

# The pragmatism of the late Foucault<sup>1</sup>

## *O pragmatismo do Foucault tardio*

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**Abstract:** Foucault underlined, throughout his whole intellectual activity, the question of truth as an effect of power-knowledge. There are not properly truths as *substances*, but *effects* of truths as incorporeal practices of discourse, that change slowly, but inevitably, the limits of our knowledge. We can say then that he has always been a pragmatist, unbeknown to him. However, it was during the last two courses delivered at the Collège de France, recently published with the title of *The Government of Self and Others* and *The Courage of Truth*, that he recognized explicitly his pragmatic vein. I will show two specific points of his philosophical testament (as we can consider the two courses). Commenting Plato's Seventh Letter, he said the philosophy coincides with "its practices" (*pragmata*). Philosophy is an *ergon*, a work, a labor, a practical and "real" activity, that must undergo the test of praxis (and of politics). Secondly, commenting Platos' *Lachetes* and the Cynical attitude, he referred to the Greek *Parrhesia*, the will to speak freely. It has evidently a pragmatist imprint: the philosopher who serves to find the truth must manifest in his way of life a congruence, a tuning between *bios* and *logos*, gestures and meanings, between the body, with its bearings and manners, and the truth conveyed. The real correspondence is not between words and facts, but between words and actions. It is not, therefore, sufficient a truth be expressed by words: it must be acted. It must transform into habits, take form in a corporeal life, in an existence, in a praxis: this is the teaching not only of the pragmatist school, but also of the hermeneutical one starting from Nietzsche to the last Foucault. Philosophy must return to be a form of life, and to witness *in practice* its ideas.

**Keywords:** Foucault. *Parrhesia*. Plato. Seventh Letter. Cynics.

**Resumo:** Foucault destacou, por toda sua atividade intelectual, a questão da verdade como um efeito do poder do saber. Não há propriamente verdades como substâncias, mas sim efeitos de verdades como práticas incorpóreas do discurso, que mudam de forma lenta, mas inevitável, os limites do nosso conhecimento. Podemos dizer, então, que ele sempre foi um pragmatista, sem ter consciência disso. Todavia, foi durante os dois últimos cursos ministrados no Collège de France, publicados recentemente sob os

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1 I wish to thank my discussant at the 16th Meeting on Pragmatism in São Paulo, Edécio Ottaviani. I am extremely grateful to his insightful observations, that I keep in mind writing the present essay.

títulos de *O Governo de Si e dos Outros* e *A Coragem da Verdade*, que ele reconheceu explicitamente sua veia pragmática. Apresentarei dois pontos específicos de seu testamento filosófico (como podemos considerar os dois cursos). Comentando sobre *A Sétima Carta de Platão*, ele disse que a filosofia coincide com “suas práticas” (pragmata). A filosofia é um ergon, uma criação, um trabalho, uma atividade prática e “real” que deve submeter-se ao teste da práxis (e da política). Em segundo lugar, comentando *Lachetes e as atitudes Cínicas de Platão*, ele se referiu à *Parrhesia grega*, a vontade de falar livremente. Possui evidentemente uma marca pragmatista: o filósofo que se dedica à busca da verdade deve manifestar; em seu modo de vida, uma congruência, uma afinção entre bios e logoi, gestos e significados, entre o corpo, com seu porte e modos e a verdade transmitida. A correspondência real não está entre palavras e fatos, mas sim entre palavras e ações. Não é, portanto, suficiente que uma verdade seja expressa por palavras: precisa ser exercida. Deve se transformar em hábitos, assumir forma em uma vida corpórea, em uma existência, em uma práxis: este é o ensinamento não só da escola pragmatista, como também da hermenêutica, a partir de Nietzsche até o Foucault tardio. A filosofia deve voltar a ser uma forma de vida, e testemunhar na prática suas ideias.

**Palavras-chave:** Foucault; *Parrhesia*, Platão, Sétima Carta. Cínicos.

The word ‘truth’ has been the focus of Michel Foucault’s analyses since his first writings on the microphysics of power to his later works on the modalities of subjectivation in the Greek world. Foucault’s entire philosophical journey can be maybe read as an attempt to answer Nietzsche’s suggestive question in the aphorism 110 of *The Gay Science*: “How far is truth susceptible of embodiment—that is the question, that is the experiment” (NIETZSCHE, 2001). In the first phase of his work, Foucault is the refined and insightful interpreter of those processes of subjectation that issue the “truth” as the product of a ramified system of power-knowledge, a system that defines the limits and criteria for distinguishing what is true from what is false. In the last phase (I will analyze some texts from this phase), truth is interpreted, to use Foucault’s own words, as the ‘reality’ of philosophy, as what puts to test philosophy’s validity.<sup>2</sup> The ideas of proof and experiment, to be found not only in Nietzsche’s philosophy, but also in pragmatism, are recurrent in Foucault’s later texts. According to the famous phrase at the outset of *The Use of Pleasure*:

The essay—which should be understood as the essay or test by which, in the game of truth, one undergoes change, and not as the simplistic appropriation of others for the purpose of

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2 These perspectives seem to clash dramatically. However, as I will try to show, in both we have the idea that truth is aethico-political construction instead of a ready-made given. In other words, truth is something produced within manifold discourses and forms of life. If any, the most marked difference lies between the late Foucault’s conception of truth as something that is produced within the conduct, and that can be constructed only through the courage and impatience for liberty, and the earlier idea that truth is always subject to a system of power and is, so far, far from an act of independence.

communication—is the living substance of philosophy, at least if we assume that philosophy is still what it was in times past, i.e. an ascesis, an *askesis*, an exercise of oneself in the activity of thought (FOUCAULT, 1985a, p. 9).

To this, I would add another striking passage from Nietzsche's *Gay Science* in which we read "that life may be an experiment of the thinker—and not a duty, not a fatality, not a deceit!"(NIETZSCHE, 2001, § 324).<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, the discourse on truth, as Foucault points out, is always tied to the discourse on the constitution of subjectivity. Yet, in his later writings, the subject is no longer seen as wholly dominated by precise power devices, but as capable of truthful speech; the subject is at the origin of practices of truth-telling, and of operations of veridiction, which both constitute her as such, and of which she is in control in virtue of the exercise of her freedom.<sup>4</sup> As a consequence, there are effects of truth produced by the active engagement of the subject in practices of self-constitution, capable to mold conduct and self-control. Even simply these latter words recall a possibility of inquiry that the pragmatists have pursued in all possible directions: the topics of truth and its effects, meanings and their explanation in terms of habits of response, are typical pragmatist topics and should be also associated to Foucault's reflection.<sup>5</sup> This thought, in both traditions, is articulated in the following way: philosophy should not only aim to ground the truth of discourse, but it should clarify what predictable and unpredictable acts would result from its concepts, in the sense of that dynamic that Foucault used to call 'alethurgy' (the work that produces truth). It is impossible to question *truth* as independent from the *practices* enacted to achieve truth. Both for the pragmatists and Foucault, philosophy has then an ethical and political efficacy: it aims to transform the individuals by endowing them

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3 For these reasons, Nietzsche and Foucault can be interpreted, in Colapietro's words, as two philosophers of experience, that is, two pragmatists (See COLAPIETRO, 2012a, p. 90). Rightly, Colapietro underlined that for Foucault experience is something that one comes out of transformed. All Foucault's work goes in the direction of the practice of self-transformation or self-overcoming. "Philosophy is, I want to urge, either itself such a practice or in the service of such practices" (Ibid., p. 68).

4 Along the famous word of *What is Enlightenment?* (FOUCAULT, 1985b, p. 32-50): "I continue to think that this task requires work on our limits, that is, a patient labor giving form to our impatience for liberty".

5 There are several passages in Foucault's work that show a deep pragmatist spirit, such as: "Ora credo che il problema non sia di fare delle divisioni tra ciò che, in un discorso dipende dalla scientificità e dalla verità e ciò che dipenderebbe da altro, ma di vedere storicamente come si producano degli effetti di verità all'interno di discorsi che non sono in sé né veri né falsi" (An Interview to Michel Foucault by A. Fontana and P. Pasquino, in *Microfisica del potere*. Einaudi: Torino, 1977, p. 12). The whole genealogy could be thus analyzed in terms of the development of a history, both continuous and discontinuous, that tries to retrieve the effects and consequences of certain discursive and non-discursive practices in the construction of the different types of knowledge. As in pragmatism, the issue is not truth but the effects of truth. Many researches have already been conducted in this field, although with different aims than mine. See STUHR, 1997; KOOPMAN, 2011; *Foucault studies*, 2011; COLAPIETRO, 2012a; COLAPIETRO, 2012b.

with new *powers* on life, not simply by making them more knowledgeable through the acquisition of different types of *knowledge* on life. In Foucault's terminology, the efficacy of philosophy is ethopoietic (habit-forming), not epistemic.

Also the topic of *parrhesia* ("free-spokenness" or expressing oneself freely, without reserve, constraint or inhibition, even in the face of the powerful), on which Foucault reflects often in his later courses, should not be interpreted as the necessity to *speak the truth*, in epistemological or analytic sense, but as the "courage" to *act upon what is truthfully held*, to "work out" the effects of truth so understood. In this way, truth is no longer only speech but becomes *pragma*. This point is obviously related to the issue of the *practices* of truth, at the intersection among living praxes, ethical habits, and bodily dispositions through which knowledge is put to practice. In a similar way, Peirce writes that beliefs are measured in terms of habits, that is, in terms of what a human being is committed and ready to do ("that upon which he is prepared to act" [EP 2:399]). From this definition, Pragmatism is scarce more than a corollary, he adds.

In ancient Greece philosophizing was not an intellectual work, but a way to shape, or to embed a certain style to, one's entire existence. By losing this horizon, we have created dichotomies between practice and theory, body and spirit, and we have started to believe that purely rational conceptual machineries are sufficient to truth. On the contrary, we have to rediscover once again the pragmatic matrix of the philosophical attitude and go back to the idea of philosophy as praxis, *techné tou biou* (HADOT, 1987).

In order to defend the claim that Foucault proposes, at least in his later works, a form of pragmatism (however unaware of the topics and the problems of that doctrine), I will start to analyze Plato's Seventh Letter, which is, as it is well known, the focus of his penultimate course at the Collège de France, *The Government of Self and Others I* (FOUCAULT, 2010).<sup>6</sup> As is well known, Plato went to Sicily to convince the tyrant Dyonisios to govern with justice, following his wise advices. And he failed. Plato's key sentence, on which Foucault builds almost his entire discourse in the lectures of February 1983, is the following one:

With these views and thus nerved to the task, I sailed from home, not in the spirit which some imagine, but principally through a feeling of shame with regard to myself, lest I might some day appear to myself wholly and solely a mere man of words (*logos*), one who would never of his own will lay his hand to any act (*ergon*) (PLATO, 1903, 328d).

Plato faces three difficult trips to Syracuse, the storms, the risk of being imprisoned and sold as a slave, for a very compelling reason: as a philosopher, he must commit himself to a precise practice, he must show that he is not only one who produces *logoi*, but that he is also able to put those ideas into practice. There is no philosophy, says the father of philosophy, without this passion (*epithymia*) for the public and political life. The love of wisdom (*philo-sophia*) and the force of power (*dynamis*

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6 Cf. in particular lessons of 9, 16 and 23 February 1983.

*politike*, cf. 335d) must proceed together; that is, the politician needs the philosopher's advice, and the philosopher has no other goal than providing the rulers of the city with a rigorous education. It is in this way that the philosopher must be capable of *parrhesia*.<sup>7</sup> However—and here is a point that leads us immediately to pragmatism—speaking openly is interpreted as acting consistently and with conceivable practical effects: that is, there should be no gap between word and reality, *logos* and *ergon*, as it happens instead in the case of rhetoricians and sophists, unless we want the defeat of the real project and function of *philo-sophia*. In order to be capable of *parrhesia*, the *logos* has to become *ergon*. According to Foucault, this point clarifies how philosophy should not be conceived simply as *mathesis*, that is knowledge and communication of knowledge, but as *askesis*, as repeated exercise leading to *pragmata*, to more adequate philosophical and political habits.<sup>8</sup>

Philosophy is for the Greeks first and foremost a way of life, a way of being, a certain practical relation to one's self,<sup>9</sup> through which one's life and other people's lives are poietically constituted (in accordance with the principle that the philosophical life ought to be lived in *koinonia*, in a community). Philosophy is *parrhesia* as long as it is a practice of truth-telling: however, it finds what is true not through logico-analytical arguments (trying to state how things are), but through life itself and its practices (trying to live consistently what is held to be true, the content of one's beliefs). Truth becomes not a logical, but an ethical product: it is not mirrored in the *logoi*, but in actual conduct. Under what conditions is then possible to speak of a truthful subject, capable of *veridiction*? This is the topic of the two volumes of *The Government of Self and Others*, which show how at the center of Foucault's analyses there is always the strict link between subject and truth,<sup>10</sup> although articulated in a different way from the writings of the '70s. Here we see the syntony with Plato's political, in a wide sense, conception of philosophy: philosophy is a spark started in the soul and fed by "much converse about the matter itself and a life lived together" (341d); it is never the abstract or intellectual articulation of mere theories. *Logos* is complete only if it is capable to lead us to a

7 There is a fundamental difference, as Foucault's explains, between the political *parrhesia* typical of democracy (everybody can talk to everybody about everything) and the *parrhesia* addressed to the only prince. Plato prefers the latter: he doesn't enter the political battlefield, but he chooses to educate one single soul.

8 Peirce wrote something that can be interpreted in the same line, as for the importance of asceticism and exercises: "The deliberately formed habit, self-analyzing habit,—self-analyzing because formed by the aid of analysis of the exercises that nourished it,—is the living definition, the veritable and final logical interpretant." (EP 2:418).

9 "If it is true that philosophy is not merely the apprenticeship of a knowledge but 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 when the philosopher has to tackle not only the problem of himself but also that of the city, he cannot be satisfied with being merely *logos*, with being merely the person who tells the truth, but must be the person who takes part, who puts his hand to *ergon*" (FOUCAULT, 2010, p. 219).

10 In FOUCAULT, 1987, p. 112, we read "What has always been of interest for me is the link between subjectivity and truth". The topic is so crucial that an entire unpublished course "Subjectivité et vérité" (1980-81) is devoted to it.

practical transformation, to a precise *ergon*: “By their fruits ye shall know them” (EP 2:401), wrote Peirce about his pragmatic maxim. Plato would have said the same most likely when his trireme was leaving Athens.

The point, then, is not how thought *corresponds* to reality, but how it *acts* in reality. But how should we translate the word *ergon*? Foucault uses the word *réel*, which is usually translated into English with “work”, but also with “reality”, or “action”. The Greek word means the practical fact, the duty, the work, the execution, the enterprise, the occupation, all aspects related to the “doing”. *Logos kai ergo* is Homer’s famous phrase with which it is claimed “in words and facts” that things went in a certain way. The power of this hendiadys is strongly diminished when one of the two terms is used without the other.

As I was saying, Foucault interprets the term *ergon* as the central expression around which the semantic variations of the words of philosophy, present in the Seventh Letter, gravitate. Most importantly, he associates *ergon* to *pragma*. Foucault’s problem is here the political implication of philosophy, its function in “reality”. What is the job of the philosopher? What do we do when we do philosophy? Aristophanes is maybe right when he claims that philosophers are pale beings, involved in their own nonsense, always with their heads up in the clouds? No: Plato’s concern was the political life of his city, the government and transformation of human beings, the edification of the *kallipolis*, the just and beautiful city. Philosophy has an integral political and civil aspiration. For this reason, the function of showing to the ruler, the prince, the tyrant, in what the philosophical work consists becomes crucial. Let me quote a relevant passage: “one must show such people, these tyrants, what *to pragma* is; through what activities, what practices and what effort it involves and presupposes” (FOUCAULT, 2010, p. 238). Foucault, then, interprets in pragmatic terms Plato’s teaching. His question has a pragmatist tone: what is the practical effectiveness of philosophy? What is the function of the philosophical practice, if it is not useless, if it has a force (*dynamis*) that is measured in terms of its effects of truth? Foucault answers (with Plato) that problematizing philosophy means to wonder what is its work, its reality. The reality of philosophy is the practices of philosophy, its *pragmata*. The topic is not, then, that of the theories that it produces, but that of the philosophical *practice*, that is, of the philosophical life.<sup>11</sup> This practice is articulated into those *pragmata* that require a demanding and hard work of construction of the philosophical subject: practices of memorization, listening, questioning, debating, and giving and asking for arguments. These actual practices orient towards a very specific style of life, far from being removed from the political life of the city; it is a practice resistant to any attempt of subjugation, “a practice which finds its function of truth in the criticism of illusion, deception, trickery, and flattery” (FOUCAULT, 2010, p. 354).<sup>12</sup> Philosophy is not mere contemplation, but

11 “The reality, the test by which and through which philosophical veridiction will demonstrate its reality is the fact that it addresses itself, can address itself, and has the courage to address itself to whoever it is who exercises power. There should be no misunderstanding here” (FOUCAULT, 2011, p. 228).

12 “It has to constantly practice its criticism with regard to deception, trickery, and illusion, and it is in this that it plays the dialectical game of its own truth. Finally, it is not for philosophy to disalienate the subject. It has to define the forms in which the relationship

*askesis*,<sup>13</sup> continuous exercise in which we shape ourselves and the world. Practice, then, should be understood as a plural word.

Philosophy is its practice. More exactly [...] the reality of philosophy is not its practice as the practice of *logos*. That is to say, the reality of philosophy will not be its practice as discourse, or even as dialogue. It will be the practice of philosophy as 'practices', in the plural; the practice of philosophy in its practices, its exercises (FOUCAULT, 2010, p. 242).

What is at stake in these exercises? Well, quite simply, it is the subject itself.

That is to say, it is in the relation to self, in the work of self on self, in the work on oneself, in this mode of activity of self on self that philosophy's reality will actually be demonstrated and attested. Philosophy finds its reality in the practice of philosophy understood as the set of practices through which the subject has a relationship to itself, elaborates itself, and works on itself. The reality of philosophy is this work of self on self (FOUCAULT, 2010, p. 242).

Foucault addresses here a topic that proves to be very important for his later reflections: the problem of the exercises through which the subject operates on herself in order to have access to truth, to become capable of "alethurgy." Contrary to what the Christian Medieval thought first and the Cartesian thought later have made us believe, the truth of the subject neither reveals itself through introspection, as if it were a secret to be subtracted to the innermost recesses of one's I; nor the truth of the object is conquered as a prey. The truth of the subject is constituted through construction, as an architectonic work, through the ethopoietics of the self. The most fundamental question for a philosopher is not "Who am I?", but "What should I do with my life?", "How can I transform myself?", "What can I do of myself and of my relationships with other human beings?" Foucault highlights how Western thought has made two roads available: one is the metaphysics of the soul, centered on the psyche and on the Socratic "know thyself"; the other one is that of the ethics (and aesthetics) of existence, grounded on the *epimeleia*, on the care of one's self, and on the *techné tou biou*.<sup>14</sup> Also this second option is owed to Socrates, but maybe, remarks Foucault,

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to self may possibly be transformed. I think that philosophy as ascesis, as critique, and as restive exteriority to politics is the mode of being of modern philosophy" (FOUCAULT, 2010, p. 354).

13 The topic of "askesis" is already developed in the *Hermeneutics of the Subject* (FOUCAULT, 2005). Here it is already defined as "practice of truth", an operative practice that aims at a self-conversion of one's self. The question at stake here is not simply "What should I do?", but "What should I do of myself?". Already in these passages, mainly devoted to the stoic understanding of the process of subjectivization, we can see a pragmatic style of thinking, that is, a way of thinking based on the practices of the transformation of true discourses into true and embodied actions.

14 This aspect is firmly underlined by GROS, 2011.

to the Socrates of the *Laches* rather than to that of the *Alcibiades*. This latter option, which has eventually been the losing option in the Western tradition, is nevertheless extremely vivid and alive in Foucault's later works, where we read words such as: "The idea of the *bios* as a material for an aesthetic piece of art is something which fascinates me." (FOUCAULT, 1983). It is necessary, then, to resurrect the idea of subjectivity as a complex technical construction rather than as a solid kernel that needs to be reached and manifested in its primitive nature. It is no accident that in the Lecture of the 12 January, by reflecting on some themes already present in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, Foucault aims at the "analysis of the pragmatics of the subject and techniques of the self" (FOUCAULT, 2010, p.42), or, definitely, at a "pragmatics of the self" (Ibid, p. 5). This pragmatics is expressed in "focal points of experience" (Ibid., p.3), in forms of life, conducts, linguistic, and practical acts.

Philosophy is therefore a praxis with very precise features: the work on one's self; the relationships, born out of long, shared discussions, with good friends; and the life in *synousia* (being-with), as Plato himself wrote (PLATO, 1903, 324d). Although a long discussion of the problem of writing in Plato would lead us astray, it is certainly worth noticing that the practice of writing ends up ruining the condition of *synousia*—of meeting, conjunction, co-habitation, and total friendship—that only makes the *eros* of philosophy possible. "There neither is nor ever will be a treatise of mine on the subject [the nature of philosophy]. For it does not admit of exposition like other branches of knowledge", wrote Plato (341d). Written words are dead: the tyrant Dionysius has written down the ideas that Plato shared with him and in so doing he has made them die miserably. For philosophy is essentially, according to Plato and Foucault, interpellation. There is only one brief mention of this discussion in Foucault's text, but I would stress it more strongly. "I think that ancient philosophy is also a *parrhesia* in a third way, in the sense that it is a perpetual interpellation addressed, collectively or individually, to persons, private individuals" (FOUCAULT, 2010, p.345). Philosophy has an allocutionary force, writes Foucault (FOUCAULT, 2010, p.350),<sup>15</sup> in a way that, either it finds the power of addressing its community or it will die hopelessly. Philosophy has to establish a circle of listening: there is no solitary philosophy, and there is no philosophy that is not aimed, to some extent, to convince and generate effects. Speech acts are always, in a certain sense, performative: they cause a reaction and demand an answer. They expect to be listened to and invite to an understanding which is both hermeneutical and pragmatic; speech should be understood as a gesture indicating something to do. But if ancient philosophy wants to find in this allocutionary function a power of *parrhesia*, capable of determining a righteous conduct, modern and contemporary philosophy privileges a conception of speech as a questioning (mainly written and epistemologically oriented) on being and knowledge.

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15 "To live philosophically is to show the truth through the *ethos* (the way one lives), the way one reacts (to a situation, a scene, when confronted with a particular situation), and obviously the doctrine one teaches; it is to show the truth in all these aspects and through these three vehicles (*ethos* of the scene, *kairos* of the situation, and doctrine). [...] and may take the form of the great Cynic and Stoic type of preaching in the theater, the assemblies, at the games, or in the forum, and which may be the interpellation of an individual or of a crowd" (FOUCAULT, 2010, p. 350).



I believe that the interpretation of philosophy as practical, ethical, and ascetical activity<sup>16</sup> that Foucault proposes in these later courses is deeply pragmatic. Let us read the following simple quotation: “asceticism is the fashioning of accepted discourses, recognized as true, into rational principles of action” (FOUCAULT, 2005, p. 529).<sup>17</sup> Peirce expressed a very similar insight, referring to the exercises (asceticism) and the habit-forming capacity that constitute the true final meaning:

The deliberately formed habit, self-analyzing habit,—self-analyzing because formed by the aid of analysis of the exercises that nourished it,—is the living definition, the veritable and final logical interpretant. Consequently, the most perfect account of a concept that words can convey will consist in a description of the habit which that concept is calculated to produce. But how otherwise can a habit be described than by a description of the kind of action to which it gives rise, with the specification of the conditions and the motive? (EP 2:418).

Philosophy understood in an ascetic-pragmatic way must translate *logos* into action in order to embody the knowledge in efficacious habits of response, capable of transforming our way to live and see the world. Or, in Gros’ words: “For Foucault then, truth is not displayed in the calm element of discourse, like a distant and correct echo of the real. It is, in the most accurate and literal sense of the expression, a *reason for living*, a *logos* actualized in existence, which sustains, intensifies, and tests it: which *verifies* it” (GROS in: FOUCAULT, 2005, p.529).

In Foucault’s long production we can appreciate a shift from a focus on the subject, understood as being subject *to* certain practices, to a focus on the subject as the subject *of* certain practices (the care of the self, the self-knowledge), which becomes in the last two courses an almost exclusive attention to the *practices themselves*, through which a philosophical subjectivity is constituted *at work*.

In this case, the “conceptual personae” (to use Deleuze’s expression) preferred by the late Foucault are the cynics.

The cynic philosopher makes his appearance in Foucault’s course of 1984,<sup>18</sup> the one that preceded immediately Foucault’s death and that was interrupted for

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16 Ethical, ascetical and *then* critical, and the other way round. See the famous words of *What is enlightenment?* (FOUCAULT, 1985b): “The critical ontology of ourselves has to be considered not, certainly, as a theory, a doctrine, nor even as a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating; it has to be conceived as an attitude, an *ethos*, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them.”

17 Cf. also “Course Context”, by F. Gros (FOUCAULT, 2005, p. 529): “It is a matter of ‘transforming true discourse into a permanent and active principle’. Further on he speaks of the ‘long process which turns the taught, learned, repeated and assimilated logos into the spontaneous form of the acting subject’” (Ibid.). Nothing more pragmatist, in my view.

18 Yet, these conceptual ‘personae’ were already present in the previous course, *The government of Self and Others 1982-1983*, and there were hints on that issue also in the *Hermeneutics of the Subject*.

his health issues. We are faced here with a type of philosopher totally different from the one of the tradition, in particular the Platonic tradition: while Plato works at the psychagogy, the guidance and conduction of the soul of the prince, through discourses and friendship, the cynic lives the philosophical testimony as an act of criticism and resistance to the power, a power which is ineradicable and that cannot be gained to the just and good thinking, but needs to be obstinately opposed. What is extremely appealing to Foucault is that the cynic philosophizes with his own body and behavior. No doctrine; his philosophy is made of actions, gestures, words used as weapons against his audience, including edgy behaviors. The life of the cynic — conducted in an elementary way—is philosophy *in actu*. These are the most advanced horizons of ethics. The *ethos* is bio-poietic (life-forming, cf. FABBRICHESI, 2015) and has no words to express itself doctrinally or speeches to convince. The cynic privileges the “short road” towards truth: he does not speak the truth, but he shows it in his own way of life, “in his gestures, in his frugality, in his renounces, in his asceticism”, in *to pragma autò*. This is a mute road: it speaks through deeds. This is why it is more arduous and demanding. *Parrhesia* becomes with the cynics an absolute form of exteriorization, of challenge and often of madness. Zeno was said to be a “Socrates gone mad”. Certainly, the cynics radicalized the Socratic teachings to the point of turning them into something different.

Let me remind you briefly some anecdotes regarding the cynics. These philosophers with no school or doctrinal principles pursued an elementary style of life: a mat for bed, their own hands for plate, only a cape for clothing and sleeping, gestures and few words for communicating, no writings. The cynic has no birthplace, no home, no personal belongings: he is a militant opponent of property and maintains a complete indifference for what human beings usually value. His life is led in a semianimal fashion, obtained through a progressive and constant renounce. The cynic, according to Foucault’s famous saying, *se de-prendre*.<sup>19</sup> He exercises practices of subtraction and resistance and attempts to leave no room for any type of dependency on power: his *epoché*, his purification, writes Gros, is a sort of “practical equivalent of the *cogito*” (GROS, 2011, p. 69).

The *bios philosophikos*, the philosophical life, is also for the cynics a manifestation of truth, an alethurgy, as it is for the Plato of the Seventh Letter. But here the cynics propose a more radical interpretation: it is in the repeated gestures of their edgy style of life, in their everyday deeds that they become “the visible theater of truth” (FOUCAULT, 2011, p. 183). The cynic chooses a dramatization of existence (*drama*, acting). “In his life he is the manifest truth” (Ibid., p. 347). It exhibits an aesthetics (in the sense of sensible manifestation) rather than an ethics of truth. No *logoi*, just *erga*. What does this mean? Foucault sees in the cynics the embodiment of a principle that he takes to be fundamental: it is life itself that produces truth, not truth the aspiration of life. The *parrhesia* of the cynic is made authentic by his life and conduct. His body is “the visible figure of a truth which attracts. He is the physical model itself of the truth” (FOUCAULT, 2011, p. 310). His body in action, his performance, is the surface of inscription of events and concepts. It is the

19 Cf. Introduction to FOUCAULT, 1985a. It means an active exercise of continual disassembling, de-tachment of the self from the self itself.

“picture”, the sculpture of truth. The cynics are, in Nietzsche’s terminology, supermen, as opposed to the “last men” who only want warmth, goods, and pleasures.<sup>20</sup> Their *parrhesia* is without shame or fear; it is daring and brave and can sometimes become intolerable insolence. “He has suffered, endured, and deprived himself so that the truth takes shape in his own life, as it were, in his own existence, his own body”(FOUCAULT, 2011, p. 173). The cynic is “martyr of the truth”:

testimony given, manifested, and authenticated by an existence, a form of life in the most concrete and material sense of the word; bearing witness to the truth by and in one’s body, dress, mode of comportment, way of acting, reacting, and conducting oneself. The very body of the truth is made visible, and laughable, in a certain style of life [...] The true life as life of truth (FOUCAULT, 2011, p. 310).

Their *bios philosophikos* is therefore a plane of pure immanence: the cynics’ body is one with the body of truth. They do not get ready for the *other life*, that life that would supposedly consist in the contemplation of the ideas; they pragmatically give form to *another kind of life (vie autre)*, here and now. However, Foucault finds a similar approach already present in the Socrates of the *Laches*.<sup>21</sup> For Laches says that he does not go to Socrates for learning his doctrine, but for imitating his behaviors. Socrates should be praised not for what he says, but for how he behaves; his life is an example of a perfect harmony and symphony of saying and doing, of *logos* and *bios*, of speech and conduct. This is why he can be an example for the young. Socrates is *mousikos aner*, a musical man. Also the cynics are musical, in the sense that they make their beliefs sound in the cords of their own existences: but their music is cacophonous, it is a screeching that hits you like a punch in the face. Nevertheless, their behavior is eloquent: it implies an analogy between the body, with its movements and attitudes, and the concept held. There has to be homophony between what one says and how one lives.<sup>22</sup> There has to be a pedagogy based not on what one *knows* but on how one *is*. A practical, pragmatic, and anti-intellectualist pedagogy (just as Dewey taught). If gestures are “the visible theater of truth”, truth becomes in this way ‘corporeal’. Foucault used to speak of a “materialism of the incorporeal” (FOUCAULT, 1981), but we could complete his terminology by speaking also of a “spiritualism of the corporeal”, in order to state that there is a “homogeneity” (JAMES, 1967, p. 188) between body and soul, thoughts and actions.

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20 F. Nietzsche. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. ed. By. W. Kaufmann. New York: Viking Press, 1976, Prologue. Cf. *The Courage of the Truth*, lessons of the 22 February 1984, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> hour.

21 Cf. *The Courage of the Truth*, FOUCAULT, 2011, lessons of the 22 February 1984, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> hour.

22 The actual Pope, Jorge Maria Bergoglio often speaks of *parrhesia* in this sense, and has introduced the principle in his daily way of life. So did Nelson Mandela, and others (few) political leaders. Anybody can recognize a man of *parrhesia* from a man of pure rhetorics (but sometimes the second ones are very able to tease us).

We realize that the material and the immaterial are intertwined and merged together, if we think of how we transform through every action our knowledge into pragmatic habits of response; how we embody our beliefs in the certainty of our praxis; how we translate the incorporeal into the corporeal, meanings into gestures, the forms of speech into forms of life. The subject capable of *parrhesia*, evoked in Foucault's later courses, is simply the subject who has learnt to *embody* the truth, as Nietzsche indicated in our first quote, and to run together thought and life. In this light, truth is not known if it is not practiced (if it is not stated, repeated, written, translated into a know-how and into an attitude to respond), that is, if *logos* does not become *ethos*, ethopoietic and biopoietic conduct constituted on the basis of a rigorous and disciplined *askesis*.

It seems to me that this is an extremely pragmatic approach. Maybe Foucault, as Wittgenstein, could have said: "So I am trying to say something that sounds as Pragmatism" (WITTGENSTEIN, 1975, § 422) by adding, however, just like the Austrian author suggested: but I do not want to affiliate my thought with any *Weltanschauung*.

Paraphrasing James, I could conclude by saying that the late Foucault is a *radical* pragmatist: there is philosophy only if there is a practice of transformation, of change, of *work* on one's self (and therefore on the other); if the interpretation is not defined as a state of mind or of consciousness, but as a practical activity, a being ready to act. Even genealogy seems too speculative at this stage. Foucault's interest in his late courses is life: the topic of the true life, of the *other life* (*vie autre*), and not of the *other world*, a life which, in its constituting and exhibiting itself, in its immanent flow, must be a plane of truth. With Socrates, the old Plato and the cynics (but Foucault adds also Spinoza, Montaigne, Pascal to the list) the topic of philosophical *practice* becomes fundamental. If is necessary to become aware of how "philosophy cannot be separated from a philosophical existence, that the practice of philosophy must always be more or less a sort of life exercise. This is what distinguishes philosophy from science" (FOUCAULT, 2011, p. 235). Instead of becoming slaves of the methods and instruments of science, we should reclaim this character of philosophy with insistence: the subject-matter of philosophy is the matter of the pragmatic agency of the philosopher, of his choices, of his newly invented practices, of his gestures of resistance. This is why Foucault, following Nietzsche, comes to believe in the fundamental value of the character, the *daimon* of the philosopher. I add this last notion in order to conclude with one of Heraclitus's fragments, in which we can certainly read the spirit of the late Foucault: "Ethos anthropoi daimon".<sup>23</sup>

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23 Usually translated as: "A man's character is his daimon", or his fate. The number of the fragment is 119 DK.

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