Michel Foucault’s research at the Collège de France during the years 1981 to 1984 led him into unexpected and promising new areas of thought, stemming specifically from his engagement at the time with Socratic/Platonic philosophy. Parlayed in courses which he offered at the Collège from 1982-1984, and at the University of California in Berkeley in 1983, it was this work that supplied him with the incentive to tie his own intellectual practice with the ethical parrhésia and “care of the self” (epiméléia heauton),¹ of which Plato speaks.

As Foucault tells it, Plato had originally addressed these themes in order to respond to democratic Athens’ lack of success in fashioning a parrhésia — that is, a political discourse of truth — capable of uniting the city around such issues as what was best for it, what would save it, what would preserve it; the Athenian Assembly had produced instead the conflict (agon) of individual interests.² While Plato was not unique among his contemporaries in identifying this dysfunction, he alone had suggested that what had given rise to it was the paucity of ascetic

¹Foucault rarely concerns himself with marking a radical distinction between the voices and ideas of Socrates and Plato. Given the nature of his project he is more concerned with the overall “problematization” within which their thought takes place. In the following, when I speak of Socrates I refer to the character who appears in the works of Plato and who is obviously based on the historically real individual. Like Foucault, I will not raise the question of the relation of the philosophy of this Socrates to the actual Socrates. Often, I will refer to “Socratic/Platonic” thought. The philosophy transmitted to us by way of the texts being in essential ways their child. See below.

²Foucault had not adequately articulated the nature of this crisis prior to his 1983 Collège de France course.
and other techniques for fashioning and operating a proper ethos or mode of subjectivity. The problem, in other words, was not so much a political as an ethical one. Plato, accordingly, developed an ensemble of practices of the "care of the self" that he also described as the practices of the philosophical life. In the period from 1981 to 1984 Foucault went on the trail of these practices. The result of Foucault's sleuthing is what will concern us here.

Parrhésia and "Care of the Self"

We begin with the notion of parrhésia. Etymologically, the term means "frankness," "license," "free speech," "to say everything,." Now, "to say everything," can be taken in both a negative and a positive sense. Negatively, it suggests a lack of restraint, such as one finds in a person who does not know how to hold his tongue, who says whatever he feels like saying having no sense of shame or limit. It suggests as well "saying whatever it takes," "whatever [would] serve the passion or interest which motivates the one who speaks."

Positively, it suggests "saying everything, guided by the truth," just as someone might who, deterred neither by fear nor the prospect of humiliation, speaks the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Such a one does not hold back; he does not attempt to alter the substance or cushion the impact of what he says by resorting to such dilatory tactics as style, rhetoric, dissimulation. Parrhésia, taken this way, suggests the ability to speak freely, courageously, even impetuously. What is more, it suggests commitment, for the truth which the parrhésiast speaks is not just any truth, but his truth, that is, the truth to which he is committed and with which he identifies. Foucault writes: he "attaches his signature to the truth that he speaks,

3 See "Discourse and Truth: The Problematization of parrhésia" — notes to the seminar given by Foucault at the University of California at Berkeley (hereafter as DT), p.1; Le Courage de la Vérité (Le Gouvernement de soi et des autres, II), Cours au Collège de France, 1984. lecture of February 8, (hereafter CdF84 followed by date of lecture and page number in transcript) CdF84, p.17. My citations refer to a transcript of the course prepared by Michael Behrent.

4 "n'importe quoi qui peut servir à la passion ou l'intérêt qui anime celui qui parle." CdF84:2/1, p.17.

5 "le tout dire indexé à la vérité," ibid., p.19.

6 Ibid.
he binds himself to it."7 Also, it is truth which runs him a clear risk because the person to whom he says it does not want to hear it — either because it is critical of, or offensive to, him — and is in a position to retaliate should he be so inclined. "[Parrhésia] is, therefore, truth in the risk of violence."8 The very bond that has arisen between the parrhesiaist and his truth drives a wedge, stretches to its limits the relation, between speaker and listener. To say it, therefore, entails courage. The speaker must have the courage to accept the consequences of speaking and the listener must have the courage to hear that truth, no matter how hurtful. Parrhésia risks, in other words, the unraveling of the relationship between speaker and listener. At its extreme, the speaker, through his act of speech, risks his very life. He risks it all the same because the truth to which he is committed must be spoken. Parrhésia, then, relates one to a duty that one is perfectly free to avoid, but which, if it is taken up, requires courage to execute. Foucault's distinctive way of putting it is in his expression, "le courage de la vérité."9 He writes:

In parrhésia, the speaker uses his freedom and chooses frankness instead of persuasion, truth instead of falsehood or silence, the risk of death instead of life and security, criticism instead of flattery, and moral duty instead of self-interest and moral apathy.10

Foucault came to engage the question of parrhésia in the course of his genealogical analyses of those dimensions of ourselves, of our activities, and of our discourses, that serve as loci — effects and relays — of power. In Discipline and Punish he traced the development of disciplinary power, a mode of power which functions, not so much by repressing individuality, as by producing and shaping it in specific settings through concrete techniques. In The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1, he demonstrated modern political power's equivalence to a "bio-power"11 which cultivates and nurtures individual life and capacities;

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7 "la parrhesiaste signe en quelque sorte lui-même la vérité qu'il énonce, il se lie à cette vérité," ibid., p.20.
8 "C'est donc la vérité dans le risque de la violence," ibid., p.20.
9 Ibid., p.23.
10 DT, p.8.
provides individual bodies with comfort, fulfillment, pleasure, happiness; shapes and integrates individualities into the state’s productive force; incites individuals — within special relationships (doctor-patient, analyst-analyzed, etc.) and by means of “hermeneutic” strategies for extracting their “hidden truth,” lodged in the form of desire, from the multitude of their actions, feelings, thoughts, fantasies, etc. — to fashion their subjectivity around the discovery, expression, liberation and fulfillment of their desire, to identify with their desire, to think of themselves as subjects of desire.\(^\text{12}\)

The shift in focus, from techniques and relations of power external to individuals, to techniques and relations of power that involve the active participation of subjects,\(^\text{13}\) in Foucault’s analyses of power supplied him with the motive to carry out investigations of the historical horizon of this experience of subjectivity. In the course of these investigations he was able to determine that the hermeneutic subject of desire emerged only within the confessional practices and spiritual exercises of Christian ethics,\(^\text{14}\) and that prior to the formation of Christian practices, in the context especially of Hellenistic and Roman philosophy, a whole range of possible experiences of ethical subjectivity existed that were “aesthetic” and “poetic” rather than “hermeneutic.”

Foucault’s discovery in Hellenistic and Roman philosophy of a different organization of ethical subjectivity and a different formulation of self-knowledge, provided the basis for his re-location of the imperative to “know yourself” from a hermeneutics of desire, to the broader and more fundamental context of the practices of the “care of the self” (epiméléia heauton), specifically, of spiritual direction, self-disclosure,\(^\text{15}\) and parrhésia.\(^\text{16}\) Indeed, through his deployment of

\(^{12}\)For example, HSI, pp.59-60. I am going through this development schematically — it has been handled at length elsewhere: for example, James Bernauer, *Michel Foucault’s Force of Flight: Toward An Ethics for Thought* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1990); Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).


\(^{14}\)HSI, pp.17-23.

\(^{15}\)CdF84

\(^{16}\)His first reference to the term is in CdF82, p. 132. It will become a main theme of the course and be the central topic of CdF83 and CdF84.
the true and frank discourse afforded by *parrhésia*, the Hellenistic and Roman philosopher provided his disciple with “spiritual direction,” as well as with incentives to convert to the moral life. Interestingly, however, Foucault discovered that *parrhésia*, originally, underpinned neither spiritual direction nor ethical discourse, but political discourse. Only with the Socratic/Platonic problematization of democracy, did it come to be displaced from the political to the ethical dimension. He writes:

> With the notion of *parrhésia*, originally rooted in political practice, and you’ll recall, in the problematization of democracy, then turned toward the sphere of personal ethics and of the constitution of the moral subject, I believe that with this notion of *parrhésia* one has the possibility — and it is for this reason that I am interested in it and which caused me to pause over it ... I believe that with this notion, one has the possibility of posing the question of the subject and the truth from the point of view of the practice of what one could call the government of the self and of others ... It seems to me that by examining more closely the notion of *parrhésia* one can see knotting themselves together the analyses of modes of veridiction, studies of techniques of governmentality and the outline of forms, of practices of the self.¹⁷

Foucault organizes his genealogy and archaeology of ancient thought around the problematization of *parrhésia* because he sees in this experience a way of isolating the dynamic interplay between relations of power, discursive or epistemic forms, and practices of ethical subjectivization. In the displacement of *parrhésia* from politics to ethics, what is revealed is how one fashions a mode of subjectivity in order to have access to true discourse to be spoken in the game of power.

¹⁷“Avec la notion de parrhésia, enraciné originellement dans la pratique politique, et vous vous souvenez, dans la problématisation de la démocratie, puis dérivé à la suite vers la sphère de l’éthique personnelle et de la constitution du sujet moral, eh bien je crois qu’avec cette notion de parrhésia on a la possibilité — et c’est pour cela que je m’y suis intéressé et qui je m’y suis arrêté et que je m’y arrête encore — je crois qu’avec cette notion, on a, je crois la possibilité de poser la question du sujet et de la vérité du point de vue de la pratique de ce qu’on peut appeler le gouvernement de soi-même et des autres... Il me semble qu’en examinant à plus près la notion de parrhésia on peut voir se nouer ensemble l’analyse des modes de véridiction, l’études des techniques de gouvernementalité et le repérage des formes, des pratiques de soi.” CDF, pp. 14-15.
relations. The three axes of experience which Foucault formulated and studied across his career come together in the problematization of parrhésia. More important still, the discovery of this convergence of power-knowledge-subjectivity allows Foucault to conceive of an alternative model of political ethics, or of an ethics of resistance to the proliferation of power. Foucault sees in this convergence a "resistance to political power... in the relation of the self to itself." If it is true, as Foucault suggests, that modern disciplinary power, normalization, and bio-power function by producing individualities, then care of the self would represent an experience of ethical life which resists those forces.

If one takes the most general question of governmentality — governmentality understood as a field of strategic relations of power ... in the sense of relations that are mobile, transformable, reversible, I believe that reflection on this notion of governmentality cannot avoid operating, theoretically and practically, with the notion of a subject who would be defined by the rapport of the self to itself. While the theory of political power as institution ordinarily refers to a juridical conception of the subject of rights, it seems to me that the analysis of governmentality ... must refer to an ethic of the subject defined by the rapport of the self to itself ... relations of power, government of oneself and of others, rapport of self to self, all this constitutes a chain, a thread, and it is there, around these notions, that one must be able, I think, to articulate the question of politics and the question of ethics.  

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18CdF82, p. 241.
19... si on prend la question plus générale de la gouvernementalité — gouvernementalité entendue comme un champ stratégique de relations de pouvoir, au sens plus large du terme et pas simplement politique —, donc, si on entend par gouvernementalité un champ stratégique de relations de pouvoir, dans ce qu’elles ont de mobile, de transformable, de réversible, je crois que la réflexion sur cette notion de gouvernementalité ne peut pas ne pas passer, théoriquement et pratiquement, par l’élément d’un sujet qui serait défini par le rapport de soi à soi. Alors que la théorie du pouvoir politique comme institution se réfère d’ordinaire à une conception juridique du sujet de droit, il me semble que l’analyse de la gouvernementalité — c’est-à-dire: l’analyse du pouvoir comme ensemble de relations réversibles — doit se référer à une éthique du sujet défini par le rapport de soi à soi... relations de pouvoir-gouvernementalité de soi et des autres-rapport de soi à soi, tout ceci constitue une chaîne, une trame, et que c’est là, autour de ces notions, qu’on doit pouvoir, je pense, articuler la question de la politique et la question de l’éthique. CdF82, pp. 241-242.
The preceding passage sheds light on the status of Foucault’s investigation into ancient thought and the practices of ethical subjectivization developed by it in order to respond to relations of power and knowledge. It is this thread connecting power to governmentality to subjectivity which Foucault tries to follow in his archaeology and genealogy of parrhésia.

Now, what is care of the self, epimeleia heauton? Care is, of course, an attitude of concern and vigilance — “a permanent principle of agitation, of movement, of anxiety in one’s existence.”\(^{20}\) However, what is more important is that to care for something is an activity. In order to stress this fact Foucault shows that the original meaning of the term epimeleia was physical not psychological. He writes: “The etymology [of epimeleia] goes back to a series of words such as meletan, meletê, etc... Meletai are exercises: gymnastic exercises, military exercises, military training.”\(^{21}\) However, even when care of the self is thought of as a purely mental activity, it is not primarily theoretical; instead it is a particular exercise of thought. The effect of care as thinking is not to produce new knowledge, rather it is to bring about a new mode of subjectivity, a new way of being-in-the-world. This is evident in the language traditionally used to describe this kind of thinking. For example, there is the language of the conversion — thinking is a way of converting oneself to the truth and of being saved by it. Care as an act of thought is often described as a “retreat,” or a withdrawal from the world, through which one finds restoration or rejuvenation. There are medical, juridical and religious descriptions of thought. In each case thinking is not so much a way of knowing oneself, as it is a way of curing, admonishing or rewarding, or of freeing oneself. Finally, thought is a practice of self-mastery and is the joy the self takes in its self-mastery and self-containment.\(^{22}\) Therefore, whether in the form of physical exercises or in the form of practices of thought, in care of the self one performs various activities which have the deliberate goal of cultivating some kind of relationship of oneself to oneself.

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\(^{20}\) CdF82, p. 9.

\(^{21}\) CdF82, p. 82.

\(^{22}\) Ibid.
The ethical subject, the subject of care, is neither a substance nor an atom, something simple and self-same. It is, rather, a complex whole, material to be worked upon and given a certain form by means of an ensemble of techniques and activities taken up and applied to it. The ethical subject is experienced in terms of its "goal" or task, what it tries to accomplish. Additionally, it stands in a certain relationship to the moral rules which define good and bad, which prescribe and forbid. This is the structure of ethical subjectivity within the framework of care of the self.

*Truth and Power: The Problematization of Parrhésia*

Now that we have in mind the basic sense of the word, *parrhésia*, we are prepared to follow Foucault’s excavation of the historical site in which it originally resided. The word first appears in the work of Euripides, in a setting which is political. It denoted a political right and activity that was both a privilege of and a duty of the Athenian citizen — to speak one’s mind in the assembly, to speak the truth to which one was committed, as one’s best to the governance of the city. But this right, this activity, which had long defined the free political life of Athens, was becoming the source of a growing anxiety. For the right to speech, and of participation in the governance of the city, as a result of the democratic reforms of the 6th and 5th centuries, had been extended beyond the aristocratic classes to all citizens. The aristocrats viewed the extension of the right of *parrhésia* to the lower classes as the sign of a breakdown in the traditional moral and political values that had for a long time provided the foundation for Athenian power and wealth. This anxiety toward *parrhésia*, toward democratic political discourse, manifested itself in a singular experience of the difficult interrelatedness of freedom, power and truth. Foucault calls this kind of experience, this anxiety, a "problematization."

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23See, HSI, introduction.
24Michel Foucault, *Le Gouvernement de soi et des autres: Cours au Collège de France*, 1983, (audiocassettes available at the Bibliothèque du Collège de France). (Hereafter as CdF83: followed by date of lecture) CdF83:1/12. My notes refer to the audiocassettes held by the Centre Michel Foucault at the IMEC; CdF84:2/8; DT, pp. 12-48.
25DT, pp. 113-116.
A problematization, to put it simply, is the process by which an aspect of reality, of one’s world, one’s experience, is brought into focus as a problem in need of a response. Through a problematization “people begin to take care of something ... they become anxious about this or that...” This caring-about-something is a way of disclosing the world in light of a problem and is therefore a response to that problem. Foucault’s shift from the analysis of dispositifs of power-knowledge to that of problematizations represents an important methodological advance. His earlier work is not left behind, but rather displaced and complimented by this new focus. This new point of attack allows Foucault to more carefully isolate the activity of “thought.”

Thought is not what inhabits a certain conduct and gives it meaning; rather, it is what allows one to step back from this way of acting and reacting, to present it to oneself as an object of thought and to question it as to its meaning, its conditions and its goals. Thought is freedom in relation to what one does, the motion by which one detaches oneself from it, establishes it as an object and reflects on it as a problem.

Thought problematizes. The analysis of a problematization is therefore the analysis of historical events through which the ordinary and familiar surrounding world, practices and relationships, lose their familiarity. To excavate, archaeologically, problematizations, and to trace, genealogically, their origins and effects, is to do “the work of a history of thought.”

This development of a given into a question, this transformation of a group of obstacles and difficulties into problems to which diverse

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26 DT, p. 48.
27 "Problematics" in Foucault Live: Interviews, 1966–1984, trans. by John Johnston, ed. by Sylvère Lotringer (New York: Semiotext(e), 1989), pp. 420–421. Foucault’s experience of “thought” is remarkably similar to that described by Arendt in her essay, “On Thinking and Moral Consideration: A Lecture” (Social Research, Vol. 38 (1971), no. 3) There she describes thinking as an activity, or a way of being, in which one “unfreezes” frozen thoughts, concepts or words. For the Foucauldian analyst, this would be the activity or way of being by which one unfreezes the problematics frozen into rigid forms of relations and practices.
28 Ibid., p. 421.
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
solutions will attempt to produce a response, this is what constitutes
the point of problematization and the specific work of thought.\textsuperscript{31}

Thought does not respond to, or problematize, its world through
a "representation" of it, i.e. a theory or description of the world. Rather,
thought "develops the conditions in which possible responses can be
given; it defines the elements that will constitute what the different
solutions attempt to respond to."\textsuperscript{32} It does this by inventing the world
anew — creating new kinds of relationships, new practices, assigning
new meanings to old practices and relations. Thought re-imagines
the purposes and possibilities the world offers.

\textit{Euripides' Ion: Problematization as Recuperation}

Foucault begins his study of this experience with a reading of Euripides.
This is not to say, of course, that the anxiety regarding political
discourse only begins with Euripides, merely that the appearance of
the word \textit{parrhésia} in his work coincided with, and referred itself to, a
phenomenon which called for thought. In Euripides’ work we can
trace the trajectory of the problematization of \textit{parrhésia}. Foucault
draws our attention to two tragedies in particular which serve to
bring the problem into focus: \textit{Ion} and \textit{Orestes}. Foucault calls Euripides’
\textit{Ion} the "\textit{tragedy du dire vrai},"\textsuperscript{33} or "the decisive Greek \textit{parrhésiastic play}."\textsuperscript{34}
\textit{Ion} was composed in the milieu of anxiety which I outlined above.
That is, Euripides, in his play, problematizes \textit{parrhésia}, responding to
the growing disillusionment with Athenian democracy and the
deterioration of its political life. The problematization arose amid
the spread of democratic freedom of speech within an assembly that
had been thrown open to all comers, regardless of their ethical
identity, and the resultant stilling within Athens of the voices of those
with some means of “differentiating” themselves in “ethical” terms as
bearers of \textit{parrhésiastic} truth. Notwithstanding this anxiety, Euripides,
in \textit{Ion}, represents \textit{parrhésia} as an activity valued so highly by the Greeks
that to be deprived of it was essentially to be deprived of the citizenly

\textsuperscript{31}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{32}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{33}CdF83:1/26; DT, p. 20.
\textsuperscript{34}DT, p. 20.
ability to speak one’s mind in the contest for power and to be relegated instead to the status of a slave. It was, in that sense, “one of the forms of appearance of the free existence of a citizen.” When, in the aftermath of political reform, social groupings other than the aristocracy (who by blood were linked to the good of the city) began to engage in parrhésiastic discourse, the question — Euripides’ question — arose: Who should come forward to speak? To whom should the assembly listen? Whose voice is grounded in truth? Clearly, for Euripides, the question of truth was a question whose principal point of reference was the subject who spoke, the “I” that manifested itself in a discourse of the form, “I believe ...” or “I think ...,” and that the answer to it should be, only those who possess the ethical quality to ground their words in truth and to say what is truly good for the city.

The possession of this right in Ion is secured primarily by genealogy: one must be native to the city. Indeed, as the tragedy unfolds, Ion is increasingly anxious to discover the truth concerning his birth. Was he or was he not a citizen of Athens? Athenian identity alone could provide him with access to that parrhésia bereft of which he would be “a nobody.” What is more, he had to possess a good name in the city, one that was reputable, honorable. Euripides meets the challenge of re-figuring a conception and practice of parrhésia for the changed times by construing it as the right possessed by the best and most honorable of citizens, to attend to the political life of the city, and in the course of so doing to constitute and accomplish their subjectivity. Euripides, in sum, grounds parrhésia in ethical differentiation, in order to be able to re-introduce truth into the city.

Orestes: Problematization as Repudiation

In Euripides’ Ion, Foucault finds a representation of political, democratic parrhésia in which this activity is valorized despite the

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35 CdF84:2/8, p.3; see Euripides, Ion, Hippolytus, The Phoenician Women.
36 “une des formes de manifestation de l’existence libre d’un citoyen libre, en donnant à ce mot libre son sens plein et positif, c’est à dire une liberté qui donne le droit d’exercer ses privilèges au milieu des autres, par rapport aux autres et sur les autres.” CdF84:2/8, p. 4.
37 DT, p. 27; CdF83:1/19.
38 Ion, ln590-595.
anxiety over the functioning, or malfunctioning, of Athenian political life. The growth of democracy opens the struggle for power to all and is perceived as the source of the erosion of the ethical differentiation which constitutes the assembly into a place of truth. In Ion, the problematization takes the form of a recuperation of parrhésia and a renewal of the ethical differentiation within the democratic assembly. However, Foucault’s analysis shows that other more pessimistic views concerning democratic discourse express themselves as the problematization deepens. What emerges is an experience in which parrhésia itself comes to be seen in a negative light. Parrhésia will no longer be immediately recognized as the manifestation of an individual’s freedom and courage to speak the truth.

In Euripides’ Orestes, Foucault sees an expression of this intensified form of problematization. In order to show this, he takes up a passage in which the term parrhésia is used to describe a mode of discourse that is negative in every way. Foucault’s analysis of this passage brings into focus, on the one hand, the elements which characterize the mode of being of negative parrhésia, and, on the other hand, the way in which someone who speaks this language constitutes his subjectivity. The “negative” parrhésiast in Orestes is characterized by a lack of restraint. He is unable to master himself, does not know what to say and what not to say, is not able to distinguish the moment which calls for speech from that which calls for silence. Because this individual is not able to let his words be guided by truth, his speech is inappropriate, peppered with falsehoods, marked by excess. What is more, the negative parrhésiast is characterized by an arrogance designed to paper over the inauthenticity of whatever ethical relationship he might claim to have to truth. Thirdly, the negative parrhésiast is not a true Athenian, but an outsider. Fourth, he relies

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40DT, pp. 38-42.
41Ibid., pp. 38-40.
42Ibid., p. 39.
43Ibid., p. 40.
44Ibid., p. 41.
45Ibid.
not on the reasonableness of what he says but on "his ability to generate an emotional reaction from his audience by his strong and loud voice." He is incapable of producing a clear articulation of the opinion he knows is expressive of truth. He relies, instead, on emotional force. Fifth, he deploys a language which can only display the lack of "mathésis" or instruction. He cannot articulate truth because he has never received any kind of mathésis. Wisdom, after all, is gained only through learning. "In order for parrhésia to have positive political effects, it must now be linked to a good education, to intellectual and moral formation..." The reference to education reflects the growing importance of the power of language, the diminished importance of noble blood, and the influence of the Sophists. Finally, the negative parrhésiast speaks, not on his own behalf, but on behalf of someone else. He speaks, not what he believes, not what he knows, but what he knows others want to hear. Parrhésia, in this sense, is not "frankness," but flattery, and is, as such, highly threatening to free political discourse.

Plato’s Problematization of Democratic Parrhésia

Moving now to Foucault’s interpretation of Plato, he takes the critique of democracy which appears in Republic as an explicit reference to the inauthentic mode of parrhésia which prevails in the assembly. Plato describes the inhabitants of a democratic city, the city founded on the principle of equality, as follows:

To begin with, are they not free? And is not the city full of liberty and [parrhesia]? And has not every man license to do as he likes?

Democracy is characterized in terms of its ability to foster equality, liberty, and parrhésia among its citizens. Equality refers to the inability on the part of each citizen to distinguish one way of life from another according to its relationship to truth. Liberty refers to the freedom on the part of each one to choose a way of life and to live the life chosen. Parrhésia refers to the freedom to say what one wants, in the

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46 Ibid.
47 Cdf83:2/9; DT, pp. 54-55.
48 Republic, 557b.
manner that one *wants* to say it. 49 Plato writes that given these definitions of equality, freedom, and free speech, "it is obvious that everyone would arrange a plan for leading his own life in the way that *pleases* him." 50 The life of the polis is completely external to the freedom of each individual in it. Each defines his interests privately and experiences his freedom as the absence of political constraint. Or, freedom, if it has a political meaning is the freedom to use political discourse to get others to do one's bidding. An assembly of individuals who live and think this way is going to listen to the discourse which *pleases* it and silence the discourse which does not. The language of such an assembly cannot be the language of truth or critique, but only that of flattery. It listens, after all, only to the person who "says he loves the people." 51 If one wants to be heard in the assembly, if one wants to accrue power there, one must be prepared to say what one knows others want to hear.

Plato characterizes such an assembly as a "great strong beast." 52 Its "full-throated clamor and clapping of hands" creates individuals, forms them, shapes them, with a dumb and ruthless power that no "private teaching" can match. 53 It is, as such, an apparatus (*dispositif*) 54 of power. It functions in such a manner as to "mold" the individual "so that he will affirm the same things that they ... [the assembled citizens] ... do to be honorable and base, and will do as they do, and even be such as they." 55 The assembly molds everyone to the same pattern, to think, to do and to *be* as "they." Democracy, as such, is a structure of non-differentiation which constitutes political and ethical subjects by means of the force of the general opinion. One *must* abide by what pleases the majority — not by what displeases it, which is any way of

54 Foucault does not use the term, "*dispositif*", in his courses or writings in his analysis of this passage. However, from the development of the course as a whole it is quite clear that he is in fact attempting to think Socratic/Platonic philosophy as a resistance to problematic relations of power and knowledge. These relations are manifested in the functioning of the assembly and of Sophistic rhetoric.
life and of speaking, any genuine parrhésia, which contradicts the democratic mode of existence. Within this milieu, rhetoric emerges as a technology of government. For the one who comprehends the flow of energy in the beast, to understand its moods and their causes, is the one who will be able to develop a technology through which he can harness its power and make it his own. If flattery is the expected mode of discourse in the assembly, then rhetoric is the technology of flattery. In flattery one articulates the opinion of the other as one's own in order to seduce. To achieve this one must know the other, know what he thinks, desires, what pleases him or gives him pain. Such knowledge, precisely, is what the Sophists strive to develop. The technology of the Sophists is a calculation of forces without meaning, of inertia, of impacts and reflexes. Plato shows how the Sophists study the workings of the assembly in order to learn how to use language as a power. The Sophists learn how the beast

is to be approached and touched, and when and by what things it is made most savage or gentle, yes, and the several sounds it is wont to utter on the occasion of each, and again what sounds uttered by another make it tame or fierce and after mastering this knowledge by living with the creature and by lapse of time should call it wisdom, and should construct thereof a system and art and turn to the teaching of it ... 

Rhetoric both inhabits and cultivates the leveling of existence into one pattern. It is a knowledge and an art of language which binds the listeners ever more tightly to its exigencies. Therefore, the democratic structure of non-differentiation takes on another — the first was the power of the general opinion which inscribes itself as the very identity of the subject, now it is the artificiality of the "I" who appears before the assembly. In the first instance, the "I" is molded through the force of the assembly, in this case the "I" is a work of art, of technique, which constructs the speaking subject as a power of persuasion. Rhetoric is a technology of government which functions together with the assembly

\[56\text{Plato, Republic, trans. by Paul Shorey in } \text{Plato: The Collected Dialogues, ed. by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), Bk.VI, 493a-d.}\]

\[57\text{Ibid., 493b-c.}\]
to produce and control individuals. All this is grounded in an interpretation of political and ethical subjectivity according to which the self knows itself in the immediate, self-evident presence of the desires, pleasures, pains that present themselves in the soul, and experiences its freedom as the power to satisfy desires, avoid pains, and enjoy pleasures. Such a self amounts to little more than a principle of pleasure and the will to power, lacking within itself those “true discourses” that would have allowed it to understand the nature and meaning of desires and pleasures, to distinguish them according to their ethical values, and to master and use them in order to give one’s mode of existence an ordered and beautiful form. 58 But the Athenians’ have neglected to “care for themselves,” they have neglected to engage those practices that could have produced in and among them that ethos which a just and effective political life requires. They have gotten caught up instead in a life remarkable only for its lack of truth, for its fixation upon the pleasure principle and will to power, and for its capitulation to rhetoric as a technology of control and, concomitantly, to general opinion as a force. The democratic assembly cannot speak or hear the truth because the individuals gathered in it have not structured their lives in accordance with true discourse, the presence of logos in their souls. If political life is to serve as the means for harnessing truth to good political governance, political agents must first work for the emergence of truth in their souls and in their lives. Because political life takes place in the element of language, when the relationship between the subject and the words he speaks is obfuscated by techniques of flattery and outright dissimulation, when frank language is suppressed, a just and effective political life is impossible.

Plato’s Invention of a Philosophical Parrhésiast

Responding to the demise in Athens of a political life deriving from true and frank discourse, Plato outlines a program for the development of a new experience of the self as parrhésiast. At this juncture, Foucault brings focus to bear upon Plato’s Apology which, in his view, contains Plato’s clearest statements concerning this new mode of subjectivity. Foucault understands Plato, in the Apology, to be (1) decisively

58Ibid., 560b.
distinguishing Socratic *parrhésia* from the rhetoric of Socrates’ accusers; (2) characterizing Socratic *parrhésia* as diametrically opposed to political discourse; (3) providing a description of Socratic *parrhésia* as “care of the self.” In what follows, I would like to say a word about each.

Socrates, in the *Apology*, begins his defense by distinguishing his mode of discourse from that of his accusers. He says that his accusers speak falsely, yet, they are extremely persuasive. The power of their speech is not to be found in its truthfulness, but in its being “a set oration duly ornamented with words and phrases.”59 They use a technical mastery of language to construct an effective discourse, one which poses as truth without actually speaking truly. Their words are so effective that Socrates himself is almost convinced: “their persuasive words almost made me forget who I was.”60 Their technique of persuasion is such that it can potentially provoke one to forget who one truly is. It is this problem of self-forgetting and self-neglect which lies at the basis of the crisis of political life in Athens. Rhetoric is the technique grounded on, and which re-enforces, the forgetfulness and neglect of oneself. *Parrhésia*, in contrast, as direct, unadorned speech, will be the language which calls one back to oneself. *Parrhésia* reminds one of who one truly is and of what one must not neglect. “[I]f the skill to speak provokes the oblivion of self, then the simplicity of speech, the speech without devices and without ornamentation, the speech which is immediately true, the speech therefore of *parrhésia*, will lead us to the truth of ourselves.”61 The recollection of oneself requires *parrhésia* — plain and direct speech.62

Socrates portrays himself as someone who speaks the unadorned truth. To make his point, he tells the tribunal that he has never argued a matter before the assembly or defended himself before the court and that he therefore lacks any understanding of the kind of language

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60 Ibid., 17a.

61 “...si l’habileté à parler provoque l’oubli de soi, eh bien la simplicité de parler, la parole sans apprêt ou sans ornement, la parole directement vraie, la parole donc de parrhésia, nous conduira, elle, à la vérité de nous-mêmes.” CdF84:2/15, pp. 4-5.

62 Ibid., pp. 3-5.

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which is typical in such situations. He is like a foreigner among them, speaking in an unfamiliar language.\textsuperscript{63} Foucault points out, however, that this very claim is a typical defense tactic.\textsuperscript{64} The claim to lack a technique of persuasion is itself an element in a technique of persuasion which, by “masking technical eloquence,” aims at gaining the sympathy of the jurors.\textsuperscript{65} As a common defense it is not proper to the individual speaking it, it is not authentic discourse. It is, rather, what anyone could and might say in such a situation. Used in such a way, this claim does not and cannot be the immediate truth of the one who speaks. Socrates himself, however, speaks the truth here. Though his claim represents a standard rhetorical technique in use at the courts, Socrates does not use it as such. This matter of the use of language is what Foucault isolates as the mode of being of discourse. It refers, on the one hand, to the relationship between the subject and the words he speaks, and, on the other hand, to the relationship between the listener and the words spoken. So in what way is Socrates’ claim to be like a foreigner in court more than a mere trick? In fact, we see that it is not a trick: Socrates proceeds to speak in a way that is truly foreign to the court. He describes the mode of discourse he will use before the court: first, it is the same as his ordinary day-to-day mode of speaking. There is no discontinuity between his everyday discourse and that which he will employ in the court; that is, he uses no technique for speaking which would alter his own habitual mode of discourse. Second, the words he uses will be “the first words that occur” to him.\textsuperscript{66} His discourse will be the immediate and unaltered translation into speech of the “movement of thought.”\textsuperscript{67} He will not attempt to rearrange the order of his thought in order to produce speech which is not “immediate” — there will be no rhetorical technique mediating the passage from thought to speech. Finally, Socrates is absolutely committed to the truth and justice of what he speaks.\textsuperscript{68} Socrates’ mode of discourse is differentiated from

\textsuperscript{63}Apology, 17d.
\textsuperscript{64}Cf84:2/15, p. 3; Cf83:2/3; see also, Burnett, Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, p. 67; and Sallis, Being and Logos, p. 30fn.
\textsuperscript{65}Cf83:2/3.
\textsuperscript{66}Apology, 17c.
\textsuperscript{67}Cf83:2/3.
\textsuperscript{68}Cf83:2/3; Apology, 17c.
that of his accusers along these three lines: it is his everyday mode of speech; it is an immediate translation of thought to speech; Socrates believes in the truth and justice of what he says.

Socrates’ discourse is a form of parrhésia because it “says everything” in that sense of saying all that and only that which is true, and to which he is committed. Furthermore, Socrates realizes that his way of speaking will neither be pleasant nor persuasive — he will not flatter the jury by saying what it wants to hear. The discourse of his accusers, however, is constructed through a technical manipulation of language to do just that. It is constructed in such a manner as to sway the jury’s opinion, to bind (lier) it to the opinion his accusers express. His accusers seek to convince their auditors to accept a certain account as true which will be determinative of their conduct. The discourse of Socrates has a different relation both to himself and to the others. On the one hand, he gives no thought to what constructions of language may or may not produce belief in the listener. He does not attempt to govern the listeners, to bind them to a certain decision by binding them to the opinion transmitted by means of his language. On the other hand, his words are related immediately to himself. Rather than using a technology of language which attempts to take hold of the hearer, he speaks words to which he binds himself. He speaks that which he knows to be true using only those words which offer themselves most immediately to him. His interest is not so much to produce a certain belief in his listener that will be determinative of the latter’s action, as it is to manifest to his listener the opinion, knowledge, that he himself holds, as well as the freedom and courage which define his subjectivity.

The second aspect of the Apology which Foucault distills is Socrates’ peculiar political choices, peculiar at least to the other citizens. Socrates says that he spent his days going from one individual to the next like a “father or older brother” advising each one to know who he is and to begin to take care of himself. He is aware of the fact that this behavior appears unusual to his fellow citizens: “It may seem curious that I should go round giving advice like this and busying myself in people’s private affairs, and yet never venture publicly to address you

\[CD\text{F83:2/3; CD\text{F84:2/15, pp. 6-7; Apology, 31c.}\]

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as a whole and advise on matters of state." Foucault sees this as an explicit reference to the *parrhésiastic* scene. It is before the assembly that one should speak the truth that one knows in order to guide others. Because he claims to speak the truth to each one about what is the best life, because he claims to say something which is in the best interest both of the city and of each of its citizens, Socrates appears before the assembly in the role of *parrhésiast*. It is in the agonistic setting of the assembly where the truth about the good, what must be done, and how, is put to the test and revealed as true.

The Athenians constituted their subjectivity as speakers and hearers of truth in terms of this scene with its agonistic relations, rhetorical structures, and rules. In his defense, Socrates marks a rupture within this function of *parrhésia*. He speaks the truth in order to guide the other but he refuses to play the established *parrhésiastic* game and to constitute himself as political *parrhésiast*. Why? Because he hears a voice. His *daemon* turned him away from political life, from speaking truth directly in the political field. His *daemon* prevented him from doing so because any attempt to speak the truth before the assembly would have resulted in death. Again, Foucault sees this as a reference not simply to the *parrhésiastic* game but to the problematization of democratic *parrhésia*. *Parrhésia* cannot serve its function of guiding the city through true discourse about the good. The assembly cannot hear and accept the truth.

There are, despite Socrates' general refusal of the *parrhésiastic* game, two occasions at which he acted in the political field. In both cases he resisted the authority of the majority because in his opinion the majority was acting unjustly. Socrates, in each case, acted in accordance with the law, chose the law over the majority view. In each case he risked death in order to avoid committing an unjust act. What is distinctive about both times, however, is that both times he does not voluntarily enter the political scene in order to speak with the purpose of asserting himself over others in order to guide them. In fact, rather than freely take up the role of *parrhésiast* in order to enter the struggle for power, Socrates each time is taken into the interior of the political game and asked to subsume his political subjectivity under

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70 Apology, 31c.
71 Cdf83:2/3; Cdf84:2/15, p. 11; Apology, 31d.
the function given him within this system. In such situations, Socrates had to constitute himself as a parrhésiast in the sense that he manifested his freedom and his courage in the refusal of an inauthentic and unjust political act.

Why risk death in such a refusal? "It is out of care of himself [souci de lui-même], out of concerning himself with himself [se preoccuper de lui-même], out of care for that which is himself, that he refuses to commit an unjust act..."\(^{72}\) The very scene where previously one accomplished one's freedom by courageously participating in the struggle for power and truth is the obstacle to Socrates' own experience of freedom and duty. Rather than letting himself be appropriated by a political decision made to determine his political, ethical identity as one of "them," he risked death. By risking death, Socrates is able to appropriate his own existence as a work and a freedom. Thus Socrates does not feel obligated to freely enter the assembly and risk the truth there to lead the others. He does not achieve himself in his freedom and courage through "care of the city." Rather, out of care for himself he evades this scene and enacts his own drama of truth. His political resistance in both cases where he risked death was a matter of not losing, not forgetting, himself by letting himself be claimed by the structure of non-differentiation which constantly levels each individual down to the same, to the "they."

The daemon that had warned Socrates away from politics had done so to preserve him for the task which is uniquely his: to care for himself and to use an altogether different form of discourse to care for the others. In other words, "being dead, he would not have been able ... to be useful to himself and to the Athenians."\(^{73}\) What underlies Socrates decision is a "certain relationship to himself and to the Athenians."\(^{74}\) Socrates avoids death because he wants to preserve and fulfill a certain relationship to himself and to others; a relationship which is beneficial to himself and to others. His daemon, the voice which intervenes in his life, calls him back to this task by turning him away from activities which are contrary to it: "this daemonic sign

\(^{72}\)CdF83:2/3.

\(^{73}\)"étant mort, il n'aurait pas pu — c'est ce qui est dit dans le text — être utile à lui-même et aux athéniens."CdF84:2/15, p. 16.

\(^{74}\)"certain rapport à lui-même et aux athéniens."Ibid., p. 17.
which turned him away from politics ... this daemonic sign had as its effect — and this was without a doubt its function — to protect this very task and the charge which Socrates had received [from the god].”

However, where Socrates is implicated in the political field, where he must choose between the possibility of death or committing an injustice, he must, by way of his refusal, accept the risk of death and thereby re-claim himself, manifestly binding himself to his freedom and courage.

The third aspect of the Apology which Foucault distills stems from Socrates’ claim that though he refused to play the political game directly, he performed an activity of even greater value to the city. By remaining outside of the political field, he exercises a positive function of parrhésia in a philosophical rather than political relationship. Foucault tells us that the task to which the divine voice calls Socrates is “a certain exercise, a certain practice of speaking the truth ... completely different from those which can take place in the political scene.” Socratic philosophy appears as a new game of truth, a new form of parrhésia whose scene is outside the political game of parrhésia, but whose effects are positive with respect to the political life of the city.

Foucault isolates what he calls three essential “moments” of Socrates’ practice of philosophy as it is described to us in the Apology. The first moment is evident in Socrates relationship to the Oracular utterance. The Oracle asserts that no man is wiser than Socrates. Rather than accept in the “field of reality” the words of the Oracle and try to interpret their meaning, Socrates submits them to an “investigation” (recherche, zetesis) in order to discover their “truth.” He shifts the meaning of the Oracular utterance from revelation of the real to the field of logos, assertion, and therefore to the game of true and false. The assertion of the Oracle is to be tested and verified rather than accepted and interpreted. In order to test the assertion

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75 “ce signe démonique qui l’a détourné de la politique, de la politique mortelle, eh bien ce sign démonique a eu pour effet — et il avait sans doute pour fonction — de protéger justement ce tâche positive et la charge que Socrate avait réçu.” Ibid., p. 17.

76 “un certain exercice, une certaine pratique du dire vrai... tout à fait différent de ceux qui peuvent avoir lieu sur la scène politique.” Ibid., p. 18.

77 Ibid., pp. 19-36.

78 Ibid., pp. 19-22.
that Socrates is wisest, he “submits it to questioning,” to an “interrogation” (elenchos). He sets himself on a path of questioning and interrogating in order “to know if the prophecy can effectively become anélenktos — unarguable.” That is, the truth of this assertion will be established only when it is no longer arguable, no longer questionable. Socrates’ practice of philosophy begins as an interrogation into the truth of an assertion. Later this will become the general form of Socratic parrhésia. The first “moment” of Socratic philosophical practice is, then, the investigation which tests and verifies the truth of assertion by submitting it to interrogation.

How does Socrates carry out his investigation? Where does his path lead him to? This brings us to the second moment of his philosophical practice. In order to test the truth of the Oracle’s words, Socrates goes around the city confronting the other citizens and questioning them to see what they know, if they know more than he does. He begins by dividing the citizens into categories distinguishable in terms of knowledge. According to the general opinion, the politicians are the wisest, followed by the poets and finally the craftsmen. Socrates can only know the truth of the Oracle, which says that no man is wiser than he, by confronting and examining those citizens who are supposedly wisest. The interrogation of the Oracle, in this way, turns into an interrogation of the other citizens, it turns into an examination in which Socrates learns what relationship the others have to truth, what knowledge or wisdom they possess. The test of the Oracle takes the form, therefore, of an “examination” (exetasis). Socrates approaches and engages individuals outside the assembly, comes into contact with them in a private relationship, and examines them with respect to the kind of knowledge they claim to have but really do not have. The exchange is a confrontation, a test of one against the other, the soul of Socrates against the soul of his interlocutor. The investigation of the truth of the oracular assertion unfolds through a “confrontation of souls.”


discover who is wiser, he confronts, examines, interrogates the others to learn the condition of their souls — to learn what kind of relationship maintains itself between their souls and the truth.

The purpose of this confrontation and examination is to learn whether the Oracle has spoken the truth. But the truth of the oracular pronouncement is at the same time the truth about Socrates himself. The truth which the Oracle reveals concerns the condition of Socrates’ own soul. The path of interrogations and confrontations leads, therefore, to a kind of self-knowledge — knowledge about the relationship which one has to the truth, knowledge about the knowledge which gives shape to one’s soul and one’s life. Of course, all the others, when questioned by Socrates, claim knowledge which they do not really possess. In the Apology, we are not told to what kind of questions, to what kind of confrontation, Socrates subjected the others. However, it is not hard to imagine based on the other dialogues and on the Apology itself, that the questions revolved around the themes of justice and of the “best life for man.” Furthermore, we can imagine the reason why the others claimed knowledge about these themes. They made a claim to such knowledge because they were claimed by a false opinion, the majority opinion, the one inscribed in their lives and in their souls by the force of the assembly and the words of the sophists. They claim knowledge but in fact they are ignorant because they have never taken care of the state of their souls. Always believing they already possessed self-knowledge, they never sought out the “true education” by means of which true discourse comes to presence in the soul. By exposing the ignorance and the self-neglect, the self-forgetfulness, characteristic of the others, this confrontation leads Socrates to the truth about himself; he learns that he is wiser than the others because he, paradoxically, knows that he knows nothing. “It is in this manner that the soul of Socrates becomes the touchstone — bassanos — the touchstone of the souls of the others.” The second moment of Socratic philosophy is the examination of oneself through the confrontation of souls which results in self-knowledge.

83 Republic, 560b.
Socrates’ practice of philosophy leads him to self-knowledge. This takes place not through “teaching” but through the confrontation by which the truth about himself is revealed to him. This brings us to the third moment of Socratic philosophy. The confrontation of souls has illuminated in Socrates a self-knowledge. Foucault points out that this self-knowledge opens Socrates to another, unexpected form of knowledge, a deeper and transformative relationship to the truth. After having confronted all those who claim to know, who claim wisdom, Socrates realizes that he is the wisest, but through this realization the meaning of the Oracle reveals itself to him and this gives to his (self-) knowledge its definitive form: the god speaks out of care, care for the city itself and care for each of the individuals who live in it. The god speaks for the very purpose of setting Socrates on a path, on a mission of confronting and examining everyone he meets, testing each one in such a way that each one becomes aware of the negligence which defines his relationship to himself. Socrates’ knowledge of his relationship to the truth, that he knows nothing, is in fact a form of truth, a new relationship to himself, that of care of the self, the form of truth through which one knows that one must care about the soul, reason and truth. The practice of care is, in a sense, the very same practice Socrates has been engaged in since receiving the Oracle, but now this practice is transformed from within — Socrates continues to confront others, continues to examine them, to reveal the relationship which they maintain to the truth (which in fact they neglect entirely) but he no longer tests the words of the Oracle. Rather, he performs the mission which the god has given to him, to care for the care that others must take of themselves. This is the essence of Socratic philosophical parrhésia. The god has put Socrates among the others like a soldier who is charged with the task of maintaining a constant vigilance over them. The purpose of this vigilance, which unfolds as confrontation and examination, is to “incite them to occupy themselves with themselves ... with their reason, with the truth and with their soul — phronésis, alétheia, psyché.” Others have neglected and forgotten themselves because of their concern for

85 Apology, 29d-e; Cdf84:2/15, p. 28.
86 Cdf84:2/15, pp. 27-28
87 les inciter à s’occuper d’eux-mêmes, et dit le texte, de leur raison, de la vérité et de leur âme — phronésis, alétheia, psyché.” Ibid., p. 28.
“wealth and reputation.” They are ignorant, they lack *phronésis*, because they do not know the nature of their souls. Socrates’ practice of philosophy, the examination of himself and others with respect to the knowledge they claim, is a practice of care of the self. Through the contest of souls one is led to the recognition of one’s ignorance. This recognition incites one to begin to care for oneself, that is, one’s soul, one’s reason and the truth. In this way care is the condition of possibility of political life because it detaches one from the inadequate self-interpretation which causes and is caused by that self-neglect which inhibits political life.

The care that Socrates takes for himself is a care for the care that others must take of themselves.\(^{88}\) The place of the philosopher, the activity and the life of the philosopher is, therefore, defined by its special relationship to others, to the truth and to oneself. The philosopher must live a certain kind of life, he must neglect the concerns of others, not to withdraw to a life of solitude and quiet contemplation, but rather to transform the way he inhabits the everyday world and lives among others. Socrates must neglect the everyday projects of the city, first because he has to concern himself with something else, he must practice a constant vigilance over the souls of the others and the form of existence which they choose. But, he must also detach himself from the false self-interpretation which the ordinary mode of existence presupposes and constantly re-inscribes in one’s soul — the philosophical life detaches itself from the concerns of everyday life, from the neglect of the self, so that it can lead another kind of life, have another kind of relationship to the others.

It is through confrontation, philosophical *parrhésia*, that one discovers the truth of oneself. Self-neglect, the absorption of oneself into the non-differentiation of the general opinion, the concern for wealth, power, and reputation is “cured” by Socrates’ *parrhésia*. Care of the self produces an *éthos* which founds a just life. By means of *parrhésia* one will be led to the self-knowledge one needs to govern oneself, to conduct oneself well. Without this *éthos* political life will continue to be inauthentic because the citizens will lack the knowledge to “make good decisions ... and avoid false ones.”\(^{89}\) Philosophical

\(^{88}\)Ibid., p. 37.

\(^{89}\)“prendre les bonnes décisions...[et]...chasser les opinions fausses.” Ibid., p. 28.
parrhésia is a care of the self which responds to the political crisis, the crisis of political discourse and subjectivity, by producing an ethos — a mode of subjectivity — which is able to speak and listen to the truth.

Conclusion

Foucault’s reading of Plato was part of his continuing re-invention of his own way of thinking in the effort to think differently. In the turn towards the subjective dimension as it shows itself through the arts of the self and especially through the practice of parrhésia, we see a new facet of his project. It is an attempt to retrieve a “neglected” possibility of ethical subjectivity — the possibility of thinking understood as taking care of oneself. If Foucault’s earlier projects represented an attempt to bring to light the relations of power and knowledge which narrowed and limited freedom, then this last project represents his effort to expand that freedom by redefining it. Foucault always stressed that modern power functions by producing individual subjects. Therefore, his claim in his 1982 Collège course makes perfect sense: the care of the self, the ethics of self fashioning, is an ideal point of resistance to power. It was his encounter with the classical texts of Western philosophy — with Plato’s Socrates in particular — that inspired in him a new consciousness of his own freedom as a thinker. However, he was only open to the creative potential contained within these texts because of his earlier effort to expose the forces operating within his own thought that confined those texts inside the academic discipline of philosophy.