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The Cosmopolitics of *Parrhesia*: Foucault and Truth-Telling as Human Right

This is my question:

At what price can subjects speak the truth about themselves?

Michel Foucault, "Structuralism and Poststructuralism"

Truth-Telling as Human Right

In June 1981, at the inaugural meeting of the United Nations International Committee Against Piracy, Michel Foucault appealed to the notion of "international citizenship" on behalf of Vietnamese boat people (Foucault 1984a, p. 22).⁵⁹ Following the Fall of Saigon some six years before, hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese had begun to flee the country by sea, but no government at the time was willing to halt their brutal and recurring victimization by pirates in the Gulf of Thailand and the South China Sea. Pirates had historically been considered "enemies of humanity" for their stateless status according to international maritime law and their "unpolitical," personally driven motives for assaulting members of any nation-state (Schmitt 2011, p. 28). Furthermore, the 1958 Convention on the High Seas, the 1974 International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea, and the 1979 International Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue had specified that member states were required to aid people in distress at sea (UNHCR 2011).⁶⁰ And yet, help did not come from any government. So Foucault reminded his listeners in Geneva of their moral duty as international citizens, a duty that obligated everyone "to speak out against every abuse of power, whoever its perpetrator, whoever its victims." He said: "It is a duty of this international citizenship to bring always to the eyes and ears of governments the testimony of people's misfortunes for which it is not true that they are not responsible" (Foucault 1984a, p. 22). By recognizing the work of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as Amnesty International, Terre des Hommes, and Cap Anamur,

⁵⁹ All translations are mine unless otherwise stated.

⁶⁰ The three conventions provided an international framework for rescuing people in distress at sea regardless of citizenship, mode of transportation, and number.

Foucault put forth an ethical framework for confronting indifferent or idle governments in violation of or at least in disregard of international human rights. Since states refused to share political power with their citizens in confirmation of Max Weber's characterization of politics as a vocational "monopoly," Foucault contended that this "division of labor" in the public sphere was a universal condition under which individual subjects around the globe experienced a certain shared difficulty (Weber 1919, p. 4, p. 10). In fact, since governments distinguished themselves from other political associations by using physical force as a legitimate means to monopolize power, this distinction gave citizens everywhere "an absolute right to stand up and speak to those in power" (Foucault 1984a, p. 22). What entitled them to public opinion – and thus, to mobilizing shame – was the membership in an international community of commonly governed subjects: "After all, we are all of the governed and, for this reason, in solidarity" (Foucault 1984a, p. 22).⁶¹

On the surface, then, Foucault presented an adversarial or agonistic model of democracy, pitting the liberal emphasis on individual rights against the representational responsibility for commons. The title of his speech – "Facing Governments: The Rights of Man" – alluded to this universal opposition to state sovereignty. Since political regimes had abandoned the obligation to safeguard each and every citizen in the rapidly globalizing market economy, what Foucault suggested was the idea that only a persistent insistence on populist reason constructed an alternative public sphere where the plight of abused prisoners, political dissidents, refugees, and the poor could properly be heard.

Upon closer examination, though, Foucault's impassioned and somewhat hastily composed appeal to the notion of international citizenship turned out to be far more complicated. As he pointed out in succinct terms, the burden of monitoring human rights violations fell upon private individuals whose impatience with politics as usual led to international humanitarian initiatives. Such modes of resistance came from "indignant" individuals who despite having no qualification for representation joined hands across international borders in opposition to national governments. For Foucault, this status of non-representation was pivotal for claiming the right to say truth to power in neoliberal democracy: "So who appointed us? No one. And that is precisely what constitutes our right" (Foucault 1984a, p. 22).⁶² Being governed and yet abused, ignored or neglected by state repre-

⁶¹ I borrow the term "mobilizing shame" from Thomas Keenan who draws upon Kant to argue that "*mobilizing shame* has Enlightenment roots" insofar as reason constitutes a faculty of public exchange that "exposes, reveals, and argues" (Keenan 2004, p. 436).

⁶² Jacques Rancière refers to Book III of Plato's *Laws* to specify how the seventh possible quali-

sentatives gave individual citizens both the right and the duty to stand together in solidarity. It grounded their moral obligation to tell the truth in international citizenship.

According to Foucault, international human rights groups managed to create “this new right – that of private individuals to intervene effectively in the sphere of international relations and strategies” and to refute “people’s misfortune” as “a silent remainder of politics” (Foucault 1984a, p. 22). Although Foucault simplified human rights as the rights of speechless victims, victims who were unable to claim their rights as national citizens, he singled out Peter Beneson of Amnesty International, Edmond Kaiser of Terre des Hommes, and Christel and Rupert Neudeck of Cap Anamur as exemplary cosmopolitans who pressed states to take action and came first in offering their help to Vietnamese asylum seekers. While mobilizing passions at local and national levels, they exposed the untruth of public officials on the world stage. Acting upon their right as governed subjects, these private citizens told the truth about hypocrisy, lies, and broken promises by indifferent governments.

I have opened this essay with a close reading of Foucault’s speech to address a broader issue he raises, namely truth-telling or *parrhesia* as a revolutionary practice in democracy and as an exercise in international citizenship. The origin of his intense interest in this speech act dates back to the second half of the 1970s when he began to work on ancient Greek modes of subjectivity and self-knowledge, coupled with public criticisms of the Gulag, the deportation of Klaus Croissant from France back to West Germany, and the widespread denunciation of the Iranian Revolution. As he reflected in one of his last interviews, Foucault was interested in statements of truth as opposed to scientific verifications and his intellectual trajectory moved accordingly from structures of power-knowledge to historical conditions under which political subjects considered themselves objects of critical inquiry. He explained this turn as follows: “This is my question: At what

fication for government is illustrative of this paradox. Four of the seven qualifications (*axiomata*) are traditional insofar as they are related to “positions of authority” (master and slave, parents and children) and “the difference of birth” (young and old, nobles and serfs). The fifth qualification has to do with “the principle of principles” and that is “the power of those with a superior nature, of the strong over the weak.” The sixth qualification is grounded in science; it is “the power of those who know over those who do not.” As Rancière goes on to say, Plato does not stop there. He adds a seventh one, which introduces a “paradox” to democratic rule. Here, “democracy is characterized by the drawing of lots, or the complete absence of any entitlement to govern.” In other words, democratic rule originates in “the absence of entitlement” (Rancière 2010, p. 31).

price can subjects speak the truth about themselves?” (Foucault 1999, p. 444). For Foucault, telling the truth constituted a communicative – and thus essentially political – activity in which speaker and listener did not interact with each other on equal terms. Moreover, it was a deeply personal and courageous deed whose truth claim aimed to improve the speaker’s life and the lives of others. As Foucault added, the problem with this risky practice was that a high price had to be paid; *parrhesia* was rarely possible for free. What concerns me in this essay is Foucault’s critical valuation of veridiction in international solidarity with human beings who are equally governed, but whose rights as individual citizens are violated by governments in a spectacle of false claims and neoliberal policies. If humanitarian aid in the form of money is always already corrupt in a profit-driven coordination between governments and businesses, Foucault asks how telling the truth in its unembellished entirety intervenes in such hegemonic relations and strategies beyond politics as usual. What is it about this ethical practice in cosmopolitanism that has the potential to reject the lies of corrupt and irresponsible states and resists the instrumentalization of truth claims in theatrical public relations? Under what circumstances does *parrhesia* engender a truly transformative politics?

Although this investigation originates in the desire to understand more deeply the fluid concept of solidarity in European intellectual thought, I want to investigate Foucault’s concern for human rights toward the end of his manifold life – basically, during the early 1980s – as a way of thinking through what Pheng Cheah has recently identified as variously alienating processes in global modernity, processes that compel individuals and communities “to radically rethink what it means to be human” (Cheah 2006, p. 3). At the risk of veering too far into the present, let us briefly revisit Cheah’s study, *Inhuman Conditions*, before we examine the relevance of Foucault’s unresolved struggle with *parrhesia* as a transhistorical category for a radically ethical or militant form of life under state surveillance.

Whether the impetus for a transformative horizon has to do with relentless capitalist exploitation, irresponsible technoscientific manipulation or excessive military violence is a central question for everyone to consider. For it determines the production of truth in modern politics. However, Cheah argues that the greatest challenge for humanity is the international division of labor after the end of the Cold War. He focuses on two correlating normative discourses to take issue with the dominant social-scientific presuppositions of humanism. One is that of cosmopolitanism and the other one is of human rights. “Both phenomena,” Cheah asserts, “are generally viewed as placing actual and normative limits on the efficacy of national culture and the sovereignty of the nation-state, which is seen as particularistic, oppressive, and even totalitarian” (Cheah 2006, p. 3). As cosmo-

politanism “erodes national parochialism and facilitates the arduous process of establishing a platform for transnational political regulation,” what this ideal as “a form of collective consciousness” offers is a critical – and not strictly oppositional – distance from “the instrumentality of sovereign national states” upon which human rights depend for enforcement (Cheah 2006, p. 5). Thus, the nation continues to serve as an essential point of orientation for cosmopolitanism and the human rights regime.

By instrumentality Cheah means to suggest Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno’s distinction of critical reason from instrumental reason, the latter being a blind, intoxicating, and abusive use of power in modern society. In contradistinction from this dehumanizing technology, which perverts progress and civilization into lethal weapons of destruction, Cheah conceives of cosmopolitanism as “a higher, self-recursive form of reason” whereby “the power to remake the world and ourselves” comes to fruition once again in rational terms (Cheah 2006, p. 6). If the Enlightenment notion of *Bildung* connotes a systematic formation of individual subjects free of fear and domination, Cheah understands cosmopolitanism to be an extension of this originally bourgeois pedagogy beyond the national body for the purpose of engendering a world community. It connotes, he writes, “a change in the *form* of the ordering of collective political life” to subsume cultural difference, national belonging, and historical particularity under common translocal interests (Cheah 2006, p. 8). Cheah concludes that this formative change takes place primarily through “symbols and images” (Cheah 2006, p. 6).⁶³

I concur with Cheah that symbolism plays an essential role in mobilizing cosmopolitan solidarity or in shaming abusive governments, but as he admits, there is a key problem in this contestation. That is, a neat abstract separation between instrumentality and reason does not do justice to the fact that “neither human rights nor cosmopolitan solidarities can escape from being entangled within the

⁶³ It is beyond the scope of this essay to explore Foucault’s deep suspicion toward the visual as a principal mode of sense-making in Western culture. According to Martin Jay, Foucault does not completely ignore the difference between truth-telling and “truth-showing.” For more information, see Jay (2008, p. 53). Andrew Herscher has also investigated the problematic use of satellite images not only for human rights advocacy, but also for interstate violence. He refers to this development as “surveillance witnessing,” that is, “a hybrid visual practice that has emerged at the intersection between satellite surveillance and human rights witnessing.” Used by governments, businesses, and non-governmental organizations, this praxis compromises the work that human rights advocacy has historically given itself. See Herscher (2014, p. 473).

field of instrumentality” (Cheah 2006, p. 8) Since dignifying figurations of the human are bound to socioeconomic, military, and political technologies or, more generally speaking, to the various forms of *technê* in modern society, the challenge is to determine how symbols and images come in handy for engendering politically transformative actions at national and international levels. To be sure, the scarcity of material objects as modern-day technologies gives way to abundant immaterial objects – words and images, feelings and thoughts – as foundations of a radically alternative cosmopolitan economy, but even here “a paradoxical interplay between radical mutability and social inertia” rules, thus exposing a certain arbitrariness or risk in cosmopolitan life (Cheah 2006, p. 9). Although the impetus for rethinking the human in the age of globalization comes from a strong conviction in the human ability to remake the world, the kind of cosmopolitan solidarity of which Cheah speaks does not escape from the ambiguity, corruption or perversion of *technê* in modern society. Cosmopolitans have to wrestle with the unruly nature of words and images, and of feelings and thoughts, as they engage in political struggles between the state’s instrumental reason and a person’s critical reason.

Cheah’s critique of human rights in the post-Cold War era is invaluable not least because he investigates the material conditions under which normative claims and universal aspirations impede globally humanizing projects. He points out that nationalism and cosmopolitanism do not oppose each other as much as they overlap with each other in the age of globalization, and that NGOs undermine simplistic North-South and East-West divisions in the new world disorder. He makes clear that non-Western governments do not oppose globalization per se, but that they object to Western models of development and aid: “The fight is between different globalizing models of capitalist accumulation attempting to assert economic hegemony” (Cheah 2006, p. 148). NGOs criticize this fight by bringing into view indigenous, feminist, ecocritical, and postcolonial perspectives, all of which urgently call for alternatives to market-driven, state-steered operations in global liberal capitalism. The challenge they face is a predominant figuration of the human in contemporary globalization talk, a representation that ultimately dehumanizes, excludes or rejects certain categories of humanity in the international division of labor or in the interest of national sovereignty. This challenge, Cheah concludes, is first and foremost for the humanities.

Cheah refers to Jürgen Habermas’s concept of communicative action in the *Öffentlichkeit* as a place for engendering procedural democracy in pursuit of cosmopolitan solidarity and in protection of freedom and dignity. He also points out that this normative formulation presupposes “the relative autonomy of the political from the economic,” an assumption that enables Habermas to conceive of

power, but not money, in democratic terms (Cheah 2006, p. 47). As Cheah illustrates, though, power and money are inseparable in modern society; they are inextricably woven together into the fabric of market-driven neoliberal policies. “It is not completely true, as Habermas envisions, that collectively binding decisions are capable of regulating ‘the actions of the administrative-bureaucratic state apparatus’ because money is not subject to strict regulation” (Cheah 2006, p. 47). Does this mean that symbols and images bypass or cut through the dehumanizing technologies in late capitalism? Do they facilitate ethical practices in revaluing persons and things in global modernity? For Cheah, the answer is: no. In today’s interconnected world, he believes that global capital permeates every sociopolitical relation and that cultural self-realization is always implicated in this instrumentalization. Although human rights and cosmopolitanism serve to safeguard unalienable, non-disciplinary definitions of the human on the foundations of individual freedom and personal dignity, both of them are partly thrown off by neoliberal prescriptions.

Cheah goes on to examine Kant’s philosophical project – *Entwurf* – on perpetual peace to register “a shift from a merely voluntary ethical community of intellectuals to a world political community grounded in right” (Cheah 2006, p. 22).⁶⁴ He locates the emergence of Kant’s modern cosmopolitan horizon in “a philosophical republicanism and federalism designed to reform the absolutist dynastic state” (Cheah 2006, p. 23). In the following pages, I want to take a slightly different route because Foucault similarly turns to Kant to clarify the definition of the human and offer a critical way out of being “just ‘parts of a machine’” in modern society (Foucault 2010, p. 35). He concentrates on Kant’s foundational essay “What is Enlightenment?” to grapple with the potential of opposing disciplinary constraints on humanity.⁶⁵ Instead of criticizing rationalism *tout court*, this detour enables the French philosopher to reveal how certain forms of rationality are practiced in Western societies.⁶⁶ It goes a long way in illuminating *par-*

⁶⁴ For a critical examination of Kant’s *Entwurf* in allusion to Abbé de Saint-Pierre’s *Projet*, see Wood (1998, p. 66).

⁶⁵ Foucault publishes a more polished, shorter and slightly different version of his text in 1984. See Foucault (1984b, pp. 32–50). In this essay, I refer mostly to his lecture because of its sustained connection between *Aufklärung* and *parrhesia*.

⁶⁶ As David Macey points out, Foucault calls upon Maurice Agulhon, president of the Société d’Histoire de la Révolution de 1848, during a public debate in May 1978 to consider the same point of departure for a rigorously historical and philosophical inquiry into the penal system: “‘Why not begin a major historical enquiry into the way the *Aufklärung* has been per-

rhesis as an ethico-political practice in world citizenship, as well as Foucault's philosophical conception of self vis-à-vis contemporary governmentality.

Kant's Aufklärung

Since money rules over every citizen, since no one lives outside of the force field of global capital, so to speak, Foucault calls attention to the ancient Greek notion of *parrhesia* (παρρησία), or what he describes as "true discourse in the political realm," as a radically democratic solution to the hegemonic logic of society (Foucault 2010, p. 6). He opens his 1983 lecture series at the Collège de France with a brief excursus of his intellectual trajectory in the history of thought and proceeds to explore how focusing on the concept of *parrhesia* illuminates revolutionary or subversive processes whereby private individuals transform into political subjects or universal subjects speaking as private individuals. Although Foucault invokes neither human rights nor cosmopolitanism, his study seeks to shed light on "the problem of the relations between government of self and government of others," a problem that he suggests affects every individual subject across time and space (Foucault 2010, p. 6). More specifically, Foucault identifies this problem as a matter of philosophy. For him, it is essentially a philosophical problem, one that concerns "the philosopher, the pedagogue," who is also "the writer (the qualified writer, translated into French as *savant*; *Gelehrter*; man of culture)," someone who has historically counseled the prince or has been responsible for enlightening the public (*Publikum*) (Foucault 2010, p. 6, p. 7).

At the heart of Foucault's lectures lies the Greek concept of veridiction, truth-telling (*dire-vrai*), free-spokenness (*franc-parler*) or saying everything (*dire-tout*) as a particular technology for "the constitution of [an] individual as subject for himself and for others" (Foucault 2010, p. 42). At first glance, this return to ancient Greece hardly seems relevant for modern politics, but Foucault asserts that nothing is further from the truth. It is true, he says, that everyone in the Greek *polis* has equal right to voice his opinion in public debate, but not everyone exercises this freedom due to lack of courage and virtue. Constitutive of citizenship, *isegoria* offers "the statutory right to speak," but *parrhesia* introduces an element

ceived, thought, imagined, exorcised, anathemised and reactivated in the Europe of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? That might be an interesting piece of 'historico-philosophical' work. Relations between historians and philosophers could be 'put to the test'" (Macey 1993, p. 405).

of difference to this constitutional framework, producing “a certain ascendancy of some over others” (Foucault 2010, p. 157). This paradox is the reason why there are rulers who take action (*arkhein*) and others who receive action (*arkhesthai*). Although every (adult male) subject (*polites*) is equally free as citizen, the practical difference in equal political freedom poses two ethico-political challenges for the republic (*res publica*): first, political resistance requires that individuals leave behind their laziness, complacency or fear – Kant later describes this pre-enlightened state as “immaturity” (*Unmündigkeit*) – and tell the truth even at the risk of dying; second, this risky exercise of freedom of speech is not to produce another division of labor within the already divided, hierarchical order of democracy.⁶⁷ To interrupt the monopoly of power in Athenian democracy, private individuals have the double task of expressing their personal conviction in the public sphere and standing together without a leader, without anyone “walking at the head” (*arkhein*).⁶⁸

Yet, Foucault does not discuss this topic for another week; instead, he goes on to introduce Kant’s arguably ambiguous definition of *Aufklärung* as “a little epigraph” to the lengthy examination of *parrhesia* for the rest of the lecture series (Foucault 2010, p. 6). As he reminds his audience, Kant’s essay appears in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* in December 1784. In the November 1784 issue, one also finds Kant’s *Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View* (*Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht*) and more essays follow in the 1785 and 1786 issues. For Foucault, this mode of publication is important because it suggests that Kant has a specific “notion of public” in mind (Foucault 2010, p. 7). Whereas Foucault addresses the audience within an institutional context, which is open to everyone, Kant considers the journal to be an essential framework at the end of the eighteenth century for cultivating the pedagogical relationship between writer and reader.⁶⁹ Foucault also points

⁶⁷ I refer to Kant at this point because he begins his essay with the following widely recognized sentences: “Enlightenment is man’s emergence from his self-imposed nonage. Nonage is the inability to use one’s own understanding without another’s guidance. This nonage is self-imposed if its cause lies not in lack of understanding but in indecision and lack of courage to use one’s own mind without another’s guidance” (“Aufklärung ist der Ausgang des Menschen aus seiner selbstverschuldeten Unmündigkeit. Unmündigkeit ist das Unvermögen, sich seines Verstandes ohne Leitung eines anderen zu bedienen”) (Kant 1784, p. 481).

⁶⁸ As Rancière writes in his definition of politics, “the meaning of *arkhein*” is “to walk at the head.” Consequently, he goes on to say, “if there is one who walks at the head, then the others must necessarily walk behind” (Rancière 2010, p. 30).

⁶⁹ It is important to note that Foucault begins his first lecture with a complaint about the distance between himself and the public. The lecture series is open to everyone and, as such, it

out that Moses Mendelssohn's response to the same question "What is Enlightenment?" has appeared in the same journal only a few months earlier, indicating a coincidental crossing of the Protestant *Aufklärung* and the Jewish *Haskala* and signaling "not only the right, but also the necessity of an absolute freedom of not only conscience, but also of expression in relation to anything that might be a religious practice considered as a necessarily private activity" (Foucault 2010, p. 10). Last but not least, Foucault distinguishes Kant's philosophical deliberation on *Aufklärung* from every other work, as questions of genealogy or historical progress pave the way to public intervention in the present "for the first time" (Foucault 2010, p. 11). Foucault spells them out in the following three ways:

The question focuses on what this present is. First of all, among all the elements of the present, the question focuses on the definition of one particular element that is to be recognized, distinguished, and deciphered. What is it in the present that currently has meaning for philosophical reflection? Second, the answer that Kant tries to give to the questions involves showing how this element is the bearer or expression of a process which concerns thought, knowledge, philosophy. Finally, third, within this reflection on this element of the present which is the bearer of or which reveals a process, what is to be shown is in what respect and how the person who speaks as a thinker, a *savant*, a philosopher, is himself a part of this process. But it is even more complicated than this. He has to show not only how he is part of this process, but how, as such, as *savant*, philosopher, or thinker, he has a role in this process in which he is thus both an element and an actor (Foucault 2010, p. 12).

Reflective of his own concern with the philosopher's role in the public sphere, Foucault works through Kant's essay to ask what it means to be a member of the "human community in general" and how the present connects him to a solidary project in particular (Foucault 1984b, p. 45). From his perspective, Kant is the first one in European intellectual history to examine how philosophy contributes to the realization of universal reason without giving rise to "dogmatism and heteronomy, along with illusion" (Foucault 1984b, p. 38). This explains why for Foucault *Aufklärung* is not a singular event tied to a philosophical tradition; rather, it constitutes "a critical attitude" that undergirds a philosopher's ideational position on political struggles between governors and governed (Macey 1994, p. 405).

Foucault builds upon this monumental work to formulate once again the philosopher's role in engendering and experiencing political change as one of many, which is to say, in solidarity. He says: "This 'we' has to become, or is in the process

involves Foucault's public use of reason. The opening remark makes clear, though, how difficult it is for him to resist private use of reason within the predetermined institutional context at the Collège de France.

of becoming, the object of the philosopher's own reflection. By the same token, it becomes impossible for the philosopher to dispense with an interrogation of his singular membership of this 'we'" (Foucault 2010, p. 13). The philosopher, the *savant*, the *Gelehrte* is directly responsible for addressing the public and shaping the present reality. Instead of blurring the singular in pursuit of the universal, the philosopher has to see things more clearly than others and show a way out of the unequal struggle between ruler and ruled in solidarity.⁷⁰

Foucault argues that Kant defines *Aufklärung* "simply as '*Ausgang*,' as way out, exit, a movement" (Foucault 2010, p. 27). In quoting the Latin phrase *Sapere aude*, Kant also suggests the universal validity of *Aufklärung* as "man's way out from the condition of tutelage," tutelage being "'the inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another'" (Foucault 2010, p. 27, p. 26). At this point, Foucault specifies the vagueness of this definition, which leaves open the question of agency, the direction of such a transformative passage, as well as the precise nature of "man." "Should man be understood to mean the human race as a species?" Foucault asks. "Or should man be understood to mean human society as the universal element within which different individual reasons join together? Are only some human societies the bearers of these values? Is it a matter of individuals, and if so, what individuals, and so on? The text just says 'man's way out'" (Foucault 2010, p. 28). Critical of Kant's blindness to the birth of political subjects only under certain conditions, Foucault argues that it is essential to be more specific.

According to Foucault, Kant attributes the state of tutelage to "an act, or rather to an attitude, a mode of behavior, a form of will," which result from a number of human frailties (Foucault 2010, p. 29). Among them are cowardice, fear, and laziness, as human beings do not necessarily take responsibility for thinking for themselves without the direction of others. By implication, those who direct others are individuals who take upon themselves the task of guiding fellow citizens out of tutelage. Some of them are genuinely caring, others are conniving and shrewd. Ultimately, though, all of them fail to "carry out this process of transformation" because they subjugate others to their authority, while speaking on behalf of others and impeding in the movement of free individual subjects (Foucault 2010, p. 34). They are false liberators, dangerous counsels, and ingenuous tutors.

⁷⁰ As Macey documents, this self-critical awareness resonates with Foucault's broader concern with the role of intellectuals in critique of conservative resurgence during the early 1980s (1993, p. 459).

Toward the end of the two-hour-long lecture, Foucault calls attention to Kant's famously confusing differentiation between the private use of reason – *Räsonnieren* – and the public one. As Foucault points out, the former applies to the use of the faculty of reason in a particular function for society where individuals are obliged to fulfill certain roles as members of the political body. Individuals think, argue, and probe what they are supposed to do, but ultimately they obey as private individuals. In the public use of reason, individuals do not address others in specific functions; rather, they speak as universal subjects making up “a dimension of the public,” which is “at the same time the dimension of the universal” (Foucault 2010, p. 36). Kant addresses readers publicly by publishing his works. Unlike Foucault who gives public lecture within the functional or institutional context of a university, Kant circulates his work through a journal, which counts as a public mode of communication with fellow universal subjects. Consequently, Foucault concludes, *Aufklärung* is opposed to tolerance because the former connotes a rational engagement with others as universal subjects, whereas the latter rules out “reasoning, discussion, and freedom of thought in its public form” (Foucault 2010, p. 37).

Returning to the quintessential question of agency in the present, Foucault criticizes Kant for being tautological and contradictory. Instead of answering where in the transformative process of *Aufklärung* the present is, Kant merely suggests the following in Foucault's paraphrase: “We are in the period, in the *Zeitalter*, in the age of *Aufklärung*” (Foucault 2010, p. 37). Foucault also mentions how Kant identifies fear, laziness, and cowardice as self-inflicted “obstacles” to practicing cultural self-realization only after having said that such “obstacles” have been overcome in Enlightenment. Furthermore, Foucault adds, Kant introduces Frederick the Great as a princely agent of liberation, someone whose refusal to prescribe religious norms in Prussia creates a clear division between private and public, but this suggestion is in contradiction with Kant's earlier statement regarding authoritative liberators, not to mention the wars that are waged for absolutist states in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

Paradoxically, then, Kant argues that “the greatest possible growth of this freedom of public thought,” which is, “opening this free and autonomous dimension of the universal for the use of the understanding,” fosters obedience in civil society (Foucault 2010, p. 38). The more the public is able to engage in free discourse, the more order there exists in the private household of the state. From Foucault's perspective, this analysis, as groundbreaking as it is, negates itself.

In the more formal version of this lecture published as an essay under the title “What Is Enlightenment?”, Foucault repeats that Kant's *Aufklärung* connotes “a phenomenon, an ongoing process,” as well as “a task and an obligation” (Foucault 1984b, p. 35). Much of the essay resonates with what Foucault says in the

lecture, but in print he places a greater emphasis on the interaction between two mutually dependent aspects of cultural self-realization in *Aufklärung*, namely collective labor and individual courage. He writes: “Enlightenment must be considered both as a process in which men participate collectively and as an act of courage to be accomplished personally” (Foucault 1984b, p. 35). The purpose of this dual praxis is to find “a ‘way out’” of the state of immaturity such that this “negative” definition of what Enlightenment is offers a solution to the necessity of freedom of religion and freedom of speech in an otherwise rigidly supervised absolutist state (Foucault 1984b, p. 34). As Foucault explains, Kant presents this political structure in a bold effort to sign “a sort of social contract” with Frederick II (Foucault 1984b, p. 37). Despite its ambiguous and contradictory elements, Kant delineates a way out of the political struggle between ruler and ruled without walking at the head, since everyone is capable of using reason legitimately, rightfully, and in public. For Foucault, this ontological study of modernity offers a thoughtful model for caring for oneself and for others.

For the rest of the lecture series between January 12 and March 9, Foucault does not refer to Kant anymore; instead, he examines the ancient Greek notion of *parrhesia* in its “rich, ambiguous, and difficult” sense as “a virtue, a quality,” “a duty,” and “a technique, a process” (Foucault 2010, p. 43). He describes the parrhesiast as someone who is “responsible for directing others, and particularly for directing them in their effort, their attempt to constitute an appropriate relationship to themselves” (Foucault 2010, p. 43). This obligation or responsibility, he explains, means telling “the whole truth” even at the risk of dying, not to mention the possibility of angering the listener (Foucault 2010, p. 43). In caring about oneself and others, the parrhesiast stands up against the tyrant instead of signing a sort of reconciliatory contract with him. Similar to *Aufklärung*, *parrhesia* is a “spidery” notion, but where they differ from each other is in the way cultural realization via truth-telling – the transformative passage from *Unmündigkeit* to courage – is pursued for oneself and for others regardless of consequences (Foucault 2010, p. 45). Despite the strong resonance between these concepts, Foucault highlights the revolutionary aspect of *parrhesia*, an aspect that is conspicuously absent from Kant’s definition of *Aufklärung*. According to Foucault, this explains why Kant revises “the agent of *Aufklärung*” in *The Contest of the Faculties* (*Der Streit der Fakultäten*, 1798) (Foucault 2010, p. 39). Here, Kant tries to resolve the contradictions in his originally cautious conception of *Aufklärung* by replacing Frederick the Great with the kind of revolutionary “spectacle” that mobilizes “spectators”. (Foucault 2010, p. 17).

Parrhesia in *International Citizenship*

During the last decade of his life between the late 1970s and early 80s, Foucault was drawn to the idea that living dangerously or being close to death played a central role in resisting modern biopolitical technologies. The kinds of “experiences” he interrogated had marked paradigmatic shifts from biopower, domination, and discipline to biopolitics, courage, and veridiction (Foucault 2010, p. 5). His support for the Iranian Revolution, Poland’s *Solidarność*, and Vietnamese boat people exemplified outside of his scholarship the ways in which he imagined potentials for opposing state-sponsored and market-driven productions of truth with money and power, with money *as* power.⁷¹ He argued that governments around the globe practiced rituals in truth-making, that they were constantly engaged in theatrical or lyrical manipulations of “a whole restrictive economy” (Foucault 1990, p. 18). Under such devastating circumstances, he felt that he had a particular responsibility as philosopher not for partaking in revolutions directly since this was insignificant and of lesser value, but for bearing witness to revolutionary passions or what he called “revolutionary enthusiasm.” (Foucault 2010, p. 39). Since every revolution, whether it was successful or not, was chaotic, what mattered to him, as Kant had said before him, was the people’s ability to exercise its right to shape the political constitution and avoid war (Foucault 2010, p. 18). A revolution was “the completion and continuation of the very process of *Aufklärung*” insofar as it engraved enthusiasm, sympathy, and potential for moving from *Unmündigkeit* to democratic politics in people’s memory. Thus, *parrhesia* constituted a public mode of testimony to this transformative process.

According to Laurence McFalls and Mariella Pandolfi, Foucault was aware of the fact that *parrhesia* as a radical exercise in truth-telling did not go so far as to undermine completely the truth of the market in contemporary governance. As

⁷¹ According to Janet Afary, it is important to differentiate Foucault’s intimate spectatorship of the Iranian Revolution – that is, Komeini’s Islamic fight against the modern and authoritative Shah – from the other human rights-related events. She writes: “While in no way minimizing the political significance of these interventions over Poland and the Vietnamese boat people, each of which had an impact on French politics, we maintain that they had a character very different from Foucault’s writings on Iran.” First, she claims, Foucault wrote a lot more about Iran than he did about Poland or Vietnam. Second, his support for the Polish movement and the Vietnamese boat people was in line with others, most notably Jean-Paul Sartre and Raymond Aron, Pierre Bourdieu and Simone Signoret. On Iran, though, he was completely alone. See Afary (2005, p. 8). Macey also illustrates how Foucault’s journalistic coverage of events in Iran exposes a deep “dilemma in terms of the duties of the intellectual” (1993, p. 411).

ubiquitous as it was, money influenced how individuals and communities were treated by public officials and in social services. Yet, Foucault presented “only the narrowest of escape routes from therapeutic dystopia,” meaning a universal and non-transparent mode of subjecting individual and collective practices of care to economic calculations of efficiency and profit-making in neoliberal managements of governmentality (McFalls and Pandolfi 2014, p. 185). On the surface, these policies appeared to be beneficial and benevolent, but below the surface they ruled out communicative procedures. For Foucault, *parrhesia* was the only possible answer to such *therapeusis*.

Although Foucault teased out contradictions in Kant’s groundbreaking definition of *Aufklärung*, the former made clear on numerous occasions – both in the lecture and elsewhere – that he belonged to the latter’s critical tradition ranging from Weber and Nietzsche to the Frankfurt School. It was essential that he found his entry into the ancient Greek concept of *parrhesia* through Kant’s modern conception of *Aufklärung* as part of his genealogical inquiry into contemporary neoliberal political economy. This did not mean that Foucault dismissed Nietzsche while embracing Kant toward the end of his life. On the contrary. His deliberations on the various technologies of self in modern society built upon Nietzsche’s conception of self as the product of a creative, if not aesthetic, work. Furthermore, the notion of *Aufklärung* signaled a transhistorical engagement with or a general tendency toward a theory of governmentality or a culture of self and others.

Michael Hardt has argued that Foucault’s intense, yet incomplete inquiry into the notion of *parrhesia* is indicative of “a militant life,” “a revolutionary life,” which seeks to blur boundaries between the private and the public (Foucault 2010, p. 159). The return to ancient Greek thought provides Foucault with a safe “distance” from which to analyze contemporary political crises and new possibilities for freedom in liberal democracy (Hardt 2010, p. 151). I concur with Hardt’s reading insofar as Foucault’s understanding of *parrhesia* and *Aufklärung* manifests itself in a firm commitment to cultural self-realization in modern society. He probes particular ways of joining political struggles as a philosopher in the era of liberal governance. This is the reason why at the end of his essay on Enlightenment Foucault calls for a “critical ontology of ourselves,” which is not “a theory, a doctrine, nor even a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating”; rather, it connotes “an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them” (Foucault 1984b, p. 50).

Foucault conceived of *parrhesia* as a verbal revolutionary action whereby Kant’s contradictory notion of *Aufklärung* could be revitalized in the discursive regime. If *Aufklärung* meant a transformative process in which human beings

realized themselves as rational political subjects, *parrhesia* was a concept long forgotten in modern society for insisting upon this cultural realization in radically democratic terms. After his previous scholarship on biopower had forced him to search for a solution to or a way out of the disciplinary formation of politics in biopower, Foucault discovered in *parrhesia* the potential for going a step further and subverting the false claims of governments united by common interests in self-enrichment, power, and oligarchy. Although words and images were always already in circulation within neoliberal political economy, this philosophical framework offered an ancient, yet still modern possibility of consolidating governed citizens around the globe in solidarity.

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