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Foucault and the Recommencement of Philosophy

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Abstract: Javier de la Higuera discusses in his "Foucault and the Recommencement of Philosophy" the idea of a recommencement of philosophy that Michel Foucault has posited on several occasions, although with different meaning and intentions. This article reconstructs how he approached this in the 1960s and shows the fundamental changes that this idea of recommencement underwent in the later Foucault. In his last three years at the Collège de France, Foucault appeared to reinterpret the very idea of philosophy based on his analysis of ancient spirituality and of parrhesiastic philosophical practice. The interpretation that Gilles Deleuze gave of late Foucault, devoted to the study of the new axis of subjectivation, makes it possible to confirm that this was also a question of a highly radical revision of the very status of philosophy and of its important role with regard to politics.

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Foucault and the Recommencement of Philosophy

In two places, separated by more than fifteen years, Michel Foucault referred to the idea of a possible rebeginning of philosophy: in *Les mots et les choses* (1966), he stated: "If the discovery of the Return is indeed the end of philosophy, then the end of man, for its part, is the return of the beginning of philosophy." (*The Order* 342) ("Si la découverte du Retour est bien la fin de la philosophie, la fin de l'homme, elle, est le retour du commencement de la philosophie." [*Les mots* 353]). In his 1983 lectures at the Collège de France, in *Le gouvernement de soi et des autres*, he asked: "Is it not as *parrēsia* to be continually taken up again that philosophy continually recommences?" (*The Government of Self* 349) ("…n'est-ce pas comme *parrêsia* sans cesse à reprendre que la philosophie sans cesse recommence?" [*Le gouvernement de soi* 321]). The same idea related to the very historicity of philosophy, its specific form of existence and its future possibility, although referring to different matters: the announcement of the coming death of man as epistemological figure and the discovery of the philosophical practice of truth-telling as an essential element of philosophy since antiquity. In the 1960s, Foucault seemed to set out this recommencement longitudinally, in relation to the fall of the anthropological epistemological framework, the end of traditional metaphysical philosophy and the subsequent opening, since Nietzsche, of a space in which it is possible to think again. In the 1980s, the recommencement of philosophy is expressed transversally, as an event that has not stopped occurring since the concept of philosophy was conceived in reality by Socrates and Plato but which we can discover in such specific, distinguished moments as Kant's *Was ist Aufklärung?* (*The Government of Self* 350). So far so good, but how should we understand this idea of recommencement in Foucault and the varied way in which he appears to have proposed it?

   The problem of the possible rebeginning of philosophy was posed by Foucault in his first archaeological works as linked to the question of the existence of language. Thus, in the opening pages of *Naissance de la clinique* (1963), he established in these terms what currently interests us: "For Kant, the possibility and necessity of a critic were linked, through certain scientific contents, to the fact that there is such thing as knowledge. In our time —and Nietzsche the philologist testifies to it— they are linked to the fact that language exists…" (*The birth* XVII). In *Les mots et les choses* (1966) he studied the context in which this "linguistic turn" of criticism comes about from the reduction of the reality of language in the classic episteme and the reappearance of "the living being of language" (*The Order* 43) in modern literature and in thinkers such as Nietzsche. And in *L'archéologie du savoir* (1969) he provided the method of analysis of discourses capable of reversing that traditional situation of "dénegation", doing justice precisely to "the 'given', the datum of language" (*The Archaeology* 112).

   For Foucault, the project of "archaeology" entailed a critique of traditional philosophical idealism. From the theoretical suppositions established by *L'archéologie du savoir*, traditional philosophy is interpreted as a discourse whose rules are that of mere fiction, having deleted its material dimension, its specific form of existence and its connections with the relations of power that constitute the real social framework at a given moment. Let us remember that the purpose of archaeology is knowledge-*savoir*, defined as the historical existence of discourses, which, as discursive events, are inserted into social practices and derive their very possibility from that evenemental-practical dimension (see *The Archaeology* 131). The interpretation of philosophy as idealist fiction is supported by the historical studies that Foucault undertook in the year 1970-71 at the Collège de France, *Leçons sur la volonté de savoir*, where he shows the "fictitious place" where philosophy was born in Greece: "a fictitious place was fixed where power is founded on a truth which is only accessible on guarantee of purity." (*Lectures* 193).

   In his critical analysis of the political nature of discourses, archaeology unmasks this fiction of a philosophical discourse separated from power but supposedly capable, in return, of normatively founding the political space. Here we clearly recognise Plato and to him Foucault does indeed attribute the inaugural gesture of "division" (*partage*) between discourse and power, between philosophy and politics. The 1970 Collège de France opening lecture denounced precisely how the reality of language, already revealed by the Sophists, has been historically sidestepped since Plato: "the highest truth no longer resided in what discourse *was*, nor in what it *did*: it lay in what was *said*." (*The Discourse* 218). The commitment to recommencing philosophy seemed then to involve inverting the Platonic gesture and re-establishing the bridge between philosophy and politics in a non-fundamentalist way. A form of non-normative criticism seemed to be Foucault's concern at that moment, a criticism that was nevertheless very problematic, exposed to the dissolution of his own criteria of validity, as Habermas pointed out ("Some Questions" 276-86).

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In the sixties, Foucault had obtained from Nietzsche the model of this inversion of philosophical idealism and fundamentalism. In the "Nietzschean model", knowledge and truth appear "as pure event at the surface of processes which do not themselves belong to the order of knowledge-*connaissance*" (*Lectures* 32). It is precisely this connection with evenemental and material aspects that characterizes "Knowledge-*savoir,*" object of archaeology, as opposed to mere "knowledge-*connaissance*": "we will call knowledge-*connaissance* the system that allows desire and knowledge [modified translation] to be given a prior unity, reciprocal belonging, and co-naturalness. And we will call knowledge-*savoir* that which we have to drag from the interiority of knowledge-*connaissance* in order to rediscover in it the object of a willing, the end of a desire, the instrument of a domination, the stake of a struggle." (*Lectures* 17; *Leçons* 18).

But if philosophy has traditionally been conceived as capable of founding politics it is because it has been interpreted as knowledge-*connaissance*, free of all dependence regarding a given presupposition and able, therefore, to found itself and produce itself. From the non-hypothetical knowledge of Plato's *Republic* to the circle of Hegelian speculative philosophy, perhaps it has not radically considered that – to use the words of Feuerbach – "Genuine philosophy thus has to begin not *with itself,* but with its *antithesis,* with *what is not philosophy*." ("Provisional Theses" 164). Foucault's analyses seem directed toward studying the way in which traditional philosophy has denied that non-philosophical exteriority and with views to re-establishing that dimension of event that is inherent to it and which make its commencement a true historical emergence.

In this regard, the 1970-71 lectures defined, in opposition to the "Nietzschean model," the "Aristotelian model," which encapsulates the way in which the assimilation of that element of exteriority has traditionally been produced – desire, power, materiality, everything designated under the label of "will to know" ("*volonté de savoir*") – in terms of knowledge: "the will to know (*savoir*) comes from a prior knowledge" (*Lecture* 31). Foucault's declared intention is "gauging the possibility of reversing the traditional configuration" (*Lectures* 32). Foucault's analysis of the renowned passage from *Metaphysics* A, 980a, on the naturalness of knowledge, reveals the functioning of "a philosophical operator," which is "with elements internal to the system, and entirely interpretable on the basis of the system, it concerns the possibility and justification of the whole system, its origin and necessary birth; and beyond the system itself, it concerns and acts on the status of philosophical discourse in general" (*Lectures* 5-6). Other examples, philosophical (the passage at the beginning of Descartes's *Méditations* on the reasons for doubting and on the exclusion of madness, § 5 of the *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione*, by Spinoza) or scientific (the beginning of the *Cours de linguistique générale*, by Saussure, or the *Sexual System of Plants*, by Linnaeus), clarify that in these types of operators it is a question of functioning in the discourse of elements wherein it establishes its own possibility and founds itself as the commencement of itself. These "operators" carry out in silence, one could say, a transition out of which the discourses say to what they do or are, that is, toward their real existential dimension. The well-known passage from the *Metaphysics* represents, therefore, the model for the functioning of self-founding philosophical fiction: a mechanism within the philosophical text supposedly capable of legitimizing and producing out of itself the existence of philosophical discourse, but that, nevertheless, and paradoxically, it does so on the condition that it negate its own reality, its character of event linked with other events of material-institutional type. The operation of "sealing up (*bouclage*) the desire to know in knowledge itself" (*Lectures* 18) characterizes the way in which Aristotle invokes through a certain philosopheme, that of the naturalness of knowledge, all the material exteriority in which philosophical discourse participates and which it connects necessarily with a desire and power that are irreducible to the mere natural desire of knowing and to the simple "constraint of the truth" (*Lectures* 33).

Starting from the Platonic theses, Aristotle had developed a model of interiority and self-reference for philosophy, which has framed all traditional philosophy ("It set the historical mode of existence of philosophy for centuries, and no doubt up to the present." [*Lectures* 37]). In it, a theory of knowledge is set forth in which the apophantic operates "the displacement of being to the ideality of signification" (*Lectures* 66), being opposed to the "sophistic operation," which referred the statement to its event reality. However, beyond the gnoseological implication, what that Aristotelian model brings, according to Foucault, is a certain conception of philosophical historicity itself, visible in that singular history of philosophy that Aristotle creates in *Metaphysics A*, enabler ("we do however find their possibility" [*Lectures* 37]) of all later histories of philosophy: the history of philosophy as the history of the truth itself; the singularity of names, systems, and even errors, are understood as its vicissitudes, reducible in essence to their simple constraint.

The idea of a recommencement of philosophy, which Foucault put forward in his book from 1966, undoubtedly lies in the radical questioning of that traditional conception of philosophical historicity.

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Governed by the principle of "interiority" (*Lectures* 38), philosophy had been conceived traditionally as installed "from the outset" (34) in a medium, that of truth, that protects it from any outside intervention. The principle of "return to ... and going back over itself" (38) means that in the core of philosophical historicity there is a structure of presupposition due to which to think is always going back to think the unthought of earlier philosophy ("this right or necessity for philosophy to think what has already been thought" [38]). The call, made in *L'usage des plaisirs* (1984), to attempt to know "how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently" (*The use* 9), seems to be expressly directed against that traditional conception of philosophical historicity. This call spoke of what can change our thought when making use of "foreign" knowledge in it ("But it is entitled to explore what might be changed, in its own thought, through the practice of a knowledge that is foreign to it." [*The use* 9]). At the same time, that call to think in other ways is liberation with respect to the "unthought" that obliges it to go back and be thought again and again ("It was a philosophical exercise. The object was to learn to what extent the effort to think one's own history can free thought from what it silently thinks, and so enable it to think differently" [*The use* 9]).

However, as the second quotation with which I opened this article suggests, the Foucault of the 1980s posited the idea of a recommencement of philosophy in a very different way. He had probably been influenced by an experience related to the silence that greeted the first volume of *Histoire de la sexualité*, *La volonté de savoir* (1976). Gilles Deleuze clearly perceived that it was about the suspicion that the analysis of power of the 1970s left thought trapped inside power relations, not able "to cross the line", as Foucault himself came to recognise: "If power is constitutive of truth, how can we conceive of a 'power of truth' which would no longer be the truth of power" (Deleuze, "Foldings" 94). The expression "power of truth" (*pouvoir de la vérité*) appeared in the first volume of *History of Sexuality* as the intended title of a forthcoming book, but he did not go on to clarify in what this truth irreducible to power might consist. Everything seems to indicate that, from the perspective of the analysis of power, all truth is truth of power. In this case, the historicity of philosophy, traditionally linked to the unfolding of a supposed transcendental truth, once this has been unmasked, falls at the same time, leading philosophy to its dissolution in the exteriority of power relations. The universality of philosophy, therefore, pulverized by the implacable method of "eventualization" ("*événementialisation*" ["What is critique?" 49]). This is an aporia that the analysis of power poses to the archaeology of knowledge but, in particular, to the possibility itself of philosophical thought. From this perspective, the recommencement of philosophy envisaged in the 1960s by Foucault would be reduced to the mere confirmation, by that analysis, of the inevitable end of philosophy.

As is known, however, Foucault himself interpreted his thought trajectory subsequent to *La volonté de savoir* as the opening of a new sphere of analysis, that of ethics, beyond knowledge and power, consistent with the discovery of a third dimension of experience, the relation of the subject with him/herself, which he addressed in *L'usage des plaisirs* and *Le souci de soi*, as well as in his later lectures at the Collège de France (a presentation of these three spheres of analysis can be seen in "Foucault," the text from the beginning of the 1980s that Foucault signed under the pseudonym Maurice Florence).

How should this new sphere be interpreted? To what extent does it represent a possibility "to cross the line" of power? How can the end of philosophy even allow its recommencement? The new sphere has, as its immediate theme, ethical subjectivity, approached historically – as Foucault does on other occasions with his respective subjects of study, such as madness or punishment – through the study of ancient ethics itself. It was Gilles Deleuze who showed clearly that in this "new axis" ("Foldings" 96) Foucault reconsiders a question that haunts him: "What does thinking signify?" ("Foldings" 116), which leads him to study the Greek idea of subjectivity but, going further, also to reinterpret the very idea of philosophy, its form of existence and its current rules. The question of the "power of truth" would thus be above all the question of philosophy, of its Greek origin and of the possibility of a rebeginning in the present (this matter is more thoroughly developed by Deleuze in his 1986 lectures on Foucault: see those of 29 April and 6 May).

After the publication of Foucault's courses at the Collège de France, we have a more complete corpus than that which Deleuze could access just after Foucault's death (in his lectures between 1985 and 1986 at the University of Paris VIII and in his book, *Foucault*, published in 1986), which enables us to reconstruct this problem more precisely and to confirm Deleuze's hypothesis. Let us examine it.

In his 1982 course, *L'herméneutique du sujet*, Foucault proposed reconstructing the specific arrangement of ancient culture itself, developed around the principle of care of the self, to which he gave the name "spirituality," and which is already distinguished in the first reading of "philosophy": if this could be defined as the investigation of the conditions through which the subject of knowledge gains the truth, spirituality would designate "the search, practice, and experience through which the subject carries out the necessary transformations on himself in order to have access to the truth." (*Hermeneutics*

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15). Ancient spirituality would be the disposition for which the truth is not handed to the subject by a simple act of knowledge, but that the access to truth compromises "the subject's very being," compelling the subject to a transformation of himself/herself through specific practices exercised on himself/herself, really constituted in his/her subjectivity. The model that Foucault presents here as representative of philosophy is Cartesian, found in the *Méditations*, in which the evidence offered to consciousness of oneself is constituted in the starting point of the access to truth and, therefore, of philosophy: "that what gives access to the truth, the condition for the subject's access to the truth, is knowledge (*connaissance*) and knowledge alone." (*Hermeneutics* 17). This is the same "philosophical operator" of whom Foucault spoke in 1970-71, also using examples from Descartes, although originally attributed to Aristotle.

Although "never separate" in the antiquity of philosophy, the spirituality that Foucault sought to reconstruct in 1982 seems to designate something very different to a philosophy that begins with itself, dissolving all eventuality and exteriority in the element of mere knowledge, and which condemns itself to idealist fiction. The analysis that Foucault makes, in these lectures of 1982, of spirituality as "ascesis," shows in what sense ancient spirituality represents for him a model to think the "power of truth," the clarification of which he appears to pursue. Ascesis refers to a relationship with oneself in which the practice of the truth is found contained. But it is the movement of "subjectivation of true discourse" (*Hermeneutics* 333), that is, of its realization in the praxis of a subjectivity, the nature of which is radically opposed to that of a mere objectivation of oneself in true discourse. Therefore, it is a question of what we might consider an experience of mundanization of the truth. The vital "equipment" (*paraskeuē*) that Seneca speaks of, which enables the subject to confront the emergence of events, is made up of *logoi*, discourses, but that don't have to be understood, Foucault clarifies, in the sense of "a supply of true propositions, principles, and axioms, etcetera. Discourses should be understood as statements with a material existence" (*Hermeneutics* 322). These *logoi* must be implanted deeply in the subject, "gradually becoming as one with his own reason, freedom, and will," until becoming "matrices of action" (*Hermeneutics* 324) and even "the *logos* at that point must have become itself the subject of action" (*Hermeneutics* 326).

In his lectures of 1982, Foucault analyses the ascetic practice of subjectivation of the truth using diverse techniques such as listening, reading and writing. *Parrēsia*, or freedom of speech, is also among them. In the general interpretative direction that this course takes of spirituality and the ascetic practices associated with it, Foucault sees in this practice something that has to do with the material or existential dimension of the truth and the *logos*, and which particularly affects philosophical discourse: "there can be no philosophical *logos* without this kind of body of language with its own qualities, its own figures, and its own necessary effects" (*Hermeneutics* 368). *Parrēsia* concerns *lexis* (the way of saying things), which is necessarily connected to the *logos*. It has to do with its effect on *pathos* but, as specifically philosophical practice, it is distinguished from the merely rhetorical *tekhnē* of persuasion: "that basically what is involved in *parrhēsia* is that particular kind of rhetoric, or nonrhetorical rhetoric, which philosophical discourse must employ" (*Hermeneutics* 368). The admission of the material and practical aspect of the true discourse does not now appear to lead to the dissolution of truth in the power relations with which it is linked, which would be the case for the rhetoric of the Sophists.

The 1983 lecture series, *Le gouvernement de soi et des autres*, reorientates the whole investigation of the new axis of subjectivity based on the study of *parrēsia*, which becomes its unifying thread. The centrality of *parrēsia* is due to the fact that it is in the "meeting point" (*carrefour*) (*The Government of Self* 45) of the three axes of experience: knowledge, behaviour matrices and modes of being of the subject. When these aspects converge in this practice, *parrēsia* thus appears as an important historical enclave for studying a certain historical experience, which is that of Graeco-Roman antiquity. But let's not forget that the history of experience or thought is in Foucault an ontological history (or a "historical ontology"): the study of the modes in which the "being is historically constituted as experience," uttered using the formulation that he was to give in the prologue to *L'usage des plaisirs* (1984) (*The Use* 6-7). In *parrēsia* there is a historical "matrix of experience" (*The Government of Self* 41), which is given a role in the historical emergence of reality – a reality that for Foucault is absolutely historical and that, therefore, does not exist in itself. (Note here the "negativism" that is specific to the historical ontology of Foucault, and which the manuscript of the first 1983 lecture mentions, where it refers to a "historicizing negativism," a "nominalist negativism," and a "negativism with a nihilistic tendency," which are presupposed in his analyses [*The Government of Self* 5]. It is important to remember here the succinct but radical formulation of the negativism of historical ontology in a crucial passage from the 1978-9 lectures, *Naissance de la biopolitique*: "It was a matter of showing by what conjunctions a whole set of practices —from the moment they become coordinated with a regime of truth— was able to make

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what does not exist (madness, disease, delinquency, sexuality, etcetera), nonetheless become something, something however that continues not to exist." [Biopolitics 19]).

The study of parrēsia as a central theme, orientated in a very visible way in the last two courses toward philosophical parrēsia, enables Foucault to reflect on how in the basis of the historical event there is, as he states in an important methodological passage from the 1983 lectures, "a principle of freedom" ("it implies that every ontology, lastly, be analysed as a fiction. Which means again: the history of thought must always be the history of singular inventions… then this history of thought —this anyway is what I would like to do— should be conceived of as a history of ontologies which would refer to a principle of freedom in which freedom is not defined as a right to be free, but as a capacity for free action." [The Government of Self 310]). Philosophical parrēsia will enclose the general structure of this fictional movement of emergence of historical reality and the way in which a particular practice, philosophy, participates in it in a specific way.

The 1983 lectures study the transformations of the practice of parrēsia from its political context of emergence until its philosophical moment, represented by Socrates and Plato, in which parrēsia is to be understood as a specifically philosophical practice, defining what philosophy itself is. In these lectures, Foucault undertakes a reinterpretation of the historical emergence of philosophy from its insertion into the evenemental context of a history of practices. Indeed, it could be said that until Plato there was no philosophical concept of philosophy, a philosophical construction of the very practice of philosophy, an issue that seemed to concern Foucault at that time. His interpretation in this series is based on an unusual place for this purpose: Letter VII, where he finds the Platonic model of philosophy as a practice that is exercised au jour le jour, in daily life. The key to philosophical parrēsia is, for Foucault, Plato's second journey to Sicily: not being simply logos but being capable of getting down to work (ergon), participating in political praxis. What Plato had discovered here, according to Foucault, is "the question of philosophy's reality," of that which defines philosophy in terms of its form of existence or its specific reality: "In worrying about the idea that he could be no more than discourse (logos), the philosopher (Plato) seems to me to pose a problem which is precisely, as I was just saying, both familiar and not well known. When he worries about being only logos, when, instead of being merely logos, he wants to try his hand at the task itself (at the ergon), it seems to me that Plato raises a question that could be called the question of philosophy's reality. What is the reality of philosophy?" (The Government of Self 227-8).

It is the real situation that Plato places himself in before the tyrant Dionysius. What is defining of philosophy here is not saying the truth "about" politics but saying the truth "to" politics and "in" politics. In his Platonic concept, philosophy would be the discourse of truth that, being necessarily introduced in the political field, would not agree with it, maintaining a "principle of refusal," a capacity to "say no" (The Government of Self 319). Philosophy would be the activity of introducing an irreducible difference into the political field, the difference of the truth (or the truth as difference, "otherness," as the final words of the last lecture say somewhat enigmatically: "But what I would like to stress in conclusion is this: there is no establishment of the truth without an essential position of otherness [altérité]; the truth is never the same; there can be truth only in the form of the other world and the other life." [The courage 340]): "The test of philosophy, on the contrary, the test of philosophy's reality, is not its political effectiveness; it is the fact that it enters the political field in its specific difference and has its own particular game in relation to politics" (The Government of Self 229). In Foucault's opinion, we find here an essential trait for all philosophy, which "is as indispensable now as in Plato's time" (288). It is the idea of a philosophy inscribed in reality, which finds in that singular mode of relation and of difference with it a means of some transhistorical mode to commence and recommence: "Is it not as parrēsia, much more than as doctrine about the world, politics, Nature, etcetera, that European philosophy is actually inserted in reality and history, or rather in the reality that is our history? Is it not as parrēsia to be continually taken up again that philosophy continually recommences?" (The Government of Self 349).

From these analyses of Platonic philosophical parrēsia, it seems that Foucault is thinking of a "power of truth" in that a truth irreducible to politics intervenes in the political field, and that it does so introducing a radical difference, one might say "ontological," that which exists between the political space of exteriority and a space of absolute exteriority with respect to it (Deleuze speaks of a "relative outside" and an "absolute outside" [Course on Foucault, 22 April 1986]). The extreme case of philosophical practice is represented by the Cynics, whom Foucault mainly dealt with in the last lectures, The Courage of Truth (1984), in whom we have the material realization of that philosophical difference in the form of a life, such as that of the Cynic, which embodies the true life, and which is presented as "the other life" ("la vie autre") and "the other world" ("le monde autre") (The Courage 244-5), realized nevertheless as a particular life and world. In every parrhesiastic philosophical act, we could speak of a recommencement of philosophy as political-ontological experience, with which Foucault seems now to

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identify his own philosophical practice. From this point Deleuze's interpretation appears to be confirmed, according to which, in this third axis, it is a question of the possibility of thought as a folding of the outside (*dehors*). Philosophy would be the expression of the Greek discovery of the folding of force in on itself (and not only on other forces), from which the constitution of an interiority or subjectivity results, which, although independent of knowledge and power, is not first, but "coextensive" with the outside. Those places of subjectivation where thought is produced possess fundamental political importance when it comes to understanding the types of resistance to power as something more than the mere "*vis-à-vis*" of these relations (the way, only negative, in which *La volonté de savoir* still conceived resistance to power; see Deleuze, Lecture 13th May 1986): now, according to Deleuze, those places are "origins" ("Foldings" 103) of the points of resistance. But in what way should these origins, in which the points of resistance emerge and where thought arises, be understood as a variable that is irreducible to power?

Deleuze saw that the Greek discovery of subjectivation is that of thought understood as "absolute exercise" ("*exercice absolu*" [Lecture, 29th April 1986]), distinct from "relative exercises" that always refer to a reality or objectivity given beforehand and which are, in this sense, mere empirical exercises that were powerless to open spaces of freedom. The political force of subjectivation comes precisely from the fact that a speculative or transcendental activity is at stake in it, "absolute memory" (with the expression Foucault used in *Raymond Roussel*, referring to Leiris, and which is taken up now by Deleuze [see "Foldings" 99]). The analyses of the later Foucault concerning philosophical *parrēsia* seem to confirm that in this third ethical axis of analysis involve a rethinking from post-metaphysical positions, like those of Foucault, of the metaphysical idealist thesis of philosophical auto-presupposition, that specifically philosophical circle that was the object of his attacks in the sixties and seventies, and which now appears reinterpreted in a very different way. The analysis that Foucault made in 1983 of Plato's *Letter VII* shows it with clarity (in *The Government of Self* 230-57). Here, three "circles" stand out through which are specified what the conditions are so that philosophy might exist as something real, three circles in which an idea is put into play that probably still prevails, of the commencement and recommencement of philosophy:

As a first condition for philosophical discourse to touch reality and not be mere *logos*, just as Plato proves in his relationship with the tyrant of Syracuse, that discourse needs to be directed solely to those that want to listen. Foucault says: "philosophy always presupposes philosophy" (*The Government* 235). It is the reappearance, in another context, of the problem of the commencement of philosophy that I discussed earlier. Now, this specifically philosophical circularity due to which knowledge founds itself in knowledge itself, establishing an interiority closed in on itself, is interpreted as the way in which the exit from this simply logical-discursive interior space is made possible toward the political exteriority; or, if desired, seen from the other side, the practical realization of philosophy as the opening of a space of otherness in the immanence of the political field. That the philosophical discourse has to be directed at the philosophical will is now, not so much the condition of a sovereign self-founding of philosophy, but the possibility that the movement of an always already begun philosophy establishes out of itself a vector that operates from within a few given political conditions (what Deleuze calls a certain "diagram" of relations of forces). This is in order to introduce in them the relation with an ontological absolute that is immanent otherness to the world: not "the other world" but "the world other" (the non-relation as absolute relation, Blanchot's theme whose importance in Foucault was remarked by Deleuze [see "Foldings" 96]); the margin of contingence of the world, its eventuality, the opening to its recommencement in each new, singular event. It is an authentic fiction of the world, which it makes out of itself and in which philosophical praxis plays an important part. Now we can understand in what sense *parrēsia* can be seen as a "matrix of experience" and at the same time be the place of philosophy's recommencement.

In this first "circle of listening" (*The Government of Self* 235), or "circle of the other" (242), as Foucault called it, we can see the idea of an immanent or speculative reflection of a practical type that gives philosophy the power to intervene in reality. This reflection is the key to its "power of truth" and the engine of its capacity to commence. Here, Foucault is not far from the interpretation that Deleuze made of Platonic reminiscence in *Différence et répétition* (1969), outside of metaphysical dualism and the thesis of the pre-existence of the soul, which are commonly presupposed in it: only when thought presupposes itself and produces as its object the not-given, the faculties are elevated to its superior or transcendental exercise, in which thought breaks definitively with *doxa* and acquires a force that is no longer that of the mere recognition of what exists but that of the event or radical newness (see "The Image of Thought" 166). It is surprising to realise that, without knowing these analyses from Foucault's lectures at the Collège de France, Deleuze had likewise resorted to the example of Platonic reminiscence,

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as "transcendental exercise of memory," in order to illustrate Foucault's interpretation of the Greek discovery of thought as the fold of the outside (see Lecture 29 April 1986).

The second condition analysed by Foucault gives rise to a second circle, "the circle of oneself" (*The Government of Self* 242), related with the problem of how to recognise those to whom the philosophical word should be directed and the test to which the possible candidates must be subjected, consisting of showing them the reality (*pragma*) of the philosophical life, its specific difficulties and tasks, its practices (*pragmata*). Foucault comments on the meaning of this passage from *Letter VII* (340b): "The text says no more or less than this, which is fundamental nevertheless, that the reality of philosophy, the reality of philosophizing, that to which the word philosophy refers, is a set of *pragmata* (practices). The reality of philosophy is the practices of philosophy" (*The Government of Self* 239). In this second circle, it is thus a question of the Socratic-Platonic discovery of philosophy, not as mere practice of the *logos* but as a form of life that encompasses the entire existence of what makes that vital choice, including its ordinary actions, and results in a work on itself in which it transforms and constitutes its own self. Philosophy as a "technique de l'ordinaire" (as it has been interpreted by D. Lorenzini [*Étique et politique* 107]) which, however, as we saw earlier, introduces "the extraordinary" into its centre, making the philosophical life the mode in which the self finds its selfhood in the existential realization of ontological difference.

The third condition, linked with the second, is so that philosophy is in touch with reality: that it is not reduced to the mere formulation of philosophemes. This concerns "the circle of knowledge" (*The Government of Self* 252). Plato's criticism of the tyrant Dionysius as the supposed author of a philosophical treatise is the occasion for a rejection of writing, as is also done elsewhere (*Letter II*, *Phaedrus*). But it is not about the rejection of writing to the benefit of the *logos* but the rejection of the simple *logos* that is not at the same time *ergon*, put to work, activity. The reality of philosophy is not found in its *mathēmata*, that is, in propositional formulae that express mere contents of knowledge, but in an activity and a task (recall the well-known passage from *Letter VII*, 341 c-d, central to Foucault's analysis: "I certainly have composed no work in regard to it, nor shall I ever do so in future, for there is no way of putting it in words ["formules (*mathēmata*)"] like other studies. Acquaintance with it must come rather after a long period of attendance on instruction in the subject itself and of close companionship ["*quand on a vecu avec eux* (*suzên*)"], when, suddenly, like a blaze kindled by a leaping spark, it is generated in the soul and at once becomes self-sustaining." [*The Government of Self* 256]). The key, therefore, to the reality of philosophy appears to be in this form of "cohabitation" (*sunousia*) with the problems that truth itself raises. What is specific of the philosophical *logos* is that immanent life that makes it put itself to work and which allows truth to reside in it, materially, real. The interpretation that Foucault offers of the famous "philosophical digression" from *Letter VII* (341e) serves to support his hypothesis: philosophical knowledge, aimed at the thing itself, is not strictly a superior level of knowledge and, therefore, a mere *logos*, but the movement of rubbing (*tribê*) or of continuous practice with diverse elements or modes of knowledge, a live movement that *mathēmata* cannot capture or objectify. Philosophy, inscribed in this circle of knowledge, thus seems capable of illuminating a truth that is not doctrine but the truth of the event itself, a truth that, in the extreme, coincides with life.

It seems evident that the reality of philosophy, defined in a specific way from these three circles, is that of a truth that has the power to commence and recommence, and whose intervention in the world probably depends whether the resistance to the established relations of power is something more than the mere affirmation of a force of opposite direction. As defining of the Platonic meaning of philosophy, that reality was already there, at the commencement of the Western tradition, perhaps as the unthought that Foucault strived to think up until the end.

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