Review of “Fearless Speech”

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Fearless Speech contains the text of a series of six lectures that Michel Foucault delivered in English at the University of California at Berkeley in the Fall of 1983, when he was working on The History of Sexuality. The main topic of Foucault's investigation is the historical development and successive problematizations of the practice of truth-telling (parrhesia) from 5th Century BCE Greece to imperial Rome. Although the lectures focus on the classical world, their theme is more closely related to the topic of the fourth, still unpublished volume of The History of Sexuality (Les aveux de la chair), which would have centered on the practice of confession during the early Christian era. The lectures had already appeared in several languages, including German and Italian.¹ No French translation is available yet.

The text itself does not come from Foucault's own lecture notes. It was compiled from the tape recordings made by Joseph Pearson, who attended the seminar in Berkeley. As he notes in his brief introduction, he edited the original recordings both for content and style, by incorporating responses to questions into the main text, substituting more easily accessible translations of the Greek text quoted by Foucault, adding chapter and section headings, and generally revising the language to make it more readable. The final result resembles a bootleg edition of rock star concert—not quite the polished record that would be produced in the studio, but still useful as a source of raw material that the author would certainly have substantially reworked before publication. (Indeed, as many bootlegs records, the lectures on parrhesia contained in Fearless Speech have been circulating for years on the Internet in more or less accessible locations. At the time of this writing, the full text, minus the bibliographic footnotes and the Greek lettering of the concepts Foucault discusses, is still available at: www.foucault.info//documents/parrhesia. Perhaps the book should have been titled Foucault Unplugged.)

There is much to be learned from Foucault's treatment of the practices and techniques of truth-telling in Antiquity. And there is much that can be learned about the shape that Foucault's own philosophical project was taking in the last few years before his death in 1984. It has been widely remarked that Foucault's work experienced a sudden shift in the late 1970s. His historical analyses of the birth of the clinic, of the emergence of social discourse, and of the development of the disciplinary institutions showed to what extent the (medical, social, carceral) subject is the product (or, rather, the effect) of a complex set of institutional practices and techniques that reached into its most inner constitution—its thoughts, feelings, and sensations. Foucault's work was considered to be
of high political relevance—although opinions were divided on his precise location within the
traditional political spectrum—because his books provided detailed analyses of the relationships
between individuals and institutions. In the late 70s, however, he became more and more
preoccupied with trying to understand how individuals were producing themselves as subjects
through the appropriation of specific moral codes and the implementation of particular techniques
(having to do with the relationship of the individual to food, friends, masters and mentors, sex, etc.)
which were geared toward the construction of the self as an autonomous entity. The overall
coloration of his work seemed to shift quite radically from the social-political toward the ethical
pole: no longer worried with the political analyses of the microphysics of power, Foucault was
offering indications for an aesthetics of existence. This is undoubtedly a rather crude
characterization, but the distinction between the "socio-political" vs. the "ethical" phase in
Foucault's work has played an important role in the reception of his work, to the point that some
scholars resume the jargon of Heidegger's scholarship and suggest the existence of a Kehre in
Foucault's own work.

One of the more interesting contributions of Fearless Speech is to help us recast this distinction.
Even those readers who are uncomfortable with the idea of a radical turn in Foucault's work
occurring toward the late 1970s must accept the fact that there are fewer texts confronting ethico-
political issues and they focus on different authors and historical periods. While the "ethical"
 writings are mostly concerned with Greek and Roman authors, on the "political" side we find the
lecture on Kant's "What is Enlightenment?," the beginnings of the debate with Jürgen Habermas,
and the lectures on governmentality and political technology (mostly concerned with the Modern
and pre-Modern theory of the state). Fearless Speech seems to bridge this thematic and
chronological gap. It relies upon some of the materials and texts Foucault had used in his "ethical"
studies, but it joins them to a study of the social and political dimension of truth-telling while
adding some methodological remarks that tie the whole effort to his older preoccupations. In order
to appreciate this point, it is necessary to spend some time on the context in which the lectures on
parrhesia delivered at Berkeley were produced, and to describe, however briefly, how the topic was
treated in the work that Foucault was carrying out at the time.

The analysis of the relationship between subject and truth was the overriding concern of Foucault's
last years. In addition to the Berkeley lectures, it was the main topic of his course at the Collège de
France in 1980-81 ("Subjectivité et vérité"), and it was a relevant part of the courses he gave in
1981-1982 ("L'Herméneutique du sujet"), in 1982-83 ("Le Gouvernement de soi et des autres") and
in 1983-84 ("Le Gouvernement de soi et des autres: le courage de la vérité"). It was central in
several lectures Foucault gave between 1980 and 1984 (University of Vermont, Berkeley,
Dartmouth, Leuven, etc.).

In the earlier texts, Foucault's declared intent is to attempt a historical inquiry into the different
modes which the Western subject has instituted in order to know itself. From the very beginning,
the emphasis is on the "technologies of the self" ("techniques de soi") that have been developed
through our past, rather than on the philosophical or scientific theories of the soul. Similarly,
Foucault discards any phenomenological approach to the direct experience one may have of oneself
through introspection. His analyses encompass the period from Socrates to the late Roman/early
Christian era, and Plato's early dialogue Alcibiades usually provides the starting point. Foucault
stresses how the well-known Delphic motto, "know thyself," was always accompanied, in antiquity,
by the equally important precept "take care of yourself." The "care of the self" (which will be the explicit subject of Foucault's last published book), was understood as a life-long endeavor, as a duty, and as a technique. It was the duty to examine oneself and to work on oneself in order to produce a well-accomplished subject who could interact with the others within the social community. It was more than the generic reminder of being mindful of oneself, or a simple concern toward one's place in the world. The "care of the self" designed a well-regulated activity requiring a set of carefully elaborated techniques that could be put to use in the various domains of human activity. Hence the detailed treatments, which Foucault discusses carefully, about the various procedures to be used in the domain of sexual interaction, or in the analyses of dreams, or in the proper utilization of food.

In the published volumes of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault describes several exemplary techniques of "care of the self," but he does not address explicitly the topic of *parrhesia*. Yet, in the lecture course on the "Hermeneutics of the self," delivered in the spring of 1982, he makes clear that the practice of truth-telling plays an important, and perhaps the preeminent role within the subject's self construction. *Parrhesia refers at the same time, to the moral quality, to the ethos, if you like, and to the technical procedure, the tekhne, which are necessary and indispensable for the transmission of the true discourse to someone who needs it for the self-constitution as subject of the sovereignty on itself and subject of the verification of itself by itself.¹⁴ The subject, in other words, can only achieve sovereignty through the acquisition of truth. And this truth must be transmitted by someone else (the master, the teacher, the Socratic instructor) through the practice of free speech. The speech of the true master, of the "directeur de conscience," is "free," because it has been disengaged from the misleading words of the flatterer and from the merely consensus-seeking techniques of rhetoric. In the period under consideration, the subject of *parrhesia*, the *parrhesiastes*, speaks the truth, and in so doing promises to serve as an example of truth and of freedom. The *parrhesiastes* does not aim at pleasing the interlocutor, its function is "psychagogical": it strives, "to modify the mode of being of the subject it is addressed to" (389). The whole discussion of *parrhesia* in the 1982 lecture course is virtually contained within this chronological and thematic compass: it is a technique that rests upon the freedom of the individual and it is directed from the master to the pupil in order to facilitate the latter's self-constitution. Foucault's historical analysis emphasizes certain shifts in the practice and theory of *parrhesia* from the 4th century Greece to the later periods. He stresses the quite substantial break that intervenes with the onset of the Christian era, when *parrhesia* will be turned into a different practice, the confession, in which the classic distinction between the master and the pupil breaks apart, and the soul speaks the truth about itself.

In this course, as well as in most contemporary publications and interviews, Foucault's analysis of *parrhesia* remains thematically confined to the ethical register and chronologically limited to the period between the classic era and very early Christianity. It is true that Foucault tries to establish a common ground between the ethical project of the care of the self, and the social and political dimension of subject domination in the notion of governmentality. Both sets of techniques and practices can be seen as different elements of a more general framework: the Western attempt to develop procedures to govern behavior (one's own and the others'). But the theoretical unity is more declared than explored, because the historical analyses tend to diverge immediately after the posited unity.

The two, fairly independent strands of governmentality start to come together in the texts published...
in the last two years. From the few reports about the last two courses at the Collège de France (the
tape transcripts are still unpublished), we can indeed witness a double movement. On the one hand,
the scope of Foucault's analyses broadened to encompass the pre-Socratic period of the Greek era,
and specifically the works by Euripides. On the other, the analysis of parrhesia is broadened as well
in order to consider the social and political dimensions within which truth-telling was allowed to
flourish as the privileged form of critical engagement with the political community.

It is in this broader context that the lectures contained in Free Speech are located. Indeed, the last
within Foucault's broader research program. They also provide the best introduction to the book.
First, Foucault makes clear that his interest in the practice of truth-telling is part of a long-standing
effort to provide a genealogical reconstruction of Western society from its Greek beginnings to the
present time. Foucault seems to suggest, without actually saying so, that one of the distinctive
features of the Western tradition is the peculiar attention it has paid to truth. Or, more precisely, the
peculiar way in which the Western tradition has never ceased to raise the problem of truth. The
novelty of Foucault's approach lies in his characterization of the problem of truth in Western culture
as essentially divided between the tradition that is concerned with ensuring that the process of
reasoning is correct in determining whether a statement is true and the tradition that is mainly
concerned with questions like: what is the importance of telling the truth? of knowing the truth? of
having people who tell the truth? of knowing how to recognize who tells the truth? The first and
better known strand constitutes what Foucault calls the great tradition of the "analytics of truth."
The seconds strand provides the roots of the "critical tradition" in the West: the lectures collected in
Fearless Speech - as well as the other texts mentioned above - constitute an attempt "to construct a
genealogy of the critical attitude in Western philosophy" (171). It should be noted that Foucault
gives the term a fairly broad meaning that potentially applies to all relationships between
individuals, including the social relationship between a citizen and the community, the relationship
between subjects, as well as the relationship between a subject and a text.

Fearless Speech (the original title of the seminar, "Discourse and Truth," would have been a more
accurate, if less flashy, characterization of Foucault's efforts) provides a fragment of this genealogy.
From the methodological point of view, it is based upon the concept of problematization, which
Foucault discussed and put to use in the second and third volumes of the History of Sexuality.
Briefly put, to study the process of problematization is to study "how and why certain things
behavior, phenomena, processes) became a problem"(ibid.). Foucault's main emphasis, in this text
as well as in the analyses of sexuality, is on the historical development that shifts certain aspects of
the behavior under consideration in and out of focus while bringing new components to the fore.
The "thing itself," however, remains to a large degree constant, as the underlying substratum to all
the different, and sometimes conflicting problematizations that take it as their object. Foucault's clue
toward the relevant behavior that will form the subject of his analysis is eminently linguistic. He
notices how the word parrhesia, normally translated as free speech, (with its most proximate
cognates) appears for the first time in Greek literature in the 5th century BCE, with Euripides, and
he follows its different problematizations until the early Christian era. Foucault defines the behavior
under consideration as "a kind of verbal activity where the speaker has a certain relation to truth
through frankness, a certain relationship to his own life through danger, a certain type of
relationship to himself or other people through criticism, and a specific relation to moral law
through freedom and duty" (19). Over the course of the approximately nine centuries he surveys,
Foucault detects a general shift in the phenomenon of truth-telling. In the older texts it primarily occurs in a socio-political context, but it moves progressively away from the political dimension into the domain of personal relationships. Foucault speaks of the different forms of truth-telling as different "games of truth" or as different ways of playing the "game of truth." The metaphors of game and game playing refers to the effects of a certain problematization of parrhesia. Once the tensions arising within a certain phenomenal field, in this case truth-telling, are resolved in a set of practices, the net result is a game that the subjects may get into. And different epochs play different games. To put it differently, a subject telling the truth, moves within a complex field of relationships, each determined by a specific set of rules that govern what can be said, by whom, in which context, etc. Telling the truth is like playing a game, because as in the latter case, there are many constraints that must be obeyed in order to be considered a legitimate player. Indeed, Foucault uses freely the expression "jinx de vérité" when referring to particular instances of parrhesia. Foucault's dependence on these ludic metaphors may produce some confusion about his project, because one may bring a whole set of assumptions about game and game-playing into his analysis. We may think that games are meaningless, for example, not having any real import on whatever social context they happen to take place in. Or we may assume that one of the characteristics of games is that they have no relationship with reality, because they contain their own, fully constructed reality. We may even think that games are not serious, in the sense that they are completely detached from the material (e.g. economics, social, political) substrate in which they occur. Any of these implicit connotations of the concept of game would give a very different reading to the main object of Foucault's analysis, to his jeux de vérité. Is "game" just a misleading concept that should be left alone? On the contrary, Foucault usage of the ludic vocabulary is perfectly consistent, one may even say necessitated by his understanding of the general relationship between a determinate relationship and its substratum. Although Foucault's discussion of the larger methodology is just sketched in Fearless Speech, a proper discussion of this point is crucial to any understanding of the project carried out in the book.

The crucial issue concerns the epistemological and ontological relationships that obtain between the problematizations Foucault analyses and their underlying substratum. Is there a priority of the latter over the former? In other words, are the different problematizations just different and perhaps more or less adequate ways of characterizing an essentially similar behavior, different interpretations, or perhaps even different names for the same object? Or is the opposite true, namely that the behavior themselves do not exist independently of their manifest problematizations. Or even: do the studied behaviors exist, perhaps, only as their problematizations? Foucault discusses this last possibility, which he dubs (borrowing the words from his critics), a form of "historical idealism," which he firmly rejects. On the contrary, he claims that the reality of the phenomena being studied is never denied. They are "things in the world," "real existents" that become the target of specific practices. Nonetheless, we should not fall into the mistake of thinking that the claimed separation between the phenomenon and its problematization entails an absolute independence of the phenomenon itself, because that would imply some form of ontological priority of the "thing itself," which the different problematizations can only approximate. This option would even allow the possibility that the development of the different characterizations of parrhesia represents a better and better rendition (or worse and worse, according to one's tastes) of the original, "true" phenomenon of truth-telling. Foucault's position is different, as is apparent from his forceful declaration, in the context of his previous work of the history of madness, that "I won't say that what is characterized as "schizophrenia" [i.e. one of the problematizations of a certain kind of behavior] corresponds to
something real in the world." (172). This declaration seems quite at odds with the point Foucault makes a few lines down when he claims that the there is indeed a relation between the phenomenon and the process of its problematization, and the problematization constitutes "an 'answer' to a concrete situation that is real." (ibid.) How can the "concrete situation" be real when the result of its problematization does not correspond to "something real in the world"?

Perhaps the best way to interpret what Foucault is saying is to use the classic conceptualization of form and content suggested by the Structuralists. Following a tradition that goes as far back as de Saussure's *Cours de linguistique générale*, Lévi-Strauss stressed that the value of a term (of a linguistic element, in his case) is not given by its content, but by the system of oppositions in which the term is found: within a language, he remarks, all the words expressing similar ideas limit one another. Lévi-Strauss took this insight one step further: the elements whose specific organization constitutes the structure of the phenomenal field under consideration are not ontologically separate from the concrete substance that sustains them. Indeed there is no ontological or epistemological opposition between a supposedly abstract form and a concrete content: a "structure has no separate content: it is the content itself apprehended in a logical organization conceived as a property of the real."

Games provides the best illustration of the structuralist conception of structure, and indeed were among Lévi-Strauss's favorite examples whenever he referred to the vast structures governing social institutions like kinship. The reason is clear: the distinctive feature of games is that their content is given on the inside, so to speak, by means of the rules that define the range of possible behaviors that appear throughout the confrontation between the players. A game is not content-less and therefore purely 'formal,' it is rather self-enclosed in the sense that it does not need anything external to itself in order to find its meaning. This is true for football as for chess, and this is why football played on a video arcade is not the same game as football played on a field, as well as chess played on a mono-dimensional chess board is not the same game as chess. It follows, in Lévi-Strauss's words, that "meaning is never a first phenomenon: meaning is always reducible. In other words, behind every meaning there is always something meaningless and the reverse is not true. Signification is always phenomenical."

Foucault's insistent characterization of the various problematizations of *parrhesia* as a collection of different "games of truth" is perfectly consistent with the structuralist account. Foucault is talking about "jeux de vérité, because he is describing, pretty much as he did in his best known works on power, self-contained structures, i.e. systems of rules that produce meaningful behaviors by the rearrangement of an underlying meaningless (purely material) substratum; and a system that is constantly under pressure to shift and reorganize itself under the pressure of external and internal events that literally change the content of the problematization. Lévi-Strauss was keen to emphasize that the structural methodology entailed a rejection of any form of transcendence, both at the epistemological and the ontological level. "There is no meaning of meaning," he claimed, "no hidden horizon of intelligibility hidden from human beings." Foucault's adoption of the ludic vocabulary so dear to the structuralists can be read, similarly, as a profession of immanence. A profession that is exercised at two levels, descriptive and protreptic. Foucault's analysis of truth-telling in terms of problematization implies a descriptive immanence on the part of the epistemologist who seeks a purely immanent explanation to a complex range of phenomena as the pure rearrangement of the meaningless elements. To say that there is no meaning of meaning
means, ultimately, that there is no ultimate ground, arche, reason, to motivate people's behavior, beyond the reorganization of their behavior in ever new arrangements.

On the protreptic level, the pure immanence asserted at the epistemological level is converted into a double-sided ethico-political program: first, as the revendication of the necessary existence of the freedom, the *libertas* to play the games, the freedom to move within relationships of governmentality, relationships of power and empowerment. And, second, as the indication of a concrete way in which a purely immanent ethics and politics can be practiced, namely through the appropriation of the existing moral, ethical, and political codes (i.e. the rules of the existing games) in order to produce a subject that can play those games to the fullest.

Foucault's methodological approach implies that a new reorganization of the field under consideration, that is, a new problematization, arises when the concrete substratum of the previous one experiences a more or less radical change. Indeed a new problematization arises as the "answer given by definite individuals" (or texts) to the challenges posed by the evolving social context. Accordingly, Foucault's discussion is organized around the few canonical problematizations that arose when a political or social state of crisis prompted a general rearrangement of the practices and preconditions of truth-telling.

The analysis of *parrhesia* in *Fearless Speech* covers approximately 7 centuries, from the mid 5th century BCE to the late Imperial age. Within this general scope, Foucault selects 3 different moments as representatives of the different conditions operating upon truth-telling: the discussion of *parrhesia* in Euripides (in whose texts the term first appears); in the situation of crisis of 4th century Athens (the Socratic dialogues); and in the Roman Imperial age (in the Epicurean and Stoic treatments offered by writers like Philodemus, Seneca, Plutarch, Epictetus, and by the Cynics). Foucault detects a general shift from the socio-political dimension that is characteristically thematized by Euripides toward the domain of personal relationships in later periods.

Foucault devotes two full lectures (out of six) to the examination of the use of the word *parrhesia* in six tragedies by Euripides: *Phoenician Women, Hyppolytus; The Bacchae; Electra;* and *Ion.* He spends most of his time on *Ion* and *Orestes,* where *parrhesia* plays an important (and perhaps the most important) role. The unifying theme of Euripides' treatment of *parrhesia* is the institutional setting within which the truth-teller, the *parrhesiastes,* operates. The problematization of *parrhesia* experiences a substantial shift, however, that reflects the shifts in political conditions in Athens between the two tragedies. Foucault points out that in *Ion,* *parrhesia* is seen as a fundamental right of the (male) citizen. Indeed, the freedom enjoyed by the citizen is almost synonymous with the right to speak the truth in front of the assembly. There may be problems concerning the proper access to *parrhesia,* because non-citizens and non-males may sometimes find themselves in the parrhesiastic position but unable to exercise the parrhesiastic practice due to their institutional position. The practice itself, though, remains rather unproblematic. Things change when, approximately 10 years later (408 BCE), and in the middle of the crisis generated by the long war with Sparta, Euripides writes the *Orestes.* The tragedy opposes two different notions of *parrhesia:* a negatively connotated mindless, ignorant outspokenness versus a positive, reflective form of *parrhesia* that is associated with wisdom and courage. Foucault comments that *Orestes* reflects a double-sided crisis in the function of *parrhesia:* it is no longer clear who is entitled to use it; and it is no longer clear which kind of relationship exists between *parrhesia* and *mathesis* (wisdom). In *Orestes* we see emerging a fundamental problem about truth: *parrhesia* "as a verbal activity, as pure
frankness in speaking, is not sufficient to disclose the truth, since ignorant outspokenness can also result." (73). The game of parrhesia, in other words, has changed, as the external conditions have changed.

A more substantial change occurs in the following century, though. The fundamental elements of the parrhesiastic game in 5th century Athens, as manifested in Euripides tragedies, are truth, logos, nomos. The fundamental problem concerns how to speak the truth lawfully, how to lawfully relate to truth, etc. In the fourth century, there is a radical shift that changes the fundamental equation and redirects it toward truth, logos, and bios. The practice of speaking the truth with courage and frankness becomes tied to the problem of caring for the self. The goal of the parrhesiastic game, as demonstrated by Socrates's interrogations in Plato's early dialogues, is "to test the specific relation to truth of the other's existence." (102). The drift of parrhesia away from nomos toward bios, from the institutional setting to the existential domain, causes another important problem to emerge—namely how to bring political parrhesia into alignment with its ethical counterpart. It is a major problem in Plato as well as in other followers of Socrates. The problem reaches perhaps its most acute characterization in the Cynic school, where the potential conflict between nomos and bios explodes into a direct opposition: the "Cynic philosopher is regarded as the only one capable of assuming the role of the parrhesiastes, and he must adopt a permanent and critical attitude towards any kind of political institution, and towards any kind of nomos." (105).

The shift away from the institutional setting becomes more and more pronounced in the following centuries. Indeed, Foucault claims that a new kind of purely philosophical parrhesia arose in the Greco-Roman period, and a large part of philosophical activity in those times required playing certain parrhesiastic games. The target of philosophical parrhesia is "to convince someone that he must take care of himself and of others; that he must change his life." The parrhesiastic practice of the philosopher implies a complex set of relations between the self and truth, because it becomes progressively more acceptable that in order to speak the truth one must first know the truth about oneself, in a theoretical spiral that constitutes one of the "problematic enigmas of Western thought" and reaches all the way to Descartes and Kant. Foucault emphasizes that the post-Socratic philosopher was involved in three different but interrelated kinds of parrhesiastic games. First, the philosopher had to assume an epistemic role, insofar as he had to discover and teach a set of truths about the world (we see here, in a certain sense, a possible root of the supremacy of metaphysics over ethics in Western culture). Second, the philosopher was required to take a stand toward the political community (in different forms, from the radical stance of the Cynics to other more accommodating positions), which means that the game of truth entailed a political role. And finally, philosophical parrhesia involved the elaboration of the nature of the relationship between truth and one's style of life or, as Foucault puts it, the elaboration of the relationship between truth and an ethics and aesthetics of existence." (105). In Greco-Roman culture, this requirement translated into the elaboration of a set of specific practices that had the goal to shape the concrete relations that individuals had to themselves. Foucault suggests that the root of our own moral subjectivity is to be found in these practices, because the decisive criterion that identifies the parrhesiastes is to be in the acquired harmony that must exist between one's logos and one's bios.

In the last third of the book, which covers the last two of the lectures given at Berkeley, Foucault analyses several parrhesiastic practices in some detail, sometimes exploiting the texts and material that he used in The Care of the Self and The Use of Pleasures (which were published just a few
months later). The most interesting part is perhaps the prolonged discussion of the different forms of parrhesiastic games played by the Cynics (almost one full lecture). Indeed the Cynics offer Foucault an excellent opportunity to bring into relief the two most important recurring themes of the whole lecture course. The first point is that parrhesia was less a doctrine than a set of practices: we know very little of the Cynics' doctrine, and indeed we don't even know whether they had one. But we do know quite a bit about the Cynic way of life and the array of techniques that they used to achieve a philosophical existence. The second point is that parrhesia is characterized by a fundamental, but increasingly problematic, relationship with the institutional sphere. The Cynics offer the most radical interpretation of this difficult relation. Indeed they represent, according to Foucault, an "extremely radical form of the very Greek conception of the relationship between one's way of life and knowledge of the truth. The Cynic idea that a person is nothing else but his relations to truth, and that this relation to truth takes shape or is given form in his own life-that is completely Greek." (117).

The last part of Fearless Speech discusses various parrhesiastic techniques as practiced in Epicurean and Stoic circles. The presentation is rather compressed, and part of the discussion repeats the material Foucault presented in his 1982 course on the Hermeneutics of the Self. It is here that the significance of Foucault's almost obsessive insistence on the notion that the parrhesiastic game is first and foremost the ever different enacting of a relation to truth comes to the fore. With a clear allusion to the games of truth that will become prevalent in the later Christian age, Foucault points out that "in all these [Greek and Greco-Roman] different exercises what is at stake is not the disclosure of a secret which has to be excavated out of the depths of the soul." Rather, the questions that motivate the philosopher to enter the game of truth concern how he related, used, applied and practiced a set of truths, or general principles that he is already familiar with. In other words, "if the truth of the self in these exercises is nothing other than the relation of the self to truth, then this truth is not purely theoretical." (165). The truth of the self is (also) technical, and the achievement of that truth involves the practical implementation of philosophical exercises. Foucault can conclude his lectures on the same theme that dominated The Care of the Self: if the main philosophical problem is how to shape one's relationship to truth, then the set of techniques to be used toward that goal and the general attitude of the philosopher can be configured as an "aesthetics of existence."

In conclusion, Fearless Speech lets us appreciate how the late Foucault was attempting to hold fast (as, indeed, he had declared multiple times) to the methodological and conceptual underpinnings of his early work while, at the same time, broadening the scope of his analyses along both the chronological and, especially, thematic axis. His research moved from the analysis of the modern and pre-modern period to a study of the whole history of the West, and from the examination of the relationships of power/domination to the more complex domain of "Gouvernement de soi et des autres," which included both the ethico-moral as well as the ethico-political aspects under a unified conceptual framework grounded by a fundamental commitment to immanence. Some of the material contained in Fearless Speech was already known from previous publications, but Foucault's analysis of Euripides' tragedies and of the Cynic way of life were only known though indirect reports. They provide precious additional material to the scholars attempting to understand his late work.

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Notes


2. For a summary of the courses, see Michel Foucault, Dits et écrits (Paris: Gallimard, 2001) vol. 2, pp. 1032-1037 (year 80-81) and pp. 1172-1184 (year 1981-82). Foucault's declining health did not allow him to compile a summary of the last two courses he gave. The text of all the lectures at the Collège will eventually be published on the basis of the tape recordings preserved at the Centre Foucault in Paris. The 1981-1982 course on the hermeneutics of the subject has already appeared: Michel Foucault, L'Herméneutique du sujet (Gallimard/Seuil, 2001). Picador Press publishes an English edition of the lecture course series under the direction of Arnold Davidson, but the 1981-82 course has not appeared in English yet. For more details on the lectures given between 1980 and 1984, see Dits et écrits and the supplementary bibliography provided by Jacques Lagrange at the end of the 4th volume. Richard Lynch maintains an updated bibliography of Michel Foucault's shorter works in English. It is available at: www.foucault.qut.edu.au/lynch.html.