarily *not* referring to it. Indeed, since he emphasizes that the psychagogue does not need

“to be present in the utterance’s reference (he does not have to speak about himself) to be present in the discourse,” Foucault could be intimating that his nonpresence, or at least his ambiguous presence (as he quotes and thereby utters the first-person pronoun), constitutes his performative identification with the psychagogue. Be that as it may, the political and philosophical utility of Foucault’s “journey to Greece”—as his focus on Greek and Greco-Roman philosophy has been derisively characterized (Daraki)—might reveal its significance more forcefully if we view it in light of Foucault’s discussion of psychagogy *as if* the psychagogy in question belonged to him as well.

When Foucault returns to psychagogy the following year in *The Government of the Self and Others*, the term initially appears apposite the “conduct of souls,” and a bit later “the government of souls” (306). Obviously, then, his discussion of psychagogy picks up the threads of “government” and “conduct” that he introduces in *Security, Territory, Population*, his earlier lectures from 1977–78, but weaves them into a different conceptual and historical fabric.¹ In *Security, Territory, Population*, conduct appears to nuance Foucault’s initial—admittedly vague—reflections on power in *The History of Sexuality* Vol. 1 (92–102), published the previous year, by situating them within a discussion of “pastoral power,” itself an element of his genealogy of “the political government of men.”² Invoking the critical polyvalence of the word *conduct—conduire* in French—as a simultaneously behavioral and energetic concept, Foucault foregrounds the necessary entanglement of power’s forms and forces. In this way, he refines his controversial claim that “where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority to power” (*History* 95) by elucidating what he calls “counter-conducts” as entrained with conduct (e.g., in the way that electrical “resistance” is entrained with the flow of electrons in a conductor). Five years later, in *The Government of the Self and Others*, Foucault reframes the powerful currents of conduct in terms of his Hellenic meditations on the *epimeleia heauton*, the “care of the self,” conceived as a form of the *tekhne tou biou*, the “art of living,” “the technique of existence.” He then situates his wider reflections about philosophical discourse within this art form.³

The locus classicus for the reflection on philosophy as an art of living appears in Plato’s *Apology* where Socrates defends himself before his accusers. Hence Foucault, not surprisingly, addresses Socrates’s famous self-defense immediately before he engages the topic of psychagogy in the *Phaedrus* cited above. When Socrates responds in the *Apology* to the charges against him, he argues that he has been enjoined by Apollo to exhort those he

meets to take care of themselves, and Foucault claims that this philosophical practice, which Foucault characterizes as parrhesia, “is identified not just with a mode or technique of justice but with life itself, [and] consists in practicing philosophy, caring about oneself, exhorting others to care about themselves, and doing this by examining, testing, putting what others do and do not know to the test. I must, he says, ‘live practicing philosophy’ [. . .], examining myself as well as others” (326). To live practicing philosophy is first and foremost a way of life, a lively experience that engages Socrates in relation to his own life (which is, after all, what is at stake in the trial) as it coincides with the lives of others. This philosophically vital relation informs their coexistence as citizens of the polis, which is to say their conviviality. Thus, even though this form of live thinking does not arise within the decision-making offices of the polis per se, it nonetheless constitutes, as Foucault states, “a necessary function with regard to politics, not necessarily for the working of the city, for its government, but necessary for its very life and for keeping it from sleeping (for its wakefulness, for keeping watch over the city)” (327). And how does the philosopher perform this function that addresses not the city’s “government,” but its “life,” and is thus not political even if it is necessary to the polis? Through a psychagogy linked to dialects, as Foucault then goes on to demonstrate through his reading of the *Phaedrus*.

To what extent could we—or should we—read Foucault’s own philosophical practice in similar terms? Was Foucault implicitly proffering his own philosophical practice as a psychagogical one, as a lively practice through which both he and his auditors might be transformed? Did Foucault see his writing and teaching as an activity that performs a “necessary function with regard to politics,” even if it was not itself what some might call “properly political”? And if so, what would this mean for how we read Foucault’s thinking about the tensions between politics and philosophy, between life and truth? In this essay, I take up these questions by tracing some of Foucault’s ideas about the ways that truth, life, politics, and thinking coincide in order to discover if the psychagogy that Foucault described might also be one to which he subscribed—or perhaps one which he even prescribed. In so doing, I hope to recast the concerns about “Foucault’s politics” that have never ceased to vex his readers throughout the thirty years since his death. If we imagine Foucault as a psychagogue, or at least as someone for whom psychagogy represented a philosophical ethos that deeply concerned him, then rather than inquiring what Foucault’s politics were, we might ask instead: how did Foucault take up the questions about politics that were posed to him and how was he changed by them?

The “Truth” of Foucault’s Politics

No one who has any knowledge of Foucault’s biography can deny that he was a political person in the colloquial sense of the term. As famous French intellectuals go, from 1970 until his death he was certainly one of the most persistently activist—maybe not quite so relentlessly *engagé* as Jean-Paul Sartre or Félix Guattari, but certainly no slug. Nevertheless, many who identified as “being on the left” continuously interrogated Foucault concerning his politics. Whether they challenged him for his lack of normative values (as Jürgen Habermas and Nancy Fraser did), or for his failure to adhere to various more or less dogmatic versions of Marxism (as did the French Communist Party, and later the French Maoists, Italian Communists, and Trotskyites of every nationality), or more recently for his failure to endorse feminism, antiracism, and anticolonialism sufficiently (as a multitude of posthumous critics have), many diverse detractors from across the political spectrum who otherwise had little in common agreed that something was wrong with Foucault’s politics—whatever they were. As Foucault sardonically noted in the last interview he gave: “I think I have in fact been situated in most of the squares on the political checkerboard, one after another and sometimes simultaneously: as an anarchist, leftist, ostentatious or disguised Marxist, nihilist, explicit or secret anti-Marxist, technocrat in the service of Gaullism, new liberal and so on. An American professor complained that a crypto-Marxist like me was invited to the U.S.A, and I was being denounced by the press in Eastern European countries for being an accomplice of the dissidents” (“Polemics” 113). Over the years, challenges to Foucault’s political credibility seemed to increase in direct proportion to his celebrity. For example, the unexpected popularity of *The Order of Things* when it appeared in France in 1966 led Sartre to lambast Foucault by exclaiming: “Marxism is the target. It is a matter of establishing a new ideology, the last defense [*rempart*] the bourgeoisie can erect against Marx” (110). Foucault pithily replied: “An unfortunate bourgeoisie, I must say. If it only had me for a rampart, it would have lost its grip on power a long time ago!” (Interview 261). Ten years later, after the much heralded publication first of *Discipline and Punish* (1975) and then of *The History of Sexuality* (1976), the left cranked up the critical heat. In interview after interview and in review after review, Foucault was both questioned and admonished about the limitations—if not the wrongheadedness—of his political perspective.⁴ In particular, Foucault’s rejection of Marxism as an overarching explanatory

schema caused many left critics to disparage his politics altogether or to wonder if he even had any.

A comparatively sympathetic interlocutor, Lucette Finas, in a 1977 interview, queried Foucault about these kinds of complaints when she asked: “Is it possible, on the basis of bringing what is called ‘power’ into question again, to adopt a political point of view in regard to power? [. . .] Would you define what sense you give to ‘political?’” (71). Since the very terms of her question already presumed a *problem*, Foucault’s response sought to illuminate the *problematic* within which this problem appears as one:

[P]olitics isn’t what determines in the last instance (or what overdetermines) relations which are elementary and by nature “neutral.” [. . .] In the main, political analysis and critique are yet to be invented. [. . .] Which is to say that the problem isn’t so much to define a political “position” (which brings us back to making a move on a pre-constituted chessboard) but to imagine and bring into existence new schemas of politicization. If to “politicize” means to bring back to ready-made choices and organizations, all those relations of force and mechanisms of power which analysis disengages, then it’s not worth the trouble. To the great new techniques of power (which correspond to multinational economies or to bureaucratic States) must be opposed new forms of politicization. (72)

Obviously Foucault’s reply addresses his Marxist critics, both humanist and antihumanist, to whose objections Finas’s questions tactfully allude. Here, Foucault engages such criticism by deploying one of his favorite forms of thinking, designed, as he avers in a contemporary context, “to analyze programmes of conduct which have both prescriptive effects regarding what is to be done (effects of ‘jurisdiction’) and codifying effects regarding what is to be known (effects of ‘veridiction’)” (“Impossible” 276–77). In so doing, Foucault refocuses the discussion in terms of “politicization,” rather than assuming what Finas called “a political point of view.” He therefore stresses the possibility that politics might not constitute a self-evident perspective on human coexistence and that “politics itself” may result from a process of politicization, which always manifests a contingent history. Furthermore, he intimates that we might not yet know what other possibilities for coexistence could be imagined or come to exist. Criticisms made in the name of politics, political positions, or political points of view, then, may miss the

mark insofar as they assume these frames as necessary without wondering how or why we insist on framing our thinking and conduct in their terms.

In the same year that this interview with Finas was published (which was also the year after the publication of the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*), Foucault began to focus explicitly on the question of modern politics as such, a theme he then elaborated over the next three years in his lectures. In *Society Must Be Defended* (1976–77), *Security, Territory, Population* (1977–78), and *The Birth of Biopolitics* (1978–79), Foucault attends to the transformations in Europe that converge into—and as—modern political economy, forming a new governmental technology from the late seventeenth century on. Over the course of these lectures, Foucault presents his famous reflections on “governmentality” as a supplement both to “discipline” (explored in *Discipline and Punish*) and to the sovereign exercise of power (considered in *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1). The lectures also elaborate his ideas concerning the biopolitical management of populations at the heart of political economy and introduce his notion that “the economy” serves to circumscribe the sovereign’s legitimate exercise of political power. When he schematically summarizes the significance of these arguments at the end of the last lecture of 1977–78, Foucault makes it clear that his thinking throughout these lectures aims at troubling the “revolutionary eschatology” that underwrites Marxist analyses of the state. (Given his famous allergy to polemics, he only intimates this significance quickly by way of conclusion; yet—and as a result—his remarks punctuate the previous two years of lectures and adumbrate the next year’s thematic.) Situating revolutionary politics among a range of “counter-conducts” that only arise in relation to modern regimes of power, Foucault queries the canonical Marxist assumption that “revolution” constitutes an ahistorical apogee of political change. Instead, he places revolution within a complex of transformations descending from the Christian pastoral that gives rise to “an eschatology that will take the form of an absolute right to revolt, to insurrection, to breaking all the bonds of obedience: the right to revolution itself” (*Security* 356). Therefore, he concludes: “[T]he history of the *Raison d’État*, the history of the governmental *ratio*, and the history of the counter-conducts opposed to it, are inseparable from each other” (357). With this articulation, Foucault implicitly proposes a genealogical perspective on the prevailing (Marxist) presumption that revolution constitutes the truth of politics per se and instead asks us to contemplate how this “truth” came to seem so true.

In the first lecture of the following year's course, *The Birth of Biopolitics*—largely devoted to mid-twentieth-century neoliberal economic theories—Foucault starts by offering a methodological reflection on his previous arguments. In particular, he identifies “political economy” as “the intellectual instrument, the form of calculation and rationality that made possible the self-limitation of governmental reason as a de facto, general self-regulation which is intrinsic to the operation of government” (13). As a result, he suggests, the emergence of political economy changes the “nature” of the governmental game, since political economy conjures the very nature that it seeks to know and regulate. More than simply recasting the domain of political economy, this insight also disturbs the putative naturalism of Marxism's founding premise since, as a critique of bourgeois political economy, Marxism holds that humans become human insofar as they modulate their conditions of coexistence as they satisfy their “natural” needs.⁵ Indeed, Foucault argues that explaining politics in terms of any supposedly self-evident nature preempts the possibility of considering how something like political economy—and the politics and economics that it enfolds—came to seem so natural in the first place. Thus he concludes his methodological introduction by claiming:

[T]he moment when that which does not exist is inscribed in reality, and when that which does not exist comes under a regime of the true and the false, marks the birth of this dissymmetrical bipolarity of politics and economics. Politics and the economy are not things that exist, or errors, or illusions, or ideologies. They are things that do not exist and yet which are inscribed in reality and fall under a regime of truth dividing the true and the false. (20)

If politics and the economy do not exist, that does not mean that they do not affect us. Rather, they insist within a field of possibilities that “the truth” devises—and divides—such that some possibilities fall “within the true” while others do not.⁶ Realization, or “inscri[ption] in reality,” thus entails not an affirmation of existence, but a submission to the bifurcation true/false as a condition of intelligibility. Politics and the economy, which do not exist, inform and are informed by a modern regime of truth practices that realizes them as that which can be true or false, though *never* as that which are of no account. The relation of politics to truth hence constitutes a relation of realization, of accountability, of inscription in the real, such that the “truth of politics” is precisely what makes politics seem so true.

Foucault returns to this coconstitutive relation between politics and truth five years later in *The Government of the Self and Others* when he emphatically denounces the shift in political discourse from “politics” to “the political”: “[N]othing seems more dangerous to me than the much vaunted shift from politics (*la politique*) to the political (*le politique*), which in many contemporary analyses seems to me to have the effect of masking the specific problems and set of problems of politics, [. . .] of the political game, and of the political field as a field of experience inasmuch as it is indexed to truth-telling and involves a certain relationship to oneself and to others for its players” (159). In this context, Foucault situates his reflections on the truth games of politics and the political games of truth through his meditations on parrhesia as a specific form of truth-telling that appears in Athenian democracy. Hence he characterizes “the problem of politics” as “a practice of having to obey certain rules, indexed to the truth in a particular way, and which involves a particular form of relationship to oneself and to others on the part of those playing this game” (158). While Foucault foregrounds this dynamic between politics and truth-speaking throughout his last four years of lectures by tracing the vicissitudes of parrhesia as a hinge between politics and philosophy, it is important to recall that the interplay of politics and truth was hardly a new topic for him. Indeed, as he frequently averred over the last years of his life, elucidating this interplay had interested him all along. Even if this self-characterization constitutes a retrospective mirage, Foucault certainly had, as an avid reader of Nietzsche, frequently considered the play of true/false as manifesting a violence that bespeaks a will to power.

Belying the popular (though mistaken) assumption that he only became concerned with ancient Greece at the end of his life, Foucault’s very first lectures at the Collège de France, titled *Leçons sur la volonté de savoir* [*Lessons on the Will to Knowledge*], already offer a complex analysis of how the matrix of politics and truth realizes itself during the passage from archaic Greece to classical Athens.⁷ Eschewing the associations between politics, philosophy, and writing that frequently characterize reflections about the “Greek miracle”—including or especially Derrida’s—Foucault instead traces the development of Greek truth practices in relation to a range of technological transformations: metallurgical, military, monetary, medical, religious, and juridical. In particular, he focuses on how, during the period between the seventh and the fifth centuries BCE, the primary locus of truth shifts from the ordeal/event [*vérité-défi, vérité-ordalique*] to knowledge [*vérité-savoir*] (103).⁸ In archaic Greece, Foucault argues, truth-seekers

beheld the truth as the result of a decisive clash between competing claimants: “The responsibility for deciding—not who spoke the truth, but who was right—was entrusted to the fight, the challenge, the risk each one would run” (“Truth” 55). In classical Greece, however, truth appears instead as a regulatory principle emerging within a process of judgment that links it to justice [*dike*].⁹ This incorporation of truth within the exercise of the law transforms the way truth operates and hence what it *is*: “The uncovering [*dévoilement*] of the truth and the exercise of sovereignty are interdependent [*solidaire*] and interdependently [*solidairement*] substitute for the designation of an antagonist and the risk he voluntarily accepts” (*Leçons* 104). As a result, truth enters into political decision making as a *persuasive* form of adjudication that introduces both “rational forms of proof and demonstration” and “an art of convincing people of the truth of what is said, of winning victory for the truth or, what is more, by means of the truth” (“Truth” 33–34). This concatenation of changes links politics and truth internally: “In Greece there was, then, a sort of revolution that, through a series of political struggles and contestations, resulted in the elaboration of a specific form of judicial, juridical discovery of truth. The latter constituted the mold, the model on the basis of which a series of other knowledges—philosophical, rhetorical, and empirical—were able to develop and to characterize Greek thought” (“Truth” 34). The coimplication and codevelopment of Greek politics and philosophy rests on a transmutation of the “value of truth” (as Nietzsche might say) in relation to the means of its determination. Politics and philosophy, then, lean on a truth practice that emerges during the transition from archaic to classical forms of governance in Greece and that still, according to Foucault, informs the meaning of “the truth” that we inherit: “The transformation of the fulguration of the event into a certified fact [*fait constaté*] and access to the truth given only to someone who respects the *nomos*, these are the two great historical constraints that have been imposed since ancient Greece on the true discourse of Occidental societies” (*Leçons* 189). In order to appreciate this geopolitical claim, it helps to remember that truth has not existed universally, a fact that François Jullien confirms in his comparative study of ancient Chinese and Greek thinking. Unlike Chinese thought of the same period, where the importance of wisdom—rather than truth—entailed recognizing “the unity and complementarity of opposites,” in classical Greece the invention of truth (predicated on the law of noncontradiction) created the “rational” basis for collective decision making that philosophy elucidates. Jullien identifies this decisive logic as underwriting the triumph of “European reason” and emphasizes that the success of Western truth practices

results from the privileging of identity and noncontradiction over “complementary contraries” (805). This prioritization favors the “stable and clear-cut” over the variable and indistinct by avowing that it offers a firm ground upon which to make decisions concerning how those who inhabit the shared life-world of the polis live together. Such convivial decisions define the process that we have come to name—following the Greek etymon—*politics*.

The political way of truth, then, is called *deciding* and, as its etymology (from the Latin *de + caedere*: to cut, slice, sever, hew, kill) implies, it always entails violence: decisions cleave the virtual from—and to—the actual (to mime Deleuze’s idiom). They divide the domain of possibilities and thereby define what becomes inscribed within the real as true.¹⁰ But how does truth become the way of deciding the experiment of life, and thereby transforming it into experience, if truth is not decision’s only face? In Foucault’s account, truth comes to govern experience in classical Greece—and thus Greece becomes the “fictive place where power founds itself on a truth that is only accessible under the guarantee of purity” (*Leçons* 186)—because truth begins to operate there as a way of purifying the “dangerously mixed”: “The truth separates. [. . .] The truth is that which permits exclusion; to separate that which is dangerously mixed; to distribute as necessary interior and exterior; to trace the limits of that which is pure and impure” (180). In Classical Greece, Foucault argues, “[T]he demonstration of truth becomes a political task” insofar as the *Nomos* separates itself from the *Thesmos*, that is, insofar as ordering by law disambiguates itself from ordering by custom or tradition (177). Experience thus becomes the way (living) being gives itself to being thought (as living) by creating “games of truth.” Insofar as it emerges by way of truth games, experience *decides* how life is lived both individually and collectively—that is, it excludes some possibilities as unplayable or unlivable (and therefore makes them so). Moreover, the Greeks invest in truth’s decisiveness in order to govern the processes through which the convivial form of life that we call politics *takes place* (and thereby actually becomes the polis). However, do games of truth constitute the only way of living—or “playing”—together? And conversely, if we do not invest in such truth games, or if we alter the stakes we wager on them, could other forms of conviviality emerge?¹¹

In 1980–81, a decade after he delivered the lectures comprising *La volonté de savoir*, Foucault returns to the confluence of philosophical and political truth in his lectures titled “*Subjectivité et vérité*,” reconsidering them in relation to “techniques of the self,” “care of the self,” and “government of the self.”¹² As Foucault describes the course, it focuses on a series

of key questions: “What should one do with oneself? What work should be carried out on the self? How should one ‘govern oneself’ by performing actions in which one is oneself the objective of those actions, the domain in which they are brought to bear, the instrument they employ, and the subject that acts?” (*Ethics* 87). Obviously, these questions reiterate Foucault’s earlier concerns with “government,” itself an elaboration of his critical engagement with prevailing political theories of power; yet now he inflects these concerns toward the experience of the subject (88). Concentrating his new analysis of government on the Hellenistic and Roman periods, Foucault explains that this shift of historical frames opens up a new perspective on what it means to govern and be governed: “And in this way one could take up the question of governmentality from a different angle: the government of the self by oneself in articulation with relations with others (such as one finds in pedagogy, behavioral counseling, spiritual direction, the prescription of models for living, and so on)” (88). While the word *psychagogy* seems not yet to appear in this context—as it will the succeeding year in *Hermeneutics of the Subject* (in juxtaposition to *pedagogy*, as noted above)—Foucault’s list certainly anticipates this possibility.¹⁵ Indeed, insofar as government of the self involves an array of articulations between self and other, it leans on a variety of dialogical practices that engage subjects with themselves by way of their relations with others. What two years later, in *The Government of the Self and Others*, Foucault will underscore as psychagogy, then, can already be discerned within the relations that subtend the government of the self, precisely because such government involves the self with others as its condition of being a “self,” a *psyche*, a soul that experiences “itself” as such in the first place.¹⁴

In *Subjectivité et vérité*, “governmentality” (which in the lectures of the late 1970s obviated the need for what contemporary Marxism referred to as “theories of the State”) now articulates the subject and others at the level of experience: “[T]he ‘care of oneself,’ [is] understood as an experience, and [. . .] also as a technique elaborating and transforming that experience” (88). Insofar as “government of the self” entails technologies and techniques of the self that both “elaborate and transform [. . .] experience,” it suggests ways to reflect on the historical processes of subject formation that encompass—but do not remain delimited by—dynamics already considered *to be* “political”:

[I]t is certain that the “technology of the self”—reflection on modes of living, on choices of existence, on ways to regulate one’s

behavior, to attach oneself to ends and means—experienced an extensive development in the Hellenistic and Roman period, to the point of having absorbed a large portion of philosophical activity. This development cannot be dissociated from the growth of urban society, from the new distribution of political power, or from the importance assumed by the new service aristocracy in the Roman Empire. This government of the self, with the techniques that are particular to it, takes its place “between” pedagogical institutions and the religions of salvation. [. . .] [T]he technology of the self intended for the adult can be analyzed during this period, provided it is pulled out of the retrospective shadow cast on it by pedagogical institutions and the salvation religions. (89–90)

This characterization gestures toward the new conceptual terrain that Foucault begins to map out in these lectures and then pursues throughout his final three years: living, existence, behavior, attachment; modes, choices, regulations, ends, and means. Certainly, these terms encompass much about the domain that we think of as politics. Indeed, Foucault makes this connection explicit by refusing to “dissociate” them from changes that contemporaries would have immediately recognized as belonging to “the political” as such. Yet, rather than assuming that such changes determine their politico-historical effects—whether in the first or last instance—Foucault’s parsing of the political terrain instead foregrounds a distinct way of knitting this political field together via the knotting of government and techniques of the self. Government of the self, which addresses living, existence, behaviors, and ends and means through modes, choices, regulations, and attachments, necessarily requires techniques, and insofar as it constitutes a *tehkne*, it must by definition be learned. Yet the kind of learning entailed, Foucault explains, does not fall within either pedagogy or salvation religion. Rather, “the technology of the self intended for the adult”—which cannot be pedagogy (because pedagogy literally means “leading children”) and which addresses the soul (but does not pertain to its salvation)—is exactly what Foucault will define as *psychagogy* in *Government of the Self and Others*, even if he does not name it as such here.

Psychagogy refers to a practice of government regulated but not decided by truth. The psychagogical game of truth-telling involves a constant relation to truth in which the process of leading the soul, the psyche, unfolds continuously throughout the course of a life. Thus, psychagogy can never be decisive—except perhaps at the point of death—and hence it does

not fall within the truth practices that constitute the political. Nevertheless, psychagogy exists in relation to the political insofar as it engages the soul dialectically with others and directs it toward the “true life.” When, in his last lectures, *The Courage of Truth*, Foucault undertakes his hauntingly beautiful reading of Socrates’s death (which is especially moving in retrospect, given its proximity to Foucault’s own death just months later), he illustrates how this exemplary psychagogue lived his death as an exhortation to live the “true life” to the end:

It is the mission concerning the care of oneself that leads Socrates to his death. It is the principle of “caring for oneself” that, beyond his death, he bequeaths to the others. And it is to the gods, favorable towards this care of oneself, that he addresses his last thought. I think that Socrates’ death founds philosophy, in the reality of Greek thought and therefore in Western history, as a form of veridiction which is not that of prophecy, or wisdom, or tekhnē; a form of veridiction peculiar to philosophical discourse, and the courage of which must be exercised until death as a test of the soul which cannot take place on the political platform. (113–14)

Through his meditation on the death of Socrates, Foucault intimates that the question of psychagogy links truth to life by way of experience. But if psychagogy represents the philosophical experience par excellence, we must also consider what philosophy means and why it remains in a relation of intimate exteriority to politics. In order to do this, we need to consider the interlacing of thought, life, and experience that Foucault weaves in the last years of his lectures at the Collège de France and reflect on why he may have undertaken this precarious journey to Greece as his last intellectual voyage. Perhaps by reflecting on psychagogy, Foucault took to heart Finas’s earlier question (“Would you define what sense you give to ‘political’?”) as a good psychagogue should: ruminating on the question, he pursues a genealogical transit through the ways that philosophy and politics first appeared together in ancient Greek culture in order to consider them in relation both to each other and to “the truth.” In so doing, he changes what and how he thought and taught. Focusing his final three years of lectures through the lens of parrhesia—truth-telling—he reopens his thinking about the ways that politics and philosophy live together in the world as a mode of experience that can—at times—change the world for good.

“Live Practicing Philosophy,” or A True Experience?

The opening lectures of *The Government of the Self and Others* focus on Kant’s essay “What Is Enlightenment?” During the early 1980s, Foucault offered several readings of Kant’s short piece,¹⁵ which served Foucault as what—following Plato’s usage—he called a “touchstone” (*basanos*) (*Courage* 84, 145, 153). Even given his touching relation to Kant’s text, however, we might wonder why Foucault chose to interpolate it exactly at the midpoint of four years of lectures otherwise devoted to Greek and Greco-Roman culture. Needless to say, at the time Foucault did not necessarily know that this placement would seem as central as it does in retrospect; nevertheless, it opens a curious window onto what Foucault was pursuing during this period. To appreciate the reading’s significance, it helps to know that immediately preceding his Kantian interlude Foucault offers a brief recapitulation of his entire intellectual project in order to distinguish it from “the history of mentalities,” on the one hand, and “the history of representations”—or the “analysis of ideologies”—on the other (2). Instead of pursuing these other histories, he declares: “[W]hat I have tried to do is a history of thought. And by thought I mean an analysis of what could be called focal points of experience in which forms of a possible knowledge, normative frameworks of behavior for individuals, and potential modes of existence for possible subjects are linked together” (3).

“Experience” appears here as the crux around which Foucault organizes his diverse approaches and inquiries. Although the term recurs with a number of different implications from the beginning to the end of Foucault’s writing, regrettably he never specifies rigorously what it means to him.¹⁶ Fortunately for us, however, in a roughly contemporary text, the preface to *The Use of Pleasure*, Foucault does provide some indication of how the term resonates for him at this point.¹⁷ Here, in the process of explaining why he chose not to pursue the project he outlined the *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, and instead decided “to isolate some of the elements that might be useful for a history of the truth,” Foucault describes his undertaking as “an analysis of the ‘games of truth,’ the games of truth and error through which being is historically constituted as experience: that is, as something that can and must be thought. What are the games of truth by which man proposes to think his own nature?” (6–7). (Foucault also once declared: “It is not natural for nature to be known” [“Truth”].) Foucault seems in this instance to suggest that experience refers to the ways in which (living) being gives itself to being thought through games of true and false. Moreover, the

being thought of (living) being occurs through the human as the thinking of its own “nature.” Hence, we might infer that human experience names the way that *living* being gives itself to being thought as such, or even that experience encompasses the way living being comes to know itself as a mode of live thinking—of *savoir vivre*—that only arises within the domain of “life itself.” (We will consider what Foucault means by “life itself” in the final section, below.)

Having commenced *The Government of the Self and Others* in terms of “the history of what could be called ‘experiences,’” Foucault segues to his discussion of Kant’s essay—which he says he will consider as “an excursus, [. . .] an exergue”—by lighting for less than one paragraph on the topic of what two months later he will discuss as *psychagogy*. In this brief transitional move, Foucault also introduces another topic to which he will return in the lectures in order to adumbrate why he continues his focus on parrhesia:

It seemed to me that this study [of parrhesia] would make it possible to see, to tighten up a bit, the problem of the relations between government of the self and government of others, to see the genesis, the genealogy, if not of political discourse in general, at least of a certain form of political discourse whose object would be government of the Prince, of the Prince’s soul by the counselor, the philosopher, the pedagogue responsible for forming his soul.
(Government 6)

Despite the fact that Foucault uses the word “pedagogue” here to describe the philosopher whose relation to the Prince involves “forming his soul,” this description fails to match the situation. In this case, the guidance involved becomes “political” precisely because it does not concern the education of a child or of “endowing whomsoever with a series of abilities defined in advance,” as he defined pedagogy the previous year, but rather bespeaks an engagement between adults who exist in an asymmetrical relation of power that regards the soul. Indeed, it is a very peculiar relation (as Foucault will argue at length in the ensuing lectures) since the one who “conducts” is in fact “governed” by the other whose self-government he seeks to modulate. Therefore, the philosopher’s conduct actually puts him at risk of violence with respect to the one he seeks to conduct (as Plato discovered when his psychagogical intervention with Syracuse’s tyrant, Dionysius, resulted in his being sold into slavery—which almost never happens to a pedagogue).¹⁸ If the political goal is not to teach someone something, but instead “to form

his soul,” then this game of truth is psychagogical, not pedagogical. Moreover, this distinction provides the basis for including Foucault’s otherwise anachronistic reflections on Kant’s essay within his overall Hellenic and Hellenistic itinerary since: 1) in his essay, Kant explicitly addresses his remarks to Frederick of Prussia, marking Kant’s text as an example of the kind of political discourse between Prince and philosopher that Foucault denominates “psychagogical”; and 2) Kant’s famous maxim *Sapere aude!* (“dare to know”) exhorts an exit from “immaturity” as a self-release from irresponsibility or tutelage in order to affirm a movement toward maturity or enlightenment in which one is no longer captivated by what one has been taught, or read, or been admonished to believe—a courageous audacity that characterizes the movement from pedagogy to psychagogy.

When Foucault turns his attention to Kant’s essay, he does so in order to reveal an “other critical tradition” within modern philosophy that does not aim at discerning “the conditions of possibility of a true knowledge,” but instead “asks the question: What is present reality? What is the present field of our experiences? What is the present field of possible experiences? Here it is not a question of an analytics of truth but involves what could be called an ontology of the present, of present reality, an ontology of modernity, an ontology of ourselves” (20–21). It might seem curious that Foucault raises this specter of constituting “an ontology of the present” in the middle of four years of lecturing on antiquity; however, as his discussion of Kant makes evident, Foucault’s journey to Greece always concerns his thinking the “present reality” as the vital matter of philosophical reflection. Moreover, by placing himself within this aspect of the Kantian legacy, Foucault clarifies the political implications of his own philosophical practice. Kant’s essay provides Foucault with an example that disturbs philosophy’s fixation on the truth as something fixed or fixable, proposing instead another philosophical practice that locates its “truth” in relation to a reality and a collectivity that it must help to produce.

Not surprisingly, Foucault describes “What Is Enlightenment?” as a seminal moment in the history of philosophy. What Foucault identifies as critical in Kant’s text is the way that it constitutes “the surface of emergence of its own present discursive reality” (15). In other words, Foucault sees Kant engaging the very moment within which his thought arises as a moment of thinking that beholds itself within the emergence of a new thought collective, a new “we,” whose very possibility it anticipates and inscribes. For Foucault, this capacity of thought to become an event that opens the present onto another future not only defines the philosopher’s situation but

also recasts philosophy's aims. Philosophy becomes an event insofar as it partakes of a present reality that it transforms by making another present possible through the creation of a "cultural ensemble" whose existence it manifests as a self-reflection on its belonging. (In *The Courage of Truth*, Foucault thematizes this possibility as the "other life," as discussed below.) Needless to say, the word *political* does not appear in this meditation on Kant. Foucault certainly makes no claim that his reading of Kant inspires a political perspective on the collective nature of current reality. However, by affirming Kant's turning of philosophy back on the present moment in which it must belong to a "we" from which and through which it appears, Foucault anticipates his characterization of Socrates's philosophical ethos as "not at all a political office but a necessary function with regard to politics" (*Government* 327).

After Foucault concludes his discussion of Kant on the first day of *The Government of the Self and Others*, he restricts his consideration to the vicissitudes of parrhesia in the Hellenic texts that comprise his archive for the next two years. The preponderance of Foucault's discussion in *The Government of the Self and Others* concerns the various ways that truth-telling impinges on the constitution and the government of a collective (what he calls the "we" in his reading of Kant). Parrhesia thus focalizes his approach to the political question—or the question of politics—because of the risk that it introduces into the political field insofar as it seeks to exercise power through "a discourse which leaves room free for other discourse and assumes the task, not of bending others' to one's will, but of persuading them" (105). For Foucault, democracy introduces a problem—or in fact a paradox—into the field of truth-telling precisely because it is by way of persuasion that power is exercised. Persuasion names the effects that the logos brings to bear on the conduct of citizens who then make decisions among different possible futures on the basis of such truth claims. Within the political field of truth-telling, the agonistics of truth gives rise to a contestation among citizens such that, even though all are formally equal before the law (*isonomia*) and all are equally entitled to speak (*isogoria*), some seek to prevail over others by way of the truth. This dynamic gives rise to "a certain superiority which is also an ambition and effort to be in a position such that one can direct others" (156).

Foucault identifies this political play of parrhesia as characterizing democracy (178). If parrhesia functions as the "hinge between *politeia* and *dunasteia*, between the problem of law and the political game," however, then it also opens up the possibility for tensions between the constitution of

the polis (*politeia*) and the exercise of power within it (*dunasteia*). Not every Athenian can be Pericles, and not all parrhesia is good parrhesia (hence the problem of rhetoric that Plato so resoundingly condemns). In other words, democracy gives rise to a fundamental paradox simply because not everyone can equally speak the truth.

Not everybody can tell the truth just because everybody may speak. True discourse introduces a difference or rather is linked, both in its conditions and in its effects, to a difference: only a few can tell the truth. And once only a few can tell the truth, once this truth-telling has emerged into the field of democracy, a difference is produced which is that of the ascendancy exercised by some over others. [. . .] [T]he question of true discourse and the necessary, indispensable, and fragile caesura that true discourses cannot fail to introduce into a democracy [. . .] both makes this discourse possible and constantly threatens it. (183–84)¹⁹

The paradox of parrhesia in democracy concerns the problem “of *dunasteia*, of the practice of the political game,” insofar as “one tells the truth in order to exercise ascendancy [. . .] which will really influence the way decisions are taken, the way in which the city or State is governed” (192). When truth operates *decisively* within the political field, it introduces differences predicated on the ability to speak the truth. Yet such truthful differentiations can undermine the “we-ness” of the political “we,” by making it possible for some forms of persuasion to speak as “truth-speaking” even though they are no longer “indexed to the truth”: “The bond between parrhesia and democracy is problematic, difficult, and dangerous. Democracy is in the process of being overrun by a bad parrhesia” (166, 168).²⁰

The threat of bad parrhesia reveals psychagogy as a political problem—or perhaps as a political solution—as Foucault indicates when he names “the four great problems of ancient political thought”: “the problem of philosophy compared with rhetoric, the problem of psychagogy and education in terms of politics, the question of the respective merits of democracy and autocracy, and the question of the ideal city” (196). Insofar as psychagogy concerns “the problem of the formation and conduct of souls, which is indispensable to politics,” it constitutes a *tekhne* that addresses the “soul” as a persistent political potential. Foucault illustrates this soulful persistence in politics by tracking its formation across what he calls the “Platonic crossroads.” First, he considers Plato’s critique of democracy in the *Republic*, which Foucault interprets as “putting us on the track of the splitting of

the two forms of parrhesia (that which is necessary to the life of the city and that which is indispensable to man's soul). Civic or political parrhesia is connected to a different parrhesia, although each calls for the other. It is this parrhesia that must be able to introduce *alethes logos* ['a discourse of truth'] into the individual's soul" (201). Then he discusses Plato's reflections in the *Laws*, where this soulful parrhesia provides

a kind of supplement that the organization of the city, the order of laws, however rational it may be, will never be able to ensure. [. . .] They will still need a supplementary discourse of truth, and someone will be needed to address them in complete frankness, using the language of reason and truth to persuade them. [. . .] [I]t is the problem of parrhesia as action to be exerted, not only on the body of the entire city but on the individual's soul, whether this be the Prince's soul or the citizen's soul. (205–6)

Finally, he addresses Plato's *Letters* to elucidate the relation between philosophy and politics: "Now the philosopher cannot be merely logos with regard to politics. [. . .] [Philosophy] should also be a mode of life, a way of being, a practical relationship to oneself through which one elaborates oneself and works on oneself; if it is true that philosophy therefore should be *askesis* (asceticism), then [. . .] the philosopher has to tackle not only the problem of himself but also that of the city" (219). Summarizing his interpretation of Plato's *Letters*, Foucault affirms: "[I]t is in the relation to the self, in the work of the self on the self, in the work on oneself, in this mode of activity of self on self that philosophy's reality will actually be demonstrated" (242).

Predicated on his passage through these Platonic byways, Foucault concludes:

[P]hilosophical discourse in its truth, in the game it necessarily plays with politics in order to find its truth, does not have to plan what political action should be. It does not tell the truth of political action, it does not tell the truth for political action, it tells the truth in relation to political action, in relation to the practice of politics, in relation to the political personage. And this is what I call a recurrent, permanent, and fundamental feature of the relationship of philosophy to politics. It seems to me that this is already very noticeable at the time we are concerned with, and that it remains true throughout the history of the relations between philosophy and politics. [. . .] Philosophy and politics

must exist in a relation, a correlation; they must never coincide.
(288–89)

Given this relation of noncoincidental correlation, of intimate exteriority, philosophy remains linked to politics through a shared concern for the truth. Philosophy's investment in parrhesia and its persistent existence as a truth practice introduce an "identity between the mode of being of the philosophizing subject and the mode of being of the subject practicing politics" (294). Moreover, this identity of interest in the truth enables philosophy to discern and to combat its "shadowy double," its political adversary, that quintessential tool of bad parrhesia: rhetoric. From the hostility between philosophy and rhetoric, psychagogy emerges as the "instrument" needed to discern between them. Both rhetoric and psychagogy aim at moving the soul; however, only psychagogy moves the soul toward the truth: "Rather than being a power of persuasion that would convince souls of anything and everything, philosophy presents itself as an operation which will enable souls to distinguish properly between true and false, and which, through the philosophical *paideia*, will provide the instruments needed to carry out this distinction" (304–5). Psychagogy as a philosophical instrument responds to the political problem that rhetoric incarnates; however, in order to work against the political power that rhetoric seeks to exercise through its persuasive manipulation of the logos, psychagogy must work outside the political field by hailing the soul as a soul in order that the citizen may be able to discern between true and false while making political decisions as a citizen.

If both rhetoric and psychagogy address the soul and seek to "govern" it, the difference between them lies in the way that psychagogy makes explicit the soul's vital relation to the truth through the dialectic. Psychagogy thus reveals that the "question of parrhesia concerns the government of souls" by asking: "What truths does one need in order to conduct oneself and others, and to be able to conduct others well by conducting oneself well? What practices and techniques are needed? What knowledge is needed, what exercises, etcetera?" (306). Needless to say, rhetoric assiduously avoids such questions, which is why Socrates focuses so much attention on them in the *Phaedrus*—and which is why Foucault then reads the *Phaedrus* so intently. Furthermore, as Foucault's reading emphasizes, since the dialogue directly concerns the question of love, Socrates's discourse unites psychagogy and dialectics as an act of love. Socrates's famous speech in the *Phaedrus* on the "true discourse on true love" thus functions not only as an encomium to true love but also as a testament to "the bond existing between access to

the truth and the soul's relation to itself. 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" (355). The soul's modification through psychagogy bespeaks its entanglement with other souls as both a political and an erotic dynamic. Or to put it differently: a politics governed by the truth depends on erotics by other means. Yet, this must not be construed as another version of the collapse of pedagogy into pederasty that commentators on Greek philosophy variously lament or celebrate. Rather, "[p]arrhesiastic philosophy in its psychagogic activity" reveals another kind of "relationship of inclusion, reciprocity, and twinning, a relationship which is pedagogic and erotic" (353). The project of psychagogy concerns "the conduction and guidance of souls" as a form of love that is also a love of the truth. It takes the soul as its focus in order to realize this love in truth and in life. Psychagogy then opens the soul to the question of what it means to live the "true life, the life in truth, life for the truth," which is precisely what Foucault will take up in the last lectures he would ever give (*Courage* 163).

Live Thinking: Toward a New Savoir Vivre

Over the last four years of his lectures at the Collège de France, Foucault repeatedly returned to Socrates to focus his ruminations on the ways that truth practices transect philosophy and politics, thereby engendering vital tensions between them. Socrates looms over these texts as a figure who embodies the meaning of the *bios philosophikos* and serves as the original incarnation of the "true life" (*alethes bios*) (*Courage* 163). As Foucault avers in *The Courage of Truth*, he often recurs to Socrates in order to illustrate

how the objective of a beautiful existence and the task of giving an account of oneself in the game of truth were combined. What I wanted to try to recover was something of the relation between the art of existence and true discourse, between the beautiful existence and the true life, life in the truth, life for the truth. The emergence of the true life in the principle and form of truth-telling (telling the truth to others and to oneself about oneself and about others), of the true life and the game of truth-telling, is the theme I would have liked to study. (163)

The “true life, the life in truth, life for the truth,” this is the topic that four months before his own death Foucault wished he could have addressed further. As if foreseeing that a foreshortened life would preempt such a possibility, he continued: “No, I am not able at present to lecture you properly on this theme of the true life; maybe it will happen one day, maybe never” (163). Though he may never have properly resolved the theme of the true life to his own satisfaction, the topic percolates forcefully through his lectures of March and April 1984, in which he focuses on the “Cynic life” as both a counterpoint to and a continuation of Socrates’s psychagogic practice.

In Foucault’s account, the Cynic constitutes himself as “living witness to the truth”: “He has suffered, endured, and deprived himself so that the truth takes shape in his own life, as it were, in his own existence, in his own body. [. . .] What is manifested in Cynicism is life as the immediate, striking, and unrestrained presence of the truth” (173). For both Socrates and the Cynics, philosophy’s real stake is life. If Socrates lives the true life within the polis as a philosopher who recognizes the polis’s claims on him until—and including—his own death. Yet, the Cynic lives “life as a scandal of the truth” (185), as “someone who is truly on the fringes of society who moves around society itself without being acceptable or taken in” (201). Moreover, whereas Socrates seeks to live the true life by living the truth to the end of his life, the Cynic lives the truth by questioning not only what the true life *is* but also by revising what makes the true life *true*. Socrates and the Cynics thus provide examples of what Foucault calls “the two ways” in Western philosophy (respectively: the long [easy] way of discourse and the short [difficult] way of ascesis) in which the Cynic short-circuits the conventional relation between *nomos* and *logos* (206–7). Indeed, the “scandal” of cynicism seems crystallized in the advice given to Diogenes by the Delphic oracle: “[F]alsify the currency or change its value” (226). Diogenes personifies this prophecy, Foucault suggests, to the extent that he embodies the worth of his existence—that is, his experience—without regard for the norms and relations that traditionally govern the polis. For example, if in direct violation of acceptable behavior, Diogenes eats and masturbates in public or refuses to acknowledge the superiority of the sovereign, he does so in order to affirm the true value of these practices in opposition to the forms they customarily assume. Yet, insofar as he radically commits to living the true life to the limit, the Cynic lives what his critics call a “dog’s life,” a life that they regard as a not *truly* human life: “Basically, the Cynic’s life is at once the echo, the continuation, and the extension of the true life (that unconcealed, independent, straight, sovereign life), but also taking it to the

point of its extreme consequence and reversal” (243). Therefore, although both Socrates and the Cynics live (for) the *alethes bios*, they value it differently: “One exposes one’s life not through one’s discourses, but through one’s life itself” (234).

Rather than issuing into the metaphysical domain of Plato’s “other world” (*l’autre monde*), then, the Cynic’s exposed life opens (onto) what Foucault calls the “other life” (*la vie autre*): “The Cynic game shows that this life, which truly applies the principles of the true life, is other than the life led by men in general and by philosophers in particular. With this idea [. . .] the true life is an other life (*vie autre*)” (244).²¹ For Foucault, the other life marks a mode of experience that unbinds the present by living otherwise; it thus reanimates the un-lived possibilities of the present by understanding that living always entails more than “this life.” Such a “diacritical” intent animates the Cynic’s mission, which recognizes “it is the fulfillment of the true life, but as a demand for a life which is radically other” (270). Yet, if the true life is the other life—the life that both is and is not this life—it also asks us to think not only about what makes it “true,” but also about what makes it “life.” In other words, construing the other life as the true life necessitates thinking about the thinking that such a life entails. This investment in what I like to call “live thinking” makes human life livable as something human, that is, as a life form whose formation involves *deciding* on a mode of living and thus on making it true—or not. Live thinking thus asks: To what extent does the “other life” as a human life require new ways of live thinking, of articulating the relation of thinking to—and as—life, in order to live otherwise? Does living the “other life” require a new *savoir vivre*, a new relation between knowing and living?

Since Foucault does not take up this problem in *The Courage of Truth*, we need to look elsewhere for an intimation of how to answer it—an obvious place being his 1978 preface to the English translation of Georges Canguilhem’s *On the Normal and the Pathological*, which explicitly acknowledges his intellectual debt to the great French philosopher of the life sciences. Reflecting on Canguilhem’s significance for a history of thinking, Foucault affirms that Canguilhem’s ruminations on life provide a practical study for the self-reflective knowing subject in general. What Canguilhem teaches us, Foucault emphasizes, is that in order to know anything we must live, and conversely, what we seek to know is always something of (our) life. Such reflections lead Canguilhem to ask, as Foucault puts it, “[W]hat makes it such that there are at the heart of living beings, because they are living beings, some beings susceptible to knowing, and in the final analysis,

to knowing life itself?” (Introduction xviii). The question of “knowing life” as living beings leads Foucault to invoke the famous phrase “life itself,” a phrase that has marked (and marred) many subsequent discussions of the notions of biopower and biopolitics; yet in this context he immediately clarifies what “life itself” means—and what it does not. “Life itself,” in the sense Foucault gives it, refers to life “as such” (as Heidegger might put it), to life informed by a concept of life, to a conceptual way of life, to a conceptual way of living, in other words, to life as experience, as a way that living being gives itself to being thought.

“Life itself” refers to life that “knows” life, or even to life that knows itself as life, and to know life always demands a *savoir vivre*. This knowledge of how to live is not life *tout court*, however, because “knowing life” (in the double sense of life that is knowing and the knowing of life by the living) is necessarily particular or partial, that is, perspectival and value oriented. Insofar as we live in a “conceptually architected environment” we “live in a certain way” and have “a relationship with [the] environment [. . .] that does not have a fixed point of view” (xviii). Thus, “[F]orming concepts is one way of living, not of killing life; it is one way of living in complete mobility and not immobilizing life; it is showing, among these millions of living beings who inform their environment and are informed from it outwards, an innovation which will be judged trifling or substantial as you will: a very particular type of information” (xviii). Thinking as conceptualizing, as forming concepts, creates the possibility for certain life forms to form new ways of life. Thinking thus bespeaks the ways we can inform the life we are by informing how we live. Since as far as we know there is no thinking without living, thinking can only exist within life; yet not all human living is necessarily thoughtful. The difference, then, between “to live” (*vivre*) and “to know how to live” (*savoir vivre*) gives rise to the problem of knowing how to live *otherwise*, since living no longer remains ensconced within the self-evidence that life might otherwise (appear to) be. Thinking troubles life insofar as it evinces a tension within life between the life that is and the life that could be. Thinking becomes “live thinking” when it evokes the capacity of life to live otherwise, to gesture toward the “other life” that it contains—and that contains it—as a permanent provocation to create another way of life that incites us *to live* (*vivre*) thinking.

The capacity to live thinking, to appreciate the possibilities that thinking releases and realizes within life, requires an art of living, a *tekhne tou biou*: “The human being is such, his bios, his life, his existence is such, that he cannot live his life without referring to a certain rational

and prescriptive articulation which is that of *tekhne*” (*Hermeneutics* 447). Psychagogy serves this *tekhne* as a thoughtful tool. Psychagogy offers philosophy a *raison d'être* in the most literal sense: it addresses the soul, the psyche, the spirit, as both the reason and the being of life—or at least as the reason of a living being, who by virtue of being alive (and of being a live being) can realize the other life within this life. Psychagogy incorporates this philosophical practice of live thinking. It affirms the vitality of thinking as an informing of life by the living insofar as this life recognizes itself in and as a *savoir vivre*. Thus, psychagogy can support, encourage, invoke a philosophical care of the self insofar as it seeks to inform human experience as a way that living being gives itself to being thought *and* lived, and hence lived thoughtfully. Although such psychagogical support does not operate within the sphere of politics per se, since it does not immediately concern itself with the decisions that determine how to live convivially, it relates to politics as a transformational practice of the self that informs how such selves come to make political decisions.

That Foucault considered his work to be such self-transformation is clear. In “So Is It Important to Think?” he writes:

Every time I have tried to do a piece of theoretical work it has been on the basis of elements of my own experience: always in connection with processes I saw unfolding around me. It was always because I thought I identified cracks, silent tremors, and dysfunctions in things I saw, institutions I was dealing with, or my relations with others, that I set out to do a piece of work, and each time was partly a fragment of autobiography.

I am not a retired activist who would now like to go back on duty. My way of working hasn't changed much; but what I expect from it is that it will continue to change me. (458)

Although he does not use the word *psychagogy* in relation to himself, Foucault's self-description could easily serve as the mission statement for a modern psychagogue. Taking his experience, that is, the way his living being gives itself to being thought, as the ground for his thinking, Foucault unremittingly seeks to change things by changing himself—for the one does not occur without the other. Indeed, insofar as the other life insists within the cracks, silent tremors, and dysfunctions of his present reality, it can only come to exist through a modification of a “we” that necessarily includes the modified “me.” Foucault's philosophical practice only works, then—for him and for us—to the extent that we are changed by it as well: “The experience

through which we grasp the intelligibility of certain mechanisms (for example, imprisonment, punishment, and so on) and the way in which we are enabled to detach ourselves from them by perceiving them differently will be, at best, one and the same thing. That is really the heart of what I do” (Interview 244). The experience of thinking as an experience of changing experience is what makes thinking live, and it is what makes Foucault’s thinking continue to live in and for those of us who continue to be changed by it. Whether Foucault himself considered his practice as psychagogical might never be known; be that as it may, he continues to serve as a psychagogue for me and for others like me to the extent that his thinking lives in us.

ED COHEN teaches modern thought in the Department of Women’s and Gender Studies at Rutgers University. His most recent book is *A Body Worth Defending: Immunity, Biopolitics, and the Apotheosis of the Modern Body* (Duke University Press, 2009). He is currently finishing a philosophical healing memoir titled *Shit Happens: Ruminations on Living with Crohn’s Disease*.

Notes

- 1 In *Security, Territory, Population*, Foucault foregrounds the notion of *conduct* in order to elucidate his ideas about power in terms of his thinking about government and governmentality: “[T]he word ‘conduct’ refers to two things. Conduct is the activity of conducting (*conduire*), of conduction (*la conduction*) if you like, but it is equally the way in which one conducts oneself (*se conduire*), lets oneself be conducted (*se laisse conduire*), is conducted (*est conduit*), and finally in which one behaves (*se comporter*) as an effect of conduct (*une conduite*) as the action of conducting or of conduction (*conduction*)” (193). Davidson discusses Foucault’s use of conduct and counter-conduct in *Security, Territory, Population*.
- 2 Foucault subsequently tried to clarify this formulation in a multitude of interviews and shorter pieces, perhaps most successfully in “The Subject and Power.” In *Security, Territory, Population*, Foucault introduces the idiom of “governmentality” in order to clarify the historical specificity of the relational dynamics of power in the context of modern Europe following the Peace of Westphalia in 1648.
- 3 In *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, Foucault explains that “the principle of taking care of oneself” was formulated within this general question of the *tekhne tou biou*. “The human being is such, his *bios*, his life, his existence is such that he cannot live without referring to a certain rational and prescriptive articulation which is that of *tekhne*. [. . .] In Greek classical culture, the *tekhne tou biou* is, I believe, inserted in the gaps left equally by the city-state, the law, and religion regarding this organization of life. For a Greek, human freedom has to be invested not so much, or not only, in the city-state, the law, and religion, as in this *tekhne* (the art of oneself) which is practiced by oneself. It is, then, within this general form of the *tekhne tou biou* that the principle of the precept ‘take care of yourself’ is formulated” (447).

- 4 Macey chronicles the criticisms and Foucault's responses to them.
- 5 Foucault makes this critique of Marxism's "nature" explicit in an interview that clarifies his appreciation for and differences from the Frankfurt School:
- The center, then, seems still to be found in Marx's phrase: man produces man. It's all in how you look at it. For me, what must be produced is not man identical to himself, exactly as nature would have designed him or according to his essence; on the contrary, we must produce something that doesn't yet exist and about which we cannot know how and what it will be.*
- Secondly, let's think about the verb "to produce." I don't agree that this production of man by man occurs in the same way, let's say, as that of the value of riches, or of an object of use, of the economic type. It's a question rather of the destruction of what we are, of the creation of something entirely different, of a total innovation.* (Remarks 121–22)
- 6 "[B]efore it can be pronounced true or false, it must be, as Monsieur Canguilhem might say, 'within the true'" ("Discourse" 224).
- 7 These lectures followed his inaugural lecture "L'Ordre du discours" [translated as "The Discourse on Language"]. In a series of lectures that he gave in Brazil two years later in 1973, Foucault recapitulates some of the material he presented in the 1970–71 lectures, explaining to his listeners:
- The hypothesis I would like to put forward is that there are two histories of truth. The first is a kind of internal history, the history of a truth that rectifies itself in terms of its own principles of regulation: it's the history of truth as it is constructed in or on the basis of the history of the sciences. On the other hand, it seems to me that there are in society (or at least in our societies) other places where truth is defined—games through which one sees certain forms of subjectivity, certain domains, certain types of knowledge come into being—and that consequently, one can on that basis construct an external, exterior history of truth. (4)*
- 8 Foucault returns to this topic in 1973–74 when he juxtaposes the two modes of veridiction as "truth-thunderbolt" and "truth-sky" (*Psychiatric* 235–39).
- 9 Foucault specifies four significant differences between archaic and classical Greek truth practices: 1) imprecation/contestation; 2) challenge between two parties/introduction of a third, nonimplicated party; 3) division between two parties/division within the law; 4) create a decision/decided by a judge (*Leçons* 75).
- 10 In the same period, decision also became a central element of Greek tragedy and Greek philosophy, as Snell illustrates (108, 182).
- 11 Not surprisingly, Foucault's formulation resonates with Jean-Pierre Vernant's. Vernant claims that Greek rationality excludes the ambiguity and ambivalence inherent in earlier mythic epistemologies that based themselves on an "implicit assimilation of physical phenomena with divine agents" and "the ancient image of the union of opposites" (380). As a result, a new "mode of intelligibility" appears so that "the social order, now conceived as purely human, could be elaborated rationally" (388). Thus, Vernant concludes, "Greek reason is the type of reason that makes it possible to act in a positive, deliberative, and methodical manner upon men. [. . .] In its limitations, as well

- as in the innovations it brought about, it was truly the product of the City” (397). We might add that in the City—that is, in the *polis*—truth made such decisive actions *political*. Concomitantly, as Vernant goes on to argue, the truth of politics made philosophy possible: “The rules of the political game—open discussion, contentious debate, the confrontation of opposing arguments—become the rules of the intellectual game. [. . .] [A] new notion of truth takes shape and is affirmed: open truth, accessible to all, and justified by its own demonstrative force” (405). Like Foucault, Vernant affirms that the play between Greek politics and philosophy reveals a congruence derived from “games”—intellectual and political—predicated on a “new notion of the truth.”
- 12 As of April 2014, the lectures in *Subjectivité et vérité* have not been published. The reference here is to the course summary that Foucault filed after giving the course (*Ethics* 87–92).
- 13 It may be the case that Foucault does refer to psychagogy in the lectures, but since they are not yet available I cannot ascertain whether he does or not. Even if the word does not appear as it does the following year, it seems fairly clear from the context that this is what he is describing in the course summary.
- 14 Again, since the lectures are not yet available, it is not possible for me to establish here precisely what terms Foucault uses to consider these practices.
- 15 Several of these different versions have been collected in *The Politics of Truth*.
- 16 Yet, if we remember that the word *expérience* in French also carries the valence of “experiment” and hence always bears the trace of its Latin etymon, *experior* (to try, to test, to prove, to risk, to hazard, to experience), itself derived from the Greek root *πειρ-* (to try, to attempt, to undertake; to try a person, to put someone to the test; hence to examine, to question), we can apprehend that experience itself—whatever it “is”—always manifests a degree of indeterminacy (which may partly explain Foucault’s indeterminate use). For a survey of Foucault’s various usages of “experience” and their implications, see both Lemke and O’Leary.
- 17 *L’usage de plaisir* appeared in 1984; however, Foucault sent a slightly earlier version of the introduction to Paul Rabinow, who included a translation in *The Foucault Reader* (1984) and suggested that it was written during the period in which Foucault was delivering *The Government of the Self and Others*.
- 18 Foucault in fact makes this risk a condition of parrhesia per se: “Parrhesiasts are those who, if necessary, accept death for having told the truth. Or more precisely, parrhesiasts are those who undertake to tell the truth at an unspecified price, which may be as high as their own death” (*Government* 56). Plato’s enslavement as recounted by Diogenes Laertius may be apocryphal, but it’s a great story nevertheless.
- 19 Twenty years later, Jacques Derrida makes a similar point.
- 20 Anyone who has paid any attention to Western electoral politics in recent years knows this is still the case.
- 21 In the last sentence of the manuscript of the last lecture he gave at the Collège de France—though he did not actually say it when he delivered the lecture—Foucault

summarizes the relation between the “other world” and the “other life”: “But what I would like to stress in conclusion is this: there is no establishment of the truth without an essential position of

otherness; the truth is ever the same; there can only be truth in the form of the other world and the other life (*de l'autre monde et de la vie autre*)” (340).

Works Cited

- Daraki, Maria. “Michel Foucault’s Journey to Greece.” *Telos* 67 (1986): 87–110.
- Davidson, Arnold. “In Praise of Counter-Conduct.” *History of the Human Sciences* 24.4 (2011): 25–41.
- Deleuze, Gilles. “Michel Foucault’s Main Concepts.” *Two Regimes of Madness: Texts and Interviews 1975–1995*. Trans. Ames Hodges and Mike Taormina. New York: Semiotext(e), 2007. 241–60.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Voyous*. Paris: Éditions Galilée, 2003.
- Dreyfus, Herbert, and Paul Rabinow. *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. 2nd ed. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1982.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–1979*. Trans. Graham Burchell. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.
- . *The Courage of Truth: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1983–1984*. Trans. Graham Bruchell. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.
- . “The Discourse on Language.” *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith. New York: Pantheon, 1972. 215–57.
- . *The Essential Works of Michel Foucault*, Vol. 1: *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*. Ed. Paul Rabinow. New York: New Press, 1997.
- . *The Essential Works of Michel Foucault*, Vol. 3: *Power*. Ed. James Faubion. New York: New Press, 2000.
- . *The Government of the Self and Others: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1982–1983*. Trans. Graham Burchell. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.
- . *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981–1982*. Trans. Graham Burchell. New York: Picador, 2005.
- . *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1. Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage, 1978.
- . “The Impossible Prison.” *Foucault Live: Collected Interviews, 1961–1984*. Ed. Sylvère Lotringer. New York: Semiotext(e), 1989. 275–86.
- . Interview. *Essential Works*, Vol. 3. 259–97.
- . “Interview with Lucette Finas.” *Michel Foucault: Power, Truth, Strategy*. Ed. Meaghan Morris and Paul Patton. Sydney: Feral, 1979. 67–75.
- . Introduction. *On the Normal and the Pathological*. By Georges Canguilhem. Trans. Carolyn Fawcett. Boston: Reidel, 1978. ix–xx.
- . *Leçons sur la volonté de savoir. Cours au Collège de France, 1970–1971*. Paris: Gallimard, 2012.

- . “Polemics, Politics, and Problematizations.” *Essential Works*, Vol. 1. 111–20.
- . *The Politics of Truth*. Ed. Sylvère Lotringer. New York: Semiotext(e), 1977.
- . *Psychiatric Power: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1973–1974*. Trans. Graham Burchell. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006.
- . *Remarks on Marx: Conversations with Duccio Trombadori*. Trans. R. James Goldstein and James Casciato. New York: Semiotext(e), 1991.
- . *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–1978*. Trans. Graham Burchell. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
- . “So Is It Important to Think?” *Essential Works*, Vol. 3. 454–58.
- . “The Subject and Power.” Dreyfus and Rabinow 208–26.
- . “Truth and Juridical Forms.” *Essential Works*, Vol. 3. 1–89.
- . *The Use of Pleasure*. Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage, 1986.
- Jullien, François. “Did Philosophers Have to Become Fixated on the Truth?” *Critical Inquiry* 28.4 (2002): 805–24.
- Lemke, Thomas. “Critique and Experience in Foucault.” *Theory, Culture, and Society* 28.4 (2011): 26–48.
- Macey, David. *The Lives of Michel Foucault*. New York: Vintage, 1995.
- O’Leary, Timothy. “Foucault, Experience, Literature.” *Foucault Studies* 5 (Jan. 2008): 5–25.
- Petit, Alain. “L’art de parler dans *le Phèdre* de Platon.” *Hermès* 15 (1995): 31–40.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. “Replies to Structuralism: An Interview with Jean-Paul Sartre.” *Telos* 9 (1971): 110–16.
- Snell, Bruno. *The Discovery of the Mind*. New York: Dover, 1982.
- Vernant, Jean-Pierre. *Myth and Thought among the Greeks*. Trans. Janet Lloyd and Jeff Fort. New York: Zone, 2006.