# INTRODUCTION

## THE HISTORY OF SYSTEMS OF THOUGHT

Michel Foucault delivered his first lecture at the Collège de France, France's most prestigious academic institution, on December 1970, at the age of forty-four.[1] He named his chair at the Collège "The History of Systems of Thought." "*Systems of thought*," he wrote, "are the forms in which, during a given period of time, knowledges [*savoirs*] individualize, achieve an equilibrium, and enter into communication."*

Foucault divided his work on the history of systems of thought into three interrelated parts, the "re-examination of knowledge, the conditions of knowledge, and the knowing subject."[2] Faithful to the broad contours of this program, he moved increasingly in the last decade or so of his life toward an emphasis on the third term, the knowing subject.

As part of his application to the Collège de France, Foucault had submitted a project of instruction and research, on "the knowledge [*savoir*] of heredity" as a system of thought. The choice of heredity as a research topic is fully in line with the work he had carried out in cooperation with Georges Canguilhem, the historian and philosopher of the life sciences with whom he was working during this period. The project's goal was to expand the analysis of natural history and biology, which Foucault had undertaken in *The Order of Things*. How did it happen, he asked, that a nonprestigious set of knowledges, such as those surrounding breeding, eventually took the form and function of a science—*une connaissance scientifique*—as important as genetics? In what specific fashion did this particular science "take up" more general historical events and enter into relations with other structures? The answers to these questions, Foucault held, would require philosophical concepts *and* detailed empirical inquiry. He wrote that, whenever possible, he would employ "a concrete example" to "serve as a testing ground for analysis." This deceptively simple rule of thumb provided him with a powerful means to counterbalance the weaknesses and to multiply the strengths of standard historical and philosophical approaches. He drew on existing resources, putting them to new uses. From the

*See p. 5 of this volume. Hereafter, all page citations given in parentheses are to this volume.

great French tradition of the *Annales* school of historical analysis, he retained an emphasis on long-term and impersonal economic and social trends; from the equally distinctive French lineage of the history of science, he adopted an emphasis on concepts and epistemological rupture points. One could say, to simplify, that he sought to work at the nexus where the history of practices met the history of concepts.

In 1966, Foucault had ended his most famous book, *The Order of Things*, impatiently awaiting the dispersal of the episteme of Man, thinking he discerned glimmers of an imminent reassemblage of language into a new form. In his inaugural lecture at the Collège, "The Order of Discourse," he looked back to the sixth century B.C. For him, it had been a time of "Greek poets [speaking] true discourse . . . inspiring respect and terror . . . meting out justice, weaving into the fabric of fate," before the tragic rupture, "a century later [when] Truth moved from the ritualized act—potent and just—to settle on what was enunciated: its meaning, its form, its object, and its relation to what it referred to."[3] He solemnly announced that his project—and the goal of his work—was "to question our will to truth, to restore to discourse its character as an event; to abolish the sovereignty of the signifier."[4] However, he would shortly abandon this nostalgia for a union of power, justice, and discourse. In order to rethink the goal of overcoming the will to truth, he would abandon his attempt to look back to the time of the Greek poets—just as he would forsake his state of alert, ever-attentive to signs of a coming episteme. Nevertheless, he continued to think about how to move beyond sovereign regimes of power and discourse to question the will to truth.

Earlier in the inaugural lecture, Foucault wondered, "what has been, what still is, throughout our discourse, this *will to truth* which has survived throughout so many centuries of our history; or if we ask what is, in its very general form, the kind of division governing our *will to knowledge*"? He answered, "we may discern something like a system of exclusion (historical, modifiable, institutionally constraining) in the process of development."[5] This formulation is vintage Foucault. From his earliest publications, he had identified and analyzed the functions of systems of exclusions variously linked to scientific categorizations. He continued to produce analyses of the will to knowledge, but they gradually came to be situated within a different framework. The will to truth, on the other hand, maintains a rather obscure presence throughout his work. At times, he strongly contrasts the will to truth with the

will to knowledge; however, almost simultaneously, it frequently seems to be totally enveloped by it. Apparently, at this point, as he entered the Collège de France, Foucault had not established an adequate conceptual framework within which to develop this opposition.

## *The Courses*

The submission of "course summaries" was one of the few bureaucratic requirements at the Collège. The summaries Foucault submitted are remarkably straightforward, even didactic. The courses themselves shared this pedagogical quality, although they were often presented with exuberant humor and theatrical flair. They provide a series of preliminary sketches of extraordinary vitality and lucidity. It is essential to emphasize that the courses at the Collège were works in progress—philosophical-historical expeditions in search of new objects and new ways of relating to things. The courses can best be seen as exercises, not final performances.

His inaugural course was entitled "The Will to Knowledge" (p. 11). He promised to explore, "fragment by fragment," the "morphology of the will to knowledge," through alternating historical inquiries and theoretical questioning. The first year's course would provide an initial test of the place and role played by the will to knowledge in the history of the systems of thought. He began by attempting to clarify a set of distinctions: "between knowledge [*savoir*] and learning [*connaissance*]; the differences between the will to knowledge [*savoir*] and the will to truth [*vérité*]; the position of the subject, or subjects, in relation to that will." His reference to "that will" is mysterious, given that he has just distinguished two types. Although grammatically the referent is "the will to truth," Foucault immediately turned the course to "the will to knowledge."[6]

This condensation of the two "wills" arises in part from the figures Foucault chose to compare, Aristotle and Nietzsche, and the manner in which he cast the comparison, as exemplars, extreme and opposed cases. Foucault interpreted Aristotle as representing the universal and naturalistic pole. For Aristotle, there is an essential pregiven harmony between sensation, pleasure, knowing, and truth. Our perceptual apparatus is constituted in such a way that it establishes a link of pleasure and of (above all visual) knowledge, even when such a link serves no direct utilitarian purpose. The same economy extends all the way up

the hierarchy through to the highest form of knowing, contemplation. As posited in the famous opening lines of the *Metaphysics*, the desire to know is essential to who we are, and is ours “by nature.” Our nature is to seek knowledge, and we take pleasure through doing so. He offers Nietzsche’s *The Gay Science*, on the other hand, as a total contrast to Aristotle’s naturalism. Nietzsche’s knowledge (*connaissance*) is not an appropriation of universals but an invention that masks the basest instincts, interests, desires, and fears.[7] There is no preestablished harmony of these drives and the world—just the contingent, temporary, and malicious products of deceitful wills, striving for advantage, fighting for survival and engaged in a ceaseless effort to forcefully impose their will on each other. Knowledge is not a natural faculty but a series of struggles, a weapon in the universal war of domination and submission. Knowledge is always secondary to those more primary struggles. It is linked not to pleasure in flourishing but harnessed to hatred and struggle. Truth is our longest lie, our most intimate ally and enemy.

The interpretation Foucault gives of both thinkers at this moment, because it provides such an absolute contrast, does not allow for a fruitful distinction between the will to knowledge and the will to truth. He seems to affirm their functional identity in Western history, a distinction without a difference. Had Foucault chosen Aristotle’s *Ethics* rather than his *Metaphysics* as his paradigmatic text, these same relations of pleasure, knowledge, and the body would have been present, but they would have taken a different form. Over the course of the next decade, he would reexamine the elements of his interpretation of both Aristotle and Nietzsche and recombine them differently. Later on Foucault would indeed come a good deal closer to posing the relations of pleasure, friendship, and practices of truth as a problem, in a way reminiscent of the *Ethics*, although he would never adopt Aristotle’s answers, or his metaphysics.

## *The Move Toward Power*

During the early seventies, for reasons his biographers have sought to explain in terms of his personal life, Foucault began to move away from these philosophical themes as well as the project on heredity. Rather, he devoted his courses to material directly related to technologies of power. These themes will be treated more fully in Volume Three of this

series; however, it is vital to an understanding of his eventual thoughts on ethics to underline several key changes here. In 1975–76, he entitled his course "Society Must Be Defended" (p. 59). The course began with a despondent, almost despairing apology for what he characterized as his thinking's directionless drift. While he had intended to bring the work of recent years to completion in his current lectures, he was at a loss on how to do so. He lamented that "[t]hough these researches were very closely related to each other, they have failed to develop into any continuous or coherent whole."[8] This confession seems severe given the publication of *Discipline and Punish* in 1975 and in 1976 *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1.

Obliged to continue teaching, Foucault decided to take up the question of power relations. According to him, we lacked an adequate understanding of power as something other than a reflection of economic structures. Two alternatives were available: one that equates mechanisms of power with repression, another that locates "the basis of the relationship of power in the hostile engagement of forces. . . . For convenience, I shall call this Nietzsche's hypothesis."[9] The first model, associated with the eighteenth-century *philosophes* and their precursors, proceeds from the social contract in which individuals give up their natural rights to a sovereign in a contractual agreement for peace and prosperity. The model contains explicit normative limits; when the sovereign extends his power beyond the contractual stipulations, then his use of power can be called oppression. Legitimate power is finite.[10] In the contrastive model (the couplet war–domination), power is understood as a perpetual relationship of force whose only goal is submission, the norm of power has no internal limitation: power seeks only victory. "It is obvious," Foucault told his audience, "that all my work in recent years has been couched in terms of" the second model. However, "I have been forced to reconsider [it] both because it is insufficient" and because its key notions "must be considerably modified if not ultimately abandoned." This forced reconsideration follows from the conclusion that "it is wholly inadequate to the analysis of the mechanisms and effects of power that it is so pervasively used to characterize today."[11]

A problem was coming into focus. By the end of the year, Foucault submitted a crisp course summary: "In order to conduct a concrete analysis of power relations, one would have to abandon the juridical model of sovereignty. That model assumes the individual as a subject

of natural rights or original powers" (p. 59). Foucault never seriously entertained a view of the individual as bearer of natural rights. There is an analogy between the figure of the individual endowed with primitive powers and the Nietzschean subject Foucault had invoked as the contrastive and polar opposite to Aristotle in his first year of lectures at the Collège. To the extent that the Nietzschean subject had itself been insufficiently submitted to genealogical scrutiny, it needed to be rethought.

The questions Foucault posed in his 1975–76 lectures lend support to this reexamination. How and when, Foucault asked, did we moderns begin to interpret (*déchiffrer*) power relations as examples of warfare? Is warfare the general model for all social relations? How did an interpretation emerge that viewed the subject as endowed with primitive powers of antagonism, proclivities for war, mutual antagonism? When and where did a historico-political discourse of war substitute for a philosophico-juridical discourse of sovereignty? How is it that truths came to function as arms? How did it come to be that within such a discourse, there emerged a subject for whom universal truth and natural law (*droit général*) came to be seen as illusions or snares? How did this somber, critical, and intensely mythical form of self-understanding and practice emerge? Under what conditions did this figure arise who refuses the role of mediator, of neutral arbiter, a role philosophers have assigned to themselves from Solon to Kant to Habermas? How should we analyze a principle of interpretation that proceeds from violence, hatred, passions, revenge, that makes brute givens such as vigor, physique, force, and temperament the underpinnings of thought; that views history as a series of chance events? What has been the trajectory of such a historical discourse that can be advanced both by bearers of aristocratic nostalgia as well as popular revenge? Pursuing this line of inquiry would make it possible not only to answer the question of how von Clausewitz became possible but, more unexpectedly, to pose the question of how Nietzsche became possible.

By the publication of "The Will to Knowledge" in 1976, Foucault had reshaped his understanding of power relations. He was also on the road to transforming his understanding of knowledge and the subject. Foucault coined the phrase the "speaker's benefit" for those who combined "a discourse in which sex, the revelation of truth, the overturning of global laws, the proclamation of a new day to come, and the promise of a certain felicity are linked together."[12] Foucault's sarcasm about

this longing for a space of knowledge simultaneously outside formations of power and yet capable of undermining them all reaches its rueful culmination in the closing lines of the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*: "The irony of this deployment is in having us believe that our 'liberation' is in the balance."[13] The highest form of irony is self-irony. Although the main target of the speaker's benefit was the reigning militant orthodoxy in France, Foucault was equally looking back over a path he himself had traveled. His true problem, he began to think, was "the subject" and its relations to the will to truth.

Over the next four years, Foucault carried out a major recasting and consolidation of his core conceptual tools. The details of this complex rethinking will receive extended treatment in the introduction to Volume Three of this series. Nevertheless, it is again crucial to underline a central shift in his views on power relations, for it situates the problems that his later thought sought to address. During the courses of the late seventies, Foucault further refined his view of power relations. Simply and schematically, he concluded: "It seems to me we must distinguish between power relations understood as strategic games between liberties—in which some try to control the conduct of others, who in turn try to avoid allowing their conduct to be controlled or try to control the conduct of others—and the states of domination that people ordinarily call 'power.' And between the two, between games of power and states of domination, you have technologies of government—understood, of course, in a very broad sense...." To denote this broad understanding of government, Foucault used the term *governmentality*. It implies, he continued, "the relationship of the self to itself, and... [covers] the range of practices that constitute, define, organize and instrumentalize the strategies which individuals in their freedom can use in dealing with each other. I believe that the concept of governmentality makes it possible to bring out the freedom of the subject and its relationship to others—which constitutes the very stuff [*matière*] of ethics." Beginning from this premise, Foucault understands thought as the exercise of freedom.[14]

## SIGNS OF EXISTENCE

In 1979, Foucault reviewed *The Era of Ruptures* by his friend Jean Daniel, the editor of a Parisian weekly, *Le Nouvel observateur*, to which Foucault had regularly contributed political commentary. His

review, "*Pour une morale de l'inconfort*"[15] (best translated as "For an Ethic of Discomfort" for reasons that will be elucidated below), is a kind of editorial—a combination of praise, reflection, and advocacy—addressed to the journal's urbane, leftist audience at a time when their political and intellectual hopes were rather dampened. Foucault set forth several guiding principles and themes, to which he would return incessantly in the remaining years of his life, albeit in different contexts and using different forms (see, for example, "What is Enlightenment?" p. 303). He began by invoking a question posed in 1784 by the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* to a number of leading *Aufklärer*, including Kant: "What is Enlightenment?" The question, as well as Kant's response, would preoccupy Foucault over the next several years. These reflections provided him with a starting point from which to transform the newspaper's question and Kant's answer into a different question—"What is modernity?"—or, as he posed it in his book review, "who are we in the present, what is this fragile moment from which we can't detach our identity and which will carry that identity away with itself?"

Good journalism required a passion for stalking the elusive singularity of the present. More challenging yet was the task of observing oneself, with a certain distance, in the process of practicing this *métier*, midst the hurly-burly of everyday events, crises, deadlines, and myriad pressing demands. Foucault was intrigued by the fact that some journalists were better suited than philosophers and political activists for the task of sustaining a supple, yet critical, stance in the swirl of passing scenes, of resisting the temptation to always have a "position." Foucault praised Jean Daniel for his deft handling of this ever-renewed demand on the left to have a firm, well-defended, vantage point for anchoring one's analysis. *Vantage point*, after all, is a military term connoting an overall perspective from afar, the proverbial bird's-eye-view—but strategic advantage, however, does not necessarily provide understanding. For Foucault, in order to establish the right relationship to the present—to things, to others, to oneself—one must stay close to events, experience them, be willing to be effected and affected by them.

Foucault was not singing the praises of vacillation and indecision, or of a total refusal of perspective. Banality of thought, resolute opportunism, or a program of deconstruction and transgression as ends in themselves all seemed to him to be equally dubious. "The demand [*exigence*] for an identity," he insisted, "and the injunction to break that identity, both feel, in the same way, abusive."[16] Such demands are

abusive because they assume in advance what one is, what one must do, what one always must be closed to, which side one must be on. He sought not so much to resist as to evade this installed dichotomy. One might say he refused the blackmail of having to choose between a unified, unchanging identity and a stance of perpetual and obligatory transgression. "One's way [*façon*] of no longer remaining the same," he wrote, "is, by definition, the most singular part of who I am." However, that singularity was never a blanket negation: if one knew in advance that everything, including one's self and the current state of affairs, was bad, what would there be to learn? What would be the sense of acting? Why think? A life without the possibility of error would not be conceivable. One might say, following Georges Canguilhem, such a life would not be alive.

Who one is, Foucault wrote, emerges acutely out of the problems with which one struggles. In the review, he phrased his approach in a manner so as to distance it from Sartre and his version of the committed intellectual: "Experience with... rather than engagement in..." Privileging experience over engagement makes it increasingly difficult to remain "absolutely in accord with oneself," for identities are defined by trajectories, not by position taking. Such an attitude is an uncomfortable one insofar as one risks being mistaken and is vulnerable to the perfect hindsight of those who adopt firm positions (especially after events have passed) or who speak assuredly of universals as though the singular were secondary. To that extent, one could say, adopting a distinction Foucault developed in his work leading up to the second volume of *The History of Sexuality*, *The Uses of Pleasure*, that this attitude is rooted in an ethics and not a morality, a practice rather than a vantage point, an active experience rather than a passive waiting.

The challenge is not to replace one certitude (*évidence*) with another but to cultivate an attention to the conditions under which things become "evident," ceasing to be objects of our attention and therefore seemingly fixed, necessary, and unchangeable. A few pages later in the review, Foucault approvingly invoked Maurice Merleau-Ponty's definition of the task of philosophy, "to never consent to be completely at ease with what seems evident to oneself." What seems so new, if we are attentive, often can be seen to have been around, at the back of our minds, at the corner of our vision, at the edge of things we almost, but never quite, saw or said. "The most fragile of passing moments has its antecedents. There is a whole ethics of an alert certitude [*évidence*]

which doesn't exclude a rigorous economy of Truth and Falsity, far from it, but isn't summed up by that economy either."[17] Philosophy is a practice and an ethos, a state or condition of character, not detached observation and legislation. "What is philosophy after all? if not a means of reflecting on not so much on what is true or false but on our relation to truth? How, given that relation to truth, should we act?" ("The Masked Philosopher," p. 321) In this formulation, we see the thinker as nominalist engaged in a reexamination of knowledge, the conditions of knowledge, and the knowing subject.

### *The Masked Philosopher*

Foucault's exasperation with what he continued to see and feel as political posturing and lack of imagination in France found another articulation in an anonymous interview he gave in April 1980 to the leading French daily, *Le Monde*, which was interviewing leading thinkers about their views on the current scene. He refused to join in this vogue of condemning "intellectuals," which was sweeping Paris as a part of rejection of the media and its supposed destructive influence on French political and intellectual culture: "I've never met any intellectuals. I have met people who write novels, and others who treat the sick; people who work in economics and others who compose electronic music. I've met people who teach, people who paint and people of whom I have never really understood what they do. But intellectuals? Never" (p. 322). His sarcasm was aimed at what he saw as the reigning style of criticism, one based on denunciation, condemnation, judgment of guilt, and attempts to silence and ultimately to destroy the object of criticism. He lyrically but pointedly evoked an alternative: "I can't help but dream about a kind of criticism that would try not to judge but to bring an oeuvre, a sentence, an idea to life; it would light fires, watch the grass grow, listen to the wind, and catch the sea foam in the breeze and scatter it. It would multiply not judgments but signs of existence; it would summon them, drag them from their sleep.... It would bear the lightning of possible storms." We should remember that he agreed to the interview on condition that he remain anonymous, that he be referred to simply as "the masked philosopher." Apparently not many readers guessed that Foucault—whom many thought of as "the nihilist," "the deconstructionist"—had spoken these words.

Well and good, the interviewer persisted, but isn't the present, after

all, a time of mediocrity and lowered expectations? Foucault responded with an emphatic *no* to that commonplace as well. Quite the contrary, he insisted: it is a propitious time. "There is an overabundance of things to be known: fundamental, terrible, wonderful, funny, insignificant, and crucial at the same time. And there is an enormous curiosity, a need, a desire to know.... Curiosity is seen as futility. However,...it evokes "care"; it evokes the care one takes of what exists and what might exist; a sharpened sense of reality, but one that is never immobilized before it; a readiness to find what surrounds us strange and odd; a certain determination to throw off familiar ways of thought and to look at the same things in a different way; a passion for seizing what is happening now and what is disappearing; a lack of respect for traditional hierarchies of what is important and fundamental. I dream of a new age of curiosity. We have the technical means; the desire is there; there is an infinity of things to know; the people capable of doing such work exist" (p. 325). Curiosity: a simple little thing.

At this time, one of Foucault's cherished projects was to create a different kind of publishing in France. After Editions Gallimard, the prestigious house that published his major books in huge print runs, refused his offer to edit a small series of books, Foucault (along with Paul Veyne and François Wahl) succeeded in convincing another distinguished Parisian publisher, Les Editions du Seuil, to initiate a series entitled "Works" (*Des Travaux*). The purpose of the series was to publish works that might be considered too long and difficult—hence lacking an immediate audience—but that over time would show their importance, short pieces outlining the main points of future work to be developed over time, and translations of important foreign works with no large market in France. Foucault and friends provided a trenchant definition of "work" as "that which is susceptible of introducing a meaningful difference in the field of knowledge, albeit with a certain demand placed on the author and reader, but with the eventual recompense of a certain pleasure, that is to say of an access to another figure of truth."[18]

## *Arenas: Iran, Poland, USA*

"Where are we today?" Foucault asked his readers to ask themselves in 1979.[19] At a moment of the globalization of the economy? "Certainly." At a moment of global geopolitics as well. But, he wondered, was thought

also in a globalizing moment? It seemed to him that the answer was no: he discerned no indications of an emergent universal philosophy or political consciousness. In France, in his view, this contradictory conjuncture had yielded a stifling combination of ever-more empty rhetorical allegiance to the receding utopia of a universal revolution, accompanied by a pervasive social conservatism. How then, to "tear oneself away from" that predicament? His almost visceral rejection of French bourgeois *moeurs* was a long-standing one that he shared with other French writers he admired, such as Flaubert. A young Canadian interviewer's assertion that France held an enduring attraction for North Americans elicited this retort: "Yes, but now I don't think they come to Paris any longer for freedom. They come to have a taste of an old traditional culture. They come to France as painters went to Italy in the seventeenth century, to see a dying civilization" (p. 123). That is why, he explained, he had lived in Sweden, in Poland, in Germany, in Tunisia, and in the United States and had made repeated trips to Brazil and Japan.

During the late seventies and early eighties, Foucault's main areas of political and social activity were outside France. He went to Iran for an Italian newspaper as an eyewitness to the period leading up to the fall of the Shah and the triumph of the Khomeini regime. Surely he had in mind a maxim he had applied approvingly to Jean Daniel's work, that of not giving "our unhesitant support [*confiance*] to any revolution, even if one can understand each revolt."[20] He was fascinated by the type of political action taking place, the massive presence of an underarmed populace in the streets facing a police force and army among the world's most brutal and omnipresent. A revolution was taking place, but it was one that made the European Left uneasy. It was hard to identify class dynamics, social divisions, a vanguard party, or political ideology as the driving force; these "lacks" intrigued Foucault. He was intrigued by the question of the role of religion in political life, of the unexpected and resurgent role it was playing. He reminded his European readers that the sentence preceding Marx's famous phrase about religion being the opium of the people, spoke of "the spirit of a world without spirit." He saw or felt—or thought he saw—hints of such a spirit, and of a possible role it might have in forming the self in a different relationship to politics.

Foucault mused that until his visit to Iran he had only read about the collective will. In Iran, it seemed that he had encountered it in the

streets, focused in determined opposition to the Shah. He wondered what to make of "the vocabulary, the ceremonial, the timeless drama into which one could fit the historical drama of a people that pitted its very existence against that of the sovereign."[21] Foucault was fascinated, perhaps above all, by what he saw as a demand for a new subjectivity. He felt he discerned an imperative that went beyond overthrowing yet another corrupt, Western-supported authoritarian regime, an imperative he formulated thus: "above all we have to change ourselves. Our way of being, our relationships with others, with things, with eternity, with God."[22] He grappled with this intuition, repeating a similar hypothesis on several occasions. "What is the meaning for these people, to seek out, at the price of their lives, that thing whose very possibility we Europeans have forgotten at least since the Renaissance and the period of the great crises of Christianity—a spirituality. I can hear the French laughing at these words, but they are making a mistake."[23] Foucault intended to examine this issue of political spirituality and its changing relationships with self-fashioning as soon as he finished the seemingly interminable rewriting of the "Greek and Christian books." In the early eighties, he proposed a two-pronged research project with colleagues and students at Berkeley—on political spirituality and self-fashioning in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and the arts of socialist governmentality in the twenties.

The latter project was linked to a dialogue he had undertaken with representatives of the main noncommunist labor union, the Confédération Française des Travailleurs Démocratique (CFDT), on such matters as the future of the social security system. He was intrigued by the spirit of the seemingly futile efforts of Solidarity in Poland, which he actively supported and with whom the CFDT forged close ties. Foucault went to Poland on a number of occasions, not just to meet and discuss the situation with various participants but to seek out rather humble work as a bookkeeper. When martial law was imposed in December 1981, France's Socialist government made only perfunctory protests. Foucault, like many others, took to the streets. And as Iran faded from Western public attention, and Poland endured in the gray night of martial law, Foucault seriously considered working anonymously with the humanitarian group Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders), or of retiring to the countryside to practice spiritual exercises and tend his garden. Although he did not pursue either of these escape fantasies, his increasing preoccupation with the theme of "the care of the

self" dovetailed with his efforts to bring the later volumes of *The History of Sexuality* to completion.

During this period, he made frequent visits to California and New York. Until the late seventies, he had been openly, if discreetly, homosexual in the then current French style.[24] In the context of his work on the care of the self, though, he began to rethink publicly homosexual and homosocial relationships, embarking on a distinctive series of explorations and reflections on emergent forms of pleasure, sociality, and thought. In California, his explorations and reflections on gay life in San Francisco are well known; less has been made of the fact that, when in California, he spent his days at the University of California in Berkeley, working in the libraries, talking with colleagues, holding seminars, and meeting students. It seems fair to say that Foucault was experimenting in his own life with the twin imperatives to "know thyself" and to "care for thyself."

## A MODERN ETHOS

Max Weber, Foucault argued, had placed the following question on the historical, sociological, and ethical agenda: "If one wants to behave rationally and regulate one's action according to true principles, what part of one's self should one renounce? What is the ascetic price of reason?" He continued, "For my part, I have posed the opposite question: How have certain kinds of interdictions become the price required for attaining certain kinds of knowledge [*savoir*] about oneself? What must one know [*connaître*] about oneself in order to be willing to accept such renunciation?" The latter formulation is a guiding thread in Foucault's historical work in the second and third volumes of *The History of Sexuality*, as well as in the unpublished fourth volume, *Confessions of the Flesh*. Despite his reformulation of Weber's question, Foucault's core concern applies equally well to Foucault himself—what is the place of asceticism in a philosophic life? If asceticism is taken as "exercise" and not as renunciation (and this is precisely how Foucault takes it up in his later work), then the question becomes: How is reason exercised? How is reason practiced?

One of the main themes Foucault explored in the early eighties was "the care of the self." The nearly complete uncoupling of this imperative from its twin, "know yourself," is an essential element of his diagnosis of modernity, in which the latter imperative was gradually to

eclipse the former as a philosophical object. From Descartes to Husserl, the imperative to "know thyself" increasingly predominated over that to "take care of thyself." As the "care of the self" had traditionally passed through or entailed relationships with others, this disproportionate weighting of knowledge has contributed to the "universal unbrotherliness" that caused Weber so much pain and which he lacked the tools to do more than decry. For Foucault the equation of philosophical *askēsis* with renunciation of feeling, solidarity, and care for one's self and for others—as the price of knowledge—was one of our biggest wrong turnings. However, reversing such a course is not merely a matter of willing or desiring it to be otherwise. What could be more self-delusional than the recent heralding of a reenchantment of the world, or that we have actually never been modern? As this trajectory became clearer to him, Foucault aimed at rethinking this separation. Rather than seek to force a reconciliation, he focused on whether the "universal unbrotherliness" produced by the will to knowledge, which had previously seemed like a necessary component of modernity—the price to be paid for knowledge and ethics—might well be more contingent than Weber had thought. He began thinking his way around this culturally coherent but humanly intolerable outcome by radically recasting what Weber would have called "a vocation"—something that Foucault called an "ethics" understood as an ethos.

## *Care of the Self*

In an interview published as "The Ethic of the Concern for the Self as a Practice of Freedom" (p. 281), Foucault provides an unusually unqualified formulation of his philosophical and ethical work. He reiterates that his project has always been to untangle the relations between the subject and truth. Although his argument is not presented as a set of working premises, it is convenient and plausible to view it this way. *Premise one:* "what is ethics, if not the practice of freedom, the considered [*réfléchie*] practice of freedom" (p. 284). "Freedom is the ontological condition of ethics. But ethics is the considered form that freedom takes" (p. 284). Thus, a condition of liberty is the ontological starting point. *Premise two:* In the Western tradition, "taking care of oneself requires knowing [*connaître*] oneself" (p. 285). "To take care of the self is to equip oneself with these truths" (p. 285). It is through these tools and this conceptual linkage that "ethics is linked to the

game of truth" (p. 285). *Premise three:* Ethics is not just a theory—it is equally a practice, an embodiment, a style of life. Hence, the problem is to give liberty "shape in an ēthos" (p. 286). *Premise four:* the subject "is not a substance. It is a form, and this form is not primarily or always identical to itself" (p. 290). "*Self* is a reflexive pronoun, and it has two meanings. *Auto* means 'the same,' but it also conveys the notion of identity. The latter meaning shifts the question from 'What is this self?' to 'Departing from what ground shall I find my identity?'" (p. 230). *Premise five:* The central arena of inquiry is the historical constitution of these forms and their relation to "games of truth." A game of truth is a "set of procedures that lead to a certain result, which, on the basis of its principles and rules of procedure, may be considered valid or invalid" (p. 297). [W]hy truth? . . . And why must the care of the self occur only through the concern for truth? [This is] *the* question for the West. How did it come about that all of Western culture began to revolve around this obligation of truth. . . ?" (p. 295). Given these premises, one must conclude equally that "one escaped from a domination of truth" only by playing that game differently (p. 295). *Premise six:* "the relationship between philosophy and politics is permanent and fundamental" (p. 293). By "politics" Foucault means both power relations and the life of the city as understood in the ancient world, the modern equivalent being "governmentality." *Premise seven:* Philosophy, understood as a practice and a problem, is a vocation. The manner in which liberty is taken up by the philosopher is distinctive, differing in "intensity" and "zeal" from other free citizens (p. 293).

Since the Enlightenment, while demand for an ethics has been incessant, the philosophical fulfillment of that demand has been notably scarce. This impasse has led to many fundamentalist projects, none of which has achieved any general acceptance, even among the philosophers and moralists. Such a meager harvest has also led to the categorical or partial rejection of such projects. Foucault himself argued in *The Order of Things* that there could be no moral system in modernity, if by "moral system" one meant a philosophical anthropology that produced firm foundations concerning the nature of Man and, thereby, a basis for human action. Ultimately, though, Foucault may well be remembered as one of the major ethical thinkers of modernity.

Foucault sets up two "ideal" types of moral systems: one that emphasizes the moral code, and another that emphasizes ethical practices.

Within systems of the first type, "the authority that enforces the code, [takes] a quasi-juridical form, the subject refers his conduct to a law, or set of laws."[25] The great monotheistic religious systems exemplify this type of moral system. In the second ideal-typical form, which Foucault associated with the ancient world, it is the "mode of subjectivation"—the way a subject freely relates to himself—that receives greater elaboration. In this type of system, the codes and explicit rules of behavior may be rudimentary, while greater attention is paid to the methods, techniques, and exercises directed at forming the self within a nexus of relationships. In such a system, authority would be self-referential and might take a therapeutic or philosophical form. He stressed that, in practice, these forms were not wholly distinct—subject-oriented practices have been widespread in Christianity, just as there were moral prohibitions in the ethical practices of the ancient world. Nonetheless, the contrast is an instructive one.

In Volumes Two and Three of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault undertook a restorative historical analysis of the place of the self-formation as an "ethical subject" in the ancient world. He describes this process as one in which "the individual delimits that part of himself that will form the object of his moral practice, defines his position relative to the precept that he will follow, and decides on a certain mode of being that will serve his moral goal."[26] His goal in this analysis was not to "return" to some archaic mode of social order but, rather, to make visible a bygone way of approaching the self and others which might suggest possibilities for the present. He was seeking not to denaturalize the "subject of desire," not to invent a philosophic system per se, but to contribute to a mode of living. He thought that elements of that possible mode of living were already in existence: he sought to learn from and strengthen these, not to discover or "invent" others. In that spirit, it seems worthwhile to turn his ethical categories onto his own thought—something he himself did not do—in order to identity and illuminate his singular enterprise.

## *The Ethical Fourfold*

Foucault saw ethical analysis as the free relationship to the self (*rapport à soi*)—a relationship that could be examined through four basic categories: ethical substance, mode of subjectivation, ethical work, and telos. Although he treats these categories as independent one from the

other, he recognizes that, in any historical instance, they are always found in a specific configuration. In his genealogy of the subject of desire, he gives us historical examples of how such an analytics of ethics had been elaborated, of the internal systematicity, and of the differential mode of alteration over time. His goal in these historical analyses was to loosen the grip of our self-understanding as "subjects of desire," so as to make possible a different relationship to our thought, ourselves and others, as well as to our pleasures.

However, as he was wont to say, there is more. What if one was undertaking not only a history of sexuality but also a genealogy of ethics? How, then, would one cast the analytics of a free relationship to the self that a life of thinking entailed? In an interview in Berkeley ("On the Genealogy of Ethics," p. 253), he was asked why he was not intending to talk more about friendship in his forthcoming books. He responded, "don't forget *L'Usage des plaisirs* is a book about sexual ethics; it's not a book about love, or about friendship, or about reciprocity.... Friendship is reciprocal and sexual relations are not reciprocal" (p. 257). "What I want to ask is: Are we able to have an ethics of acts and their pleasures which would be able to take into account the pleasure of the other?" (p. 258).

There are two important points here. First, Foucault makes it clear that the content of the ethical discussion he provides in Volumes Two and Three of *The History of Sexuality* follow from the subject matter under discussion. As we shall see, the general categories of ethics he provides can be elaborated differently in the context of a different genealogy. At the end of the *Archaeology of Knowledge*, he stated that it would have been perfectly possible to construct other archaeologies of other objects, and that he was never talking about the spirit of an age or a unified understanding of being. Second, he is very clear that he is not advocating a "return" to the Greek model of sexual or human relations. Ancient Greek society was characterized by essential inequalities and nonreciprocities that moderns can only find intolerable. Consequently, what he identifies in the ancient world is a problematic, a way of thinking about ethical issues, and a form of practice—*askēsis*—integrally linked to that thought.

It should be stressed again, though, that when in 1984 Foucault was asked if he found the ancient Greeks admirable, he answered: "Not very.... They were stymied right away by what seems to be the point of contradiction of ancient morality: between, on the one hand, this

obstinate search for a certain style of existence and, on the other hand, the effort to make it common to everyone, a style that they approached more or less obscurely with Seneca and Epictetus but which would find the possibility of realization only within a religious style. All of antiquity appears to me to have been a 'profound error' (*laughs*)."[27] It is not entirely clear what exactly he was laughing at: certainly not the obstinate search for a style of existence. Was it the religious stylization? Was it the effort to make a stylized life common? The offending term appears to be "common," understood as uniform. Foucault definitely rejected two possible interpretations of what "common" could mean: either that a class location or professional identity was the sine qua non of liberty and, hence, of ethics; or that everyone would have the same stylization. Foucault unequivocally equated the latter project with normalization and the will to knowledge, and there is no reason to believe he ever entertained the former (although the issue of "leisure" to pursue such questions remains unaddressed). This answer, perhaps appropriately, leaves entirely open how general and diverse Foucault thought such a project could be.

ETHICAL SUBSTANCE: THE WILL TO TRUTH. *The way that the individual has to constitute this or that part of himself as the prime material of his moral conduct*—Foucault[28]

For Foucault as a thinker, the ethical substance, the prime material of moral conduct, is the "will to truth." As we have seen, in the course summary of his first year at the Collège, he summarized his comparison between Aristotle and Nietzsche, discussed archaic practices of establishing the truth in the context of justice, and elucidated the general goal of his work. The primary, perhaps ultimate, task he had set for himself was to establish "the difference between the will to knowledge [*savoir*] and the will to truth [*vérité*]; the position of the subject, or subjects with respect to that will" (p. 12). The lion's share of Foucault's work centered on [t]he historical analysis of this rancorous will to knowledge."[29] He did not abandon his attention to the dangers of knowledge–power complexes, even as he cautiously moved away from a central focus on the "will to knowledge." He categorically refused appeals to "science, religion, or law" as the basis upon which a free person could shape his life. For him, whatever we were to become, it could not be legitimated by the will to knowledge. Still, of the will to truth he said very, very little. In his 1971 essay, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," he offered an utterly bleak picture of modernity: [T]he will to truth . . .

loses all sense of limitations and all claim to truth in its unavoidable sacrifice of the subject of knowledge."[31] In "The Order of Discourse," he had told his audience it was "[as] though the will to truth and its vicissitudes were masked by truth itself and its necessary unfolding."[31] The "as though" presents the smallest sliver of maneuvering space.

Thirteen years later, in the introduction to *The Uses of Pleasure*, Foucault formulated his problem thus: "How, why and in what forms is thinking constituted as a moral domain?"[32] A few paragraphs later he could ingenuously write, "As for what motivated me, it is quite simple; I would hope that in the eyes of some people it might be sufficient in itself. It was curiosity—the only kind of curiosity, in any case, that is worth acting upon with a degree of obstinacy; not the curiosity that seeks to assimilate what is proper for one to know, but that which enables one to get free of oneself."[34] Foucault presents curiosity as a modest impulse, but his qualification that curiosity is what enables one "to get free of oneself"—the telos of his ethics—signals that the stakes of this simple little thing could not be higher. "But, then, what is philosophy today—philosophical activity, I mean—if it is not the critical work that thought brings to bear on itself"[34]

In another version of the preface to *The Uses of Pleasure*, Foucault wrote, "It is easy to see how the reading of Nietzsche in the early fifties has given access to these kinds of questions." Nietzsche does indeed provide access to these kinds of questions. In *The Gay Science*, he had already specified the problem: "This unconditional will to truth—what is it? Is it the will *not to allow oneself to be deceived?* Or is it the will not to deceive?" He concludes: "Consequently 'will to truth' does not mean 'I will not allow myself to be deceived' but—there is no alternative—'I will not deceive, even myself'; *and with that we stand on moral ground.*"[35] Nietzsche and Weber are clearly Foucault's precursors in making these topics into problems.

MODE OF SUBJECTIVATION: SELF-STYLIZATION OR FORM-GIVING. *The way in which the individual establishes his relation to the rule and recognizes himself as obligated to put it into practice.*—Foucault[36]

> M.F. What strikes me is the fact that, in our society, art has become something that is related only to objects and not to individuals or to life. That art is something which is specialized or done by experts who are artists. But couldn't everyone's life become a work of art? Why should the lamp or the house be an art object, but not our life?

Q. Of course, that kind of project is very common in places like Berkeley....
M.F. But I am afraid in most of those cases, most of the people think if they do what they do, if they live as they live, the reason is that they know the truth about desire, life, nature, body and so on. (pp. 261–262)

For Foucault, the challenge of the mode of subjectivation is not to base one's subjectivity, that multidimensional relationship (to others, to things, and to ourselves) on any science, nor on any previously established doctrine. In "What is Enlightenment?" he wrote: "I wonder whether we may not envisage modernity as an attitude rather than as a period of history. And by 'attitude,' I mean a mode of relating to contemporary reality; a voluntary choice made by certain people; in the end, a way of thinking and feeling; a way, too, of acting and behaving that at one and the same time marks a relation of belonging and presents itself as a task" (p. 309). This "belonging" is relation to the society in its historical and political determinations, with its embedded and embodied strictures, its sedimented orders of thought. The "task" is to determine what must be shown to be contingent, and what can be shown to be truly singular in the present. An essential aspect of doing this work is to take up a stylized relationship to things, to oneself, and to others. The question is, What form should such a relationship take?

In "What is Enlightenment?" Foucault presents two exemplary modes of subjectivation, one personified by Kant, the other by Baudelaire. Kant took up this question in an original way, by transforming it from an issue of epochs or of pure reason into a question of the thinker's relationship to the present—to temporality understood as memory.[37] Foucault restates Kant's question thus: "What difference does today introduce with respect to yesterday?" (p. 305). What difference does the present make to our thinking? For Kant, addressing this question put one on the road from an "immature" state marked by a lack of thought, or reflection upon dependency toward "maturity." Kant problematized the relationship between the will, authority, and reason. For him, thinking about the relationship of these terms was not only a process but, equally, a task and an obligation. We are responsible for our own maturity. Consequently, it is through the obligation to work on ourselves that we may discover the way to a proper relationship to the Enlightenment—we will "dare to know." Kant proposed a political contract with the "rational despot" Frederick II: an exchange of political

subservience for the free use of the rational faculties. However, this contract was not something Foucault was willing to endorse.

Baudelaire also privileged a particular relationship to temporality—characterized by keen attentiveness to the passing moment. However, he transformed the Enlightenment attitude into one of "modernity." In his now-classic manifesto, *The Painter of Modern Life*, Baudelaire identified the modern artist's challenge as one of seizing the eternal within the "contingent, fleeting, volatile" present. What he sought was not behind or beyond the present but within it. The artist had not merely to observe the carnival parading in front of him with the disinterested, ironic, blasé attitude of the *flâneur* but rather to heroize the present by "taking hold" (*prendre*) of it. For Baudelaire, the artist has "no right to despise the present"; hence, it is his business—through an act of will—to seize hold of it.

This is only half the story, though. The point of seizing hold of the present is to transfigure it. As Foucault understands it, Baudelaire's "transfiguration entails not the annulling of reality but a difficult interplay between the truth of what is real and the exercise of freedom" (p. 311). Transfiguration is not transgression; *transgression* is a word Foucault does not employ in his later work.[38] Rather, Foucault sought in Baudelaire the means to invent a different attitude toward the world and the self, one more respectful and ultimately more difficult to achieve. Just as he drew from Kant an attention to the historical singularity of reason as a practice, so, in a parallel way—and one closer to the original text he was interpreting—he drew from Baudelaire a stylization of the self as an exercise "in which extreme attention to what is real is confronted with the practice of a liberty that simultaneously respects this reality and violates it" (p. 311).

Baudelaire gives form to the self in art. He never imagined, Foucault insists, that such stylization could operate on "society itself or on the body politic" (p. 312). Foucault proposes a stylization of the practices and exercises of the self taken as an attitude—a relationship—that clearly draws from the models of Kant and Baudelaire. However, unlike Kant, Foucault does not accept social and political conformity as the trade-off for freedom of thought; equally, he refuses Baudelaire's restriction of a modern ethos to the arena of art. Rather, Foucault hopes to invent a mode of subjectivation in which this ethos would be a practice of thought formed in direct contact with social and political realities. "Yet if we are not to settle for the affirmation or the empty dream of free-

dom, it seems to me that this historico-critical attitude must also be an experimental one. I mean that this work done at the limits of ourselves must, on the one hand, open up a realm of historical inquiry, and, on the other, put itself to a test of reality, of contemporary reality, both to grasp the points where change is possible and desirable, and to determine the precise form this change should take" (p. 316). The relation to the present is one that tests the limits of society, and of the self, a determination of what it is desirable and possible to change.

"This philosophical attitude may be characterized as a *limit-attitude*. We are not talking about a gesture of rejection. . . . Criticism indeed consists of analyzing and reflecting upon limits. But if the Kantian question was that of knowing [*savoir*] what limits knowledge [*connaissance*] must renounce exceeding [*franchir*], it seems to me that the critical question today must be turned back into a positive one: In what is given to us as universal, necessary, obligatory, what place is occupied by whatever is singular, contingent, and the product of arbitrary constraints? The point, in brief, is to transform the critique conducted in the form of a necessary limitation into a practical critique that takes the form of a possible crossing-over [*franchissement*]" (p. 315). Such a crossing-over or "clearing-away" will always be historically specific and partial. "This means that the historical ontology of ourselves must turn away from all projects that claim to be global or radical. . . . I prefer the very specific transformations that have proved to be possible in the last twenty years in a certain number of areas which concern our ways of being and thinking, relations to authority, relations between the sexes, the way in which we perceive insanity or illness; I prefer even these partial transformations, which have been made in the correlation of historical analysis and the practical attitude, to the programs for a new man that the worst political systems have repeated throughout the twentieth century. I shall thus characterize the philosophical ethos appropriate to the critical ontology of ourselves as a historico-practical test of the limits we may go beyond, and thus as work carried out by ourselves upon ourselves as free beings" (p. 316). What is that work?

ETHICAL WORK: CRITICAL ACTIVITY, THOUGHT EXPERIENCE. *The work one performs to attempt to transform oneself into the ethical subject of one's behavior. (What are the means by which we can change ourselves in order to become ethical subjects?)*—Foucault[39] What we are to do, either to moderate our acts, or to decipher what we are. . . .

The task of ethical work for Foucault is to establish the right relation-

ship between intellect and character in the context of practical affairs. His clearest discussion of this relationship between "thought" and "experience" is found in a version of the preface to *The Uses of Pleasure*, where he states that his attempt in this work had been to develop a satisfactory means to analyze sexuality as "a historically singular form of experience." However, as he indicates elsewhere, his general remarks about sexuality apply as well to other "fundamental" experiences. Not surprisingly, he differentiated his approach from phenomenological or existential approaches based on the subject and its "primary experience." Rather, Foucault located experience (and the subject) within a complex site comprising "a domain of knowledge [*savoir*], a type of normativity, and a mode of relation to the self." Thus, he addressed experience as a historical product that emerges within a "field of knowledge [*connaissance*]... a collection of social rules... and a mode of relation between the individual and himself." Foucault identified this overall project as a nominalist philosophic anthropology, explicitly rejecting any basis in pregiven essence or nature. Without rejecting the possibility that some such constants can be found, he interprets experiences, such as those of sexuality, within the particular historical fields that shaped them, to which they were in part a reaction, and which both created and limited the form those experiences could take at a given historical moment.

Many analytical, political, and ethical problems could be developed from this nominalist understanding of experience, thought, and the subject. Foucault made this constellation the privileged domain of the history of thought. To do so, he provides a rich, if idiosyncratic definition of "thought": "By 'thought,' I mean what establishes, in a variety of possible forms, the play of true and false, and consequently constitutes the human being as a knowing subject [*connaissance*]... as social and juridical subjects... and as an ethical subject." This definition establishes a terrain for the history of thought which is far broader than the history of scientific disciplines or philosophic systems. It posits all forms of experience as potential objects of thought, and thus of the history of thought. The task of the history of thought is to identify and delimit the development and transformation of these domains of experience; as these domains and these experiences are diverse, it follows that so, too, are modes of thought.

Foucault's definition of thought as a modern practice is so broad that it comes close to equating thought not only with experience but with

action. However, it is important to avoid a misunderstanding here (as in a parallel way with Foucault's definition of power). Since thought is a defining aspect of any historically singular complex—a vital aspect of its singularity—an analysis of such complexes is always possible for a history of thought. But that does not mean that thought (or power relations, which are also an unsurpassable part of such historical singularities) is totally coextensive with the object of analysis. As Foucault put it, "The study of forms of experience can thus proceed from an analysis of 'practices'... as long as one qualifies that word to mean the different systems of action *insofar as* they are inhabited by thought." Insofar, to the extent that, "qua"—a classic and elementary philosophic proviso that is often misunderstood today as totalization.

In this light, we can make sense of Foucault's claim that "thought is... the very form of action." He is referring to a potential present both in the object of analysis and for the analyst. "Thought is not what inhabits a certain conduct and gives it its meaning; rather, it is what allows one to step back from this way of acting or 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." Precisely because thought is not a given, thought is an action; and actions arising from experience and formed by thought are ethical ones.

This brings us to the question of ethical work; it will have both an intellectual and a practical dimension, though, as we have just seen, experience and action arise within complex assemblages. As a thinker, the work Foucault performs "to transform himself into an ethical subject of one's behavior" is a distinctive form of intellectual practice, a singular form of critical thought. He writes: criticism is "a historical investigation into the events that have led us to constitute ourselves and to recognize ourselves as subjects of what we are doing, thinking, saying. In that sense, this criticism is not transcendental, and its goal is not to that of making a metaphysics possible; it is genealogical in its design and archaeological in its method.... [I]t will separate out, from the contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think... it is seeking to give new impetus, as far and as wide as possible, to the undefined work of freedom." Such work would have multiple dimensions but, qua ethical work, it would be a disentangling and re-forming of

the (power and thought) relationships within which and from which the self is shaped and takes shape.

Thus, Foucault came to conceive of the most general name for the practice he was seeking to identify: "problematization." "The proper task of a history of thought is: to define the conditions in which human beings 'problematize' what they are, what they do, and the world in which they live."[40] Or, again, in more philosophical language, he defines his object of analysis (and also his task) as: "the problematizations through which being [*l'être*] offers itself to be necessarily [*pouvant* et devant] thought and the practices on the basis of which these problematizations are formed."[41] It is vital to understand that, for Foucault, "being" is given through problematizations and practices; it is not prior to them. That is why it is both potentially and obligatorily—*pouvant* et devant—available for thought. As Foucault insisted, thought does not reside in the practices giving them their meaning; it is always a practice of freedom that could have taken (or could take in the future) a different form. Problematizations and practices can and must be thought vis-à-vis experience insofar as they concern our freedom. Ethical work makes them available in that form.

In interviews with the young editors of gay journals, Foucault presents a quasi manifesto of what he sees as his own ethical task, cast as the work of thought, pleasure, and invention. In these interviews, he is especially crisp in his formulations, speaking as a member of the community. The problem for gays now, he told his young interviewers, was not to uncover the truth of homosexual desire but to make homosexuality desirable; "Sex is not a fatality; it's a possibility for creative life" (p. 163). The search should be not for the secret of one's identity but for how to invent new modes of relationship and a new way of life. How, that is, to become homosexual rather than affirming that one already is so. "I am not sure we should create our *own* culture. We have to *create* a culture" (p. 164). Could such a quest lead to a way of life not based on social class and other existing divisions? One that could be shared among individuals of different ages, statuses, and so on? One that could "reopen affective and relational virtualities" (p. 138) and invent "the instruments for polymorphic, varied, and individually modulated relationships" (p. 139)? He thought this was possible; what needed to be problematized was the whole tissue of sociality. What was needed was not a means of making everyone the

same but of creating new modes of being together.

Gays, Foucault told his interviewers, have come a long way in overcoming sexual renunciation, so perhaps they have an obligation, to themselves and to others, to invent "a homosexual ascesis," a manner of being that today seems improbable. Ascesis is "the work that one performs on oneself in order to transform oneself or make the self appear which, happily, one never attains. Can that be our problem today?" (p. 137). To make the self a continuous creative task, a social experience? For gays, the problem might be how "to make ourselves infinitely more susceptible to pleasure [*plaisirs*]. We must escape and help others to escape the two readymade formulas of the pure sexual encounter and the lovers' fusion of identities" (p. 137). Or, he asked in the same interview, "What is friendship?" His answer: "the sum of all those things through which [people] can give each other pleasure" (p. 136). A provocative answer, no doubt, but what he means by *pleasure* is not very well spelled out. A few things, however, can be said about his use of the term. First, he is opposing pleasure to desire, as surface to depth, as the body to the person. He is seeking to break open the equation of the forms of pleasure one enjoys and one's supposed identity. Second, his attention to pleasure does not entail embracing the doctrine of hedonism: pleasure is neither the unique nor the highest good but, rather, an accompaniment to other activities. Foucault's pleasure is embedded in a practice, an *askēsis*. One might say, it supervenes on other practices. For him, pleasure seems to function as a kind of ethical heuristic, in the sense that he suggests that where one encounters pleasures, one will be in the vicinity of experiences worthy of further reflection, experimentation, and reformulation.[42]

In another interview for a gay audience, Foucault insisted that gays should not privilege the model of individual rights or heterosexual marriage (that is, rights to inheritance and so on). As important as the struggles to obtain basic rights and legal protections for homosexuality were, Foucault argued, the real target was the general impoverishment of social relationships in contemporary society. Instead of treating the task as one of normalizing homosexuality in the heterosexual model, he urged his readers to try and invent something else. Such work, while arising within gay relationships, might be partially transposable to others, albeit with some imagination and tenacity. The problem, as he saw it, was to create new social forms: "We should fight against the impoverishment of the relational fabric" (p. 158). Why not imagine new