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Experience in Michel Foucault's Philosophy

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ACADEMIC DISSERTATION

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Abstract

In everyday language the word “experience” is used in different senses: it might refer to a subjective phenomenon, expertise that is gained through time or something people have in common and share with others. Scientific, experiential knowledge is commonly considered opposite to personal experience. In the history of Western thinking, however, “experience” is frequently associated with scientific knowledge, and the ways in which the concept is understood are also related to different conceptions of mental distress.

This thesis is an investigation of Michel Foucault’s (1926–1984) concepts of experience and of the issues he addresses when he refers to these terms. Previous studies on the subject focus only on some aspects of experience in Foucault’s philosophy or are framed according to a specific theme. He is often considered an anti-experientialist thinker, but this thesis places experience at the core of his philosophy and reveals the crucial theoretical functions of the different concepts of experience in his work. The research explicates the meanings of these concepts and analyses their interrelations and similarities when Foucault uses them in different contexts.

A further focus in the thesis is on the continuities between Foucault’s early and late philosophies of experience. He refers to experience throughout his work, especially in his early writing on psychiatry and psychology from the 1950s and 1960s and in his late work from the 1980s. “Experience” thus constitutes a thematic link between his earlier investigations into medical, especially psychiatric knowledge and his late research on ancient virtue ethics that is closely connected to the medical tradition and the topics of health and care. His writings do not constitute a system, but these texts are brought together in the same study because, independently, none of them allows a comprehensive grasp of his philosophy of experience. Terms such as “lived experience”, “background experience”, “contradictory experience”, “forms of experience”, “fields of experience”, “limit-experience”, “transformative experience” and “experience of the self” are explicated. The meanings of these terms are not always entirely fixed.

The thesis consists of two main parts. Part One is a systematic study of the theoretical and argumentative roles of the different concepts and notions of experience in Foucault’s early works on psychiatry, psychology and medical knowledge, and in his late articles and interviews. Part Two of the thesis is based on the argument that it is necessary to analyse the different concepts of experience to understand Foucault’s late work on ethics as a study on *intersubjectivity*. The thesis discusses the ways in which it is possible to experience the self in cultural contexts in which people are encouraged to listen to, turn to, observe and find themselves. Foucault’s investigation into “experiences of the self” is understood as a normative and critical study of cultural practices, activities and techniques, including therapeutic and confessional procedures, through which one forms a relationship with oneself and with others.

Thus, analysing the concepts of experience in Foucault’s philosophy helps to enhance understanding of his work as a whole: “experience” opens the discussion to themes such as mental distress, the social and intellectual exclusion of madness, ethical skills and, in the end, the virtue of critique.

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General Introduction

The word “experience” is used in everyday conversations as if its meaning were the most obvious thing. One could describe a sudden incident as a singular experience that comes and goes, for example, or claim to have gone through a new, powerful experience that was sufficiently significant to change one. It is common to use the word to express that over time, people acquire knowledge and skills, gain experience and become trained or even experts in an activity. One could speak about experiences and presuppose that one does so from an entirely subjective perspective or assume that they are something people have in common and share with others. Scientific, experiential knowledge is often considered opposite to personal experience in both academic and public debates, and sometimes the concern is that “experts in experience” have become authorities in the media when historical events are interpreted, political views are presented, or responses are sought to questions that revolve around sickness and health. However, the concept of experience is different in all the above examples. These different concepts imply presuppositions and philosophical commitments that have their roots in the long tradition of Western thinking.

This thesis is an investigation of the ways in which Michel Foucault (1926–1984) uses different concepts of experience in his work and of the issues he addresses with reference to experience. Foucault refers to experience throughout his oeuvre, especially in his early work on psychiatry and psychology from the 1950s and 1960s and in his late work from the 1980s. In fact, he assigns a variety of meanings to the word “experience”, using terms such as “lived experience”, “background experience”, “fundamental experience”, “contradictory experience”, “forms of experience”, “fields of experience”, “limit-experience” and “transformative experience”. Moreover, in the 1980s he describes his work on ethics as an investigation of “an experience of the self”. These terms are not always explicitly or clearly defined, and many references to experience are unfixed notions rather than concepts.¹ Thus, one of my main tasks is to explicate the meanings and theoretical functions of the different concepts of experience in Foucault’s work.

¹ The French word “notion” does not imply the same pejorative meaning as the English word “notion”, which can refer to beliefs and vague ideas. In the case of Foucault’s work, one could refer to “notions of experience” and emphasise that the meaning or the theoretical functions of “experience” are not fixed. The word “notion” is used in English translations of and commentaries on Foucault’s works: terms such as “care of the self” or *parhēsia* are notions rather than concepts. However, to avoid pejorative connotations I will generally refer to Foucault’s “concepts of experience”, in the plural, and thus emphasise the aspects of variety and change, but I will also use the word “notion” in its neutral meaning.

The concepts of experience Foucault uses form significant theoretical and thematic links between his earlier investigations of medical, especially psychiatric, knowledge and his late work on ethics. In his early essays he frames his study on mental illness as one in which “experience” is always much more than a mere subjective occurrence. At the same time, he does not reduce it to cultural or collective determinations. Similarly, in his late work he connects aspirations to take care of the self both to a personal experience and to a cultural practice within a shared field of experience. When I investigated the ways in which he uses concepts of experience I soon came to realise that “experience” links several themes in his early and late work such as medicine, sickness, health, meditation and exercising. He also reflects on the relationship between freedom and cultural practices and on how to understand personal ways and styles of reacting to situations in the intersubjective framework. I therefore investigate these themes throughout my thesis.

Having reorganised his research in the 1980s, Foucault looks back to his early studies on psychiatry in *The Use of Pleasure* and in his late lectures, for example, and redefines his entire work as an investigation of experience. He admits in the original version of the introduction to *The Use of Pleasure* that he was not entirely satisfied with his earlier notions of experience. Nevertheless, in *The Government of Self and Others* for instance, he states explicitly that experience is the link between his late work on ethics and his early studies, such as *Mental Illness and Psychology* and *History of Madness (GSA, 5)*. He explains that in his early work he did not investigate madness as an unchanging object but as different, heterogenous forms of medical, psychiatric and psychological bodies of knowledge—possible ways of experiencing madness within a culture.

Second, he describes his objective in his works of the 1970s as to analyse the sets of norms that define abnormality in a society and configure the behaviour of psychiatric personnel. He uses the word “experience” less frequently in his middle career from the late 1960s to the mid-1970s, but it occurs here and there when he discusses psychiatric practices, normalisation and political activism.

Third and finally, Foucault explains his interest in the question of subjectivity, in the possible ways of experiencing oneself as a healthy, sick or ethical subject, for example. It is clearly noticeable, however, that whereas he tackles questions of madness and illness in an institutionalised setting in his early work, he locates his later research outside institutions and emphasises aspects such as voluntariness and health. I will show that the question of health and the notion of carrying out exercises willingly were not mere historical curiosities to Foucault in his late work but were integral to his investigation of ethics and experience of the self.

My work differs from the few previous studies on Foucault's philosophy of experience in that I analyse the ways in which he uses various concepts of experience throughout his theoretical work, and I focus my study on problems that revolve around madness, illness, health and care. Previous studies have framed their discussions of experience differently, focusing either on a specific theme or only on some aspects of experience in his philosophy. Beatrice Han-Pile, for example, argues that Foucault operates with two contradictory concepts of experience: first, he investigates "the objective" structures of experience that enable subjects to perceive themselves in specific ways; and second, he includes in the "subjective" notion of experience the possibility of reflecting on and questioning these objective structures (Han-Pile 1998, 249–257). Timothy O'Leary, in turn, positions his book *Foucault and Fiction: The Experience Book* (2009) within literary studies, and he provides a shorter philosophical analysis of Foucault's various conceptions of experience. Martin Jay investigates Foucault's concept of limit-experience in his article "The Limits of Limit-Experience" (1995); Gary Gutting's article, "Foucault's Philosophy of Experience" (2002) is a short introduction to the theme; Thomas Flynn (2003) analyses "experience" in a specific, phenomenological context; Thomas Lemke (2011) discusses Foucault's concepts of experience in the light of his late critical philosophy; Elisabetta Basso (2012) touches upon the question of experience in the context of the early essays on psychiatry; and Johanna Oksala (2014; 2016) deals with experience in her articles and in *Feminist Experiences, Foucauldian and Phenomenological Investigations* specifically in the context of feminist philosophy.

Curiously, Foucault's thought has played a crucial role in the debate on the status of experience in the historical sciences, even though his notions of experience and how they differ are rarely defined. The so-called "experiential turn" in the 1990s challenged traditional history writing, the monumental histories that focus on wars and other large-scale events, emphasising the importance of making visible alternative histories of everyday lives and personal experiences. Foucault's analyses of the different mechanisms of power facilitated the formulation of theoretical frameworks for investigating microhistories. However, Joan W. Scott's article "The Evidence of Experience", which has become a classic of some sort in the debate on the status of experience in history writing, launches Foucauldian ideas in order to *reject* individual experience as valid evidence or as a legitimate source of historical knowledge (Scott 1991, 777; 780). Scott refers explicitly to Foucault, especially his work from the 1970s, and argues that researchers should question how experiences are constituted in the first place: it is problematic that singular experiences are claimed to represent the experiences of black people, women, gays, members of the working class, people with mental disorders, prisoners and immigrants, for example (Scott 1991, 782). Lois McNay further claims that Foucault's

critical thought is profoundly anti-experiential and anti-subjectivist, and she also criticises him for totally overlooking suffering and its social aspects (McNay 2012, 62).

In response to Scott, Johanna Oksala defends experience as a crucial standpoint against claims that it is theoretically illegitimate and unsophisticated to refer to it (Oksala 2014, 388). She argues in her article “In Defense of Experience” that ways of conceptualising phenomena should always be reassessed and questioned in the light of experiences, which may be new or may not fit in the current schema: through the critical study of experience one can transform discourses, which in turn shape one’s experiences (Oksala 2014, 396; 399; 2016). She further claims that it is problematic to presuppose that experiences constitute identity categories, or that one would be motivated to fight against injustice only if one had a shared experience of it (Oksala 2014, 390; 396). Oksala goes on to engage in a discussion with contemporary analytical philosophy of mind to further substantiate her point.

I will take another route to Foucault’s philosophy of experience, however, and analyse and systematically explicate the ways in which he uses the concepts of experience in their diverse meanings throughout his works. It is necessary to carry out this conceptual work before applying Foucault’s concepts of experience to contexts such as the empirical sciences or applied philosophy. I will argue that Foucault does not reduce experiences of madness, illness, health or care of the self to the private experiences of individual subjects, or to discursive formations, but conceives of experiences as fundamentally intersubjective, social and political processes that individuals go through and relate to. Instead of arguing, as is sometimes claimed, that experiences are merely linguistic events produced by discourses, Foucault investigates experiences at the margins of society, reflects on their conditions, and seeks ways to speak about experiences in their own terms. Moreover, he aims at theorising so as to enable people to establish a distance from difficult experiences and to change their relationship with them.

This thesis comprises two main parts. Part One is a systematic study of the theoretical and argumentative roles of the concepts of experience in Foucault’s works, and of the themes he investigates through the different concepts of experience. I have divided the study into five chapters that deal with Foucault’s works in chronological order. The first of these concerns Foucault’s early essays on psychiatry and psychology, including *Mental Illness and Psychology* and “Dream, Imagination and Existence”, both of which discuss the experience of mental illness. Chapters, 1.2–5 analyse the concepts of experience especially in *History of Madness*, *Introduction to Kant’s Anthropology* and *The Birth of the Clinic*, as well as in the articles and interviews that are collected in *Dits et écrits I and II*. The focus in the final chapter of Part One is on Foucault’s late articles and interviews from this perspective. None of these texts alone allows a

comprehensive grasp of Foucault's philosophy of experience, simply because his works do not form a system. For the same reason, my own investigation requires singling out and reflecting on the different concepts of experience, their interrelations, similarities and differences, and asking what Foucault achieves by using these concepts in different contexts.

Part Two of the thesis addresses the question of experience in a different way. I argue that an analysis of the different concepts is necessary for understanding Foucault's late work. In referring to his late work I mean the last three volumes of *The History of Sexuality*, the lectures and lecture courses of the 1980s, such as *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, *The Government of Self and Others*, *The Courage of Truth*, *Subjectivity and Truth*, *On the Government of the Living*, *Fearless Speech*, *About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self* and *Dire-vrai sur soi-même*, and the articles and interviews in *Dits et écrits II*.

In the late work Foucault uses different concepts of experience to provide a framework for his study on ancient practices of care of the self. These concepts include “fields of experience”, “forms of experience” and “experience of the self”. He refers to his work on ethics as a study of “a certain experience of the self”, and my aim is to explicate what this experience involves. I argue in Part Two that even though the field of experience that Foucault investigates is historically delineated in antiquity, he discusses similar themes as in his early work: medical knowledge, exercising for well-being, freedom and styles of conducting oneself and reacting to situations.

Political theorists tend to overlook his late work as a personal crusade that addresses private issues such as sexuality and ascetic exercise, but his late lectures and other related works demonstrate that he arrived at these questions—and the question of experience—while investigating techniques by which one governs not only oneself but also others. Foucault organises his investigation of the field of experience in the same way as he groups his work in general in his late writing: as consisting of three constitutive elements—knowledge, governing and ethics. In other words, the investigation of experience in his later work takes into consideration the discursive practices that organise knowledge, practices of governing and, third, the ways in which the subjects constitute themselves and form a relationship with the self using different sets of techniques (*GSA*, 6, 42; *CV*, 10; *HS2*, 10–12).

Thus, I discuss Foucault's investigation into “experiences of the self” as a normative and critical study of cultural practices, activities and techniques through which one forms a relationship with oneself and with others. In the final chapters of the thesis I explicate in what sense critique and normativity should be understood in Foucault's ethics.

Part One

Michel Foucault's Concepts of
Experience

experience

/ɪkˈspɪəriəns/

noun

- *Practical contact with and observation of facts or events.*
- *The knowledge or skill acquired by a period of practical experience of something, especially that gained in a particular profession.*
- *An event or occurrence which leaves an impression on someone.*

verb

- *Encounter or undergo (an event or occurrence)*
- *Feel (an emotion or sensation)*

Oxford Dictionary

Introduction to Part One

The French word *expérience* has a whole variety of meanings: “experience” refers to knowledge, expertise, experiment, attempt, practice and even to taste. Foucault uses it in most of these senses. He uses the concept to demarcate a field of scientific knowledge (e.g. *expérience psychologique, expérience médicale*), for example, and on some occasions with reference to a horizon against which perceptions stand out (*expérience fondamentale*). At times, too, the notion connotes creative exploration: “experience” implies possibilities of experimenting and trying out (Lat. *experiri*). On the other hand, it is associated with failing and bitter ends (Lat. *periri*), danger, perishing and taking a risk.

It is thus not an easy task to analyse the different concepts and notions of experience in Foucault’s thought, given that his work is extremely broad and “experience” is a moving and transforming target. However, clarifying his uses of the term “experience” will enhance understanding of the arguments, theoretical commitments, continuities and changes in his thought. Moreover, the various concepts of experience connect the themes of his early and late works: the word “experience” features significantly in Foucault’s early essays on psychology and psychiatry, in *History of Madness, The Birth of the Clinic*, and he reassesses his concepts of experience in the 1980s, especially in *The Use of Pleasure* and his late articles and interviews. He also refers to experience in his late lecture series including *The Hermeneutics of the Subject, The Government of Self and Others* and *Dire-vrai sur soi-même*. Even though he does not

always clearly explicate the meanings of the concepts, they have important theoretical functions.

I begin my study with a discussion about the concepts of experience in Foucault's early texts on psychology and psychiatry, especially in *Mental Illness and Psychology* and "Dream, Imagination, Existence". Having originally written these two essays in the 1950s, Foucault refers to experience in the framework of phenomenological anthropology, looking for an alternative to medical discourses on mental illness. When he redefines the concept as "the field of experience" in the 1980s, he explains that his work in psychiatric institutions led him to rethink the practices of care and cure that presupposed a clear distinction between normal and abnormal, or normal and pathological (*DEII.212*, 374; *DEII.281*, 877). Foucault uses Ludwig Binswanger's phenomenological psychiatry in "Dream, Imagination and Existence", Binswanger's thinking giving him the methodological and conceptual framework for taking personal experiences seriously: he argues that Binswanger's existential approach to psychiatry provides tools that enhance understanding of patients as *relational* and situated beings with deeply personal ways of responding to situations and giving meaning to them.

He also frames his study in the context of social history in the revised version of *Mental Illness and Psychology*², using the concept of contradictory experience to draw attention to social conflicts and conditions that affect mental well-being. Foucault calls for a philosophical analysis that investigates the conditions of possible experience, not wanting to reduce experiences of mental distress simply to individual subjects.

I argue in Chapter 1.2 that the concept of experience also plays a significant theoretical role in *History of Madness*, but in a different sense: by referring to experience, Foucault formulates a method that rejects the idea of the dialectical progress of history. Distancing himself from dialectical thinking, he purports to investigate historical and social "forms of experience". The concept of experience in this context is a spatial abstraction by means of which Foucault refers to a field in which madness may be known, felt, seen and distinguished in specific ways.

It is quite commonly claimed that Foucault overlooks individual experience altogether in *History of Madness*. The first, shortened English translation of it was published in the series *Studies in Existentialism and Phenomenology* that is associated with R. D. Laing, one of the prominent figures in the anti-psychiatric movement. The preface was written by David Cooper, who invented the term "anti-psychiatry", and *Madness and Civilization* has been strongly associated with this movement (Hoeller 1993, 7). The anti-psychiatric movement of the 1960s and 1970s emphasised the socio-political and cultural aspects of mental disorders.

² Foucault wrote *Maladie mentale et personnalité* in 1954, and *Mental Illness and Psychology* (1964) is a rewritten version of his first book.

During the translation process the title of the book was changed from *History of Madness* to *Madness and Civilization* (1964). Whereas the original title makes a distinction between madness and unreason (*folie et déraison*), the title of the translated version frames the book in a new way and stresses the distinction between madness and society. Thus, many later philosophies of madness and histories of psychiatry emphasise aspects of power, the discursive formation of knowledge and social constructivism in their interpretations of Foucault's thought.

I argue, however, that rather than rejecting the personal-experience perspective, Foucault asks how historical conditions delimit the ways in which it is possible to experience phenomena such as madness, illness, abnormality, normality or health in specific ways (DEII.212, 372–373).³ Moreover, in *History of Madness* he focuses especially on questions concerning the social and intellectual exclusion of madness. One of his main arguments is that psychiatric knowledge reduces madness to silence, in other words to a form of suffering that cannot speak for itself. This exposes continuities between the two early essays and *History of Madness*: in his first essays on psychiatry and psychology his aim is to give personal experiences a voice of their own.

In his early essays from the 1950s Foucault defends the framework of phenomenological anthropology, but in his second thesis, *Introduction to Kant's Anthropology*, he investigates the theoretical roots of this tradition in a more critical manner. The question I address in Chapter 1.3, therefore, concerns how Foucault understands the role of experience (*Erfahrung*) in Kant's *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*. Kant states in *Anthropology* that his study operates on the level of experience, and when he asks: "What is a human being?" he discusses mental illnesses as possible derangements of experience that concern everyone.

How Foucault relates to Kant is, of course, quite ambiguous. In the early essays he supports the way in which the tradition of phenomenological anthropology combines empirical engagement with patients and philosophical analysis. However, he is much more famous for his critique of the anthropological structure of knowledge, specifically targeting knowledge that mixes empirical content with philosophical analysis and presupposes that the human being could simultaneously be its object and its subject.

Nevertheless, in his late works Foucault contextualises his own thought with reference to the Kantian tradition of critical philosophy, and he continuously returns to Kant's political essays in his work from the 1980s. In this sense, he sustains a close relationship with Kantian philosophy throughout his work. In his late work, he investigates the integration of

³ Foucault refers to the founders of the anti-psychiatric movement R. D. Laing and David Cooper in an interview from 1978, and contrasts his own study, a critical historical analysis, to their work (DEII.281, 877). He also hesitates to use the word "anti-psychiatry" in *The Psychiatric Power* (*Psych*, 39).

philosophical guidance and medicine in antiquity. Kant's *Anthropology* also shows influences from ancient dietetics and virtue ethics: it is a study of possible derangements of experience as well as of well-being. Kant gives his peers advice on exercising their mental health and improving their cognitive powers. One of my tasks in this thesis is to clarify Kant's influence in Foucault's late work and to explicate the theoretical role of dietetics and practical exercises in his formulation of the critical subject.

In chapter 1.4 I investigate the concepts but also the less-well-clarified notions of experience in *The Birth of the Clinic*. Foucault defines *The Birth of the Clinic* explicitly as an investigation of different "forms of medical experience", which could be understood as the fields of medical knowledge that imply rules for perceiving and observing the objects of knowledge and speaking about them in specific ways. He therefore examines medical literature from the 18th and 19th centuries and analyses their descriptions of how to look, or not to look, touch or listen to the patient. He further asks how perception itself becomes the object of medical investigation that is formulated by scientific vocabularies and taught to the students at the clinic. Foucault uses the term "clinical experience", referring to a structure of knowledge that involves historically delineated ways of using the senses and verbalising these actions in the clinical space.

Apart from in his early essays, Foucault tries to detach his works from the phenomenological tradition and to develop alternatives to the concept of lived experience (Fr. *expérience vécue*; Ger. *Erlebnis*).⁴ However, regardless of the explicit rejection of phenomenology, in his own analyses he applies distinctions that have roots in the phenomenological tradition. In a sense, he continues the phenomenological critique of science that was developed by Edmund Husserl and reformulated by Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. This is most evident when he criticises the anthropological structures of medical knowledge in *The Birth of the Clinic*.

I argue in Chapter 1.4 that even if he continuously criticises the anthropological structure of knowledge, and remains suspicious about the self-evident value of experience, Foucault does not target his critique at experiences as such, or at experiencing patients, but at the scientific status that is given to the doctor's perception. In other words, the point is to question the formation of certain kinds of subjects, not to disregard the ways in which patients sense

⁴ Foucault understands "lived experience" as something immediate and intimate to the individual (*DEII.212, 372*). This is not the standard definition of the term in phenomenology, however. Lived experience should rather be understood as experience that someone *lives through*, and in this sense subjectivity, not immediacy, defines lived experience in phenomenology.

themselves and their own situation. Therefore, one cannot simply dismiss Foucault as an anti-experientialist thinker.

At the beginning of Chapter 1.5 I draw attention to the changes in Foucault's thought on experience between the mid-1970s and the early 1980s. It is a period that witnessed a shift in his thought, and he placed his studies outside institutional contexts. I will ask what this shift means with regard to his definitions of experience and other concepts that became central to his thought. I then proceed to explicate the concepts of experience especially in the late articles and interviews collected in *Dits et écrits II*. In these late texts Foucault describes his work as an investigation of "the field of experience" that includes aspects of knowledge formation, governance and the ethics of the self. As a concept "the field of experience" combines the micro and macro aspects of power mechanisms, concerning the ways in which subjects can perceive and concretely act upon themselves, and how they are instructed, guided and persuaded to do so in a society.

However, even though the field of experience is delineated according to the tripartite structure, Foucault also invites his readers to shatter their preconceptions of the limits of possible experience (*DEII.234*, 590; *DEII.281*, 862; 868; *MFDV*, 238). He uses notions such as "transformative experience" and "limit-experience", and he refers to experience when he describes exploring and experimenting with new ways of being and thinking. In addition, he contrasts party politics with both grassroots activism and "political experiences", which create social movements and agitate social change.

Thus, I argue in Part One of the thesis that the different concepts of experience in Foucault's thought include intersubjective and personal, societal and political, spatial, abstract, and very concrete features depending on their meanings and contexts of usage. Even if Foucault's aim is not to build a comprehensive system with his concepts and notions of experience, his thought is not sporadic, inconsistent, discontinuous or unsystematic. He has profoundly influenced humanities, social sciences, legal studies and pedagogics, their methods, vocabularies and ways of asking research questions, and his thought has generated new scientific disciplines. One of my aims is to find out what aspect of Foucauldian thinking, perhaps even a new one, is in evidence when the focus is on different aspects of experience in his work. I will single out and explicate the meanings of his various concepts of experience, with a view to enhancing understanding of Foucault's arguments, challenging some standard conceptions of his work and further discussing the issues he addresses when he refers to experience.

1.1 Experience in Foucault's Early Essays on Psychology

"When, in a bitter disappointment, "we fall from the clouds", then we actually do fall. [...] Our harmonious relationship with the world and the men about us suddenly suffers a staggering blow."

Ludwig Binswanger, Dream and Existence

1.1.1 Experience in Mental Illness and Psychology

When Foucault characterises his late work in the 1980s he revises his earlier notions of experience, thereby returning to his early project on psychiatry. He describes the relationship between his early and his late works as follows in the original version of his introduction to *The Use of Pleasure*:

To study forms of experience...—in their history—is an idea that originated with an earlier project, in which I made use of the methods of existential analysis in the field of psychiatry and in the domain of "mental illness". For two reasons, not unrelated to each other, this project left me unsatisfied: its theoretical weakness in elaborating the notion of experience, and its ambiguous link with a psychiatric practice which it simultaneously ignored and took for granted. One could deal with the first problem by referring to a general theory of the human being, and treat the second altogether differently by turning, as is so often done, to the "economic and social context"; one could choose, by doing so, to accept the resulting dilemma of a philosophical anthropology and a social history. But I wondered whether, rather than playing on this alternative, it would be possible to consider the very historicity of forms of experience. (*PHS2*, 334)

Foucault is referring in the above to his work on psychiatry and mental illness, and it is a passage that Hubert Dreyfus quotes in his introduction to Foucault's *Mental Illness and Psychology* (Dreyfus 1987, vii). Foucault clearly makes a distinction between the two different theoretical frameworks in which he discusses experience in his early work, namely, philosophical or existential anthropology and social history. Thus, *Mental Illness and Psychology* consists of two parts and is based on two parallel conceptual frameworks. In the citation, however, Foucault states that the combination is not satisfactory because the notion of

experience is left theoretically weak. He seeks another approach to the study of experience in his later work.⁵

This passage does not appear in the final version of *The Use of Pleasure*, a deletion that raises the question of how experience is then discussed and framed in *Mental Illness and Psychology*. My aim in this chapter is to investigate the concepts of experience especially within the theoretical framework of existential analysis. At the end of it I will raise the question of how Foucault uses the concept in the context of social history.

In the context of existential analysis, or phenomenological anthropology, Foucault purports to discuss *experiencing* without reducing it to the third-person perspective of scientific knowledge.⁶ I will argue, first, that he positions his discussion about the experience of mental distress as a study on intersubjectivity, which is why he turns to Ludwig Binswanger's existential analysis of psychopathology. I also point out that when Foucault discusses personal ways of responding to challenging occurrences in life he defines a term for the conditions of personal experience (*the existential a priori*) that includes the past events the person has gone through and the respective social contexts. Moreover, within this intersubjective framework he uses the concept of style in referring to personal ways of responding to distressing situations. I will show how, in "Dream, Imagination and Existence", he discusses dream experience so that he could reflect further on the relationship between the conditions of possible experience and the original way of moving towards the future and beyond the current states of the self.

Second, I will argue that from the perspective of social history Foucault pays attention to the ways in which madness, mental illnesses and pathologies are understood in diverse cultural contexts. These cultural conceptions of mental distress are connected to the possibility of experiencing oneself as "mad", "ill" or "disordered", for example. Moreover, in stressing the societal aspects of experience he draws attention to the contradictions people face with respect to their environment, such as economic exploitation, colonialism and class struggles.

Thus, in *Mental Illness and Psychology* he uses the notion of experience to refer to the personal experience of the patient (hallucination, delusion, experience of the body), *and* to deal with social phenomena (e.g. "contemporary experience of madness", "major experience of the

⁵ Foucault refers to "the forms of experience" in his late work when he investigates the historical-cultural conditions that enable subjects to perceive themselves in specific ways. In the introduction to *The Use of Pleasure*, Foucault also uses the concept "fields of experience" to unify three different aspects of his own work: subjectivity, governmentality and the procedures of truth (see Chapter 1.5.2).

⁶ Note, however, that Foucault also uses the word "experience" to refer to empirical knowledge, but before discussing experience in that sense (chapters 1.3–1.4), I will draw attention to his essays on phenomenological anthropology in which the viewpoint is that of personal experience.

Insane”, “Christian experience”). I will argue that even if Foucault makes a clear distinction between the frameworks of existential analysis and social history, they are complementary rather than conflicting perspectives of experience in his early discussion on mental distress⁷.

1.1.2 The Role of Existential Analysis in Foucault’s Discussion on Mental Illness

My discussion on Foucault’s concepts of experience starts from his early essays in which he operates in the framework of existential analysis. In an interview from 1978 he reflects retrospectively on the role of existential analysis in his early work:

The reading of “existential analysis” or “psychiatric phenomenology” was important to me when I was working in psychiatric hospitals and when I was looking for something different from the traditional psychiatric viewpoint, a counterweight. Certainly, these superb descriptions of madness as unique, incomparable fundamental experiences were important. (*DEII.281, 877*)⁸

As Foucault explains in the quotation, he is interested in existential analysis for very concrete reasons: he is looking for an alternative to his contemporary medical discourse, and for a better, more adequate way of understanding the experiences of patients.

To understand the significance of the perspective of lived experience in Foucault’s discussion on mental disorders one must ask to which problems he is responding in using the notion of experience, and why he proposes this alternative focus. He raises the following questions at the beginning of *Mental Illness and Psychology*: “Under what conditions can one speak of mental illness in the psychological domain?” and “What relations can one define between the facts of mental pathology and organic pathology?” (*MIP, 1*). His main argument is that mental pathology requires its own unique methods of analysis that differ considerably from the methods of organic pathology (*MIP, 10–11*). In his view, it is only due to an artifice of language that similar or analogous vocabularies are employed in discussions about mental disorders (or psychopathologies) and organic pathologies (*ibid.*). Thus, one of the tasks is to investigate how certain phenomena become defined as illness and are organised into categories in accordance with the vocabulary of pathology. As an example Foucault examines the

⁷ Foucault does not use the term “disorder” when he discusses mental distress. The use of the term “disorder” is characteristic of the paradigm shift that was instigated by *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders III (DSM-III)* in the English-speaking world in 1980.

⁸ “La lecture de ce que l’on appelé “analyse existentielle” ou “psychiatrie phénoménologique” a été importante pour moi à l’époque où je travaillais dans les hôpitaux psychiatriques et où je cherchais quelque chose de différent des grilles traditionnelles du regard psychiatrique, un contrepois. Assurément, ces superbes descriptions de la folie comme expériences fondamentales uniques, incomparables furent importantes.” (*DEII.281, 877*)

botanical model of classification, a framework in which illnesses are identified as if they were botanical species and organised in tables according to the symptoms that are supposed to manifest the essence of the disease (*MIP*, 6).⁹ Moreover, he rejects the notion of defining mental pathologies as organic units according to functional normality or abnormality, being suspicious of all attempts to combine the physiological and the psychological aspects of mental illness in one unity. He is of the belief that unification only covers the problems that remain when mental pathologies are explained in terms of organic, functional abnormalities (*MIP*, 9).

Foucault is often characterised as a social constructivist, but this interpretation is not fully adequate: he does not claim, for example, that symptoms refer to nothing outside of the cultural-historical context of the patient, or that they refer only to language or to cultural-historical customs. On the contrary, in *Mental Illness and Psychology* he clearly distinguishes human sciences—by which he means psychology, psychiatry and psychoanalysis—from natural sciences and organic medicine, claiming, in fact, that physiology is able to provide analytical tools for delineating diseases in organic medicine (*MIP*, 10).¹⁰ Delineating psychopathologies is highly problematic, however, because certain questions remain, such as how to avoid confusing patients' personality features with their pathological symptoms, and it is not entirely clear how to make a distinction between normal and pathological behaviour (*MIP*, 11). Dreyfus emphasises the fact that the natural sciences investigate causal relations, which is why they are objective in a different sense than the human sciences in which it is difficult to isolate variables and prevent objects of research—human beings—from being affected by scientific practice (Dreyfus 1987, xi).¹¹

⁹ *The Order of Things* provides a wider context for the history of scientific knowledge. Foucault explicates the botanical ideal of knowledge by referring to Carl von Linné's *Genera Morborum* (1766), which provides a classification of diseases, including a chapter on mental illnesses. Von Linné's idea was that classifying things would bring one as close as one could get to their essences. Moreover, classification should be based purely on visible signs, such as feathers or shapes of beaks or petals. In a similar vein, he equates symptoms with signs of mental disorders. Von Linné's categorizations and listed symptoms seem rather strange nowadays: he categorizes vertigo, tinnitus, nostalgia, sleepwalking and rabies as mental disorders, for example (*Genera Morborum 1766, V*). Even if contemporary medicine does not seek essences or entities of mental disorders, Ian Hacking, following in Foucault's footsteps, criticizes the current *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5) for its botanical structure: the manual groups sets of symptoms into categories of disorders from which a diagnosis must be found for each patient (Hacking 2013).

¹⁰ Foucault refers especially to psychology, psychiatry and psychoanalysis, sometimes also to sociology, as belonging to the human sciences (Foucault 2008, 87).

¹¹ Ian Hacking has continued Foucault's critique of the classification of mental disorders in the contemporary context. He uses the term *looping effect* to refer to the circular process in which diagnosis affects the behavior of the diagnosed as a self-fulfilling prognosis, and, conversely, the changed behavior leads to the creation of new categorizations (Hacking 1996; 2006). Hacking also makes a distinction between indifferent "natural kinds" and interactive kinds, of which the latter engage in looping. It is another debate whether there may also be varieties and mixtures of kinds. My objective, however, is not to respond to the ontological question of what a mental disorder *is*. I am simply asking how Foucault understands experience in these texts. On looping, see e.g. Hacking 1996; 2006.

Foucault also argues in *Mental Illness and Psychology* that organic medicine cannot respond to questions concerning how patients structure their own world and give meaning to it and to their past: these are questions that existential anthropology investigates (*MIP*, 44–46), and they are crucial to enhancing understanding of mental illness.

Thus, Foucault proposes an experiential perspective for investigating mental disorders, and methods of investigation that are independent of organic medicine. He distinguishes his own method from discursive analysis, biographical history, the natural sciences and the search for mechanistic causalities (*ibid.*). Despite being famous for his later investigations of discursive practices, he declares in *Mental Illness and Psychology* that his work “owes nothing to the discursive analysis”, and he argues that discursive methods are insufficient because they can only follow disordered lines of thought and become exhausted in their attempts to paraphrase their content (*MIP*, 44–45). These early theoretical views diverge from his later critique of existential analysis and phenomenology, but in *Mental Illness and Psychology* he takes seriously the task of investigating experiences of mental distress in their own terms, beyond the manifestation of symptoms. In other words, Foucault is interested in the phenomenology of psychopathology and existential analysis because the method allows him to discuss experience by means of experience itself (Basso 2012, 173).

For these reasons, Foucault’s suggestion is to “place ourselves at the center of this experience”—within the experience of disordered consciousness (*MIP*, 44). It is well-known that he subsequently questioned the possibilities of doing so, but in this context and at this stage of theorisation he defines the objectives of existential analysis as follows: “The understanding of the sick consciousness and reconstitution of its pathological world, these are the two tasks of a phenomenology of mental illness” (*MIP*, 46). “Understanding the sick consciousness” means investigating the way in which one experiences oneself as someone sick or abnormal, and the second task is to investigate how the world unfolds from the patient’s viewpoint (*ibid.*). Foucault explains that the analysis cannot accept any pre-given definitions of normality or pathology, which implies rejecting the typical set-up in which the doctor adopts the viewpoint of the healthy and possesses primary knowledge about the illness, whereas the patient is placed in the sphere of illness and is associated with a lack of knowledge (*MIP*, 50). In his view, it would be a mistake to presuppose that patients are totally ignorant and unaware of their states and situations: they might not always have theoretical distance from their own situation, but awareness of their own state of being becomes manifest and expressed in their relations with others (*MIP*, 46–47).

I argue in the next section that Foucault uses phenomenological anthropology in interpreting mental distress as an intersubjective phenomenon. He also studies the conditions

of personal experience and personal ways of responding to distressing situations. The main aim is to find ways of grasping experiences in their own terms.

1.1.3 Background Experience as the Shared Cultural Context

Foucault refers to Ludwig Binswanger's (1881–1966) existential analysis in his search for a method that would allow the grasping of experience without explaining it in terms of causes or classifications. He does not follow Binswanger faithfully, which is typical of him, but he acknowledges that the strength of Binswanger's work is his attempt to operate on the concrete level of existence by treating patients as persons and trying to understand the ways in which they experience their own being (*DEI.1*, 93–94; 96–97; Basso 2012, 160). Binswanger distinguishes his existential analysis from philosophy because of its practical, therapeutic context, hence he refers to it as “phenomenological anthropology” (Binswanger 1962; Brencio 2015, 282).

I argue above that mental disorders become manifest and are expressed in relationships with others according to Foucault: even if experience is understood as something the individual lives through, it does not mean that mental disorders should or could be reduced to individual minds. In referring to Binswanger and the tradition of phenomenological anthropology, Foucault positions his study as an analysis of intersubjectivity (*MIP*, 45). The emphasis on intersubjectivity stems from Binswanger's indebtedness to Heidegger and his “intentional misreading” of Heidegger's *Being and Time*. Heidegger characterises *Dasein* as a mode of being, and he deliberately distinguishes the concept from that of a “human being”—he explains that in the case of *Dasein*, being itself is at issue (Heidegger 1978, §10). He further defines *Dasein* as being-in-the-world, which means that *Dasein* is profoundly relational and embedded in the practical social world rather than an entity amongst other entities (Heidegger 1978, §12). Binswanger stresses the relationship between the psychiatrist and the patient in his formulation of *Daseinsanalyse* for therapeutic purposes: patients should not be defined by their symptoms but should be understood as they are situated in the world in their entirety (Brencio 2015, 282). From this perspective, psychoses, as specific forms of being-in-the-world, can be understood only in terms of a certain world design (*ibid.*).

Foucault uses the concept *background experience* (*expérience fondamentale*) with reference to psychosis as an intersubjective experience in which relationships with others are altered (*MIP*, 45). This raises the question of what background experience means in this context. Foucault argues that it “dominates all pathological processes”, and that practitioners should reconstitute the pathological *world*, the world that the patient experiences, by means of direct contact (*MIP*,

45–46). Dreyfus provides a Heideggerian reading of Foucault’s *Mental Illness and Psychology*, arguing that directing and orienting oneself towards the world always presuppose a context, a background understanding, even though one does not consciously reflect upon it (Dreyfus 1987, xviii). In familiar surroundings, one instantly knows how to operate with objects and entities without paying attention to or questioning the ways in which they embody an understanding of the meaning of being (ibid.). In other words, language, tools and institutions of the concrete environment embody the ways in which background contexts respond to the question of “what it means to be” (ibid.). Foucault does not thematise or address the question of being in this Heideggerian sense, but throughout his work he focuses his inquiry on actual statements and expressions, concrete techniques, practices and architectural arrangements. This emphasis on concrete statements and material arrangements represents a strong philosophical commitment: the idea is that concrete phenomena such as bodily expressions, daily routines and spatial orchestrations embody a comprehensive background experience of the world.

However, in *Zollikon Seminars* Heidegger rejects Binswanger’s objectives of developing *Daseinsanalyse* for psychiatric purposes.¹² He argues that Binswanger’s approach remains on the anthropological (ontic) level, which means that his analyses only provide descriptions of human beings as reduced to subjects of human-scientific or anthropological knowledge (Heidegger 2001, 115; 190). He further claims that even if Binswanger takes the concept of being-in-the-world as the starting point of the method he uses in psychiatry, he does not take seriously enough the fundamental ontological project of *Being and Time* and the constitutive dimensions of the viewpoint of the one who is present in the world—the patient (Heidegger 2001, 188–189).¹³

Foucault, for his part, defends the way in which Binswanger combines Heidegger’s conceptual apparatus with the analysis of patients’ everyday experience. As he explains, the anthropological aspect of Binswanger’s method involves approaching and treating patients as subjects of experiencing, whereas the ontological task is to investigate the ontological structures of existence—such as temporality, spatiality, sociality and corporality—as they are

¹² On Heidegger and Binswanger see Brencio 2015; Askay & Farquhar 2013.

¹³ Heidegger criticises anthropology in *Being and Time* and in the *Zollikon Seminars*, and the critique is targeted explicitly towards Binswanger’s psychiatric *Daseinsanalyse* (Heidegger 2001, 115; 188–189; 190). In *Being and Time*, Heidegger distinguishes his existential analytics from anthropology, psychology and biology: they do not address the question of being, because they only focus on the objects of knowledge as things. Anthropology, as Heidegger knows it, takes for granted concepts such as “man” and “life” without analysing them philosophically (Heidegger 1978, §10).

manifest in experience.¹⁴ Anthropology in this context raises the question “What is it like to be a human being?”, whereas ontology addresses the question of the singular *who* that is announced at certain “structural moments” (Binswanger 1993, 84).

Thus, in *Mental Illness and Psychology* Foucault gives examples of pathological distortions in the structures of experience: these include disturbances in *temporality* (such as the fragmentation and discontinuity of time, and hyper-reflective awareness of eternity), *spatiality* (shattered and disconnected surroundings and objects), the *social world* (becoming profoundly the other, losing things that are shared, such as language and expressions), and one’s own *body* (the strangeness of sensing it or disturbed ideas about its constitution, location in space and so on) (*MIP*, 50–54).¹⁵ One example of these structural distortions is the notion of “falling”, which Binswanger picks out from patients’ descriptions of their emotional collapses. He argues that these expressions should not be perceived merely as figurative speech: after a severe disappointment or a state of shock one might experience falling even though there is no physical aspect of collapsing (Binswanger 1993, 81–82).¹⁶ The concept of falling depends on a matrix of meaning in which the movement from above to below has existential significance to the subjects who experience it (Binswanger 1993, 82).

Foucault explains in *Mental Illness and Psychology* that the task of his analysis is to grasp “the radical alteration of the living relationship with others” (*MIP*, 45). In other words, his point in arguing that the experience of illness or distress covers much more than mere symptoms is that awareness of one’s own situation becomes manifest in the intersubjective sphere. The different ways in which patients try to reject or accept their condition and give meaning to it are integral to the experience of mental distress, and such conditions require constant activity in terms of adjusting and re-orientating oneself in the natural and social world. In *Dream and Existence*, Binswanger describes a patient who wishes to withdraw entirely into a subjective realm, but he argues (for structural existential reasons) that there is no possibility of a complete dissolution into subjectivity, not even in psychotic cases (Binswanger 1993, 91).

¹⁴ The distinction between anthropology and ontology is without doubt Kantian (see Chapter 1.3). Foucault argues in “Dream, Imagination and Existence” that the distinction between anthropology and ontology only has an operational function in Binswanger’s work, and that in practice it is difficult to draw such a line (*DIE*, 32). He describes how Binswanger moves “back and forth between the anthropological forms and the ontological conditions of existence” (*ibid.*). Foucault is well-known for his critique of the anthropological structure of knowledge, especially in *The Order of Things*. He also describes anthropology as “a problematic structure of philosophizing” in other early essays from the 1960s in that it addresses all philosophical questions from the first-person perspective and objectivises the others (*DEI*.30, 467).

¹⁵ These structures of experience have been studied extensively in later phenomenological research on mental disorders and psychopathologies. See Heinämaa & Taipale 2018..

¹⁶ In a more recent debate on existential psychiatry, Thomas Fuchs analyses the experience of falling into a depression. See Fuchs 2002.

In *Mental Illness and Psychology*, Foucault gives examples of the different ways in which patients can be aware of their mental disorders: they may, for instance, create a maximum distance from their own condition and perceive it only as an organic process, or they may acknowledge a change with respect to their previous life and feel that its meaning has profoundly altered. Alternatively, they may fully accept hallucinations but also recognise (at times in a minimal sense) that in doing so their world seems radically solitary and separate from the world of others; they might also describe their experience as a dreamlike state that is different from the world of those who seem to be awake (*MIP*, 47–50). The point is that most of these examples manifest not only a clear awareness of change, but also an altered relationship with the world and with others.

1.1.4 The A Priori of Existence and Personal Style of Expression

Even though Foucault presupposes in his analysis that personal experiences of illness are embedded in a shared cultural context, he also turns to Binswanger to emphasise the aspect of personal style in structuring the world, giving meaning to it and relating to others (*MIP*, 56; Dreyfus 1987, xx). When the theoretical framework is profoundly intersubjective, the question of in what sense ways of experiencing and responding to others are then unique to the subject assumes significance.

Foucault uses the notion *a priori of existence* with reference to the personal style of experiencing. The passage is short, but it reveals that the existential style implies an individual history that furnishes current experiences: “A certain style of experience that marks the traumas, the psychological mechanisms, that triggers off, the forms of repetition that it affects in the course of pathological episodes: it is a sort of a priori of existence” (*MIP*, 42).¹⁷ In other words, the a priori of existence as a concept refers to the conditions that facilitate the experiencing of phenomena in specific ways. It is not entirely a matter of conscious choice how one reacts to distressing situations (Basso 2012, 172). One could argue further that experience implies its own conditions of possibility: what allows an experience to appear in a specific way and gives meaning to it is immanent to the experience itself and should not be

¹⁷ Foucault uses the concept *existential a priori* in his discussion of anxiety. He argues that anxiety is the foundation that is already there in the patient’s reaction. In this context, anxiety should not be understood as a psychological state or as a mood, but in a Heideggerian sense as an existential structure that unveils Being-in-the-world. As a concept anxiety (*Angst*) ensures the unique standpoint of experience in the intersubjective context, distinguishing oneself from the world and becoming self-aware (Heidegger 1978, §40; Dreyfus 1987, xxviii; Critchley 2009). This self-awareness involves a strong sense of strangeness (*Unheimlichkeit*). In his later works, however, Foucault rejects the idea of being able to trace the underlying structure of existence in therapeutic processes.

sought elsewhere (Basso 2012, 156–157). However, Foucault states in “La psychologie de 1850 à 1950” that the most human thing in a man is his history, meaning that the conditions that enable human beings to experience in specific ways are historical, not necessary (*DEI.2*, 165).

One could also argue that the world unfolds from a specific, situated viewpoint: the conditions for experiencing things in specific ways imply personal histories that comprise infinite numbers of singular moments and events, which accumulate in people’s bodies.¹⁸ From the perspective of existential psychiatry, Foucault claims that, in fact, people are conscious of their own illness in an original way, and given that ways of disconnecting from the shared world are unique to each person, one’s own style of relating to one’s situation cannot be fully reduced to the cultural features that one incorporates in one’s ways of being (*MIP*, 46; 56).

At this point, and to further explicate Foucault’s idea that stylistic features mark traumas as lived realities, it would be appropriate briefly to investigate Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s discourse on the lived body (*corps vécu, Leib*) and his concepts of style and stylistic unities. Foucault does not explicitly refer to Merleau-Ponty in this context. However, he was Merleau-Ponty’s student at the *École Normale Supérieure* and was clearly influenced by his conceptualisations. In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty discusses the body above all as the *capacity* and *potentiality* that imply continuity and the habitualization of experiences (Merleau-Ponty 2005, 122; 162; Fuchs 2011, 91). With regard to the movements of the body, he describes a whole history of personal gestures—their past, present and future orientation—as follows:

At each successive instant of a movement, the preceding instant is not lost sight of. It is, as it were, dovetailed into the present, and present perception generally speaking consists in drawing together, on the basis of one’s present position, the succession of previous positions, which envelop each other. But the impending position is also covered by the present, and through it all those which will occur throughout the movement. Each instant of the movement embraces the whole span, and particularly the first which, being active initiative, institutes the link between a here and yonder, a now and future which the remainder of the instants will merely develop. (Merleau-Ponty 2005, 162)

¹⁸ Foucault makes a distinction between *psychological evolution* and *psychological history*: psychological evolution “integrates the past in the present in a unity without conflict”, whereas psychological history marks a moment of reflection that detaches the present from the past and makes it intelligible (*MIP*, 30). In this way, psychological history, as Foucault understands it, implies the possibility of breaking away from the past or at least putting it into perspective.

As Merleau-Ponty explains, the body envelops all previous occurrences and experienced events (Merleau-Ponty 2005, 167; 169; 170; 177). One's personal history of experiencing necessarily also involves references to other experiential lives, simultaneous but also past as well as future.

At the same time, he conceptualises the lived body as an expressive open entity and a core of meanings with a style that is unique to it. The body is anchored in the world and past events as a "grouping of lived-through meanings" (Merleau-Ponty 2005, 208). However, even if one's way of directing oneself emerges from one's past and from the pasts of others, and even though one's body orients towards the future with its predisposed capacities, expressions are always produced in new ways.

Both Foucault and Merleau-Ponty argue against seeking meaning beyond that which is expressed (Basso 2012). At least in Foucault's case, this could be understood as a normative, ethical stance that questions attempts to interpret personal experiences from the third-person perspective, in therapeutic relationships, for example. Merleau-Ponty explains the view that "expression is indistinguishable from the thing expressed" by comparing the body to a work of art. In doing so he does not mean to imply that human bodies are objects of artistic decoration: it is rather that meaning is accessible only through direct contact, and that gestural meanings can be produced and understood only in the concrete and comprehensive whole of expression, not outside of it (Merleau-Ponty 2005, 175). In emphasising the fact that all utterances embody their own meaning, Merleau-Ponty claims that even the loss of speech should be understood as a way of constituting meaning, and not as a deficit (Merleau-Ponty 2005, 186–187; 203). Foucault, who compares ways of being to works of art in his later work, and who has falsely been accused of artsy individualism because of it, similarly suggests in his early essays that expression implies its own meaning.

I continue this discussion in the next section, focusing on the conditions of responding to situations in personal ways. My aim is to show that, in Foucault's view, experiences are not fully determined by past events and social conditions, even though he presupposes an intersubjective framework for his research. He discusses these issues in his essay on dream experience.

1.1.5 Investigating the Existential A Priori by Rethinking Dream Experience

Foucault's early essay "Dream, Imagination and Existence" is an introduction to Ludwig Binswanger's *Dream and Existence*, but in fact it is more than that. Dream experience functions as a specific case that facilitates investigation of the conditions of personal experience (*the*

existential a priori). I argue in the following that Foucault's objective in investigating dream experience is to disclose the possibilities of change in stagnated, repetitive ways of being. Foucault emphasises the aspect of movement in dream experience: it is true that dreams are rarely described in the same way as still photographs. In his analysis he builds up a counter-argument to the presupposition that mental illnesses follow a determinate course, which was a commonly accepted view in the 1950s when he wrote the essay (*DEI.1*, 137).

I focus especially on two arguments in Foucault's dream essay: first, dream experiences should be understood in their own terms. They pave the way for understanding the uniqueness of the ways in which people orient towards the world with past experiences that are incorporated in their bodies. In other words, dream experience implies past experiences with their social and cultural contexts at the same time as it orients towards the future in an original way (*DEI.1*, 127). Second, the essay suggests that facilitating this movement should be one of the objectives of therapeutic practices.

In the essay, Foucault criticises psychoanalysis for its understanding of dreams only as a psychologized "rhapsody of images", or an "oneiric drama", a spectacle of images that surround the dreamer and symbolise former experiences in a polysemantic form (Binswanger 1993, 82; *DEI.1*, 108; 124). He questions the justification of speaking about dream *images* in the first place, and of taking an image or a representation as the starting point of an investigation (*DEI.1*, 144–145). He further argues that psychoanalysis cannot explain how image and meaning coincide, characterising the psychoanalytical conception of dreams as an interpretation of "language whose grammar one does not understand" (*DIE*, 35; *DEI.1*, 105). The implication in psychoanalysis is that dreams enclose meanings of which people are unaware but that can be disclosed by means of hermeneutic labour (*DEI.1*, 97). Foucault's concern is not that some images might be censored or hidden from the view.

At the beginning of the essay he turns to Husserl's *Logical Investigations* in his discussion of alternative ways of understanding dream experience, but in the end, he also distances his thought from Husserl's phenomenology. However, also in this context, he credits phenomenology with contrasting the first-person perspective with the third-person perspective of natural sciences, and with scientific notions of the human being (*homo natura*) (*DEI.1*, 94). He compares dream experience to the experience of space, explaining that the difference between a scientific viewpoint and the perspective of lived experience could be understood in the same way as the difference between conceiving of a rectangle or perceiving a landscape or a park (*DEI.1*, 129). The aim in phenomenology is to capture experience before seeking any scientific explanation—before construing a space in terms of geometrical figures, measures or geographical signs. Merleau-Ponty argues in *Phenomenology of Perception*, for

example, that when someone dreams that a body part is turning into a snake, it is not the same thing as watching an image of a body part that is a snake: instead, from the experiential perspective, the body part becomes and *is* the snake (Merleau-Ponty 2005, 195). It is also misleading to contend that dream experiences involve peeking into to another world, as if one were looking at a dream through a keyhole, as well as to assume that dreams are compositions of familiar things gathered together from the environments of the dreamer's waking life. In both cases the specific spatial and corporeal character of dream experience is overlooked.

Moreover, Husserl's distinctions between *signification*, *indication* and *meaning-giving activity* allows Foucault to rethink the relationship between the content of a dream and its meaning. Taking an example from Husserl, he explains with regard to verbal expression that one does not understand what someone is saying merely by the *signification* of words and sentences that are composed together (*DEI.1*, 102). Aspects such as the tone of voice, pauses and silences, gestures and emphases, and the look of the person's face also communicate what is meant. Someone who is bursting with anger does not have to say, "I am angry" to make it understood: the same conclusion can be drawn from the reddening of cheeks, the clenching of fists, the tensing of the upper body and a high-pitched and trembling tone of voice.

Thus, to have a dream experience in which a black cat crosses a street is not the same thing as to claim that the meaning of the dream is that the black cat crosses the street. To the one who experiences the dream, the appearance of the cat in a dream can be indicative of sorrow, for example, even though nobody else would make the same connection. In terms of *indication*, the meaning and the sign exist independently and there is not necessarily a link between them (Husserl 2001, 183; Heinämaa 2016).¹⁹ There is no necessary link between a flag and a nation, for example.

In stating that meanings should not be sought from beyond the dream experience itself, Foucault purports to give the full authority over its meaning to the subject. He is much better known for his later critique of the foundationalist conceptions of the subject, but in the dream essay he insists that human beings are the foundation of all meaning of dream experience, and that the only access to their modes of existence are the human beings themselves (*DEI.1*, 126–127). Foucault would find it highly problematic to claim that a black cat crossing a street heralded a hereditary myth, death, bad luck or anything that was exterior to the experience (*DEI.1*, 138). In the same way, one should argue, the meanings of patients' experiences should

¹⁹ As Sara Heinämaa explains in her article "Embodiment and Expressivity in Husserl's Phenomenology", Husserl makes a distinction between expression and indication. Expressions are meaningful signs: their meaning is internally connected to the things to which they refer (the word "red" and the colour red) (Heinämaa 2016). In the case of indication, in turn, the meaning and the sign exist independently and there is no necessary link between them (a flag and a nation) (*ibid.*).

not be sought in theoretical speculation beyond these experiences, hidden meanings or unconscious desires.

With a view to giving the authority of experience to the patient-subject in therapeutic relationships, Foucault introduces Husserl's idea of *meaning-giving* activity to the debate. He explains that from a phenomenological perspective one could argue that the gesture of meaning-giving discloses not only the meaning-giving acts but also the subjects of such acts. Let us take the example of seeing figures in the snow: it is easy to see how they might merely be uninteresting holes to some people, but to a hunter they are the tracks of a hare that has just gone by (Binswanger 1993, 102; *DEI.1*, 103). In other words, in the activity of meaning-giving the connection between the image (or sign) and the meaning exists in the subject—meaning-giving brings to light the gesture of “I act” or “I imagine” (*DEI.1*, 105–106). This is not to claim, however, that meaning-giving acts are arbitrary or create meaning out of nothing: on the contrary, they erupt against a whole, immediate horizon of perception, and the act of aiming points out that the subject is meaning *this* particular thing (*DEI.1*, 104).

These claims that experience should be addressed in its own terms and that expression implies its own meaning have immediate practical implications if one accepts that the meanings patients give to their experiences in therapeutic practices “can mean what they mean, and they *actually* mean what they mean” (Basso 2012, 176): the position of not knowing the meaning is then reserved for the therapist and not for the patient.

However, these phenomenological analyses of indication and meaning-giving activity do not yet satisfy Foucault in his discussion of dream experience, which he seeks to understand regardless of conscious intent: this is highly relevant in the case of illness and mental distress. Husserl does not address the issue of mental disorders in *Logical Investigations*: it is worth pointing out that the context of Foucault's discussion is Binswanger's existential analysis, which uses phenomenology with the aim of providing a method for therapeutic practice. Whereas Foucault states in *Mental Illness and Psychology* that one should try to understand disordered consciousness from within, in “Dream, Imagination, Existence” he argues that one should not expect to understand an expression only if one inhabits the act and lives through it (*DEI.1*, 106–107).²⁰ By the end of the essay he is already looking for ways in which statements, which in this case express (dream) experiences, could be addressed in their own

²⁰ Foucault criticises Husserl's analysis of meaning-giving activity for not fully explaining how the meaning is communicated to others. He argues that phenomenology “has succeeded in making images speak; but it has given no one the possibility of understanding their language” (*DIE*, 42). As Heinämaa explains, however, “in verbal communication, words have both an expressive function and an indicative function. They express their meanings, and they indicate the lived experiences (*Erlebnisse*) of the speaker.” Communication involves not only indicating meaning-giving actions but also informing others about one's inner life (*ibid.*).

terms without inhabiting the expression. In later texts he then develops the archaeological method for investigating explicit statements (Chapter 1.4).

As argued above, Foucault's objective in the dream essay is to disclose the movement with which people orient towards the world with everything that is incorporated in their bodies. He also seeks to foster this movement in therapeutic relationships, especially in cases in which the patient experiences stagnation. The next questions that arise, then, concern his understanding of 1) the aspect of movement in dream experience and 2) the objectives of therapeutic relationships.

First, he purports to show that a repetitive mode of being is not necessary, even if a patient were to experience and exhibit stagnation, hence he stresses the aspect of movement as a basic structure of dream experience. At the same time as experiences are conditioned by previous life events, dream experience “manifests itself as the coming-to-be”—it makes itself and the future in its own style (Basso 2012, 173; *DEI.1*, 126).²¹ Questioning the view that dream experiences could be analysed as representations, Foucault argues that they are closer to the *movement of imagination* than to fixed images.

Another way of understanding the comparison between dream experience and imagination is to remember that if one imagines someone or something it does not mean that the person is somehow partly present. If I imagine someone, a person, to be present, I am still the one who is imagining the person, their gestures and reactions, and the whole environment—the curtains and walls, or forest and trees (*DEI.1*, 139).²² In a similar manner, the dreamer is not just one of the characters in the dream but everything in it: the sea, the space and the animals, or whatever the content is. In Foucault's words:

In the dream, everything says, “I”, even the things and the animals, even the empty space, even objects distant and strange which populate the phantasmagoria

²¹ Foucault even claims that a dream “anticipates the moment of liberation” and is “the first movement of freedom freeing itself” (*DIE*, 58). Note, also, that in French, one does not “have an experience”—one “makes an experience” (*faire une expérience*), in the same way as one “makes a dream” (*faire un rêve*). Thus, instead of passively going through something, experience implies that one is involved in the process. When Foucault claims that dream experience brings forth the existential structure of freedom, he is also arguing that it brings forth the concrete ethical task of reflecting and acting upon this freedom (*DEI.1*, 146–147).

²² Foucault writes: “I am also his gaze and his attentiveness [...] I am what he is doing, I am what he is. [...] I am not there, before him, because I am everywhere, around him and in him; I do not talk with him, I hold forth; I am not with him, I “stage” him (*DIE*, 68).” In a sense, this description could also be understood as an ethical commitment to the notion that the workings of my imagination do not represent the other person *as they are*. In other words, my imagination does not capture the *otherness* of the other, because it does not have access to what makes the other person unique, other than myself. The discussion on imagination is also a response to Sartre, who claims that imagined objects are only what one intends them to be, and in this sense, they have nothing new to offer. Foucault, in contrast, understands imagination as movement that can go beyond what is currently familiar.

[...] Dreaming is not another way of experiencing another world, for the dreaming subject it is a radical way of experiencing one's own world (*DIE*, 59).

In other words, Binswanger's *Dream and Existence* allows Foucault to argue that dream experience is "a radical way of experiencing one's own world", so radical that even the surroundings say "I" (*DEI.1*, 128). Rather than representing contents or visiting another world, dream experience discloses the original movement of consciousness in the same way as imagination, which creates a whole world for itself (*ibid.*).

Moreover, Foucault rejects the idea that hallucinations stem from a vivid imagination. He describes a case of hallucinatory experience in which the patient is imprisoned by forceful images with a strong sense of being trapped in repetition, and with no power at all to affect the images:

The slightest effort of the imagination stops. [...] The dimension of imagination has collapsed. The patient is left only with the capacity to have images, images all the more forceful, all the more tightly knit [...] Phantasms cannot be understood, therefore, in terms of imagination deploying itself, but only in terms of imagination disenfranchised. The aim of psychotherapy should be to free the imaginary that is trapped in the image. (*DIE*, 72)

The argument is that the capability of moving beyond images has collapsed in this type of experience, and that the movement Foucault calls imagination cannot employ images in a flexible way (*DEI.1*, 142–143).²³

Second, it should be stressed that at the same time as Foucault argues for dream experience as a radical way of experiencing one's own world, he also contends that it is not yet sufficient to assign the meaning of dream experiences to individuals without explaining how it can be communicated to others and how these experiences could be shared: this is highly relevant in therapeutic relationships. The implication in the above quotation is that even though there may seem to be no way out of a repetitive mode of being, the objective of therapy is to raise the possibility of movement with its iconoclastic function, the capability of changing and shattering images that have become too fixed (*DEI.1*, 144).

²³ Foucault's discussion of image makes another reference to Sartre. Sartre did not, in fact, understand *image* as a representation of the mind but he stressed the aspect of activity: image is a concept of consciousness that aims at producing its objects (Sartre 2004, 7; 97). He argues that people do not pay attention to this process, even though it involves feelings and judgments they connect with the objects (*ibid.*). Thomas Flynn claims that when Sartre defines image as "a form of consciousness, a way of being present to the world" (Flynn 1997, 214). Defining image as a way of being explains why Foucault discusses pathological modes of being with reference to image in the essay.

As Hubert Dreyfus explains, the role of therapeutic processes in Foucault and Binswanger's theoretical, intersubjective framework is to focus on the patient's way of *relating* to others and being in the world (ibid.). He suggests that *Dasein* (being-present-to-the-world) should be defined as "a space in which coping with every sort of being becomes possible" (Dreyfus 1987, xviii). The function of therapy is not, then, to uncover and integrate unconscious contents into a meaningful whole (as it is in psychoanalysis, for example) (Dreyfus 1987, xv). Instead, if a patient expresses a stagnated or a repetitive mode of being, the therapist should focus on the small instances in their expression that break the repetitive cycle (ibid.). These ruptures are easily lost in the repetitive mode, but therapeutic relationships can also confirm that the current way of being is an outcome of a series of accidental events, not an outcome of a determinant course of illness.

1.1.6 The Historical A Priori and Contradictory Experience

I pointed out at the beginning of this chapter that Foucault discusses experience in two different contexts in *Mental Illness and Psychology*: existential analysis and social history. Thus far I have operated within the first framework and equated the notion of experience with experiencing—with the lived experience of phenomenology. In the context of social history, however, Foucault also uses the word "experience" referring to cultural fields of experience such as "Western experience" and "the experience of madness". The second part of *Mental Illness and Psychology* is, in fact, a summary of *History of Madness*, and the emphasis is on social and institutional history. Foucault argues that individual experiences, problems and obstacles are situated in social, historical and economic circumstances (*DEI.3*, 181).

My aim in this section, therefore, is to show that the frameworks of existential analysis and social history are two complementary perspectives in the study of experience in Foucault's early essays. He argues in *Mental Illness and Psychology* that when people live through mental distress they are unlikely automatically to make analytical distinctions and abstractions between personal reactions and different impulses that come from the environment or from the medical practice itself. People should rather be understood as unique wholes, holistic beings who are situated in the world (*MIP*, 13).

As I have argued, Foucault investigates the conditions of personal experience (*the existential a priori*) in an intersubjective context in the first part of *Mental Illness and Psychology*. However, in the second part of the revised version he shows how madness becomes understood as illness in Western society, and what the concrete, historical conditions (*the historical a priori*) are for its appearance (*MIP*, 60). He states:

It is in these [existential] conditions, no doubt that the illness manifests itself, that its modalities, its forms of expression, its style, are revealed. But the roots of the pathological deviation, as such are to be found elsewhere [...] mental illness has its reality and its value qua illness only within a culture that recognizes it as such (MIP, 60)

Foucault thus claims that mental disorders become manifest and expressed based on their existential conditions, but they can only be understood as illnesses if they are defined and perceived as such in a cultural context. In other words, whatever the symptoms are in reality, only a cultural defining and classifying system makes it possible to experience a set of symptoms precisely as “schizophrenia”, “hysteria” or “ADHD”, for example.

When Foucault defines *the historical a priori* in *The Order of Things*, he refers to “the totality of experience” which is delineated in a specific way:

This a priori is what, in a given period, delimits in the totality of experience a field of knowledge, defines the mode of being of the objects that appear in that field, provides man’s everyday perception with theoretical powers, and defines the conditions in which he can sustain a discourse about things that is recognized to be true (OT, 158).

Thus, according to Foucault, the historical a priori is a concept that enables the grasping of ways in which objects of knowledge can exist, how they can be known, and how the subjects can speak about them in a certain context. He goes on to declare that this field of experience includes “the organization of a certain visible existence as a domain of knowledge” (OT, 158). He is well-known for arguing that scientific claims do not develop spontaneously and that different sciences define ways in which it is possible to observe objects. Explaining his archaeological project in 1968 he refers to “illusion of experience” (*illusion de l’expérience*) as a presupposition that things spontaneously constitute fields of knowledge that submit themselves to sciences for discovery and explanation (DEI.59, 757). Human beings, for example, do not disclose themselves to the observing gaze in some natural manner: instead, they become observable as “human beings” or “individuals” in the scientific process.

In an early essay on psychology from 1957 (*Dits et écrits I*), Foucault refers to experience when he points to the need to investigate the relationship between individual existence and society and to ask how the structures of society condition and affect the individual (DEI.2, 157).²⁴ In the original version of *Maladie mentale et personnalité* he also attempts to explain how

²⁴ In this early essay from 1957 (*Dits et écrits I*), Foucault in fact connects the notion of experience to two sets of questions (DEI.2, 157). The second set of questions concerns the relationship between lived experience and the scientific understanding of psychological processes, and in addition to this the relationship between clinical

social structures and contradictions influence personal experiences and turn into pathological reactions. Without hesitating to use psychoanalytical vocabulary, he argues that people use different defence mechanisms in coping with external and internal conflicts, but they may not succeed in controlling the reactions, in which case the contradiction between the social and the existential conditions (e.g. personal history) becomes overwhelming (*MMP*, 102).²⁵

However, in the second part of *Mental Illness and Psychology* Foucault portrays historical and cultural ways of understanding and dealing with mental distress, and he uses the notion of experience to draw attention to the conflicts that people face in their social environments. In both *Mental Illness and Psychology* and *Maladie mentale et personnalité* “contradictory experience” means a form of experience that the individual goes through, but which can be recognised as a phenomenon of social injustice. This vocabulary of contradiction has a Marxist background: contradiction characterises the tension between co-existing, opposing poles that have conflicting interests in society.²⁶ The social contradictions to which Foucault refers include different forms of imposed competition, economic exploitation, imperialist wars and class struggles (*MMP*, 86; *MIP*, 82).

Foucault insists that it is perfectly common to experience conflicts and contradictions, explaining that they disturb the subject’s affective life and stability from the outside (*MIP*, 39). In other words, subjects may experience conflicts as external to them even though they live through them in their own environments. However, pathological experiences are different in the sense that “where the normal individual experiences contradiction, the ill person undergoes a contradictory experience; the experience of the first opens onto contradiction that of the second closes itself against it” (*ibid.*). An individual experiencing internal contradiction, for example may want to live and to die at the same time. The point is that contradictions do not take place only on the general societal level—human beings also find them within themselves and try to reflect on and cope with them (*DEI.2*, 150).

Foucault’s discussion on contradictions is also linked to the question of scientific knowledge and truth: he claims that contemporary psychology, as he knows it, involves an attempt to control the contradictions of human existence. The definition of contradiction

practices and scientific ways of explaining illness. Foucault addresses this latter set of questions in *The Birth of the Clinic*, specifically how scientific ways of understanding illnesses affect clinical practices (see Chapter 1.4).

²⁵ In *Maladie mentale et personnalité* Foucault has no problem at all with psychoanalytical vocabulary, such as “defence mechanisms”, even though in the later work he treats psychoanalysis systematically as a pseudo-science and as “a confessional science”, referring to the obligation to tell the truth about the self. However, in both versions of the book he describes contradictory situations in which men find themselves. He states in *Maladie mentale et personnalité* that it is not sufficient to investigate experiences of mental illness without analysing the concrete, historical conditions in which they occur (*ibid.*).

²⁶ On Marx’s use of contradiction see Crocker 1980; Suchting 1986.

undoubtedly includes the societal processes of normalisation and exclusion. He also finds it problematic that developmental psychology focuses mainly on the cessation of development, that the psychology of adaptation emphasises maladjustment, and that the psychology of memory is mainly concerned with forgetting (*DEI.2*, 149–150). Instead of settling for dismissing the psychology of the 1950s as a young immature science, he declares that the discipline could define itself as knowledge (*savoir*), in terms of both research and practice, if it rejected the belief in its own positivity and did not overlook its own contradictions (*DEI.3*, 165; 186).²⁷

At the beginning of this chapter I quoted a passage in which Foucault states that his early work took psychiatry and psychology, as he knew them at the time, too much for granted. What was needed, in his view, was an investigation of the conditions of possibility of psychology, psychiatry and psychoanalysis, which would involve analysing the historical circumstances that made it possible for these practices to appear as sciences (*MIP*, 87; *HM*, 529; *DEI.3*, 184). Foucault also declares in *History of Madness* that he is investigating “the conditions of possibility of psychology”, meaning the historical constitution and isolation of madness (*HM*, xxxiv; 529). He similarly claims in *Mental Illness and Psychology* that psychology cannot tell the truth about madness because madness is the condition of psychology, the first prerequisite for psychology to appear (*MIP*, 74). The point is that psychology could only exist as a field of study once madness is distinguished from poverty, criminality and other marginalized phenomena in a specific historical context.

In this chapter I have focused on Foucault’s early essays on psychiatry and psychology, especially *Mental Illness and Psychology* and “Dream, Imagination, Existence” and investigated how the different concepts of experience operate and what their theoretical functions are. I organised my study within the frameworks of existential analysis and social history. In the context of existential analysis experience is discussed from the first-person perspective, as “lived experience”, whereas in the latter Foucault operates with the concept of contradictory experience to highlight the relationship between social conflicts and mental distress. On the

²⁷ Foucault argues that investigating the conditions of possibility in psychology includes questioning the decisions and choices that are made in psychological research, whether they imply investigating neurons, statistics, the frequency of respiration, conduct and so on. (*DEI.3*, 184). He is concerned about the demand to define psychology by the vocabulary and methodology of the natural sciences, empirical data and quantitative analysis, which in his view do not respond to questions that arise in clinical work (*DEI.2*, 148–149).

basis of this discussion I argued that *the existential a priori* refers to the conditions of possibility of personal experience, which are also related to personal ways of responding to situations. *The historical a priori*, in turn, refers to the conditions or system of rules that define how objects of knowledge can be and how they can be perceived and spoken about. “Background experience” in the early essays refers to the shared cultural context which is embodied in concrete practices, architectural arrangements and actual statements.

I also argued that, within the theoretical framework of existential analysis, or phenomenological anthropology, Foucault characterises mental disorders as intersubjective phenomena that alter the subject’s relationship with others. I contended that the experiential approach provides him with an alternative way of discussing mental disorders as distinct from medical discourses. One of the objectives is to show that mental distress does not necessarily determine the course of one’s life. The purpose of his investigation of dream experience is to analyse the existential conditions, including past experiences that are engraved in the bodily memory, and articulate the original movement of coming-to-be as one of the basic structures of human existence.

I proposed that the notion of style should be understood in this methodological context, and that his early essays clarify the intersubjective context and the notion of style also in his work from the 1980s. In this light, Foucault’s early interest in existential analysis cannot be understood simply as a false start to his career, even though he later questions many of the ideas he explores in the context. Looking back to his early discussions on mental distress, he declares explicitly in his late interviews that his investigation concerns the history of existence as a style (*DEII.344*, 1448–1449; *DEII.357*, 1550). He describes the relations one forms with oneself and with others as “essentially a practice, a style of freedom” (*DEII.357*, 1550).

In the final section of this chapter I explained that Foucault refers to “contradictory experience” when he deals with the societal aspects of mental distress: economic injustice and exploitation, concrete forms of exclusion and scientific classification of mental disorders. In the next chapter I continue my study of the different ways in which Foucault uses his concepts of experience in the context of *History of Madness* in which he focuses on the question of exclusion.

1.2 Different Concepts of Experience in *History of Madness*

“There you go, you others! If we say something good, it’s as if we’re mad or inspired—just a fluke. It’s only you others who really understand what you’re saying. Yes, Mister Philosopher, I understand what I’m saying, and I understand that just as much as you understand what you’re saying.”

Denis Diderot, Rameau’s Nephew

1.2.1 Experiences of Madness: Society and Forms of Experience

Foucault uses the word “experience” frequently in *History of Madness*, but its meanings are not always clearly defined. Jean Khalfa (2006) claims in the introduction of the English translation of *History of Madness*, that when Foucault mentions experience, “he never does anything other than to point to a difference in historical configurations of practices, beliefs and institutions,” and investigates only “documents and archives” (Khalfa 2006, xx). I argue in the following, however, that Foucault also assigns other meanings to concepts of experience, which do not entirely neglect the aspect of personal experience. He stresses aspects such as the social and theoretical exclusion of madness—processes in which madness is separated from the realm of reason and is concretely excluded from society—but he also continues to discuss “madness” and dream experiences as specific types of limit-experiences.

Foucault distinguishes both reason and madness from *unreason* in his investigation of the exclusion of madness.²⁸ The passages that deal with unreason are probably the most difficult ones in the book, and for this reason it is still debated how his concept of unreason should be interpreted. I argue in Chapter 1.2.3 that unreason should be understood as a form of background experience and explicate how background experience should be defined in this context.

In *History of Madness*, Foucault presents a narrative of the constitution of the cultural category of madness and the process in which the objects of medical, psychiatric knowledge

²⁸ The original title of the book, *Folie et déraison. Histoire de la folie à l’âge classique* (1961), makes a distinction between madness and unreason, but Foucault leaves the words “folie et déraison” out of the title in the second edition (1972). The English translation *Madness and Civilization* is a shortened version of the book. A full-length translation of *History of Madness* was published in 2006.

become separated from other phenomena. He states clearly that he is investigating the experience of madness and the structures of this experience (*HM*, xxxii–xxxiv; 122):

This structure of the experience of madness, which is history through and through, but whose seat is at its margins, where its decisions are made, is the object of this research. Which means that it is not at all a history of knowledge, but of the rudimentary movements of an experience. A history not of psychiatry, but a madness itself, its vivacity, before it is captured by knowledge (*HM*, xxxii).

Here, Foucault explains that he is studying the history of the experience of madness from the perspective of exclusion, and he makes a clear distinction between the history of madness and the history of psychiatry.²⁹

In *History of Madness*, as in the second part of *Mental Illness and Psychology*, he investigates how madness was understood before certain phenomena were classified and defined in medical terminology as illnesses. His critique focuses on the social and historical conditions of perceiving madness in specific ways. He summarises his interests in the second part of *Mental Illness and Psychology*, stating that in the context of social history his main questions concern how mental illnesses become deviances that are excluded in society, and how society understands mental disorders as otherness and refuses to recognise itself in them (*MIP*, 63). Foucault discusses Hieronymus Bosch's paintings in the context of the Renaissance and contrasts their view of madness with modern conceptions and treatment of mental illness. He claims that madness was not always controlled in the same way as in modern societies, and it was not pushed out of sight: "madness was allowed to reign, it circulated through society, it formed part of the background and language of everyday life, it was for everyone an everyday experience" (*MIP*, 67). Needless to say, claims such as these should be assessed with caution.

However, Foucault's aim in *History of Madness* is to identify different "forms of experience" (*mode d'expérience*) that define and demarcate societal phenomena and objects of knowledge in particular ways.³⁰ "The Experience of Unreason" delineates the field in which the poor, the

²⁹ For some, the word "madness" may seem politically incorrect and stigmatising. However, it would be anachronistic and inadequate to speak about mental disorders or mental illnesses outside of medical discourses. The history of psychiatry comprises late-modern discourses on psychopathologies, or more recently on disorders, that began at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries with an attempt to organise phenomena related to mental distress according to medical knowledge. As pointed out, Foucault does not accept symptom-based systems of classification as a starting point for the analysis of madness (or mental illness and disorders), and he claims that discourses based on medical explanation do not engage with madness and thus cannot take into consideration the different ways of experiencing it (*DEI.4*, 188).

³⁰ Frédéric Gros argues that in *History of Madness* and *The Birth of the Clinic* background experience (*expérience fondamentale*) refers to the collective and cultural ways of perceiving and speaking about madness that involve social practices and medical definitions (Gros 2001). Admittedly, Foucault uses *expérience fondamentale* in different ways, but as I see it Gros' definition rather characterises "the forms of experience".

criminal, prostitutes and the mad are included in the same, broad category and confined to asylums. He uses the term “the experience of madness” in contexts in which madness becomes separated from other forms of unreason, and the term “the pathological experience” in contexts in which madness is defined in medical terms. In addition, he refers to “the experience of the Insane” when he points out the specific status given to madness in the Renaissance (*HM*, 122). He also uses terms such as “classical experience of madness”, “experience of medicine”, “experience of psychoanalysis” and “Western experience”.

The theoretical function of emphasising these different forms of experience is to contrast their diversity with the Hegelian idea of history as dialectical progress:

What matters here is to remove all chronology and historical succession from the perspective of ‘progress’, to reveal in the history of an experience, a movement in its own right, uncluttered by a teleology of knowledge [...] The aim here is to uncover the design and structures of experience of madness [...] That experience is neither progress nor a step backward in relation to any other. (*HM*, 122)

Explaining that he is investigating “the fundamental structures of experience”, Foucault also distinguishes his experiential perspective from chronologies of discoveries and from histories of ideas (*HM*, 529). All in all, the concept of experience is a vertical and spatial abstraction: it refers to a field in which a phenomenon is perceived in specific ways.

Foucault argues, referring to the 1960s, that “the contemporary experience of madness” is profoundly connected to institutions of internment and practices of exclusion (*MIP*, 68). As noted above in the discussion of *Mental Illness and Psychology*, he uses the Marxist concept of contradiction to draw attention to the conflicting interests in society, and their interdependency. Discussing the exclusion of madness in *History of Madness*, he claims that the historical constitution of madness and the articulation of medical discourse were parallel processes without any mutual dialogue or confrontation—and without dialogue, social contradictions are not faced (*HM*, 171). He conceptualises both processes, the articulation of medical discourse and the historical formation of madness, as forms of experience:

The different forms of experience developed to their own ends, the one in practice without commentary, the other in a discourse without contradiction. Entirely excluded on one side, entirely objectified on the other, madness was never made manifest on its own terms, in its own particular language. (*HM*, 171)

It is common to emphasise the difference between the first version of *Mental Illness and Psychology* (*Maladie mentale et personnalité*) and *History of Madness*, but in fact Foucault also contends in *History of Madness* that the absence of existential analysis in medical discourse is a problem: he claims that there is no real concern for the aspect of existence in psychiatry and

he criticises practices in which madness is reduced to silence (*HM*, 171). He further suggests that expressing contradictions paves the way for creating a social space in which different forms of experience can speak for themselves (*HM*, 174). In his view, expressions of madness could contradict current conceptions of reason and question our self-understanding, which is why they are potentially risky.

I claim above that even though Foucault speaks of the structures of experience, he does not overlook the aspect of personal experience. He refers briefly to experience in *The Order of Things* as follows:

Thus, in every culture, between the use of what one might call the ordering codes and *reflections* upon order itself, there is the pure experience of order and its modes of being. The present study is an attempt to analyse that experience. (*OT* 1980, xxi, italics mine)

Here, “pure experience” (*expérience nue*) is understood as a space that lies *between* the use of codes that organise knowledge and the processes of analysing these codes. In other words, in his search for an “objective” account of experience Foucault uses the concept to capture something more than just a singular, individual occurrence or way in which codified systems of knowledge function. Thus, he distinguishes pure experience from the subjective first-person perspective of experience and from the *use* of codes that determine common understanding of knowledge. Nevertheless, the definition of pure experience implies both aspects.

Timothy O’Leary argues that the term “experience” in the *History of Madness* refers to everything that can be felt and formulated about madness within a culture, and that personal experience is conditioned by the environment, its structures and historical possibilities (O’Leary 2009, 79). Foucault uses expressions such as “mode of perception” and “sensibility” to explain that understanding something as madness involves perceiving phenomena in specific ways and identifying and conceptualising objects of knowledge as particular types of objects (*HM*, 54; 57; 62; 77). Experience, then, is not only a form of sensibility, because it is closely connected to knowledge (*connaissance*). Moreover, knowledge is supported and applied by institutional practices, and is closely related to concrete ways of treating the objects of knowledge—healing and taking care of or isolating them (see Chapter 1.4).

It is equally true that, as Foucault states in an interview, madness exists only in a society (*DEL5*, 197). However, it is one thing to claim that madness as a category exists only in a society and quite another thing to claim that society is the (only) cause of mental disorders.

Foucault's claim is the former: madness *as* a category and as an isolated object of study exists only within a culture (*DEI*, 5, 197; O'Leary 2009, 79).³¹

One of the main arguments in *History of Madness* is that the language of psychiatry refers to madness as otherness in a continuous monologue, without ever entering into a dialogue with the *other* that it thematises (*HM*, xxviii). Not wishing to repeat such one-sided speech, Foucault claims that alongside institutionalised history writing, something always remains unsaid: in other words, silence runs alongside the official history, which in turn has a voice (*HM*, xxxi–xxxii).³² He goes on to claim that madness marks the “absence of an *œuvre*”, meaning that an artwork or a piece of philosophical writing, for example, cannot be understood as an expression of madness (*ibid.*).

Foucault thereby historicises not only discourse but also silence, claiming that when madness is understood as a medical species and opposed to reason, it has no vocabulary of its own and no language via which it could speak its own truth (*HM*, 516). Silence, in this context should be understood not merely as absence, but rather as a plurality of manifestations that do not fit in existing systems of classification. Madness is not a monolithic fact, but is felt, experienced and perceived in different ways and from multiple points of view that constitute a moving constellation (*ibid.*). That is why he explains, for instance, that his aim is not to describe historical *attitudes* to madness (as an extra-historical phenomenon), because then madness would be understood as an unchanging phenomenon (*HM*, 163–164).

History of Madness has been heavily criticised by historians, as has the influence of *Madness and Civilization* in contemporary studies of madness.³³ The strongest and best known objections in philosophical discussions were voiced by Jacques Derrida, who argues that the

³¹ As Foucault explains in “The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom”: “I have been seen as saying that madness does not exist, whereas the problem is absolutely converse: it was a question of knowing how madness, under the various definitions that have been given, was at a particular time integrated into an institutional field that constituted it as mental illness occupying a specific place alongside other illnesses” (*EST*, 397).

³² There is a distinct Heideggerian influence in Foucault's statement that “human beings are not characterized by a certain relationship to truth; but they contain, as rightly belonging to them, a truth that is simultaneously offered and hidden from view” (*HM*, 529). Heidegger describes truth as unconcealedness (*alētheia*), meaning that when something is unveiled something else gets covered, and in Foucault's view that which gets covered, silenced and excluded is madness.

³³ For example, Petteri Pietikäinen argues in his book *Madness, a History* (2015) that even today much of the research on the history of madness is Foucauldian, which makes it monotonous, numbing, and even untruthful (Pietikäinen 2015). Pietikäinen further claims that Foucault was not at all concerned with individual experience. As a historian, he questions Foucault's empirical claims, especially concerning the statistics: referring to historian Roy Porter (2006), he questions Foucault's hypothesis of the great confinement, the idea that in the 17th century different marginalised groups would have been gathered together and locked up in the same institutions, not to be cured but to be out of sight and controlled (*ibid.*). However, these historians (who refer only to *Madness and Civilization* in their discussion) do not explicate the concept of experience or investigate other philosophical concerns such as the differences between madness and unreason.

distinction between silence and historical forms of speech raises difficult questions about historicity in general: it remains open to question, for example, how it is possible to speak about madness and to write anything about it without already reducing it to the other of rational discourse. In his later works Foucault rejects the idea of an underlying structure of silence that would be a necessary condition and the opposite pole of written and verbally articulated history.

The dispute pertains to one passage in particular, which Foucault erased from the shortened version of *History of Madness*. It deals with Descartes' *First Meditation*, on the basis of which Foucault formulates his arguments about the processes that led to the theoretical and social exclusion of madness in the 17th century. The debate concerns the distinction between dream experience and madness, which are understood as two different forms of limit-experience. I discuss the debate between Foucault and Derrida on this specific passage in *History of Madness* in the following section.

1.2.2 The Exclusion of Madness and the Argumentative Function of Transformative Exercise

In *History of Madness* Foucault defines both madness and dream experiences as forms of limit-experience and claims that they are distinguished from reason in the philosophical tradition. In an interview from 1980 he characterises limit-experiences as domains or forms of life that are pushed to the margins of society, such as suffering, poverty and criminality (DEII.281, 886; 1044). He also describes such limits as the “obscure gestures, necessarily forgotten as soon as they are accomplished, through which a culture rejects something for which it will be the Exterior” (HM, xxix). The idea is that at the same time as limit-experiences are excluded, they embody cultural values that support the very gestures of exclusion (ibid.). In other words, limit-experiences, just like gestures of exclusion, carry the values of a culture in them and in that sense maintain the continuity of its own, official history. Hence, Foucault states that the gesture of exclusion “makes its essential choices, operating the division which gives culture the face of its positivity” (ibid).

Foucault portrays Descartes' *First Meditation* as decisive in terms of excluding madness as a voice from the dialogues of Western thought. One of the arguments in *History of Madness* is that the exclusion of madness from philosophical thought, and from the realm of reason, in the 17th century also concretely excluded it from society, and those who were treated as outcasts were confined (HM, 170–171). The claim is, of course, problematic, because it is not clear what connection there may have been between a philosophical view and a concrete

practice of confinement (Derrida 1978, 47; Derrida 1994, 239). Nevertheless, Foucault argues that in *First Meditation* Descartes distinguishes madness from other forms of sensory illusions such as dreams, perceptions and the images of painters, all of which may be deceptive, and that this distinction facilitates the exclusion of the mad from society.

Foucault stresses in his reading that Descartes' *First Meditation* is not just a piece of philosophical writing, but also a set of *concrete exercises*. His point is that when Descartes seeks the absolute certainty of knowledge and articulates his method of meditation, this necessarily involves excluding the possibility that the meditating subject might be mad. The only absolute certainty, the apodictic truth, in the end is that one cannot doubt one's own existence, which is why truth never completely slips away into darkness. The subject of meditation cannot be mad because the act and clarity of thinking in this meditative exercise ensures the subject's existence. For these reasons, madness cannot be included in the exercise of thinking, or considered an exercise of any kind. As Descartes writes:

[H]ow could I deny that these hands and this body are mine, were it not perhaps that I compare myself to certain persons, devoid of sense, whose cerebella are so troubled and clouded by the violent vapours of black bile, that they constantly assure us that they think they are kings when they are really quite poor, or that they are clothed in purple when they are really without covering, or who imagine that they have earthenware head or are nothing but pumpkins or are made of glass. But they are mad, and I should not be any the less insane were I to follow examples so extravagant. (Descartes 1993, 46)

Foucault notes how madness is portrayed as an extravagant example in this passage, an exception amongst other forms of illusion. Whereas sensory illusions and hallucinations are separated from reason on the basis that they do not cohere with other beliefs and conceptions that one may have, the doubting of one's own body parts is compared to comprehensive madness that distorts all beliefs and potential conceptions. Thus treated, madness is not just an individual misbelief or misconception, analogous to delusions and false judgments. It is not just a misguided existential belief of the form "I am king." One could argue that, rather than being a misjudgement, madness is a comprehensive relation to the world in Foucault's interpretation of Descartes' *First Meditation*.

The debate between Foucault and Derrida is grounded in their different interpretations of the methodological role of Descartes' distinction between madness and other possible ways in which the senses can be deceptive. In his article "Cogito and the History of Madness", Derrida credits Foucault for being probably the first to argue that Descartes distinguished madness from other forms of sensory illusion, but he opposes this view strongly (Derrida 1978, 57). Derrida's response to Foucault is to insist that Descartes did not exclude madness

in any particular way, because he excluded all sensory illusions in the search for apodictic truth for the same, principled reasons (Derrida 1978, 58; 60). He further argues that the senses sometimes deceive us all, but that madness lacks this generality—it does not concern us all, and whenever it attacks it does not affect all sensory perception (Derrida 1978, 58; 62; *DEI.102*, 1114).

Second, in Derrida's view madness is an ill-suited example of sensory illusion for the exercise of methodic doubt, because there would be no point in engaging in the exercise or listening to a philosopher if one could assume that one was interacting with someone insane (Derrida 1978, 61–62). The implication is that philosophy always presupposes a certain level of normalcy: the practices and activities of writing and saying something are based on the presumption that they mean something. Third, Derrida claims that Descartes, in fact, welcomes the possibility of complete madness in the interiority of thought in introducing the hypothesis of the evil genius (Derrida 1978, 64). The hypothesis puts forward the possibility that a devil in disguise may be whispering in our ears and may make us err even in the simplest logical and mathematical judgments—the evil genius raises the suspicion that a square may not have four sides after all (Derrida 1978, 64; Descartes 1993, 48).³⁴

Foucault, in turn, rejects Derrida's claim that dreaming is a better example of illusion for Descartes's exercise just because it happens to be a more commonly or more universally shared experience than madness (*DEI.102*, 1115; *DEI.104*, 1154). In fact, he does not accept the idea that Descartes refers to madness as something less common. For him, the suggestion that madness does not concern everyone is in itself an exclusive presumption in that it denies the fact that madness is a possibility for everyone. In Foucault's view, Derrida continues the philosophical neglect and exclusion of madness in his critique because he does not problematise what is understood by normality or the normality of philosophy. In addition, Foucault does not accept the claim that madness always concerns only some parts of sensory experience: on the contrary, he contends that according to *First Meditation*, people who believe

³⁴ Derrida's critique includes several other points as well. In his view, Foucault's mistake is not to develop further a positive relationship between philosophy and madness (Derrida 1978, 66; 73). He argues that philosophy may approach madness in a free and creative way, and that language and the presumption of meaning guard against falling into the realm of silence or becoming mad by philosophising. Second, Derrida criticises the way in which Foucault uses the word "*Decision*", with a capital letter, to describe a single and conscious act that distinguishes reason and madness (Derrida 1978, 46; 1994, 239). He claims that Foucault's project runs the risk of being totalitarian, because in Foucault's interpretation Descartes' cogito becomes only an "event in a determined history", and if anything is said about madness, one participates in the acts of exclusion (Derrida 1978, 70). Finally, Derrida criticises him for postulating a pure state of insanity, a "primitive purity" of madness. Foucault explains in later texts, however, that his aim is not to mystify or romanticise madness or to advocate an irrationalist historical narrative (*Power*, 255; *DEII*, 874–875). His objective in *History of Madness* is rather to write a history of different conceptions of truth about madness and to question how these truths can be known (*ibid.*).

that they are kings or are made of glass can hold such beliefs consistently, in all circumstances, and that all their sense-experiences and sensations confirm them (*DEI.102*, 1115).

Foucault explicitly responds to Derrida in “My Body, This Paper, This Fire” and “Reply to Derrida”, emphasising that Descartes’ meditations were a practice and an exercise through which the subject of uncertain opinions became the subject of certainty (*DEI.102*, 1119; *DEI.104*, 1160). He points out that meditation consists of two aspects: 1) demonstration and 2) ascetic exercise aimed at self-transformation (*DEI.102*, 1125). Consequently, readers who are following Descartes’ meditations must first of all go through his propositions (the implicit rules that form a system), and at the same time participate in an exercise aimed at change, so that in the end they would be able to convey their own truth.

The exercise of meditation is crucially connected to change and alteration of the subject:

[I]n meditation, the subject passes from darkness to light, from impurity to purity, from the constraint of passions to detachment, from uncertainty and disordered movements to the serenity of wisdom, and so on. In meditation the subject is ceaselessly altered by his own movement [...]. One can see, what a demonstrative meditation would be: a set of discursive events which constitute at once groups of utterances linked one to another by formal rules of deduction, and series of modifications of the enunciating subject which follow continuously one from another (*AME*, 406).

Hence, the difference between a demonstration and an ascetic exercise is that the demonstration addresses the subject as a rational and scientific agent, whereas the ascetic side of meditation is supposed to produce a new modification of the subject—meaning that the subject is self-deformable (*DEI.102*, 1125). Moreover, in combination a demonstration and an ascetic movement give assurance that one can doubt everything and still be rational (*DEI.102*, 1127). Descartes’ demonstration guides subjects through the exercise and allows them to detect presuppositions, prejudice and unnecessary attachments, and to be free from unqualified preconceptions (*ibid.*). However, if one doubts everything without any reason, then the meditative exercise cannot be valid and cannot provide a foundation for certitude: it cannot take place within madness (*DEI.102*, 1128).

Thus, the experiences of dreaming and being mad play very different roles for Descartes in the task of showing how the process of doubt is to proceed. In the methodological exercise of doubt subjects can acknowledge the possibility that they are dreaming or that their eyes are deceiving them, but madness is different in this regard because if the meditating subjects really were insane, their doubting would no longer be a systematic and conscious exercise that could lead to certainty (*DEI.102*, 1113; Foucault 1998, 393). In other words, Descartes privileges dream experience to madness in the exercise of meditation because dreams perfectly serve the

purpose of a test (*épreuve*), whereas madness does not. The advantages of dream experiences are that they can be studied reflectively afterwards, they are fully and immediately accessible, and it does not matter if one suddenly starts to suspect that one might not be awake—one can still follow the rules of demonstration and proceed successfully in the exercise of meditation (*DEI.102*, 1117–1118; 1129; *DEI.104*, 1160).

Being mad, in contrast, cannot function as a form of exercise or as a test in this manner: one does not carry out an exercise if one truly believes that one is a glass figure and has no distance from one's own condition. One must be able to remain the subject of meditation simultaneously as one is the subject of doubt, or else one falls into irrationality. Foucault continues:

Let us reread Descartes' text. "I shall think that the sky, the air, the earth the colours, figures, sounds, and all other external things are nothing but illusions and daydreams" (whereas the madman thinks that his illusions and daydreams are really the sky, the air and all external things). "I shall consider myself as having no hands, no eyes... but believing falsely that I have all these things" (whereas the madman believes falsely that his body is made of glass, but does not consider himself believing it falsely). (*AME*, 415)

Moreover, the hypothesis of the evil genius does not represent total madness to Foucault, as Derrida claims, but is part of a controlled exercise that is voluntarily carried out (*DEI.102*, 1133–1134). Reflected suspicion of the meditating subject is clearly distinguished from the illusions of the mad. The exercise establishes the foundation of philosophical thought in the Cartesian system, and it cannot be carried out if one is delusional in the way that Descartes describes. Foucault's point is that the possibility of the evil genius is introduced in the mediation only after the exclusion of madness—the one who is contemplating the possibility of being deceived is not mad. If this part of the exercise were to coincide with madness, then the meditating subjects would not master and control their exercises, even though they were carrying them out voluntarily (*ibid.*).

In this, Foucault sticks to his view that Descartes' philosophy plays its own part in excluding madness from rational discourse. In fact, for him, the hypothesis of the evil genius represented a form of *unreason* rather than a form or a content of madness. Unreason is a concept that implies self-awareness on the part of the subject, the possibility of reflecting on one's own mental state and a way of being. I explain what Foucault means by "the experience of unreason" in the next section.

1.2.3 Unreason as a Background Experience

Unreason is one of the key concepts in *History of Madness*, and also one of the most hotly debated. Foucault distinguishes unreason both from reason and from madness. There is no consensus on how the concept of unreason should be interpreted, and even today Foucault scholars are discussing how it should be defined (see Allen 2016; Hacking 2014; Huffer 2014; Koopman 2013). When Foucault uses the concept he often refers to the “experience of unreason”. In the following I argue that unreason should be understood as a form of background experience. I explain in my reading of *Mental Illness and Psychology* in Chapter 1.1 that he understands background experience as the horizon against which phenomena stand out in personal experience. I will now show that Foucault uses the concept in a slightly different sense in *History of Madness*.

My argument differs from previous interpretations of unreason, which is why I draw attention to them first.

Ian Hacking, for instance, admits that he does not really understand what Foucault means by unreason in *History of Madness*. He emphasises the fact that Foucault erased the term “unreason” from the title of the book, and then asks what distancing movement this erasure serves (Hacking 2014, 43). It is worth emphasising that even if the title is different, unreason still plays a crucial part in the overall argumentation in the book, and in that sense the topic is far from being absent. I pointed out above that the difference between madness and unreason is that the latter concept emphasises the aspects of self-awareness and reflective expression, whereas madness is reduced to silence in a society. In his interpretation of unreason, Hacking refers especially to a passage in which Foucault compares unreason to dazzlement: being dazzled and seeing nothing for a moment is not the same thing as lacking the sense of vision altogether. Hacking explains that unreason is like dazzled reason: one opens one’s eyes and sees nothing but at the same time one is well aware of the situation (Hacking 2014, 45). The voice of unreason could also be compared to artistic expression, in that it is capable of expressing that which both madness and reason cannot (Hacking 2014, 43; 48). If madness is understood as fallen silence, art cannot possibly be a form of madness.

Hacking nevertheless claims that Foucault’s idea of unreason is just another romantic myth about exceptional individuals, artists and philosophers, who not only speak the truth but somehow *are* the truth (Hacking 2014, 48). Foucault does indeed refer to exceptional artists as “those who tried the test of *Unreason*”, which may have romanticised connotations. He argues that it is impossible to constantly live or remain in unreason, and those who try to do so are eventually reduced to madness (*HM*, 352).

It is my belief, however, that these claims should be considered in the context of Foucault's overall argument of unreason, and then one simply cannot argue that the main objective is to place exceptional individuals on a pedestal. Amy Allen, for example, who does not analyse the concept of unreason in particular, points out that Foucault takes on the task of tracing different vulnerable modes of being or "lines of fragility" in *History of Madness*. Works of art in particular reveal these fragile modes of being—"open wounds," as Foucault calls them—in that they illuminate the current historical a priori, the conditions of present ways of thinking and being (Allen 2016, 185; *HM*, 537).

Colin Koopman, in turn, claims that unreason is the lost space in which madness and reason could once interact (Koopman 2013, 166). He emphasises the aspect of communication between reason and madness and argues that Foucault's main point is not that reason would subjugate and exclude madness. In his view, Foucault rather articulates the simultaneous, interdependent production of both reason and madness that cannot interact with each other (*ibid.*).³⁵ In response to these claims Lynne Huffer argues that, despite the possible communication between reason and madness, the critical question about knowledge remains. In her view, Foucault's main research question is how a scientific discourse, such as in psychiatry, can know madness if madness is at the same time conceived of as the other of all reasoning (Huffer 2014, 54).

I believe, in turn, that in most cases unreason should be understood as a form of background experience, and that it is not sufficient to perceive it only as a reflective state of dazzlement or a space of communication. Hacking's reading runs the risk of formulating an ahistorical definition of unreason, and Koopman's definition could lead to an idealised conception of a communicative space. Unreason cannot be characterised as an *ideal* horizon of experience: Foucault uses the concept to thematise a way of thinking that allows the placing of a whole variety of individuals—the poor, prostitutes, criminals, madmen and the disabled—in the same category and sending them out of sight to the former leprosy hospitals of the 17th century.³⁶

³⁵ Koopman argues that the relationship between madness and reason is twofold. He points out that at the beginning of the book Foucault discusses the historical exclusion of madness as an attempt to purify reason from it (Koopman 2013, 167). However, the other parts of the book deal with producing both instead of claiming that one (reason), suppresses the other (madness). Koopman further suggests that, rather than mere exclusion, madness is produced as the necessary other of reason. In his view, Foucault is looking for a way of philosophising without drawing a sharp distinction between reason and madness, and he invites readers to notice silence in the narrow line between reason and unreason from which certain artists and thinkers attempt to raise their voices (Koopman 2013, 169).

³⁶ Foucault claims that the common denominator between confined people, apart from poverty, is alleged moral failure, and he identifies contradictions in this way of thinking. He points out, for example, that in some cases madness is understood simultaneously as moral failure and animality. On the one hand, animality presupposes a lack of self-control and freedom of choice, yet on the other hand the idea of moral failure

Foucault argues clearly that unreason is *reduced* to a psychological event by the discourses of early psychiatry. Instead of supporting this displacement he claims that *madness was once placed against the horizon of unreason*, and describes how “unreason lay beneath it, or rather defined the space of its possibility” (*HM*, 156–157). In other words, in this context the word “unreason” refers to the background against which madness, among other phenomena, once stood out. This specific type of background is a condition for the ways in which madness appears in a certain historical context.

I argue in Chapter 1.1 that background experience for Foucault means the context of experiencing and the shared understanding that is embodied in the concrete cultural environment and supports worldly operations without being consciously reflected on. In *History of Madness* he defines unreason as an underlying experience as follows:

It is this single, underlying experience, visible here and there, explaining and justifying the practice of internment and the cycle of knowledge, which constitutes the classical experience of madness; and *this is the experience that we can describe with the term ‘unreason’*. [...] for unreason is both the division and the reason for the unity that is to be found on both sides of the divide. (*HM*, 173, italics mine)

In this context, Foucault also characterises unreason as “difference” (*différence*), which might sound quite abstract (*ibid.*). “Difference” in this case does not simply mean that unreason consists of a multiplicity of different things: it rather refers to the process of division and differentiation, to the idea of dynamic movement, of self-referential partitioning. In other words, as a background experience unreason is in constant change. It implies the idea of division and a relationship between its (two) diverging poles, such as the simultaneous production of specific types of reason and madness.

However, even if unreason can now be understood as a general background experience from which the separate category of madness emerges, one can also identify different, singular *expressions of unreason*.³⁷ Foucault sets diverse forms of self-conscious trickery, nonsense and absurdity against this historical horizon of unreason in his analysis, and includes them under

presupposes, paradoxically, that one can reflect between different options and control one’s behaviour. He further argues that the scientific discourse on madness in the 18th century was preoccupied with the question of moral failure and responsibility (*HM*, 515). The problem is that if madness is understood as a biologically explainable mechanism, the mad person cannot be culpable. However, if the madman is viewed as free of culpability, but simultaneously completely determined, he must be carefully locked up in his absolute freedom (*HM*, 514–515; 519–521).

³⁷ In her article “Foucault’s Evil Genius”, Lynne Huffer focuses on evil genius as a form of unreason, arguing that the evil genius precedes “I think thus I am” and thus it challenges the sovereignty of cogito. She describes the evil genius as “a ground-shattering force” and as “an ethical force” and refers to the possibility of disruption (Huffer 2014, 53; 56; 58-59). She further claims that the evil genius appears in the form of fiction, because it cannot appear in the language of reason (Huffer 2014, 53). In my reading, however, I stress the variety of different expressions of unreason that are sketched out against a background experience.

the same, broad rubric. For example, the cunning and the silliness of fools and satirists are expressions of unreason in specific, historical contexts. They involve well-reflected, conscious and deliberate activities that deviate from the norms and ideals of everyday conduct. Foucault presents Descartes' hypothesis of the evil genius as one of the forms of unreason, as well as Enlightenment philosopher Denis Diderot's novel character Rameau's Nephew, to whom I turn next.

1.2.4. A Literary Example: Experience of Unreason from the First-Person Perspective

I argue above that Foucault does not overlook personal experience entirely, even though the framework of *History of Madness* is that of social history. I also claim that unreason should be understood, above all, as a general and historical horizon of experience, even if in *History of Madness* Foucault describes how unreason becomes "visible here and there" (*HM*, 173). There are examples in which he discusses singular expressions of unreason in a cultural context, and in some cases, he characterises unreason from the first-person perspective as dazzlement.

Denis Diderot's novel character Rameau's Nephew functions as an example of unreason expressed from the first-person perspective. Instead of connoting mere dazzlement, unreason takes the form of cultural critique. More precisely, *Rameau's Nephew* should be understood as a description of self-reflective unreason *and* madness, which intersect in the same person (*HM*, 517). It is noteworthy that in his reading, Foucault investigates the concrete expressions the character utters in a conversation, not the structures of personal experience that he discusses in his first essays on phenomenological anthropology.

Diderot wrote *Rameau's Nephew* in 1761–1762, and the novel contributed to the debate on the Enlightenment in showing a buffoon-type character who reveals the norms of a society that perceives itself as reasonable—a theme to which Foucault returns in his late work.³⁸ *Rameau's Nephew* is a satire written in the form of a dialogue: the dialogue takes place between a philosopher (called *Moi*), who is presented as an independent voice of reason, and the title character (*Lui*) who is portrayed as a Bohemian parasite in upper-class social circles with no special skills of any kind. The characters could also be understood as two different sides of one person who reflects on himself as a member of the social elite, and at the same time as a

³⁸ Foucault also discusses the relationships between society, criticism and extravagant behaviour in his last lectures on the ancient Cynics. Diderot's characters debate the Cynics as well. Moreover, Hegel refers both to *Rameau's Nephew* and the Cynics in his discussion on the Enlightenment (Hegel, §522–523). In his late writing Foucault locates his own work explicitly in the Enlightenment tradition, which at least partly explains his interest in the Cynics.

philosopher who is not interested in social games but educates the reader and the buffoon. The Nephew presents moral views reflecting the attitudes of certain social circles of his time, but which were generally considered corrupt. He takes advantage of other people by letting them pay for his way of living and dining.

Hegel's strong influence on Foucault is noticeable in his discussion of unreason in *Rameau's Nephew*. Hegel refers to the dialogue in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, in the chapter on culture. For Foucault, the Nephew's character marks a moment in which a culture allows madness to speak in the first person, but he also argues that the Nephew is mad because he is expected to be—the others treat him as someone who is crazy and present themselves as reasonable people and as the norm of comparison (*HM*, 343). Hegel, in turn, considers Diderot's Nephew an example of a confused consciousness that is clearly aware of its own state (Hegel §522).³⁹ The words assigned to the character in Hegel's description are familiar and recognisable from academic discourses, but stylistically the Nephew's expressions and gestures are full of mimicry, exaggerated motion and emotion, and everything he utters becomes perverted or spoiled by means of ridicule.

Foucault, too, argues that madness and self-reflective unreason coincide in the Nephew: he is mad, and he knows it very well (*HM*, 343; 351). Whereas Descartes finds certitude in "I think, therefore I am", the Nephew's certitude is his madness. From the first-person perspective, unreason is not, then, fully external to reason because it can be turned into an object of reflection: unreason can reflect both upon itself and upon what is meant by reason (*HM*, 345). The Nephew, for example, is fully capable of making attentive remarks about himself and about society.

When Foucault refers to "the experience of unreason" in this context, the focus is not on the possibility of an evil genius lurking in the reflecting subject, it is on the *in-between* of people. In *Rameau's Nephew*, unreason and madness both take place and intersect on the public surface of the individual's behaviours, gestures and the whole repertoire of his utterances (*HM*, 350).

³⁹ Foucault refers to Hegel as someone who could rethink unreason in a new way, as something that was not foreign to reason (*HM*, 348). Hegel understands the distinction between reason and unreason as a movement of dialectical process, and there are similar tones in Foucault's discussion on unreason, even if, on a larger scale, he refers to different "forms of experience" in the plural. Hegel argues that the kind of conscious action that is typical of the Nephew springs from the internal, self-differentiating movement of culture, but his point is that reason is not fully aware of itself if it tries to struggle against possible delusions and phantoms (Hegel 1977, §546–547). He explains that when unreason is fought against, it is only given an existence as something that appears as "sheer uproar and a violent struggle" (Hegel 1977, §547). Further: "As insight, therefore, it becomes the negative of pure insight, becomes untruth and *unreason*, and, as intention, it becomes the negative of pure intention, becomes a lie and insincerity of purpose" (Hegel 1977, §547, italics mine). However, he also claims that attaining a veritable insight into one's existence requires that the possibility of error be no longer seen as the *other* or something external and alien to oneself. Instead, delusions and errors should be understood as part of human existence.

The Nephew imitates and repeats discussions he has heard and displays them only as mere appearances and reflections in a mirror (*HM*, 347; 349). As Foucault describes it:

To be oneself that noise, that music, that spectacle, that comedy, to realize oneself as both a thing and an illusory thing, and thus to be not simply a thing but also void and nothingness, to be the absolute emptiness of the absolute plenitude that fascinates from the outside, to be at once the total abolition that is enslaved consciousness and the supreme glory that is a sovereign consciousness. (*HM*, 348)

As is clear, Foucault's use of words becomes poetic, almost Dionysian, as he describes the Nephew's sovereign consciousness and at the same time his "will to delirium", "drunkenness of the sensible" and "fascination with the sensible" (*HM*, 350). He contrasts these notions with the idea that unreason is only something hidden, a secret structure that lies beneath what is sensed (*ibid.*). In these examples expressions of unreason burst out from the historical horizon, which immediately frames them such that contemporaries understand exactly their meaning and context. At the same time, however, imitation puts the framing and the meanings of the expressions into perspective and shows them as contingent. In the above quotation the Nephew can suddenly perceive himself as "a thing and an illusory thing", an object amongst other worldly objects or cultural creatures, and at the same time he realises that there is nothing necessary about this specific, codified way of perceiving him.

What is more, at the same time as Foucault's reading of *Rameau's Nephew* presupposes the cultural world and the intersubjective context, expressions are presented as access to experience, which unfolds from the first-person perspective but that is, nevertheless, more than just a private occurrence. Even if the character's speech consists of paradoxes and inconsistent craziness, it still has a relation to truth: Nephew's expressions reveal something crucial about the society and its culture (*HM*, 517). The truth is in his utterances, on the level of language and worldly things, in his madness, dreams and delusions that appear in the dull reality of everyday existence (*HM*, 349). In this way, Foucault remarks, discourse recognises the commonness of madness in human beings, and madness is not understood as an extravagance in the same way as in Descartes' *First Meditation*.

The grand narrative of *History of Madness* implies that when unreason is organised around psychiatric knowledge it is relocated in the human being, and it can no longer say anything about a society or a culture (*HM*, 522). One of Foucault's main critical arguments is that the "mentally ill" do not have access to public truth—the only access they have is to their own, private truths. This is the context in which Foucault characterises the impossibility of remaining in unreason, which is often interpreted as fostering a romanticised myth of

exceptional individuals. The claim is, in fact, that the moment one expresses the “I” of unreason in medical discourse, one is trapped in one’s own truth and “retreats into the shadows of insanity” (*HM*, 351), hence the question:

Why is it not possible to remain in the difference that is unreason? Why is it that unreason always has to separate from itself, fascinated in the delirium of the sensible and trapped in the retreat that is madness? How was it that it was deprived of language to such an extent? What is this power that petrifies all those who dare to look upon its face, condemning to madness all those who tried the test of Unreason? (*HM*, 352)

In conclusion, I would like to emphasise the fact that Foucault does not neglect individual experiences altogether, but he does question the division between people whose immediate, first-person perspective is the voice of reason and universality and those whose experience is only a solitary cry of a private truth.

In this chapter I have explicated the different ways in which Foucault uses the term “experience” in *History of Madness* and argued that it is necessary if we want to understand his arguments. He analyses different “forms of experience”, such as “the experience of madness” and “the experience of unreason”, to further his aim of formulating a theoretical stance that questions the idea of the dialectical progress of history. I also noted that in *The Order of Things* “pure experience” is a spatial abstraction between the ordering codes of knowledge in society and reflections that concern these codes. In doing so I demonstrated that Foucault does not exclude the first-person perspective of experience from his analysis—occasionally he even refers to existential analysis, although he now takes distance from the methodology of the phenomenological anthropology.

I argued that Foucault discusses madness as a form of limit-experience. In *History of Madness*, he defines the concept of limit as a gesture of exclusion that is by no means necessary. He points out, for example, that Descartes excludes madness from reason in distinguishing it from different forms of sense perception. In Descartes’ *First Meditation*, the gesture of exclusion takes place because reflecting on the possibility of one’s own madness cannot function as a transformative *exercise* in the search for a reliable basis of knowledge. The aspect of meditative exercise, then, plays a crucial argumentative role in Foucault’s reading.

Moreover, I suggested that Foucault's concept of unreason should be understood as a form of background experience, not as an ahistorical psychological state or an ahistorical space of communication. In Chapter 1.1.3 I discussed background experience as the horizon that enables people to operate in the world. In this chapter I claimed that unreason, in general, refers to a historical understanding of a background against which certain phenomena stand out. When the poor, the criminal and the mad are all confined and grouped together, for example, they are treated and understood as the undifferentiated crowd of unreason. Madness, then, is not structured and analysed as an illness that is squeezed into a botanical tabula and classified as a species. Unreason includes different reflective modes of being, which I characterised as "forms of unreason". Thus, Foucault's analysis of unreason includes the aspects of self-reflective gestures and expressions, and he points out that at certain moments of history these expressions are viewed as important mirrors of society. The diverse forms of unreason do not fall within the (historical) category of reason, but they cannot be reduced to madness or silence, either. In a specific, historical context, madness appears as one of the diverse modes of unreason, all of which are subjected to social and cultural exclusion. Thus, unreason is not the same thing as madness—and neither unreason nor madness is the same as a "mental illness" or a "mental disorder".

History of Madness, like several other works by Foucault, ends with a critique of the anthropological structure of knowledge, a theme I have not yet explicitly discussed. I explicate the role of experience in Foucault's second thesis, *Introduction to Kant's Anthropology*, in the next chapter, and explain why mental well-being and madness are discussed in this context. Mental exercises are a strong theme throughout Foucault's work, not only in his discussion with Derrida as discussed in this chapter, but especially in his late work on ethics (Part Two) as well as in his discussion on Kant's *Anthropology*.

1.3 Experience in Introduction to Kant's Anthropology

"In mental derangement the patient's thoughts take an arbitrary course with its own (subjective) rule running counter to the (objective) rule that conforms with laws of experience."

Immanuel Kant, Anthropology

1.3.1 Revisiting Foucault's Critique of the Anthropological Structure of Knowledge

The theoretical functions of the concept of experience in Foucault's *Introduction to Kant's Anthropology* are altogether different from those in *History of Madness*. I argue in this chapter that it is necessary to explicate the meaning and implications of Kant's conception of experience (*Erfahrung*) to understand the philosophical questions addressed in Foucault's reading of Kant. One of the reasons for Foucault's interest in Kant's anthropology is that Kant defines severe mental illnesses as derangements of experience. In comparison to Foucault's reading of Diderot's *Rameau's Nephew*, in which the Nephew becomes mad because others expect it of him, Kant's *Anthropology* does not portray mental illnesses as consequences of social interactions but rather as errors of thought within human beings—of synthetic activity that organises experiences. Exercises that could prevent these possible errors and sustain well-being, in turn, take place in interactions and casual conversations between people.

Foucault's relationship with Kant is complex. In *Introduction to Kant's Anthropology* he criticises the anthropological structure of knowledge, and many of its theoretical and practical commitments, but when he formulates his own conceptions of critical subjectivity in the 1980s he is profoundly influenced by Kant. Amy Allen, for example, argues that, rather than understanding *Anthropology* as a marginal project, Foucault emphasises its central role in Kant's oeuvre (Allen 2008, 30). It is typical of Foucault to make it difficult to distinguish between when he is criticising and commenting on Kant and when he is formulating his own philosophical standpoints, hence the need to clarify what he adopts from Kant and what he rejects.

In his investigation of Kant's *Anthropology*, Foucault explores the roots and presumptions of phenomenological anthropology and thus his own early work on mental illness. He does

not specify that he is referring specifically to Binswanger, but he criticises the tradition of philosophical anthropology in all its forms (*IKA*, 118).⁴⁰ Whereas Foucault does not consider existential anthropology to be a problematic viewpoint in his earlier essays, here he questions the whole tradition, especially the idea that philosophy could access the fundamental structures of experience through empirical investigation and involvement. This is a significant difference compared to his early discussions on existential psychiatry in which he leans on Binswanger's phenomenological anthropology in theorising the possibilities of going beyond current states of being, and in which he argues that phenomenological anthropology should have a crucial role in clinical work.

However, even if Foucault's reading of Kant's *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* is a critical study of the anthropological structure of knowledge, the relationship between Foucault and Kant cannot be presented as mere rejection. On the contrary, Foucault positions his own work along a continuum with Kant's critical philosophy in his writing from the 1980s and takes up several topics already discussed in the context of Kant's anthropology, such as dietetics and well-being, exercise and freedom, and their connections with political activity (*AME*, 461; *DEII.345*, 1450). Returning to these issues and investigating their relations in his late work he also recognises Kantian distinctions and some Kantian solutions in his own thought.

In *Introduction to Kant's Anthropology*, Foucault pays attention to how Kant demarcates the new science he calls "anthropology". Kant defines anthropology as knowledge aimed at responding to the question: "What is a human being?", but the demarcation seems rather strange nowadays. The first part of *Anthropology* deals with the topics of cognition and consciousness and includes discussions about mental illness and derangements of experience. In the second part Kant characterises different temperaments and their interaction, as well as sexes, nations and races in a way that many contemporary readers may consider controversial, sexist and racist. Foucault undoubtedly questions the 18th-century views of "human nature" and "human reason" that Kant's anthropology takes for granted (*ibid.*).

Foucault notes that anthropology operates on the level of experience, which in this context means that anthropological truths are established not by making conceptual distinctions but in interaction between people, in the realm of intersubjectivity (*IKA*, 102–103). The anthropological truth about human beings, then, is revealed and captured in the ordinary use

⁴⁰ Foucault does not always make it entirely clear to whom he is referring as anthropologists, but his definition of anthropological thinking is broad: "For a long time, the "anthropologists" thought that they could absorb Kant's teachings without any difficulty, without any rethinking on their part being required: Schmid, Hufeland, and Ith are the first to attest to this, but the list could go on and on, and is by no means confined to the eighteenth century" (*IKA*, 118).

of language: “the universal emerges from the very heart of experience in the movement of the *truly temporal* and the *actually exchanged*” (IKA, 103). Here one recognises distant echoes of the theoretical, intersubjective framework adopted by Foucault from phenomenological anthropology in his early essays.⁴¹

Kant characterises anthropology as a popular science on the basis that anyone can find examples that are useful for the anthropological study of their own daily life (Kant 1974, 5). He suggests that his readers could make their own remarks about human beings and contribute their observations to the study, and these observations would gradually become the corpus of the new science. Kant also points out that human beings are particularly difficult objects of investigation because they are easily affected by scientific practice and may start to behave in self-conscious ways when they are being observed (Kant 1974, 4).

However, Foucault questions the extent to which Kant’s *Anthropology* could be understood as an empirical inquiry and to what extent it is a philosophical study. The answer is that the distinction between empirical and philosophical content is not clear-cut: anthropology operates on pragmatic and popular levels, but it is empirical only in disguise (IKA, 83; 118). Even if *Anthropology* comprises a collection of empirical examples, and the main objects of anthropological investigation are not the a priori conditions of knowledge, Kant argues quite clearly that anthropology can only be a form of knowledge and a serious science if it is rooted in philosophy (Kant 1974, 4). In other words, Kant’s anthropology covers all empirical knowledge about human beings that is given in experience, but he does not refrain from making a priori distinctions in *Anthropology* because they are the necessary foundation for his empirical study. If one asks what he means by “experience” on which anthropology is grounded, the study becomes more complicated and irreducible to an empirical inquiry.

Without *Introduction to Kant’s Anthropology* and Foucault’s early essays it is quite difficult to understand the context in which the anthropological structure of knowledge, “the anthropological illusion”, is discussed in Foucault’s more famous texts, especially in the last parts of *The Order of Things*. He identifies several features that comprise anthropological illusion

⁴¹ Foucault refers to Kant’s contemporaries in his search for different ways of demarcating and defining anthropology, for example to Carl Christian Erhard Schmid’s *Empirische Psychologie* from 1791. He finds an account that defines psychology as the study of man’s inner world and inner sense, medical anthropology as a science that deals with the human body and, finally, *proper* anthropology as an investigation of relationships *between* the interior and the exterior (IKA, 112). In this light, one could argue that Kant’s *Anthropology*, at least in Foucault’s view, is a study of this in-between: anthropology deals with the relationship between the inner world and things that are experienced on the one hand, and on the other hand it investigates interaction between human beings in general. This allows explanation of why mental illnesses are discussed in this context as errors of the mind and its capabilities of organising perceptions coherently, at the same time as exercises that alleviate mental distress are understood in terms of interaction.

in the chapter “Man and His Doubles”, and he argues that not only Kant’s philosophical anthropology but all human sciences, including psychology and psychiatry, are based on the anthropological structure of knowledge. The main features of this structure include 1) mixing empirical and transcendental levels of knowledge 2) emphasising the aspect of human finitude and 3) focusing extensively on errors of thought.

First, he argues in *The Order of Things* that the main problem with anthropological knowledge is that it confuses two different levels of thinking, the empirical and the transcendental, a problem he characterises as *the empirico-transcendental doublet*: anthropological knowledge reflects the conditions of possible knowledge by proceeding through empirical contents (*OT*, 319; 341). I have shown above how in his earlier essays he supports Binswanger’s argument according to which the concrete task of communicating and interacting with patients can consistently be combined with the aim of analysing the ontological structures of experience. In this context, however, he accuses anthropology of presupposing that a human being is simultaneously the object *and* the source of all possible knowledge.

Second, Foucault argues that the question of *finitude*—acknowledging that human knowledge is limited by cognitive capabilities and anatomy—is integral to the anthropological structure of knowledge. He claims, irrespective of Kant, that “modernity begins when the human being begins to exist within his organism, inside the shell of his head, inside the armature of his limbs, and in the whole structure of his physiology” (*OT*, 318). The emergence of anthropological illusion marks a decisive moment in which mental illnesses are placed inside human beings. In Kant’s system of thought, certain universal conditions of knowledge delineate what is possible for humans to know, and these limits cannot be exceeded. In Foucault’s reading, then, anthropology is a man-made science seeking the truth about human beings who cannot possibly know the truth about human beings (*IK4*, 116–117; 122).

Kant, however, not only describes what man *can* (*kann*) make of himself but he also prescribes what he *should* (*soll*) make of himself as a free being (Kant 1974, 3; 157). Man’s primary task, in Kant’s view, is to use reason in the best possible way (*IK4*, 63). Most importantly, it involves not only engaging in the process of self-improvement but also proceeding further as humanity, which connects anthropology to political objectives. Foucault thus criticises Kant for first defining human beings as finite creatures and then arguing that they should constantly improve themselves (*IK4*, 106). He raises a critical question: How is it possible to proceed further if we are squarely placed within certain limits and conditions of knowledge?

Finally, Foucault calls the third aspect of the anthropological structure of knowledge *the negativity of thought*. In his view, anthropological thinking is extensively focused on delusions,

misunderstandings and errors of thought: human experience as thematised in anthropological knowledge is under the constant threat of being confused or deluded (*OT*, 323). Therefore, I focus in the next section on how the concept of experience is linked to the questions of delusion and mental derangement.

1.3.2 Experience and Mental Illness in Anthropology

Above I discuss Foucault's early work on psychiatric knowledge, and also draw attention to his critical analysis of the theoretical, Kantian roots of existential anthropology. Now, in this historical framing of psychiatric knowledge, it is relevant to ask why Kant's *Anthropology from the Pragmatic Point of View* deals with mental illness in the first place. In response to this question it is necessary to clarify Kant's concept of experience and its role in his anthropological study.

In Kant's *Anthropology*, the topic of mental illness and the justification of daily exercise are both theoretically connected to his concept of experience. He defines experience (*Erfahrung*), first, as empirical knowledge, and he explains that an anthropological study operates on this experiential level (Kant 1974, 23). However, Kant also defines experience in a much more theoretical way as "knowledge of objects of sense", meaning knowledge that involves sense perception (Kant 1974, 22), as follows:

Experience is empirical knowledge; and knowledge [...] requires reflection (*reflexio*) and, accordingly, consciousness of our activity in combining the manifold of ideas according to a rule of the unity of the manifold—that is, it requires concepts and thoughts in general (as distinguished from intuition) (Kant 1974, 22).

Thus, perception, according to Kant, is only a fragmentary multiplicity, and the world is given to us in perception in the form of dispersion. Experience, in contrast, consists of perceptions that are organised by the mind, or rather by the "faculty of understanding" (Kant 1974, 22). Experience involves a whole variety of syntheses that organise existing perceptions (*IKA*, 67–68; Kant 1974, 10). Kant claims, for example, that small children do not yet have proper experiences, only sporadic perceptions, and that novels, plays and biographies are not based on "experience and truth" because they are invented and do not reflect that which is perceived (Kant 1974, 5; 9–10).

One of Foucault's main arguments in *Introduction to Kant's Anthropology* is that whereas Kant theorises about how mental faculties (*Vermögen*) or abilities organise and ground experience in

his *Critiques*, in *Anthropology* he gives no guarantee that experience is organised appropriately (IKA, 69). In Foucault's words:

To critical thought, which represents the investigation into that which is conditional in the founding activity, *Anthropology* responds by offering an inventory of what is un-founded in the conditioned. In the anthropological domain, there is no synthesis that is not under threat: it is as if the realm of experience were hollowed out from within by dangers which are not of the order of some arbitrary going beyond, but of collapse. (IKA, 70)

In fact, Kant does not explicate the theoretical background of his classification of mental derangements in detail in *Anthropology*, but a closer look at the classification reveals that they are indeed connected to the failure to form experience. He explains that in cases of mental derangement the patient's thoughts take their own course without following the "laws of experience" (Kant 1974, 74). His classification of mental derangements includes four types of illness (Kant 1974, 84–85):

- 1) *Amentia* means the inability to bring ideas together coherently, and ultimately the inability to have synthetically formed experiences.
- 2) *Dementia* concerns the derangement of the "formal laws of thought that makes experience possible": the imagination leads the way and creates non-existing objects by combining perceptions in false ways.
- 3) *Insania* is defined as the incurable derangement of judgment, which in *Anthropology* means that the person believes that the random connections between concepts or worldly objects invented in the mind are universal.
- 4) *Vesania* is a type of illness in which the patient cannot be guided by experience because those who suffer from it do not trust experiential knowledge or the general laws of nature, which is why they are prone to thinking that they can square a circle or invent perpetual motion, for example. Kant explicitly states that *vesania* involves the derangement of the faculty of reason.

Kant classifies only a few forms of severe mental derangement, but he also uses the concept of mental deficiency to distinguish lesser defects from true illnesses.⁴² He includes minor deficiencies such as foolishness, silliness and being absent-minded in his concept of mental

⁴² Kant makes a distinction between mental illnesses and mental deficiencies (1974, 73). Together they are classified as "faults of the cognitive power". Mental illnesses, which are all severe conditions, are divided into morbid anxiety and mental derangement, and the four-field division presented here concerns the latter.

deficiency. In Foucault's view, Kant uses such everyday terms in speaking about mental illnesses to demonstrate that he is taking seriously the ordinary ways of using language (*IKA*, 95).

Kant's distinction between two different forms of experience and *inner sense* further illuminates his reasons for including a discussion on mental illness in his *Anthropology*. Despite the fact that making such a priori distinctions between different forms of experience and the inner sense does not belong to the core of anthropological research, he briefly explains these distinctions in his study. First, he distinguishes between *inner experiences* and *outer experiences*.⁴³ There is no clear consensus amongst Kantian scholars concerning what he means by inner experiences, but roughly speaking, both types of experience could be understood as forms of knowledge: outer experience refers to "knowledge of the objects of space", whereas inner experience concerns knowledge of objects as they appear to us (Kant 1974, 15).⁴⁴ Given that experiences are organised and united by the laws of understanding and imply the aspect of knowledge, inner experience differs from the mere idea of having sensations and existing (Kant 1974, 22–23).

Second, Kant explains that *inner sense* as a concept does not relate to knowledge: it refers only to sensing oneself as one appears to one's self-consciousness, but it is not yet experience as Kant understands the term (*ibid.*). Inner sense is a term for *undergoing*, and, most importantly, he claims that it is prone to being subjected to illusions: one does not just take notice of the inner sense but continuously introduces things to the self-consciousness, which is why Kant defines inner sense as the "consciousness of what we *undergo* insofar as we are affected by the play of our own thoughts" (Kant 1974, 39).

In sum, in Kant's view, mental illness is connected to the tendency to confuse invented appearances with experiential knowledge (*ibid.*). It is a tendency that is inherent, and not an outcome of social interaction, at least not in the same way as in *Rameau's Nephew*.

Foucault argues, then, that the different types of mental illness described in *Anthropology* are not considered to be *interferences* of some normal experience. Mental disorders are rather defined in terms of possible experience—as possibilities they concern everyone, and this is

⁴³ It is not self-evident what Kant means by inner experience and inner sense, and what the role of self-consciousness is in general in his Critical philosophy. See Katharina T. Krauss (forthcoming); McLear 2017.

⁴⁴ Kant further argues that by inner experience we know ourselves only as we *appear* to ourselves but not as we truly are. He explains that by inner experience "I know myself only as I appear to myself, not as a thing itself", because "the thing itself" cannot be known in any empirical sense (Kant 1974, 22). This view is in line with his idea that we can know an object of knowledge (by "outer experience") only as it appears to us but not as a thing itself. Furthermore, he makes a distinction between "taking notice of oneself" and "observing oneself" and warns that the latter is a methodological inventory of perceptions, a form of introspection that can turn into fanaticism and even lead to the mental asylum (*ibid.*).

why they are included in the overall discussion of human beings (*IKA*, 31). At the same time as the field of experience is the source of anthropological truth, there is also a constant possibility of losing experience in dazzlement: the concern is that, in principle, one can fall into madness or egoism at any time, and confuse phenomena with illusions (*IKA*, 69–70).

Kant does not suggest, however, that sensibility as such causes disorder, and he does not share the Cartesian concern that senses are deceptive in any significant way. *Anthropology* includes a section entitled “Apology for Sensibility”, in which Kant argues that sense perceptions are not yet organised, they are merely appearances, but that there is nothing in them that would cause disorder, either (Kant 1974, 23). In his view, claiming that senses are deceptive means only that one is confusing appearances with experience (Kant 1974, 24–26). Instead of *causing* confusion, sensibility presents material to one’s understanding, and the possibility of erring concerns the constitution of experience in synthetic activity. As pointed out, when appearances are organised in terms of understanding, they become experience and empirical knowledge.

Nevertheless, as Foucault remarks, the threat of being dazzled can be alleviated by exercise and social interaction (*IKA*, 69). Hence, he pays considerable attention to the instructive aspects of Kant’s text. I turn to the theme of carrying out exercises for one’s own well-being and for the sake of humanity in the next section. These topics are strongly related to the political objectives of Kant’s *Anthropology* and, in the end, pave the way to Foucault’s own formulation of the critical subject.

1.3.3 Anthropology as the Study of Well-Being and the Philosophical Justification of Exercise

Kant’s *Anthropology* is essentially a study of intellectual capacities and mental well-being. As pointed out above, Foucault emphasises the derangement of experience as an ever-present, inherent possibility in *Anthropology*, Kant’s eventual aim being to improve the state of humanity as a whole. To the extent that experience is always subject to possible failings and errors in anthropology, Kant is bound and motivated to formulate exercises for daily conduct, mental well-being and other forms of self-perfection. In the following I discuss the role of exercise in the process of preventing possible dazzlement. As noted in Chapter 1.2.3, the theme of exercise features prominently in Foucault’s response to Derrida in the aftermath of *History of Madness*, and I briefly mentioned its reappearance in Foucault’s late work. In the 1980’s, he continues to investigate the philosophical guidance and justification given to the idea of self-

improvement in the context of ancient ethics, and not only as practical or theoretical but also as political concerns.

The full title of Kant's anthropological treatise is *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*. At the very beginning of it he distinguishes his practical anthropology from physiological anthropology, pointing out that practical anthropology is a normative study that provides instructions and directions for well-being (Kant 1974, 3). Anthony E. Mahler explains that the ancient practices of medicine and dietetic regulation have a significant role in the anthropological discourses of the late German Enlightenment, and there are references in Kant's *Anthropology* to Greek ethics and dietetics that stress aspects such as the cultivation (*Bildung*) of a healthy body and adopting a temperate way of being (Mahler 2014, iv). In anthropology, as in ancient thought, dietetics is closely connected to the aims of moral perfection and overcoming the current state of the self (Mahler 2014, v). Consequently, the topic of dietetics⁴⁵, as "the everyday art of healthy living", plays a crucial role in Foucault's discussion on anthropology and in his late work on ethics.

Foucault argues that, as an art of healthy living, dietetics is of philosophical concern in Kant's *Anthropology*, given its aim of managing and governing the life of the human mind and the daily lives of human beings (*IKA*, 47–49). He notes, however, that philosophical guidance has nothing to do with the aim of overpowering disease, its purpose rather being to manage health and the relationship between health and illness. Whereas the task of medicine is to identify and exclude illnesses, that of philosophical guidance is to provide concrete instructions for the holistic sustenance of health and the prolongation of life.

I note above that Kant's objective is not only to describe a human being but also to *prescribe* what people should make of themselves in order to advance and benefit the human community (Kant 1974, 3; 5). The point is to train people to use their cognitive powers (*Macht*) to their full extent (*IKA*, 54).⁴⁶ The human being of anthropology cannot, therefore, only be someone whose experience is formed according to certain conditions, or someone whose experience takes the form of dispersion: it is someone who goes through life with a sense of continuity and a future orientation. As Foucault describes it: "Like every living being, its lifetime is not indifferently dispersed and scattered; it has its own path to follow" (*IKA*, 60–

⁴⁵ The English translation of Foucault's *Introduction to Kant's Anthropology* uses the word Regime instead of dietetics, but in the original text he uses the French word "Diététique". Translating the term as dietetics is in line with Foucault's ethics, in which dietetics has a major role in defining ethical labour on the self (see Chapter 2.1.4).

⁴⁶ Even if the study of well-being cannot be entirely dissociated from the topic of the living body, Kant's *Anthropology* is less concerned with the human body than with improving the human mind: he holds that human beings differ from other species in having a sense of an "I" as well as an understanding (*IKA*, 54; 63; Kant 1974, 9). Practical anthropology should therefore cover questions concerning the mind and its capabilities, or "powers" (*Macht*) as Kant calls them, which are characteristic of human beings (*IKA*, 54).

61; 67). This idea implies the aspect of movement that is present in Foucault's early essays in which he also argues that one does not have to accept that the current state of being is a necessary one, especially in the case of mental disorders.

Before explicating what Foucault adopts from Kant in his own critical philosophy, I consider what he rejects in Kant's practical advice. There are several features in Kant's normative study of well-being of which Foucault does not approve, including the presumption of a particular type of healthy subject. First, he characterises the instructive sections of *Anthropology* as knowledge of normality *par excellence*: they concern human beings in their state of health (*IKA*, 115). Second, even if Kant rejects the notion that one could master pathological sensations only by controlling the mind, he clearly stresses the role of reflection in emotional well-being. Kant claims, for instance, that emotional agitations are not about the intensity of feeling, but issue from the *lack of reflection* on one feeling in comparison to the totality of other feelings (Kant 1974, 122).

Third, Foucault is highly critical of the idea that humanity would proceed further towards a common end. The role of exercise in *Anthropology*—apart from controlling the possibility of error—is to affect the world intentionally, gradually to expand self-governing and exercising from individuals to families, to populations, and finally to the whole of humanity (Kant 1974, 3; 5; *IKA*, 70–71; 91).

The idea of extending the aim of self-improvement to cover the whole of humanity elucidates Kant's political objectives in *Anthropology*: he explains that the aim is to provide knowledge of man as *a citizen of the world* (Kant 1974, 63). He borrows this term from the ancient Cynics, who defined themselves as cosmopolites (*Lives*, 1972, IV.2.63). The general idea is that the world of an individual man cannot be presented as universal, but the common denominator between the citizens of the world is that they have “residence in language”, and the truth about human beings is realised and acted out in exchange (Kant 1974, 63). Hannah Arendt argues that Kant's citizen of the world frames his investigation as a study of intersubjectivity, even if the word “intersubjectivity” is not used (Arendt 1992, 120). Foucault notes, however, that even if Kant's *Anthropology* concerns citizens of the world as intersubjective beings, it focuses much more strongly on the cognitive powers of human beings than on concrete political issues such as rights, duties and actual citizenship (*IKA*, 55).

It is worth drawing attention to the fact that the assumed recipients of Kant's advice are guests at a dinner party, or banquet, and do not include all kinds of people. Kant's exercises are not meant for solitary meditation in that they involve engaging in conversation with

others.⁴⁷ He describes social conversation as a necessary but also as an artificial (*künstliche*) way of relaxing and taking care of one's own mental well-being (Kant 1974, 78). As Foucault explains, however, Kant's presupposed audience is not a very inclusive group of people: a citizen of the world is, after all, a subject who submits himself to certain customs and laws, a legal subject of a kind who also prescribes himself a moral code (*IKA*, 42). Thus, even if Kant poses the question, "What is a human being?" and purports to answer it by keeping the discussion on the level of experience and everyday interaction, he does not target his exercises on all human creatures. On the contrary, his instructions are addressed to clergymen needing to relax their minds after a busy day at work, and to navigate amongst social codes so as not to be awkward in interaction—too selfish or ego-centred, superficial, too bored or too boring. The aim is to become capable of participating and situating oneself in social games, and of controlling them. Kant instructs clergymen as follows:

Recollecting ourselves (*collectio animi*) to be ready for every new occupation promotes mental health by restoring the balance of our mental powers. The most beneficial way of doing this is social conversation filled with varied subjects, carried like a game. [...] Mental hygiene includes a (not common) art for busy people: the art of distracting themselves in order to gather their forces.—But when we have collected our thoughts—that is, have them ready to be used for whatever purpose we choose—we cannot be called distracted if, in an unsuitable place or at business meeting, we deliberately immerse ourselves in our thoughts and so pay no attention to the business at hand. [...] If a man is habitually distracted, this affliction gives him the appearance of a dreamer and makes him useless to society. (Kant 1974, 78–79)

As this quotation shows, Kant's advice is targeted at busy people who are useful to society. These exercises and instructions do not concern women and servants, for example: women's minds are not so occupied (they do not know anything about gentlemen's work), and servants who seem to be distracted and unfocused are not suffering from real stress but most likely have improper things on their minds (*ibid.*).⁴⁸

At the beginning of this chapter I describe Foucault's *Introduction to Kant's Anthropology* as a critical study of the anthropological structure of knowledge. However, in his late work on

⁴⁷ Kant argues against Rousseau, who famously claims that life would be good and innocent if social interaction did not corrupt people. Kant, by contrast, refers to all men as actors and defends their games in social situations, as he believes that pleasant behaviour will gradually pass into the attitudes and will of the individual (Kant 1974, 30). He further states that instead of worrying about other people's insincerity, one should be concerned only with one's own motives (Kant 1974, 32). Foucault, in contrast, emphasises in his late work the importance of being committed to one's own words and actions (Chapter 2.3.4).

⁴⁸ Kant claims for example that women are under tutelage and incompetent to speak for themselves (Kant 1974, 79). Foucault remarks that because women are not included in the "citizens of the world", they have no juridical rights but are understood as possessions and as domestic animals (*IKA*, 42–43). Women have no spirit (*Geist*), and the relationship between men and women is characterized as rivalry and manipulation (*ibid.*).

ancient ethics, he returns to the theme of exercise in his discussion on techniques of the self which create and simultaneously manage the sphere of freedom. To what extent, then, is Kantian influence present in Foucault's work from the 1980s, in which he encourages his readers to become critical subjects who are not just simply conditioned by historical circumstances but are also capable of reflecting and acting upon them?

1.3.4 The Task of Forming Oneself as an Ethical and Political Subject: Seeking a Way out of Guidance

Introduction to Kant's Anthropology portrays a rather complex relationship between Foucault and Kant, which further raises the question of what Foucault wants to adopt from Kant in his late work on ethics, and what he eventually rejects.

Describing his work in the 1980s, Foucault locates his own thought explicitly in the critical tradition beginning from Kant and defines his study as a critical history of thought (*DEII.339*, 1381; *DEII.345*, 1450). In this context, he separates his own study from the investigation of errors of experience. He does not accept the view that mental distress is merely the cause of derangements in synthetic activity and, as I have shown, he is highly suspicious of the project of proceeding further as a form of humanity, which Kant assumes is rather a homogenous unity of those with legal rights. Foucault describes his work as follows:

[A] critical history of thought would be an analysis of the conditions under which certain relations of the subject to object are formed or modified, insofar as those relations constitute a possible knowledge [*savoir*]. It is not a matter of defining the formal conditions of a relationship to the object; nor is it a matter of isolating the empirical conditions that may, at a given moment, have enabled the subject in general to become acquainted with an object already given in reality. The problem is to determine what the subject must be, to what condition he is subject, what status he must have, what position he must occupy in reality or in the imaginary, in order to become a legitimate subject of this or that type of knowledge [*connaissance*]. (*AME*, 459)

He thus defines his philosophy as the critical investigation of the subject, meaning that the focus is on the conditions that enable one to become a subject, especially on the *activities* through which one must go to be a legitimate subject of particular types of knowledge, medical and pedagogic knowledge, for instance. In his late work he gives his readers the task of questioning the conditions under which certain activities, practices and ways of thinking about

the self—explaining the self, reflecting on the self, questioning, conducting, and governing the self—become possible.⁴⁹

However, in his discussion of the role of guidance (Fr. *conduite*; Gr. *oikonomia psukhon*) in different practices of care in the 1980s, Foucault continuously returns to Kant's essay on Enlightenment *Was ist Aufklärung?* Rather than presenting a rigorous exegesis of Kant's response, Foucault addresses the question "What is Enlightenment?" in his own way: he connects his own thought to the modern tradition, which he portrays as a critical impulse that should be rethought (Allen 2003&2011; Habermas 1984b, 107; O'Leary 2002, 165). His late lecture course *The Government of Self and Others* from 1983 begins with a description of methodology—and he discusses Kant's essay on Enlightenment and the self-reflective attitude he formulates (*GSA*, 15).

Kant identifies features that are characteristic of modernity in his essay and emphasises the need to liberate oneself from the direction of authorities. As discussed above, he provides instructions for improving one's cognitive capabilities and well-being in *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, but in his essay on *Aufklärung* he characterizes Enlightenment as the attitude of rising above the state of self-caused immaturity that issues, from a lack of courage to reason without guidance rather than a lack of understanding (Kant 1991, 54). Thus, the motto of Enlightenment is: "Dare to know!"

For Foucault, too, Enlightenment is not a historical period but a self-critical attitude of courage that becomes manifest in different eras. He defines *Aufklärung* as taking a specific attitude to the present moment: the present moment is not to be understood as an outcome of past events or as heralding the future, it should be taken as a question (*EST*, 305). Most importantly, it marks a break—a way out (*Ausgang, sortie*) (ibid.). "The way out" is a task and an attempt to redefine the present moment (ibid.; Kant 1991, 58). Such a redefinition requires that the present moment cannot be fully detached from the past or from the future, and that it is not fully determined, either. Foucault explains that past events constitute a continuous and enduring virtuality that forms a continuity towards the future (*GSA*, 21).

Foucault's relationship with Kant is commonly presented as a contradictory split (Habermas 1984b; Norris 1994; Trainor 2003). According to Jürgen Habermas, for instance, Foucault presents two mutually contradictory Kants: the Kant who investigates the conditions

⁴⁹ Foucault's late work is strongly influenced by Nietzsche and Heidegger (*DEII.354*, 1522). Foucault describes his relationship with Nietzsche and Heidegger as a "fundamental experience", meaning that they influenced his work significantly (*DEII.354*, 1522). Nietzsche, in *Beyond Good and Evil*, questions the self-evident status that is given to "I" in the philosophical tradition, stating that there is nothing self-evident in what it means to think or to be (Nietzsche 2013, §16). Heidegger, in his turn, questions the emphasis on the reflective subject in the phenomenological tradition, and takes active involvement in the world as the starting point of his theorisation.

of experience and possible knowledge, and thus defines the limits of knowing that cannot be exceeded, and the Kant of the Enlightenment essay who takes initiatives in freedom and tries to make a change in the world (Habermas 1984b, 106; Allen 2003, 181). It is true, as noted above, that Foucault criticizes Kant's thought on anthropological illusion in *The Order of Things*, first defining human beings as finite creatures and then prescribing how they should move beyond their current states of being and improve themselves. He also divides the Kantian tradition roughly into two phases *The Government of Self and Others* and in "What is Critique?": 1) the study of the conditions of possibility of knowledge and 2) the investigation and interrogation of the present moment with a critical attitude (*GSA*, 22; *WC*, 36).

A similar kind of duality has characterised debates on the relationship between Foucault's earlier and later works, his earlier investigation of the conditions of subjectivity and his later studies aimed at finding ways of changing the subject. His late work from the 1980s has been accused of formulating ethics in the same way as activists or poets whose main concern is not the possible inconsistency of their thought (Habermas 1984b; Norris 1994; Rorty 1984; Trainor 2003). In other words, it is commonplace to accuse Foucault of causing a permanent, unresolvable tension between individual sovereignty and the determinations of social reality. However, authors such as Amy Allen and Beatrice Han-Pile have argued against the idea of a Kantian split in Foucault's thought (see Chapter 2.4.2; Allen 2008; Han-Pile 2016), and I have argued that ever since his early essays Foucault wanted to theorise in a way that enabled people and society to change.

I agree that Foucault should be understood as a thinker who although profoundly influenced by Kant, plays out his critical project in his own way. Instead of simply assuming an opposition between Kant's critical project and his critical *attitude*, one should acknowledge Foucault's aim to provide reinterpretations of the connections between these two forms of critical thinking.

It is worth pointing out that Foucault identifies the relationship between Kant's critical project and a critical attitude in slightly different ways in different texts. Whereas in *The Order of Things* he emphasises the contradiction between them, he explicitly claims in "What is Critique?" that Kant's critical project and the attitude of *Aufklärung* are systematically connected, explaining that they both revolve around questions of knowledge. Kant's critical project questions the extent to which one can know, and the later formulation of a critical attitude implies the task and the obligation *to know knowledge* (*WC*, 36; 61). In other words, a critical attitude is possible if one has an adequate understanding of the formation of knowledge itself (*ibid.*).

In identifying the division between the conditions of possible experience and critical attitude in *The Government of Self and Others*, Foucault in fact formulates the starting point for his late lectures (see Chapters 2.3.5 and 2.4.2). In “On the Genealogy of Ethics” he reflects thus on the relationship between the subject of knowledge, which is conditioned by certain capabilities, and the subject of ethics, whose choices must be grounded on freedom:

Kant’s solution was to find a universal subject that, to the extent it was universal, could be the subject of knowledge, but which demanded, nonetheless, an ethical attitude—precisely the relationship to the self which Kant proposes in *The Critique of Practical Reason*. [...] Kant says, “I must recognize myself as universal subject, that is, I must constitute myself in each of my actions as a universal subject by conforming to universal rules.” The old questions were reinterpreted: How can I constitute myself as a subject of ethics? [...] Are ascetic exercises needed? (*EST*, 279–280)

As Foucault argues in this quotation, Kant returns to the old, ancient questions concerning daily behaviour and exercise through which ethical subjects are formed. Instead of embracing a split between the critical attitude and the critical project, they are combined by a type of virtue ethics. Robert Nichols explains that ethical work on the self requires having an adequate picture of the current situation and the conditions that have formed subjects, and that this acceptance of finitude should not be understood as a constraint but as the necessary starting point of ethics (Nichols 2014, 6–8). To both Kant and Foucault, then, the conditions are not the end but the *beginning* of freedom, the beginning of the process of transforming the mode of being within certain conditions, relationships and situations (Nichols 2014, 7). Nichols explains that when Kant outlined the conditions of possibility of knowledge, he overcame human finitude by making it necessary, the cornerstone of freedom (*ibid.*).

It is noteworthy that in *Anthropology*, Kant uses the concept of *virtue* in his discussion of the cognitive powers of men, their self-improvement and engagement with the world. I refer above to the highly exclusive nature of Kant’s alleged audience or peer group, but his idea of exercising for well-being is presented as an ethical concern. These questions are discussed in detail in Part Two of this thesis, but I will briefly touch upon virtue here, not as a sudden undertaking but as an excellence or a skill that requires continuous effort. Kant distinguishes virtue from a mere habit: a habit is something one persists with as customary without reflecting on the action, whereas virtue always “springs forth” in new and original ways (Kant 1974, 26–27).

Kant does not actually contradict his deontological moral theory, because he defines virtue as the “*moral strength* in pursuing duty” (*ibid.*). He famously states that the Categorical Imperative always guides one to act in a way that could be turned into a general law (Kant

1996, 5:21; Kant 2002, 4:421). Foucault argues that, in *Anthropology*, implementation of the Imperative is ensured by exercise, by artificial play (*künstlicher Spiel*) and its daily application that is always renewed in the present moment (*IKA*, 52–53; 88). Thus, responding to the question “What is a human being?” is, in practice, a continuous, never-ending task that cannot be completed or predefined (*IKA*, 51).⁵⁰ That is why Foucault also uses the notion of experience in the sense of exploration (Fr. *expérience*) in this context: he stresses that anthropology is about exploration, because the object of study, a human being, is always mediating between nature and freedom by directly engaging with the world (*ibid.*).

Foucault rejects the aspect of duty in Kant’s moral theory, and his aim is to change the *historical* conditions, the current circumstances of experience. However, clearly influenced by Kant, he associates the critical attitude with virtue (*WC*, 25), thereby emphasising that critique requires constant practice, reflection and exercise (see Chapter 2.4.3). One should emphasise the aspect of *practical* involvement with the world in Foucault’s reading of Kant and understand the critical subject especially as someone who is involved with the world (see chapters 2.2.2; 2.2.5).⁵¹

It is also worthy of remark that even if Foucault aims at reinterpreting the connections between Kant’s *Critiques* and the critical attitude that is thematised in the Enlightenment essay, he does not claim that these connections are entirely unproblematic. He questions, for example, Kant’s suggestion that by exercising critical reflection and knowing one’s own limits, one also comes to understand that one must obey and posit oneself autonomously under the command of sovereign power (*WC*, 35). Kant addresses Frederick the Great in the essay and explains why people should be allowed to express their thoughts in public as freely as they like. Foucault notes in “What Is Enlightenment?” that Kant is offering Frederick II a type of

⁵⁰ Foucault equates this artificial play with exercise and explains that its course cannot be fully determined in advance (*IKA*, 90–91). When the play is defined as artificial (*künstlicher*) it is not a mechanically exercised technique, but equivalent to arts and crafts, trickery and cunning (*IKA*, 90–91). As pointed out above, the aim of social play is to affect worldly affairs. Foucault expresses this in a more theoretical way, but in brief, the role of *Kunst* is to construct illusions (*Schein*) and present them as new phenomena (*Erscheinung*), which are then introduced into play (*IKA*, 90–91).

⁵¹ Foucault’s critical subject is neither empirical nor transcendental in the Kantian sense, because he does not investigate subjects as the objects of empirical inquiry, and the conditions he is interested in are historical. Amy Allen argues, in turn, that the subject of *Anthropology* is simultaneously empirical and transcendental, and that Foucault adopts this combination from Kant. In her view, Foucault uses Kant’s *Anthropology* to formulate his own conception of the critical subject whose experience is not only determined by certain conditions, and who is also rooted in concrete cultural and historical environment (Allen 2008, 31–32). She reads a passage in which Foucault states that in *Anthropology* the “I” as not only being given to man from the start, but also as being empirically generated, and once has been generated, it recognises that it is already conditioned, “already there” (Allen 2008 31; *IKA*, 67). She of course explains that the conditions in Foucault’s case are historical and cultural, and when she uses the word “empirical” she does not mean the empirical sciences. However, it is problematic to claim that Foucault, a critic of the anthropological structure of knowledge and “the empirico-transcendental doublet”, would define the critical subject as both empirical and transcendental.

contract between the king and his subjects, a contract based on the idea that free reasoning is the best guarantee of securing obedience and good behaviour among citizens (*EST*, 308). He goes on to argue that free human beings control and restrict their own behaviour, and that they should be guaranteed freedom because in this way they can improve the condition of mankind in general (Kant 1991). The appeal to improve the condition of mankind is also familiar from *Anthropology*.

Foucault is, of course, suspicious of sovereign power and suspects that increasing individual and social freedom does not necessarily lead to a society in which individuals respect one another's strengthened capabilities (*EST*, 317). He insists that the task of *Aufklärung* involves asking what *mis*conceptions are inherent in knowledge. This task is necessary given his belief that knowledge is never fully innocent but is an outcome of negotiation and struggle: the effects of these struggles on individuals should be examined (*WC*, 46; 49). The aim is, then, to investigate the relations between knowledge and discursive games and show how they have emerged (*WC*, 54–55). He argues in “What is Critique?” that one should not accept the Cartesian notion “I think therefore I am”, and he changes it to the form “*What*, therefore I am”—meaning that one should interrogate the “I” and ask what conditions allow and encourage subjects, us, to form ourselves in our everyday existence (*WC*, 46).⁵²

In sum, Foucault rejects Kant's project of investigating the errors and a priori conditions of experience in his late work, and thus does not accept the way in which Kant places mental illness within the individual, in the activity in which experience is organized. Moreover, he questions Kant's definition of humanity, which overlooks the different aspects of power and mechanisms of exclusion. One could argue, however, that he was strongly influenced by Kant's philosophy, especially in defining his late project on ethics as an investigation of the connections between the (cultural and historical) conditions of subject formation and the ways in which we constitute ourselves as ethical subjects (Chapter 2.4.2).

⁵² Later texts that analyse different mechanisms of power privilege the question of *how* over the questions of what and why, the aim not being to formulate what power is or why it functions but to investigate the *ways* in which different mechanisms of power operate and the ways in which we submit ourselves willingly to different practices (*Power*, 336).

In the above I have discussed the central role of experience in Foucault's reading of Kant's *Anthropology*, arguing that Kant defines experience (*Erfahrung*), first, as empirical knowledge, and then explains further that in experience, perceptions are organised by synthetic activity. Foucault describes how anthropology operates on the level of everyday experience, meaning that anthropological knowledge concerns human interaction and the daily application of conduct. He claims, however, that *Anthropology* offers no guarantee that experience is well-organised but is rather constantly under threat of being disorganised and disordered. Kant's main concern in *Anthropology* is the prospect of the collapse and loss of truth when experience fails to be properly founded. Kant's *Anthropology* thus advocates the improving of one's cognitive powers and taking care of one's mental well-being.

I argued that the relationship between Kant and Foucault cannot be characterised simply as rejection. Foucault criticises Kant for placing mental illnesses inside the subject, and he does not investigate the possible errors of experience in his late work. He also rejects the idea that one should engage in exercises of health for the purpose of proceeding further as humanity. However, he describes his work on ancient ethics as a critical history of subjectivity which means that he investigates the conditions that form active subjects. In both *Introduction to Kant's Anthropology* and in his late work on ethics Foucault addresses the issue of managing and influencing modes of being by continuous labour and specific arts of existence that are culturally codified and shared. Thus, he discusses well-being and dietetics as philosophical, ethical and political issues not only in his later works but also in his early writing.

Kant's *Anthropology* offers a formulation of virtue ethics connects questions of health, or dietetic practices, and political activism. The downside of dietetic practices—dietetics understood in the broadest possible sense as the art of healthy living—is that they tend to be exclusive. It is for this reason that I drew attention to the fact that even if Kant poses the general questions “What is a human being?” and “What human beings can and should make out of themselves?”, the instructions he proposes for improving one's health only concern a specific group and a limited number of people.

Defining experience as empirical knowledge helps in enhancing understanding of how Foucault uses the concept of experience also in some of his other works, in *The Birth of the Clinic*, for example. I continue the discussion in the next chapter, focusing on experience in the context of medical knowledge. When Foucault refers to “experience” in his analysis of

medical literature, he sometimes presupposes the Kantian definition of experience. His focus in *The Birth of the Clinic* is on experiential forms of knowledge and the ways in which a doctor-subject perceives the patient in a specific clinical setting.

1.4 Experience and Medical Perception in *The Birth of the Clinic*

“Of all the physical sciences in general, there is perhaps not one in which it is more important to question the senses than in medical practice. Every theory is silent or almost always disappears in the patient’s bed, giving way to observation and experience. On what are experience and observation founded, you see, if not on the relationship of our senses?”⁵³

Jean-Nicolas Corvisart, Preface to New Method

1.4.1 Different Concepts of Experience: Medical Experience, Background Experience, Expertise

Looking back on his early work in the first version of the introduction of *The Use of Pleasure* (1984), Foucault explains that *experience* was not as fixed a concept in *History of Madness* or in *The Birth of the Clinic*:

It was indeed a dwelling place of experience that I tried to describe from the point of view of the history of thought—even though my use of the word “experience” was floating [...] I tried to analyze, in the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the genesis of a system of thought as a field of possible experiences: the formation of a domain of knowledge that constitutes itself as a specific knowledge of mental illness, an organization of a normative system (DEII.340, 1400)⁵⁴

Here, “the field of possible experiences” refers to a domain of knowledge in which certain conceptions of mental illness become possible. In other words, domains of knowledge are normative systems that define how madness or illness can be perceived. Foucault states in

⁵³ “De toutes les sciences physiques en général, il n’en est peut-être pas une dans laquelle il importe plus d’interroger les sens que dans la médecine-pratique strictement dite. Toute théorie se tait ou s’évanouit presque toujours au lit du malade, pour céder la place à l’observation et à l’expérience ; hé ! sur quoi se fondent l’expérience et l’observation, se ce n’est sur le rapport de nos sens?” (Corvisart 1808, vii)

⁵⁴ “[C]’était bien un foyer d’expérience que j’essayais de décrire du point de vue de l’histoire de la pensée—même si l’usage que je faisais du mot “expérience” y était très flottant [...] j’ai essayé d’analyser, au cours du XVII^e et du XVIII^e siècle, la genèse d’un système de pensée, comme matière d’expériences possibles : formation d’un domaine de connaissances qui se constitue comme savoir spécifique de la maladie mentale; organisation d’un système normatif.” (DEII.340, 1400)

“On the Archaeology of the Sciences” from 1968 that the formation of “clinical experience” cannot be explained only from the perspective of personal style, because the clinic cannot be dissociated from political, institutional, economic and pedagogical enactments and regulations (DEI.59, 740–741). Clinical experience in this sense means certain ways of perceiving, observing and speaking about objects of knowledge. It is a form of experience that is possible when clinics are established in a reorganised hospital field and patients are located in the enclosed setting (BC, 196). The main question addressed in *The Birth of the Clinic* is thus as follows: What types of subjects and objects are simultaneously constituted in these different fields of knowledge?

Foucault describes his project in *The Birth of the Clinic* as historical and critical, meaning that he investigates and questions the conditions of medical experience in a concrete historical context (BC, xi). The project is also critical in the political sense because it includes the tasks of transforming discourses and making new discourses possible. According to Foucault, one can consciously grasp old experiences only when new ones have emerged—and new experiences facilitate the historical and critical understanding of the past (BC, xv, xix). In the following I continue my investigation of his different concepts and notions of experience. In addition, given that domains of knowledge are characterised as normative systems, I also discuss the normative features of medical perception.

The Birth of the Clinic is undeniably a demanding book in terms of interpretation: at the same time as analysing medical literature from the 18th and 19th centuries, Foucault engages in philosophical discussions without explicating his sources or references. Moreover, he uses the term “experience” frequently and in a whole variety of meanings. Sometimes it refers to the doctor’s expertise and practical skills as opposed to theoretical training and mere observation, and on some occasions the French word *expérience* is translated as an experiment of scientific practice.

Foucault also continues to use the concept *background experience* (*expérience fondamentale*)—without explaining the reader what it means. The only explanation he gives is that background experience lies “below the level of our certainties” (BC, x), but he uses expressions such as “fundamental area”, “fundamental system”, “fundamental structure” and “fundamental organization of the disease” throughout the book. Hence, despite having given up the idea of investigating the underlying structures of silence, and even though he does not discuss unreason, he still conveys the same idea of background experience as in *History of Madness*. As I argue above, the notion of background experience is an abstraction in *History of Madness*, used for analysing the processes that form distinctions between phenomena, between different groups of people or different conceptions of reason and madness, for example. Foucault’s

aim in *The Birth of the Clinic*, in turn, is to trace the moments in discourse when different senses used in medical perception (seeing, hearing, touching and tasting) are connected or are distinguished from each other (BC, xi). Thus, it is a question not only of how diseases are defined, but also of how different senses are used as means or instruments in medical knowledge.

Most significantly, however, Foucault articulates different “forms of experience”, especially of “medical experience”, which he understands as normative systems that imply different rules for perceiving the objects of knowledge—and varying practices of cure that are in line with specific spatial arrangements. He defines the clinic, for example, not only as a concrete space or institution but also as one of the structures and types of medical knowledge that implies articulated ways of using the senses—seeing, touching, hearing—and ways of orienting oneself in the concrete, carefully designed space.⁵⁵ In other words, “clinical experience” characterises not only one of the historically delineated fields and structures of empirical knowledge, but also the *possibilities* of knowing, speaking and perceiving things in specific ways—that which *can* be perceived, known and said about the objects of knowledge in a clinical context. As I explain in Chapter 1.1.6, Foucault’s *historical a priori* is a concept for the sets of rules that define possible ways of speaking about objects of knowledge and knowing them, and his point is that the conditions, the rules and the normative criteria for perceiving and speaking about these objects of knowledge are immanent in the forms of experience.⁵⁶ In other words, rules are not imposed on a discursive practice from the outside, which is why Foucault focuses his study on concrete statements and descriptions of practices also in *The Birth of the Clinic* (AK, 127).

The subtitle, “An Archaeology of Medical Perception”, locates the study in the framework of Foucault’s archaeological project.⁵⁷ An archaeological project could be defined roughly as the study of explicit statements as they appear in their historical contexts. When Foucault characterises his study afterwards in an interview from 1971 he explains that he did not use the word “experience” in its everyday sense:

⁵⁵ Examples of other “forms of experience” include humoral pathology, a speculative system of knowledge that focuses on bodily fluids; the botanical model of classification and pathological anatomy in which disease is localised in the patient’s body, in biological processes, tissues and organs.

⁵⁶ The idea that the conditions that make phenomena appear in specific ways only exist in the phenomena themselves (Chapter 1.1.4; 1.1.6) could lead to circular definitions of experience, such as “experience is the condition of medical experience”, when in fact one is trying to say that “the normative system that enables one to perceive the objects of knowledge in specific ways is the condition of medical perception and knowledge”.

⁵⁷ When Foucault explains his archaeological study, he advises his audience to read *History of Madness*, *The Birth of the Clinic* and *The Order of Things* together (DEI.59, 736): *The Order of Things* constitutes an investigation of the history of human sciences in general, *The Birth of the Clinic* focuses on medical knowledge and perception and *History of Madness* concerns the formation and exclusion of madness. He explains in an interview from 1980 that *The Archaeology of Knowledge* articulates the method he uses in *The Birth of the Clinic* (DEII.281, 861).

The sets of “practices and discourses” constitute that which I have called the experience of madness, a bad word for that matter, because it is not really an experience. However, I have tried to extract a system in the practice of excluding the mad. But at the moment, I spend my time oscillating between two poles: discourse and practice. In *The Order of Things*, I have mainly studied the webs, the ensembles of discourse. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* too. (DEI.95, 1075)⁵⁸

Foucault is thus criticising the way in which he used the word “experience” in his earlier work, emphasising that his task was to focus on discourses and practices. In a short text entitled “Le discours ne doit être pris pour...” he defines discourse, not so much as the ensemble of things that have been said, but as the strategic field of meanings that become manifest in interaction between people: gestures and attitudes, ways of being and spatial arrangements, things that have been said and are not said (DEI.186, 123). In other words, for him, discourse is the concept that refers to the implicit negotiation and struggle going on in interactions between people, and not only to the language used or what it denotes. His objective is not to explicate the meanings of what has been said, or the intention, but rather to show how actual statements relate to other possible or actual statements, and to ask why a certain statement occurs instead of some other one (BC, xvii; DEI.59, 734). Hence, one should pay attention to the conditions that make a statement possible in a clinical space.

Foucault states in *The Birth of the Clinic* that we “must place ourselves, and remain once and for all, at the level of the fundamental *spatialization* and *verbalization* of the pathological” (BC, xi). This focus clearly contrasts with *Mental Illness and Psychology*, which invites readers to take the perspective of disordered consciousness. He does not contradict the view that experience should be sought in that which is explicitly enounced—which he expresses in his early essays—but neither does he focus especially on the first-person perspective of the patient. Instead of emphasising personal experience in the same way as in the earlier texts, he investigates the institutional constitution of empirical knowledge. One could, of course, argue that domains of knowledge enable individuals who are being studied and treated at the clinic to experience themselves and illness in specific ways, but Foucault’s focus is elsewhere—on the status that is given to the doctor’s perception (AK, 65). He even explains in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* that in *The Birth of the Clinic* his interest is more in investigating the institutional siting of the subject in clinical practices than in the formation of conceptual systems (ibid.).

⁵⁸ “[C]’est cet ensemble “pratiques et discours” qui a constitué ce que j’ai appelé l’expérience de la folie, mauvais mot d’ailleurs, car ce n’est pas en réalité une expérience. Cependant, cette pratique de l’exclusion des fous, j’ai essayé d’en dégager le système. Mais, maintenant, je passe mon temps à osciller entre les deux pôles, celui du discours et celui de la pratique. Dans *Les Mots et les Choses*, j’ai surtout étudié des nappes, des ensembles de discours. Dans *L’Archéologie du savoir* aussi.” (DEI.95, 1075)

At the same time, he asks, how an individual, the patient, becomes the object of medical perception and the site of mental illness, and how disease is localised in the body.

1.4.2 Spatial Abstractions: “Clinical Experience” as a Form of “Medical Experience”

I argue above that Foucault studies the clinic not only as a concrete space but also as a knowledge structure that includes specific ways of observing and verbalising objects: as forms of medical knowledge, or “medical experience” as he understands the term (BC, xviii; 114). One of his main arguments in *The Birth of the Clinic* is that gaze (*regard*) has not always been a crucial component of medical knowledge—in humoral pathology, for example, it might be more important to taste urine than to look at the patient. Nevertheless, gaze assumed a privileged role in the reorganised “medical experience” in the 19th-century clinic, and the clinic became the necessary location for the formation of knowledge (BC, 64; 89). In the same way as in *History of Madness*, Foucault supports these claims by comparing the structures of different fields of knowledge, in other words “forms of experience”. As explained above, this methodological choice questions the idea of history’s linear, especially dialectical progress.

Foucault analyses these different structures of knowledge, and the practices they involve, in terms of space. The botanical model of classification, for example, is a model in which diseases are arranged on a flat surface, a two-dimensional table, in the same way as natural species (BC, 15). He contrasts this two-dimensional model with forms of medical knowledge that are delineated by three-dimensional spaces: the concrete hospital space in its socio-political environment and the bodies of the patients.

The Birth of the Clinic is not only a description of different normative systems, it is also a normative study that takes a stand. Foucault’s analysis of mental distress in *Mental Illness and Psychology* implies the ethical objective of advocating better ways of treating patients by means of enhancing understanding of how the world unfolds from the patient’s perspective and locating patients’ reactions in an intersubjective framework. He adopts a different strategy for change in *The Birth of the Clinic*, however, in showing that the different structures of knowledge are in line with the ways in which patients are treated.

Foucault argues, for example, that when the clinics were first established, doctors aimed at picking up diseases and their essences in the same way as botanists picked up and organised their plants. In explaining that similar-looking things are organised according to their resemblance in the botanical model of classification, and that each species is represented as an archetype of an essence, he also shows that the individual features of the patient are

understood as interferences that inhibit the doctor from perceiving the essence of the disease and its natural course (*BC*, 6–8; 15). In other words, even if it is the patient who is suffering, he or she is understood to be external to the essence of the disease. Hence, Foucault claims that “the doctor must abstract the patient” and “place him in the parentheses” in order to learn the truth about the disease (*BC*, 8). One of the functions of the hospital space, then, is to remove the supposedly insignificant features from the analysis, those that concern the patient’s personal life outside the institution (*BC*, 109).

However, the new structure of knowledge Foucault refers to as “clinical experience” privileges visual perception, the viewpoint of the doctor, his gaze and his scientific vocabulary:

“the clinic appears—in terms of the doctor’s experience—as a new outline of the perceptible and the stable: a new distribution of the discrete elements of corporeal space [...] a reorganization of the elements that make up the pathological phenomenon” (*BC*, xviii).

The clinic offers a *new* form of experience compared to the botanical model because the clinical gaze of the doctor is not aimed at figuring out the essence of the disease (*BC*, 91). Whereas symptoms do not point anywhere beyond themselves, the specialised, clinical gaze purports to capture diseases as collections of symptoms on the level of empirical, perceivable reality. Moreover, when the field of clinical knowledge is organised according to the scientific gaze, it is crucial for doctors and students to exercise their vision and their eyes (*BC*, 89).

In claiming that clinical knowledge makes the doctor’s perception the main locus of the formation of medical knowledge, Foucault continues to criticise the anthropological structure of knowledge. He observes that the anthropological model is particularly dominant in medicine and makes both implicit and explicit references to his previous analysis of Kant’s *Anthropology*. As noted above, the human being is at the same time the limit, the source and the object of knowledge in Kant’s anthropology. Now, in *The Birth of the Clinic*, he claims that in the organisation of clinical knowledge the foundation or the source, but also the limits of that knowledge reside in the doctor’s perception (*BC*, xiv; 197). It is commonly suggested that Foucault was profoundly anti-experiential in his thought, and that his critique of the anthropological structure of knowledge questions all (personal) experience as a valid source of knowledge (Scott 1991; McNay 2012; Zahavi 2014). However, it is not any human being, but a certain type of human being with certain skills, certain dispositions, certain propensities and certain interests who functions as an anthropological figure in Foucault’s analysis, and as the target of his critique.

In addition, the clinical gaze is not only the source of medical knowledge but also the object that is verbalised, analysed and taught to students. The clinic is essentially a pedagogical space in which, as Foucault points out, doctors and students form the collective subject of experience: he describes a medical amphitheatre in which the doctor-subject is surrounded by students who form the audience, their eyes focused on the performance and their minds aiming at reaching the truth about the object of knowledge that is located in the centre of the room.⁵⁹ Foucault thereby questions the view that contemporary medical practice is historically founded on dual, intersubjective relations between the patient and the doctor as described in his earlier essays (*BC*, xiv; 54–56).

Thus far I have discussed the clinic as one of the domains of empirical knowledge, as one of the forms of experience. However, Foucault also uses the term “experience” in a different register, presupposing (in a Kantian way) that it consists of perceptions that are organised as knowledge when they are examined and tested. For example, when he investigates a medical text from the late 18th century that describes how patients sense their own illnesses, he simultaneously and unintentionally defines what experience as a concept is not: it is not about self-observation nor about patients’ sensibility concerning their own conditions. He explains that before there were clinics,

medicine in its entirety consisted of an immediate relationship between sickness and that which alleviated it. This relationship was one of the instinct and sensibility, *rather than of experience*; it was established by the individual from himself to himself, before it was caught up in a social network [...] It is this relationship, established without the mediation of knowledge that is observed by the healthy man; and this observation itself is not an option for future knowledge; it is not even an act of awareness (*prise de conscience*); it is performed immediately and blindly. (*BC*, 55, first italics mine)

Here, Foucault distinguishes experience from mere instinct and sensibility, and connects it to empirical knowledge that is constituted through the gaze of the healthy, i.e. the one who is the other in respect to the patient. He also quotes a passage in which the doctor’s observation “reads nature” whereas experience “asks questions” from it, and in this way he makes a further distinction between scientific observation and scientific experience (*BC*, 108).⁶⁰ Mere observation, as a specific form of perception, is not yet experience, even though experience

⁵⁹ Foucault also characterises the medicine of epidemics as “a collective experience” but in a different sense: he explains that an epidemic requires collective attention, and the collective gaze implies supervision of the police, state control and regulation of grocery production, healthy housing, cemeteries etc. (*BC*, 25–26). He returns to these themes in his lecture series *Security, Territory, Population*.

⁶⁰ Foucault refers here to Claude Roucher-Deratte’s book *Leçons sur l’art d’observer* from 1807.

presupposes perception, which can lead to the process of knowledge through examination and interrogation (ibid.). Moreover, giving instructions to students, for example, is “not in itself an experience, but a condensed version, for the use of others, of previous experience” (BC, 61). This implies that experience is a form of knowledge one processes, reflects on and analyses, challenges and contests, and not something one simply receives and adopts.⁶¹

It is not difficult to draw the conclusion that the structure of knowledge that is constituted this way does not imply the perspective of the patient—the disease unfolds itself only for the doctor and medical students (BC, 110). In other words, knowledge about the patient must proceed through their perception in order to be objective, and patients are not the subjects for whom the truth is uncovered. In this light, it is understandable that Foucault formulates a theory of discourses in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, explaining that discourses offer only certain types of subject-positions that determine how individuals can participate in them and how the statements of different subjects are received (AK, 50–55).

1.4.3 A Critique of Scientific Perception

On several occasions, Foucault distinguishes his study from a phenomenological investigation of lived experience (OT, xiv; DEII.213, 372; DEII.234, 583; DEII.281, 862; DEII.356, 1537; DEII.359, 1569; DEII.361, 1592). He explains in an interview from 1978 that in positioning his study as a philosophical and historical investigation of human sciences in the footsteps of Georges Canguilhem he is taking distance from phenomenology, and he does not wish to give priority to the perceiving subject as the source of knowledge (DEII.234, 583; Canguilhem 2007).

In his later essay “Life: experience and Science”, he makes a distinction between the phenomenology of lived experience and the philosophy of science, which investigates definitions of life in scientific research. He credits phenomenology for bringing the body, sexuality, death and the perceived world into the field of philosophical analysis, but he states that one should further ask what is understood by “life”, and not take its meaning for granted.

Foucault refers to Canguilhem in *Psychiatric Power*, drawing attention to the fact that the word “normal” only meant the state of organic health before psychiatry expanded the term in the 19th century to cover different forms of behaviour, feelings and desires (*Psych*, 202). He

⁶¹ In this context, Foucault describes experience as a test: “In the eighteenth century, the clinic was not [yet] a structure of medical experience, but it was experience at least in the sense that it was a test—a test of knowledge that time must confirm, a test of prescriptions that will be proved right or wrong by the outcome, before the spontaneous jury of students: there is a sort of contest, before witnesses, with the disease” (BC, 61).

explains that a certain conception of a healthy organism was, for a long time, the frame in which “pathologies” were traced and on which medical-explanation models were based (*DEII.361*, 1591). In the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, he goes on to discuss the concept of homosexuality and the emergence of the idea of an abnormal individual. He argues that the emergence of the idea of a homosexual figure—whose appearance, gestures, behaviour and ways of being are recognisable—is contemporary with the 19th-century idea of categorising sexual psychopathologies, which according to Foucault were classified like species of insects (*HS1*, 59–60).

He also states in an early essay on psychology that examples of mental pathologies should not be used in attempts to theorise “normal” structures of perception, because disorders do not reveal some hidden structures of normal processes (*DEI.2*, 148–149). This critical remark is probably addressed to Merleau-Ponty, who in *Phenomenology of Perception* discusses psychopathologies as exceptions that facilitate understanding of the (normal and universal) structures of perception.

Canguilhem understands normality as a value judgment, and he redefines the concept of life by using vocabulary one can recognise from information studies and contemporary technology: words such as coding, decoding and messaging (*DEII.361*, 1593; Canguilhem 2007, 277). He explains that coding and decoding take place on the very basic level of life in the continuous flow of information—and so do disturbances and interruptions: all kinds of mistakes occur in these information flows long before they become diseases or shortfalls (*DEII.361*, 1593). Life, then, is “that which is capable of error” (*AME*, 476; *DEII.361*, 1593). Understanding life as “that which is capable of error” questions common attitudes towards pathology: in the light of Canguilhem’s conceptualisation, it is fully “normal” (in the sense of common) to err and for a process to be disturbed (Canguilhem 2007, 277). In Foucault’s view, too, there is nothing self-evident about the distinctions between normality, abnormality and pathology, because they are value judgments and are always historically defined.

However, despite not wanting to identify with phenomenology, in *The Birth of the Clinic* Foucault clearly continues his critique of positive science as developed in the phenomenological tradition, and in the context of his early works this connection must be explicated. He states in *The Birth of the Clinic* that the clinic may present itself as a neutral and objective form of scientific knowledge, but in fact it implies several philosophical commitments concerning perception, language, the body and disease that phenomenologists would oppose (*BC*, xviii; 199). One could question, for example, the view that symptoms are best understood in the same way as linguistic signs pointing to an illness in an individual, which appear and can be grasped on the level of contested, experiential knowledge. Foucault

also investigates how objectifying perception operates and how it is understood in medical literature.

Instead of recapitulating the descriptions of these historic sources, in a philosophical study one should rather ask through which methodical lenses his research questions are posed. It is noteworthy that a year before the publication of *The Birth of the Clinic*, in 1963, Husserl introduces in *The Crisis* the idea of reduction of objective, positive sciences.⁶² The reduction of positive sciences refers to the methodical aim in philosophical analysis to disclose prescientific practices and experiences, a *life-world* (*Lebenswelt*) in which the norms of scientific knowledge are neither articulated nor operative (Husserl 1963; Heinämaa 2016, 11–12). For example, the hospital environment can be studied as a life-world, a world of direct experience, in which scientific objects and techniques are created by human beings who form communities and practices for the acquisition of scientific knowledge (Heinämaa 2019). The role of philosophical analysis, then, is to identify the constitutive steps that objectify and abstract the entities of scientific knowledge from the entities of the life-world (Heinämaa 2019, 5). Scientists, and doctors at the clinic, operate in the life-world and are dependent on its objects, spatial arrangements and ways of communicating, and they use their bodies and senses as a means of taking part in scientific practice (Heinämaa 2016, 14). This dependency is not thematised in the practice of positive scientific work, and thus remains hidden in so far as one operates within its limits (*ibid.*). However, Foucault’s specific focus in *The Birth of the Clinic* is on the ways in which doctors use their senses.

Moreover, when Foucault portrays the object of medical knowledge—a human being who is perceived from different angles as a body that is looked upon as if it was a corpse in a medical amphitheatre—his critique is informed by Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of the body (see Chapter 1.1.4. above). In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty argues that natural sciences are solidly based on the (lived) experiences of human subjects, but this relation is taken for granted to such a degree that the very sciences remain “naïve and dishonest” (Merleau-Ponty 2005, ix). In his view, modern natural sciences cannot thematise lived experiences or perceptual horizons, even though they presuppose these horizons of experiencing and borrow from them all the time (Merleau-Ponty 2005, 85). His main point is that natural sciences cannot provide an account of the perceived world from the perspective of experience and of those who experience, including natural scientists themselves. Merleau-Ponty further argues that the natural sciences can only provide partial and interested accounts

⁶² It should be noted, however, that even though in his late work Foucault was familiar with *The Crisis*, which he acknowledges as a significant contribution to the tradition of critical thinking (*DEII.361*, 1586; *DEII.364*, 1633), his conception of phenomenology in his early work is based mainly on Husserl’s *Logical Investigations*.

that merely capture certain features of people as subjects of experiences, such as animality, a human constitution and consciousness. Ultimately, he claims: “I am, not a living creature nor even a man, nor again even a consciousness endowed with all the characteristics which zoology, social anatomy or inductive psychology recognize” (Merleau-Ponty 2005, ix). Foucault similarly states that human beings do not present themselves as objects of psychiatric or psychological knowledge in a neutral and natural way.

Merleau-Ponty explains that we can objectify living bodies—our own as well as the bodies of others—in multiple ways, and we do this constantly and habitually for different purposes. His point is, however, that such objectifications are always dependent on the more fundamental experiential attitude in which the living body is given to us as someone’s grasp upon the world, his or her zero-point of orientation and means of experiencing the world as a whole (Merleau-Ponty 2005, 108–109).⁶³ He also points out that, from the first-person perspective of the patient, his own body with its gestures and movements can never be merely a worldly object amongst other objects. Nor can any other living body be merely a perceivable object for us. All bodies, those of others as well as one’s own, are double beings, at the same time objects of perception and unique poles of perceiving. The subject does not perceive the surrounding world and its objects by means of intellect—the surrounding objects and the surrounding world are “real” for the body, presenting themselves to all its senses, and they are given from a concrete standpoint, from a “here” (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 17).

The major and rather obvious difference between the methods applied in *The Birth of the Clinic* and developed in *Phenomenology of Perception* is that whereas Merleau-Ponty argues in a Husserlian vein that one should take the experiencing “I” as the absolute source and the starting point of the analysis (Merleau-Ponty 2005, ix), Foucault abandons the phenomenological principle of giving methodological priority to the “I”. He questions the position of doctor-subjects as the foundation of knowledge by historicising the status that is given to the doctor’s perception in the medical sciences.

Foucault also criticises the idea that it is possible to bracket all presuppositions and all forms of knowledge already acquired, and to take pure perception or experience as the starting point of an investigation. He even claims in *The Birth of the Clinic* that the clinical structure of

⁶³ Merleau-Ponty criticises Kant’s conception of experience that I discuss in the previous chapter: he argues that the perceived world is not dispersed and then intellectually put together, as Kant suggests (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 12; 14): perception is rather a horizon and the basis of all being, meaning and rationality, and it is present in a very practical sense (*ibid.*). The implication is that perception is not just a collection of parts (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 85). He also argues that perception always presupposes aspects that are beyond the sensing subject—things the subject cannot see and viewpoints the subject cannot take (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 16). The object of perception is not, then, something that is captured by the subject but the sum of an indefinite number of possible viewpoints (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 15–16).

knowledge presumes that “[t]he clinician’s gaze and the philosopher’s reflection have similar powers” (BC, 96). The point of this statement is to question the idea that the doctor’s perception could lead to adequate or comprehensive knowledge of the patient, and that the philosopher’s reflection could do the same. At the beginning of the chapter “Seeing and Knowing”, Foucault refers to physician Jean-Nicolas Corvisart’s (1755–1821) short text describing how the doctor-subject should observe a patient:

The observing gaze refrains from intervening: it is silent and gestureless. Observation leaves things as they are; there is nothing hidden to it in what is given. The correlative of observation is never the invisible, but always the immediately visible, once one has removed the obstacles erected to reason by theories and to senses by the imagination. In the clinician’s catalogue, the purity of the gaze is bound up with a certain silence that enables him to listen [...] The gaze will be fulfilled in its own truth and will have access to the truth of things if it rests on them in silence. (BC, 107–108)

The subject of medical knowledge is characterised in this quotation as someone who is understood to be impartial and objective.⁶⁴ This reference to the subject who refrains from intervening could be read as a critique of the phenomenological method of reduction, but Foucault’s relationship with phenomenology is more complex than that. As Sara Heinämaa recalls, in *The Crisis* Husserl distinguishes the reduction of objective, positive sciences from transcendental-phenomenological reduction (Heinämaa 2016, 11–12), which aims at a more radical shift of perspective by bracketing everything learned thus far and taken for granted in experiencing. Foucault naturally rejects the possibility of executing this latter step. Nevertheless, the reduction of objective sciences should be understood as a move that facilitates investigation of the hospital space from a different angle, as a life-world, and discloses its prescientific practices (ibid.). One of the specific tasks Foucault takes on in *The Birth of the Clinic* is to investigate descriptions of the ways in which doctors use their bodies and their bodily senses. He also studies how the different ways of using the senses cease to be prescientific knowledge as they are verbalised and turned into scientific methods.

Thus, instead of choosing a strict phenomenological method for the study, he analyses the medical literature and pays attention to the actual statements that instruct the doctors to use their senses in specific ways in medical practices.

⁶⁴ The text to which Foucault refers here is Jean-Nicolas Corvisart’s “Preface” to Leopold Auenbrugger’s *Nouveau Méthode pour reconnaître les maladies internes del ja poitrine* from 1808. Corvisart stresses the importance of educating the senses so that one would not err in medical perception (Corvisart 1808, ix–x). Foucault draws attention to a description of visual perception whose assumed task is not only to see the disease but also to “hear a language” that the disease speaks. The point is to question the presumption that gaze could self-evidently correspond with language and knowledge that is verbalised (BC, xii; 107–108).

1.4.4 Ways of Perceiving the Objects of Knowledge

In the above quotation (p. 97) Foucault describes how doctors should observe their patients as objects of knowledge according to an early-19th-century medical text. I argue above that Foucault investigates different “forms of experience” and that he understands these forms of experience as structures of knowledge that define the objects of perception as well as ways of perceiving them. As is familiar from the phenomenological tradition, one should distinguish between the *object* of perception, the *horizon* of perception against which the object stands out, and *ways* of perceiving things (Ratcliffe 2009, 191).

First, in *The Birth of the Clinic* Foucault addresses a set of ontological questions concerning the objects of knowledge. What is it, exactly, that one is trying to perceive? Is one trying to trace, for example, the essence of a disease that is not dependent on the patient, or perhaps complex organic processes that are manifest in symptoms? By observing the symptoms, is one trying to detect beneath them an illness that remains invisible to human senses, or is one examining a body that is filled with organs and tissues? Foucault does not address the philosophical question “What is perception?” and he does not respond to the question of what a disease *is*: he rather identifies different responses. The second set of questions concerns the perceptual horizon and the fundamental experience that form the background for perceiving the objects of knowledge. As I explain above, Foucault studies the concrete conditions of experience, including the historical circumstances.

Third, he investigates different descriptions of the doctor’s perception, the *ways* and styles of perceiving. My focus in this section is on this third aspect of perception in *The Birth of the Clinic*—specific ways of perceiving the objects of knowledge.

In *History of Madness*, “the mode of perception” refers to the ways in which phenomena are perceived in general (*HM*, 54; 57; 62; 77), and is distinguished from “objective perception”, which is associated with scientific practices. As explained above, objective perception is part of “scientific experience” which involves experimenting and testing, and “observation” is a specific type of perception used for acquiring information, making remarks and taking notes. However, the distinction between the modes of perceiving and scientific observation is not clear-cut in *The Birth of the Clinic*, the point being that different ways of perceiving are articulated and transformed into theoretical vocabulary. Foucault further aims to show that the ways in which objects of knowledge are perceived do not simply serve a neutral, clinical purpose in that they also have normative features.

When Foucault singles out different ways of perceiving the objects of knowledge he portrays vision as an activity and gaze as an act. If one reflects for a moment on the idea that

gaze is an act, one easily realises that it makes all the difference in any direct interaction whether one looks someone in the eye or whether one looks past them, whether one ignores, despises, stares in wonder, conveys acceptance or love. As reported in Rosenhan's well-known pseudopatient experiment from the 1970s, for example, in which actors assumed the role of patients in a psychiatric hospital and took notes on everything they saw, the actor-patients remarked that members of the hospital staff looked past and spoke about the patients as if they were absent, thereby making them socially invisible in the hospital space (Rosenhan 1973; Pietikäinen 2015).⁶⁵ Foucault's analysis of Panopticon provides an inverse example of gaze, which can see everything and as a mere possibility has the power to control every single act of those in disciplinary institutions.

Merleau-Ponty also describes gaze as an act, but his analysis operates on a very different epistemological level than that of Foucault: he studies how gaze focuses on a figure on the very basic level of sensing. When it finds a thematic focus, the perceiver does not need to know anything about the anatomy of the eye, rods and cons, or about any other anatomical, physiological or physical factors (Merleau-Ponty 2005, 78). However, if one wants to see an object properly, one needs to put the perceptual surroundings in abeyance and attend to the object at the same time as allowing the background to be blurred (Merleau-Ponty 2005, 78).⁶⁶

Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty discusses gaze as an instrument of perception that could be compared to a blind man's stick:

In the gaze we have at our disposal a natural instrument analogous to the blind man's stick. The gaze gets more or less from things according to the way in which it questions them, ranges over them and dwells on them. To learn to see colours it is to acquire a certain style of seeing, a new use of one's own body [...] our body is not an object for an 'I think', it is a grouping of lived-through meanings. (Merleau-Ponty 2005, 177)

Discussing the body as a system of lived-through meanings, Merleau-Ponty argues that people perceive the world with all their senses simultaneously (Merleau-Ponty 2005, 176). The blind man's stick, then, is a sensibility tool with which to orient the world and that leads the way (ibid.). The stick and the hand that holds it form a system that constantly moves in a probing

⁶⁵ One should always, of course, show some restraint in referring to historical psychological experiments given that one cannot claim anything about their validity, repeatability or generalisability. Nevertheless, one could take this experiment as an example of gaze that functions as an act, and of a phenomenon that is recognisable in almost any hierarchical institution.

⁶⁶ A Heideggerian influence is also recognisable here: in *Being and Time*, he explains that the point is not to remain on the level of perceiving historical facts but to study the conditions of perceiving objects of knowledge in specific ways. Heidegger also makes a distinction between theoretical and everyday (practical) ways of perceiving objects (*Umsicht*) (Heidegger 1978, §15; Chapter 2.2.2).

manner analogous to that of the eye, and thus extends the tactile sensibility of the blind person to his or her near environment. He explains that we do not perceive the world around us and its objects as geometrical figures or as signs that indicate objects; instead, the things that we perceive relate to other things we can perceive, and in this way their sense-content is “already ‘pregnant’ with a meaning” (Merleau-Ponty 2005, 177).

If gaze is understood as a tool or a form of action it can also be understood as a normative act (e.g. permitting or prohibiting). Foucault argues that the doctor’s experience is “presented as primary source and constant norm”, and he describes the observing or scrutinising eye as something that governs and knows, calculates and decides (*BC*, 54). When doctors are observing and perceiving a patient, for example, they are not expected to see everything and rather control and direct their gaze according to the goals of their science—it is usually considered appropriate that some things are left unseen (*BC*, 164). The descriptions of things that should be seen or left unseen are normative, just as are the instructions for preferred ways of perceiving.

I am now able to illustrate two ways of looking at patients that Foucault identifies in *The Birth of the Clinic* from Corvisart’s introductory text on medical perception from 1808. He makes a distinction between *gaze* (*regard*) and *glance* (*le coup d’œil*) (*BC*, 121–122). First, as I explain above, clinical *gaze* is not intended to capture the essence of a disease, it is a way of looking that focuses especially on symptoms as they appear on the surface level of phenomena (*BC*, 91). The *gaze* also operates on the surface of the clinical environment: it is an act that “scans”, “records” and “calculates”, it reconstitutes and articulates the open field to which it stretches out. The *glance*, in contrast, is much sharper than a gaze: it is a way of looking that pokes or interrogates like a finger (*BC*, 121–122). Foucault compares it with a sense of touch, which penetrates the body through different layers and a mass of organs (*BC*, 122). Given its association with direct contact, the glance does not “listen” or scan the environment in the same way as the gaze does.⁶⁷

Foucault’s discussion leads to the question of what one sees and how one looks when the object of knowledge is a patient. At the same time as illustrating the acts of the perceiving subjects he brings up the formation of their objects, the idea that the object of medical knowledge is a symptom or a body, but not a human being as a person. In light of these

⁶⁷ The aim of these examples is to show the connection between two different structures of knowledge and two different ways of perceiving. Foucault associates the gaze and the glance with two different fields of knowledge: “clinical experience” and “anatomy-clinical experience”, the latter referring to clinical knowledge organised around pathological anatomy (*BC*, 121–122). He claims that touch is the norm of characterising medical perception in the historical context of pathological anatomy, in which the experiential field is demarcated according to the space of the tangible body (*ibid.*). In this way, he thematises the connection between seeing and palpating in medical literature.

different ways of looking at patients one could argue that the act of looking past someone is, indeed, and act with content that is pregnant with meaning.

In Chapters 1.2 and 1.3 I stressed the role of exercise in the debate on *History of Madness* and in Foucault's reading of Kant's *Anthropology*. The notions of exercise and self-cultivation assume importance in *The Birth of the Clinic* when Foucault connects modes of perception to the ways in which doctors, the subjects of perception, conduct themselves and modify their own behaviour. He argues that the conception of gaze, which includes the normative aspects of governing and deciding, implies a subject that changes itself, applies the codes of knowledge and exercises medicine as an art (BC, 89–90; 121). Whereas Kant's *Anthropology* gives instructions to free men, mostly clergymen, in the medical context Foucault discusses the arts of the medical personnel.⁶⁸ He describes doctors' arts as "technical armature", identifying an aesthetic criterion for evaluating the subject of medical knowledge:

The whole dimension of analysis is deployed only at the level of an aesthetic. But this aesthetic not only defines the original form of all truth, it also prescribes rules of exercise, and it becomes, at a secondary level, aesthetic in that it prescribes the norms of an art. [...] The technical armature of the medical gaze is transformed into advice about prudence, taste, skill: what is required is 'great sagacity', 'great attention', 'great precision', 'great skill', great patience'. (BC, 121)

Foucault's lecture series *Psychiatric Power*, from 1973–1974, continues his critical study of the ways in which medical personnel observe patients, as well as the codified ways in which doctors are perceived, especially by patients and students. He investigates the instructions for composing the doctor's *habitus* and describes the techniques and comportment of "the masters", as psychiatrists and educators are called in Édouard Séguin's *Traitement moral, hygiène et éducation des idiots* (1846). Foucault remarks that according to Séguin, the psychiatrist who masters "the idiots" (as some patients were classified in the 19th century) needs to have an impeccable body, good gestures, gaze and pronunciation, and to be recognised immediately by the way he carries himself (*Psych*, 216). For example, doctors cannot be clumsy, have an accent or eyes set too far apart, be physically poorly shaped or have gestures that are too

⁶⁸ Note that aesthetic evaluation is also connected to the political tasks of the doctor. In *The Birth of the Clinic*, Foucault discusses the 18th-century doctor as a political figure whose task is, in his view, to provide knowledge of the model man, the healthy and non-sick man, and to maintain the distinction between the healthy and the pathological, or normal and abnormal individuals (BC, 34–35). The idea is that doctors are seen as enablers of freedom who equip individuals with knowledge and skills that allow them to manage their own health, well-being and happiness (BC, 34). These themes are also familiar from Foucault's *Introduction to Kant's Anthropology* and his late work.

“common” (ibid.).⁶⁹ These themes—identifying aesthetic criteria for comportment and the arts and behaviour of those who govern themselves and others—are familiar from Foucault’s late work of the 1980s, and he continues to study codes of guidance and governing in the context of ethics.

In this chapter I have continued my discussion on Foucault’s different concepts of experience, which have integral theoretical functions in *The Birth of the Clinic*. I claimed that the clinic is one of “the forms of experience”, one of the domains or structures of empirical, medical knowledge. These different fields of knowledge imply different rules that regulate ways of examining, observing and perceiving the objects, i.e. the patients.

Foucault positions his study of medical perception as part of his archaeological project, the investigation of actual statements and their relations, and he conceptualises different fields of empirical knowledge as normative structures. I have argued throughout this thesis that the conditions and the rules that regulate how objects of knowledge can be perceived are immanent to the forms of experience, which is why Foucault focuses on concrete statements and practices. He analyses fields of medical knowledge as different types of spatialization: the flat table of the botanical model of classification differs considerably from the structures of knowledge aimed at conceptualising how patients are observed in the three-dimensional space of the clinic, or as three-dimensional bodies. Against this background, it is comprehensible that in his later text “Different Spaces”, Foucault identifies various types of heterotopias that he characterises as spaces of otherness, contrasted both with utopias and dystopias, but also as spaces that cannot be hierarchically organised (*AME*, 179–185).

The Birth of the Clinic constitutes, first and foremost, an archaeology of medical perception, and I discussed “clinical experience” as a form of knowledge that is profoundly based on gaze. I pointed out that when Foucault analyses his sources, every now and then he presupposes a Kantian concept of experience. When “experience” is understood as empirical, scientific knowledge that is examined and tested, it does not refer to the lived experience of the patient in the same way as it does in his earliest essays. However, in this chapter I have argued that *The Birth of the Clinic* features conceptual distinctions that are familiar from the

⁶⁹ This description is also from Seguin’s (1812–1880) *Traitement moral, hygiène et éducation des idiots* from 1846.

phenomenological tradition, such as that between the object of perception, the background experience of perception, and the different styles and ways of perceiving phenomena. I have developed a reading that emphasises Foucault's close relationship with phenomenology, even though he often characterises this relationship as a rejection. In the last section I focused especially on different ways of looking at the patient, noting how Foucault defines gaze as a normative act. Defining it thus allows further consideration of the ethical implications of different ways of looking at one another in hierarchical institutions or in any direct interaction.

Below, in Chapter 1.5, I analyse the different concepts of experience in Foucault's late work and explain how they differ from or are thematically connected with his earlier conceptions of experience.

1.5 Experience in Foucault's Late Articles and Interviews

What are our experiences, then? Much more what we attribute to them than what they really are. Or should we perhaps say that nothing is contained in them? that experiences in themselves are merely works of fancy? [...]

To view our own experiences in the same light as we are in the habit of looking at those of others is very comforting and an advisable medicine.

Friedrich Nietzsche, The Dawn of Day

1.5.1 Political Experience in Foucault's Articles and Interviews in the 1960s and 1970s

Chapter 1.1 begins with a quoted passage in which Foucault reorganises his work around the concept of experience and refers to his early work on psychiatry. I point out that when redefining experience in the early 1980s he looks back on his early work and concludes that the concepts or notions of experience are used too fluidly (*flottante*) and unsatisfactorily. Before singling out the different concepts of experience from his late work of the 1980s I will briefly explain his use of the various notions of experience in his articles and interviews from the late 1960s and mid-1970s.

As Timothy O'Leary notes in *Foucault and Fiction: The Experience Book*, Foucault avoided using the word "experience" in the 1970s in his analyses of power relations and different institutions such as prisons, hospitals and schools (O'Leary 2009). Experience is not a theoretical concept that frames his study in a significant way in his interviews and articles from the late 1960s and early 1970s, but the notion does occur here and there when he reflects on his early work on psychiatry and discusses different forms of political action. On a few occasions he refers to experience in a pejorative sense, such as when he describes the problems with the popular courts in Mao's China: he criticises the expression "the experience of the masses", meaning practices in which the verdict is formulated on the basis of individual opinions (*DEI.108*, 1213–1214; 1218). Foucault also uses the word "experience" in a less positive sense in an interview from 1974, stating that when philosophers claim to be speaking about experience in general they are, in fact, speaking of something very particular (*DEI.136*, 1390). Furthermore, he continues, there is no philosophical discourse without an object, and

regardless of whether the object is experience, being, time or whatever, it is discussed in a codified manner that is already something other than an immediate, personal experience.

However, Foucault refers to “political experience” to distinguish political thinking from political parties, ideologies and theoretical technicalities. He connects political experience to direct, physical engagement and characterises it as an “existential act” and “moral energy” (*DEII.281*, 898). He also claims that people tend not to demand political explanations or seek political solutions to their experiences of madness or illness, for example, even if political initiatives strongly influence the formation of these experiences (*EST*, 114). Moreover, referring to actions that should be taken to improve the prisons, he argues that “individual experience has to be transformed into collective knowledge” (*savoir collectif*) (*DEI.88*, 1046). The formation of collective knowledge involves turning experiences of isolated revolt into coordinated practice so that different groups that do not tolerate the situation could come together (*DEI.88*, 1044). He further contrasts “experience” with utopia and encourages people to experiment (*expérience*) with new types of communalities and individualities, but he is sceptical of projects that presuppose or promote the idea that society is a totality (*ensemble de la société*) (*DEI.98*, 1102–1103). In sum, Foucault refers to experience in a political context when he articulates his standpoint as an activist and discusses possible ways of restricting the excessive use of power.

He uses the expression “normalizing experience” in his articles and interviews from the mid-1970s to characterise the features of a “normalizing society” (*Power*, 255; *DEI.130*, 1322; *DEII.194*, 188). Such a society operates by means of certain mechanisms of control, which involve

practices of confinement, with a specific economic and social context corresponding to the period of urbanization, the birth of capitalism, with the existence of a floating, scattered population (*Power*, 255).

In this context, Foucault’s concern is with medicalisation, the use of medical power and the tendency to perceive human behaviour and desires through the lens of pathology (*DEII.194*, 188–189). He explicitly claims that psychiatry is a way of using normalising power in society (*DEI.126*, 1301; *DEII.161*, 1661; *DEII.173*, 76; *DEII.202*, 273; *DEII.212*, 373; *DEII.299*, 1023)⁷⁰, mentioning on several occasions that “discipline normalises”, by which he means that

⁷⁰ Foucault refers to the “Psy-function” (*fonction Psy*) as the societal role of psychologists, psychiatrists, therapists, psychoanalysts and other professionals in the field (*Psych*, 85). He means a discourse that constitutes a system of truth and at the same time organises and controls the conditions for normalisation to take place in disciplinary systems (*Psych*, 86). In this context he discusses psychiatrists and psychologists as mere agents of the disciplinary apparatus: they intervene when families have failed in their upbringing and correctional duties. The

disciplinary institutions aim at changing, correcting and educating individuals by means of regulated practices and internalised techniques. In “Truth and Juridical Forms”, for example, he describes the aim of disciplinary institutions as to correct *potentialities*, the potential behaviour of the individuals, instead of rectifying their actual behaviour (*Power*, 57).⁷¹ In short, Foucault’s specific focus in this context is on institutions in which individuals, their bodies and potential behaviours are controlled.

In his late work, however, he uses concepts of experience and frames his discussion of the experiencing subject in a new way. There is an explicit shift of perspective in the Collège de France lecture series *Abnormal* from 1974–1975 and *Security, Territory, Population* from 1977–1978, from institutions to the everyday experience of subjects who perceive themselves as free beings (*Abnormal*, 134; *STP*, 118–120). *Abnormal* and *The Psychiatric Power* also mark a theoretical transition in dealing with processes of psychiatrization on the societal level: Foucault investigates how the vocabulary of psychiatry extends to explaining the everyday experience and conduct of individuals, irrespective of sickness or the hospital context (*Abnormal*, 110; 132; 163; *Psych*, 203).

In *Security, Territory, Population*, the theoretical shift from institutions to the everyday experiences of free subjects takes place in the lecture in which Foucault defines the concept of governmentality (*STP*, 121–122). Governmentality is defined as the intersection of techniques that are used for governing others and techniques through which one governs oneself (*EST*, 225; *ABHS*, 204; *DEII.304*, 1033). In the late articles and interviews, he also connects “the experience of the self” closely to the question of governing and argues that political analysis of the techniques should address the points at which techniques of dominating individuals transform into processes in which the individuals submit themselves to their own actions (*ABHS*, 203–204; *DEII.363*, 1604). In sum, Foucault uses the concept of governmentality to connect the macro and micro levels of analysis, which enables him to focus on the practices that subjects accept and adopt voluntarily.

idea is that the Psy-function extends from family problems to the institutional level: it steps in if institutions such as schools, hospitals or the army are deficient (*Psych*, 86).

⁷¹ In *Security, Territory, Population* Foucault makes a distinction between “disciplinary normalisation” and “normalisation”. The former presupposes an institutional context, whereas the latter refers to processes of control in which the individual is understood as a member of a population. Disciplinary techniques focus on preventing and producing possible behaviours. He refers to disciplinary normalisation also as “normation”, by which he means that training is carried according to a norm, which then facilitates the distinction between normal and abnormal (*STP* 57). Thus, in disciplinary normation, the *norm precedes* the formation of the normal and the abnormal, and the division is an outcome of concrete practices. In the case of “normalisation”, however, the relationship between the norm and the formation of normality is different in that *the process of dividing normal and abnormal precedes establishing the norm*. This happens especially when people are governed as populations (*STP*, 56). Foucault argues that their regulation concerns their health, ways of being, death, well-being and reproduction (*ibid.*).

As Foucault explains, the question in his earlier work concerns how the mad were governed, whereas in his late work he pays attention to the ways in which people govern themselves:

In the case of madness, I have tried to connect together the constitution of the experience of the self as someone mad, mental illness, the psychiatric practice and the institution of the asylum. Here I would like to show how self-government is integrated to the practices of governing others. These are, in short, two opposite paths to the same question: how the type of “experience” is formed, experience in which the relationship with the self and others are linked. (DEII.304, 1033)⁷²

In sum, Foucault arrives at issues concerning the self and “experience of the self” through his investigation of governmentality. In the 1980s he studies the ways in which subjects submit themselves voluntarily to the different practices through which the self is formed with varying degrees of freedom. Hence, in the article “Omnes et singulatim” from 1981 he seeks a new way of including the subject in his study, and at this point he understands experience as one of the three aspects to be included in the analysis. He argues that a philosophical study should always take into consideration aspects such as 1) experience (e.g. of madness and of suffering), 2) knowledge of the object (e.g. psychiatry, medicine) and 3) the ways in which power is used in practice (e.g. techniques, guidance) (DEII.291, 966).

However, other texts that are contemporary with “Omnes et singulatim” give experience an even bigger role in the analysis. “Experience” is no longer one of the constituent elements of the tripartite study in his late work, but a term that covers these three dimensions of his philosophy: ethics of the self, the formation of knowledge and processes of governing. I discuss this tripartite concept of experience in more detail in the next section, as well as the key concepts in Foucault’s late work that imply the aspects of governing and ethical self-formation.

1.5.2 The Field of Experience and the Axes of Knowledge, Government and Ethics

In his writing from 1981 onward Foucault quite systematically positions his work as an investigation of the “field of experience” (*champ d’expérience*). When he explains what the study

⁷² “[D]ans le cas de la folie, j’ai essayé de rejoindre à partir de là la constitution de l’expérience de soi-même comme fou, dans le cadre de la maladie mentale, de la pratique psychiatrique et de l’institution asilaire. Ici je voudrais montrer comme le gouvernement de soi s’intègre à une pratique du gouvernement des autres. Ce sont, en somme, deux voies d’accès inverses vers une même question : comment se forme une “expérience” où sont liés le rapport à soi et le rapport aux autres.” (DEII.304, 1033)

involves, he returns to the themes of his early work and refers to the institutionalised practices of psychiatry:

Psychiatry as we know it couldn't have existed without a whole interplay of *political* structures and without a set of *ethical* attitudes; but inversely, the establishment of madness as a domain of *knowledge* changed the political practices and the ethical attitudes that concerned it. It was a matter of determining the role of politics and ethics in the establishment of madness as a particular domain of scientific knowledge, and also of analysing the effects of the latter on political and ethical practices. (*EST*, 116, italics mine)

As implied in the quotation, his investigation of the field of experience links political structures, ethical attitudes and different domains of knowledge.

There are, in fact, multiple variations of this tripartite concept of experience in his work. He explains in “Polemics, Politics, and Problematizations” that the field of experience consists of “a game of truth, relations of power, and forms of relation to oneself and to others” (*EST*, 117). Similarly, in “What is Enlightenment?” he encourages his readers to ask how we are constituted as 1) the subjects of knowledge, 2) subjects who use or submit to power relations and 3) subjects who reflect on our own actions as moral beings (*EST*, 318). On another occasion, referring to his investigation into the experience of sexuality in *The Use of Pleasure*, he mentions “fields of knowledge”, “types of normativity” and “forms of subjectivity”:

[I]t was a matter of seeing how an “experience” came to be constituted in modern Western societies, an experience that caused individuals to recognize themselves as subjects of a “sexuality”, which was accessible to very diverse fields of knowledge and linked to a system of rules and constraints. What I planned, therefore, was a history of the experience of sexuality, where experience is understood as the correlation between fields of *knowledge*, types of *normativity*, and forms of *subjectivity* in a particular culture (*UP*, 4, italics mine).

In *The Government of Self and Others*, in turn, Foucault frames his study as an investigation into “the present field of possible experiences” (*GSA*, 22), which entails analysing “forms of veridiction”, “procedures of governmentality” and “pragmatics of the self” (*GSO*, 5; 22). In other words, he specifies each element of the knowledge-government-self matrix depending on the context, but in most cases the tripartite structure of the field of experience remains the same (except in *The Courage of Truth*, see Chapters 2.3.1). He further explains that although each aspect of experience may be emphasised and highlighted in turn, none of them should be understood as being independent of or separate from the other two. His aim is to explicate the ways in which the ethics of the self, knowledge formation and governing are related, and how changes in one element also affect the others (*DEII.342*, 1415–1416; *DEII.354*, 1516).

As indicated in the above quotation from *The Use of Pleasure*, Foucault's investigation covers certain experiences of the self in a specific cultural context. Timothy O'Leary explains that at a particular moment in time, forms of objectivation, subjectivation and ways of using power constitute "the historical *a priori* of possible experience" (O'Leary 2009, 82). In other words, at a certain time and for a certain group of people these elements form the framework for perceiving oneself and the objects of knowledge in specific ways (ibid.). The different aspects that constitute the field of experience are not, therefore, structures, capacities or categories of the mind in the Kantian sense but historical conditions that are constantly changing. For example, in the late work of the 1980s, Foucault investigates Classical Greek, Stoic, Cynic and Christian ways of being and ways of relating to the self in their historical-cultural contexts.

I have argued that Foucault's discussion on governmentality—on the intersections between techniques of domination and techniques through which one forms a relationship with oneself—leads him to study experiences of the self. At the same time, he develops concepts—such as *conduct*, *governing* and *care*—that presuppose the aspect of freedom rather than straightforward domination. Implicit in all these concepts, in addition to the notion of guiding someone's behaviour and being guided, is the idea of allowing oneself to be guided and doing the guiding oneself. All these concepts imply the ethical aspect of guiding one's own behaviour, and thus presuppose subjects who are free, but inherent in their freedom is the need for continuous work on processing their relationships with themselves and with others. These concepts are highly relevant in conceptualising and becoming aware of subtle, productive rather than repressive forms of power in practices of healing or in small pedagogical communities that tend to be based on goodwill, benevolence and free choice.

Arnold Davidson identifies *conduct* as one of Foucault's key concepts, pointing out that the structure on which it is based is present in other concepts, too (Davidson 2011).⁷³ He suggests that when Foucault uses the word *conduct* he is trying to find an equivalent expression to the Greek notion of *oikonomia psychon*, the economics of the soul (*STP*, 193; Davidson 2011, 26). *Conduct* as a concept also covers the activity of conducting (*conduire*), the ways in which one conducts oneself (*se conduit*), lets oneself be conducted (*se laisse conduire*) and is conducted, as well as actual behaviour as the effect of conducting (ibid.). Foucault explains in "The Subject

⁷³ Foucault also uses the term "conduct" in *Abnormal* in his discussion on the processes of constituting the cultural category of abnormality (*Abnormal*, 110; 158–159; 163), but there is a change of register in his late work. In *Abnormal* *conduct* is an object of scientific explanation, behaviour, and the concept lacks the ethical and political meanings he assigns to the term in his later texts (Davidson 2011, 36).

and Power” that conducting refers to leading others *and* the self in the “open field of possibilities” (*Power*, 341).⁷⁴

Foucault uses the concepts of governing and conducting in a rather similar way, at times interchangeably (*STP*, 193; *DEII.356*, 1539; *WC*, 29). He defines governing as the “guidance of behaviour and individual will” without commanding or exercising force and explains that his investigation concerns the connections between the arts of governing others, letting oneself be governed and governing oneself (*STP*, 116; *WC*, 26). In addition, the concept of governing in the 17th-century context as defined in *Security, Territory, Population* also includes the aspects of nurturing, benevolent instructions for behaviour and prescriptions for diet, daily interaction and processes of exchange between individuals (*STP*, 122).

Interestingly, in *The Use of Pleasure*, Foucault characterises “care of the self” as a form of conduct. This is understandable given that the structure of the concept is the same: care of the self implies not only taking care of oneself, but also taking care of others, letting oneself be taken care of and the actual practices of care. Through all these relations, care of the self modifies the way of being (*ethos*) of the individual.

Foucault’s much stronger interest in ways of conducting oneself than in explicit rules for moral conduct further explains the connection between care of the self and conduct in his work on ethics. Reflecting on ethical conduct, he makes a distinction between the *rules* of conduct, *actual* conduct and *ways* of conducting oneself:

[A] rule of conduct is one thing; the conduct that may be measured by this rule is another. But another thing is still the manner in which one ought to “conduct oneself”—that is, the manner in which one ought to form oneself as an ethical subject in reference to the prescriptive elements that make up the code [...] there are different ways to “conduct oneself” morally, different ways for the acting individual to operate, not just as an agent, but as an ethical subject of this action. (*UP*, 26)⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Foucault discusses pastoral power as a form of power that is practised through guidance, conducting the conduct of individuals, in the name of benevolence (*DEII.291*, 966; *STP*, 126). It is a type of governing that focuses on care and doing good, and it is typical of religious and pedagogical communities, in which governing does not necessarily involve clearly defined sets of rules and regulations (*STP*, 126). In the shepherd-flock model each member of the flock needs to be individualised on a continuous basis because the objective is to lead each member to individual salvation (*STP*, 126; 166–167; *DEII.306*, 1048; *Power*, 333). This involves examining the minds and the souls of individuals. Moreover, the one who guides must surveil the flock and make individual sacrifices to save it (*STP*, 127; 166–167; *DEII.306*, 1048).

⁷⁵ “Une chose en effet est une règle de conduite; autre chose la conduite qu’on peut mesurer à cette règle. Mais autre chose encore la manière dont on doit “se conduire”, c’est-à-dire la manière dont on doit se constituer soi-même comme sujet moral agissant en référence aux éléments prescriptifs qui constituent le code [...] il y a différentes manières de “se conduire” moralement, différentes manières pour l’individu agissant d’opérer non pas simplement comme agent, mais comme sujet moral de cette action.” (*DEII.338*, 1375)

In stressing the different ways of conducting oneself, he returns to the question of style I discuss in Chapter 1.1—the unique ways of responding and reacting to situations within an intersubjective context. The social context delineates the field of acceptable moral behaviour, but there is a variety of nuances in the ways in which one conducts oneself as a moral subject.

I referred in Chapter 1.3.4 to the debate in which Foucault's thought is characterised by a theoretical split between 1) the analysis of conditions that determine how the subject can be and 2) the critical attitude that is supposed to be taken with regard to freedom. However, it is now clear that the tripartite concept of experience, “the field of experience”, and concepts such as conducting, governing and care do not fall into twofold divisions. Whereas all these central concepts in Foucault's late work imply the guiding of oneself and others, being guided and letting oneself be guided by others, the subject of a critical attitude cannot be understood as a singular agent. On the contrary, the subject's freedom and the concrete, genuine and positive possibilities of acting upon this freedom lie in such practices of guidance and in the ways in which the subject posits itself in these relations.

In sum, when Foucault investigates ethics as one of the constitutive axes of experience in his lectures and articles from the 1980s and in later volumes of *The History of Sexuality*, the elements of knowledge and governing are included in the analysis. The moral attitudes and ways of conducting oneself that interest Foucault develop in a historically delineated, cultural context, and the ways of conducting oneself are closely connected to political arrangements and forms of knowledge that concern the practices of the self (*EST*, 117). I will come back to these issues in Part Two and discuss “the experience of the self” in detail, but before that I will explore the other concepts and notions of experience in Foucault's late articles and interviews.

1.5.3 Background Experience Redefined and Transformative Experiences

I noted in Chapter 1.1 that Foucault defines the concept of background experience (*expérience fondamentale*) as the context and a horizon against which personal experiences stand out. In Chapters 1.2 and 1.4 I characterised background experience not only as a shared understanding of the context but also as a process of division that separates out phenomena. Foucault also refers to *expérience fondamentale* in his work from the 1980s, but it is not always clear if the concept can be translated as ‘background’: at least he does not refer to an underlying division or structures that are “below the level of our certainties”, as he does in *The Birth of the Clinic* and *The History of Madness*. However, he does state in “La philosophie analytique de la politique” from 1978 that the task is to make visible that which is too readily

taken for granted—not some underlying structures but that which is already visible and almost too obvious:

For a long time, it has been known that the role of philosophy is not to discover what is hidden, but to make visible that which is, precisely, visible; that is to say, to reveal that which is so close and so immediate, so intimately connected with ourselves that, because of it, we do not perceive it. Thus, the role of science is to make known that which we do not see, whereas the role of philosophy is to show what we do see (*DEII.232*, 540–541)⁷⁶

Foucault also refers to phenomena such as madness, illness, suffering, death, desire and sexuality as fundamental experiences in his late articles and interviews (*DEII.281*, 877; *DEII.291*, 954; 966–967). As I have argued, regardless of the fairly abstract and spatial concepts of experience, he does not exclude personal experience from his study, and in an interview from 1980 he describes fundamental experience as unique and incomparable, profound and meaningful to the subject who goes through it. It is in this context that he explains the aim of existential analysis in his early essays: to propose an alternative to medical, psychiatric discourses and improve understanding of patients' personal experiences of mental distress (*DEII.281*, 877). Occurrences and articulations of madness, death and sexuality are inevitably singular, even though there are culturally and historically specific, shared ways of understanding them.

Foucault argues in an interview from 1978 that the formation of fundamental experiences is closely related to processes that define how the objects of knowledge can be known and how they are formed—and how the subjects can constitute themselves (*DEII.281*, 876). For these reasons, fundamental experiences such as madness and illness should be investigated together with processes that form different kinds of rationalities to justify the specific ways in which the subjects and objects of knowledge are constituted (*DEII.291*, 954). Moreover, according to Foucault's view, processes of rationalisation revolve around techniques of individualisation, which involve conducting the conduct of individuals, and affecting the ways in which people perceive themselves and guide their own behaviour (*DEII.281*, 876; *DEII.291*, 954–955). This is why the focus in his late work is on the concrete techniques people, especially subjects of ethics and health, use in their daily lives.

⁷⁶ “Il y a longtemps qu'on sait que le rôle de la philosophie n'est pas de découvrir ce qui est caché, mais de rendre visible ce qui précisément est visible, c'est-à-dire de faire apparaître ce qui est si proche, ce qui est si immédiat, ce qui est si intimement lié à nous-mêmes qu'à cause de cela nous ne le percevons pas. Alors, que le rôle de la science est de faire connaître ce que nous ne voyons pas, le rôle de la philosophie est de faire voir ce que nous voyons.” (*DEII.232*, 540–541)

It is thus a question of how people experience themselves and identify with the processes that define them as the objects and/or subjects of knowledge. Given that governing processes may function in a very sophisticated way, one should also ask how personal experiences are connected to the formation of knowledge (*connaissance*) and to each other (*DEII.291*, 967; *DEII.306*, 1044). One might well investigate, for example, the daily practices to which “good patients”, “healthy subjects” or “proper anorexics” subject themselves, provide analytical tools for such study and further question whether the mechanisms of subjectivation have something in common. Instead of claiming that one is simply manipulated by the procedures of governing, one should aim to articulate the connections between the different aspects of experience (knowledge, practices of guidance and the relation one forms with oneself).

I have argued that when Foucault positions his study as an investigation into the field of experience in his late work he is stressing the procedures in which subjects modify and change themselves. However, he refers to “transformative experience” when he describes the methods and objectives of his own philosophical writings. Having once worked as a psychologist in psychiatric hospitals, he reflects retrospectively on his earlier analyses of normalising power, especially from the 1970s, and admits that in practice, his earlier work on psychiatric institutions left members of the hospital staff paralysed: they felt incapable of carrying out their daily activities (*DEII.281*, 866). Thus, in his late work he no longer aims at conceptualising the mechanism of power in disciplinary institutions and disclosing the field of normalising experience. Instead, he points to the possibility of questioning the ways in which subjects are formed and dismantling fixed identity categories so that the subjects do not have to be the same as before (*DEII.281*, 862). Transformative experiences could be described as the moments in which ongoing, everyday experience is interrupted and current ways of understanding madness, sexuality, death, desires, suffering and so on are called into question (O’Leary 2009, 89–90).

Moreover, explaining the methods of his own work in an interview from 1978, Foucault uses the French word “experience” in the sense of “making experiments”. Experimenting implies the aspect of taking a risk, and the possibility of failing: the etymology of experience, Latin *ex-periri*, refers to an attempt, but also to danger (Jay 1995, 166). In stating that his books are experiences to him, Foucault implies that they are experimental and do not aim at building up a system (*DEII.281*, 860–861; *DEII.328*, 1233; O’Leary 2009, 77). He refers to *History of Madness* and *The Birth of the Clinic* as experience books (*livres d’exploration*) rather than books of truth and demonstration, and he describes *The Archaeology of Knowledge* as a methodology book

(*livre de méthode*), because it articulates what has been done previously in his experiments (DEII.281, 861; O’Leary 2009, 81).

In this context, Foucault defines experience as “something from which one comes out transformed”, meaning that at first, people do not know where the experience, or experimenting, will take them or what the outcomes will be, but afterwards they are not able to think in the same way as before (DEII.281, 860–861; O’Leary 2009, 77). He explains that, at least for him, experimenting pre-dates method, and it transforms the subject who is doing the research. In this sense, Foucault questions the subject as the solid foundation of scientific truth.

However, not only does he refer to his own experiences as a researcher in his discussion about transformative experiences, he invites his readers to reflect on their current ways of thinking and to interact with the experiences of others in a way that could be transformative on a larger scale and result in social movements (DEII.281, 865–866). When one investigates the ways in which madness or sexuality have been understood, grouped and categorised in the past, for example, one can compare past categorisations and forms of knowledge to the ways in which such phenomena are currently perceived (DEII.281, 864–865). Foucault further explains that the documents he uses for his research are real, but he also admits that they are presented with the aim of transforming his readers’ relationships with the world and establishing new relations with the issues that are discussed in the texts (DEII.280, 859; DEII.281, 863–865). Thus, he explicitly characterises his work as a normative project aimed at making a difference (see Chapter 2.4).

Foucault quite famously states that he has written nothing but fiction, and there is a recognisable Nietzschean influence in this statement: in *The Dawn of Day*, Nietzsche asks whether experiences are merely “works of fancy” (Nietzsche 1911, §119). These references to fiction are a response to Kant and his concept of experience, which is connected to empirical knowledge and the universal ways in which perceptions are organised. As Arthur Danto explains, for Nietzsche, there are numerous ways of constituting and sorting out experiences, and there is nothing necessary about them or in the distinctions that Kant presents (Danto 2005, 22). In a similar way, Foucault criticises Kant for presenting arbitrary distinctions as universal. He characterises experience in this context as a subjective occurrence that is fabricated in the self by the self at a particular moment—it does not fall into the categories of true and false, and it cannot be fully recaptured afterwards (DEII.281, 864). However, this does not mean that personal experiences do not refer to anything or that one would simply make them up. Nietzsche in fact states in *The Dawn of Day* that we can think more things than

we actually experience, but it does not mean that the use of intellect is more real (Nietzsche 1911, §125).

Nietzsche gives the following example of an incident that elucidates the interpretative process of personal experience. He describes how one morning, a man collapsed in front of him in a public space. Whereas someone nearby started screaming and panicking, he remained calm and was able to help the person (Nietzsche 1911, §119). When he reflected on the incident afterwards, he was quite certain that if he had known the day before that something like this would happen, he would have suffered from agonies, and he would not have been able to sleep or to act at the decisive moment: as he states, experiences are “much more what we attribute to them than what they really are” (Nietzsche 1911, §119). Nevertheless, experiences are corporeal and fully felt. Nietzsche associates them with interpretative processes of “nervous irritations”, which emphasises the bodily and unconscious aspects of experience (ibid.; 2013, §192). He explains that one’s own corporeal processes are unknown to one, which is why responding to experiences is not merely a question of a reflected attitude, as if one could always simply decide which reaction to choose (Nietzsche 1911, §119). However, the idea of interpretative process implies that active involvement with reactionary processes is possible, even though it might take long-term effort to learn to react to situations in adequate ways (Danto 2012, 22).

Even if Foucault refers to fiction in his discussion on personal experience, and even if Nietzsche declares that experience should not be defined only in terms of knowledge, one should not draw the conclusion that, in Foucault’s work, experiences in general are merely artificial inventions.⁷⁷ Under the pseudonym Maurice Florence in the early 1980s, as well as in “The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom”, he explains that refusing to constitute “madness” or “sexuality” as universals does not imply that they refer to nothing or to some made-up images that are invented for questionable purposes (*DEII.345*, 1453; *EST*, 397). In this context, Foucault states explicitly that something much more is at stake than fabricating fictitious chimera (*chimères inventées*) (ibid.). This “something” at stake is experience in the broad sense of the word, meaning that the focus should be on the conditions that enable one to recognise oneself as a mentally ill subject, for example. Foucault argues in the following quotation that it is not very useful to understand the subject either as a mere flux or as someone who is only determined by discourses:

⁷⁷ Note, however, that in “Nietzsche, genealogy, history” Foucault refers to invention in a different meaning. He contrasts invention (*Erfindung*) with origin (*Ursprung*) and explains that invention might seem insignificant when it occurs, but it is also a new beginning: “For Nietzsche, invention, *Erfindung*, is on the one hand a break, on the other hand something with a small beginning, one that is low” (*Power*, 6–7). The point is that historical sciences should focus not only on grandiose occasions but also on minuscule events.

[R]efusing the philosophical recourse to a constituent subject does not amount of acting as if the subject did not exist, making an abstraction of it on behalf of a pure objectivity. This refusal has the aim of eliciting the processes that are peculiar to an experience in which the subject and the object “are formed and transformed” in relation to and in terms of one another. The discourses of mental illness, delinquency, or sexuality say what the subject is only in a certain, quite particular game of truth; but these games are not imposed on the subject from the outside according to a necessary causality or structural determination. They open up a field of experience in which the subject and the object are both constituted only under certain simultaneous conditions, but in which they are constantly modified in relation to each other, and so they modify this field of experience itself. (*AME*, 462)

As Foucault explains, the *relationship* between the subjects and objects of knowledge is in a continuous state of change. In this context he hesitates equating experience with invention, given that he is discussing something more general than the creative aspects of singular experience—the constitution of and the possibilities of modifying “the field of experience”.

1.5.4 Limit-experience and Tragic Experience

Foucault characterises phenomena such as madness, suffering, death, sexuality and delinquency not only as transformative experiences and fundamental experiences, but also as limit-experiences. I discussed dream experiences and madness as limit-experiences in Chapter 1.2 and claimed that Foucault’s work investigates limit-experiences from the very beginning. This notion does not always differ significantly from fundamental or transformative experiences: after an intense limit-experience, for example, the subject may never be quite the same as before. However, even if Foucault’s different notions of experience overlap to some extent, it is possible to differentiate between fundamental experience, transformative experience and limit-experience, and to assign them specific meanings.

One should also make a distinction between two different aspects of limit-experience, or the two different ways in which Foucault discusses these experiences in his late interviews: first, as phenomena pushed to the margins of society and second, as intense personal experiences. In practice, these aspects may well be inseparable: phenomena in the margins of society could be viewed from the perspective of profound, personal experiences that are unique to the subjects who live through them, unique to the extent that they change the subject in a significant way.

With regard to the first of these, Foucault frequently refers to phenomena in the margins of society as limit-experiences without taking the first-person perspective. If one understands different forms of marginalisation, sexuality and delinquency—all major themes in his work—

as limit-experiences one cannot consider them mere subjective occurrences.⁷⁸ Foucault points out in *History of Madness* that he is investigating “experience of the historical limits”, by which he means the emergence and the movement of the division between madness and reason (*HM*, xxix). He further states that writing the history of truth always produces limit-experiences, or fundamental experiences, when they are distinguished from reasonable discourses (*HM*, xxix; *DEII.291*, 954).

Second, when Foucault refers to limit-experience in his late interviews he characterises it as an intense (personal) experience that is as close as possible to being unliveable (*DEL.50*, 642–643; *DEL.70*, 862; 868; *DEL.73*, 886). As he explains in an interview from 1978, he is interested in:

the forms of experience in which the explosion of the subject, its annihilation, the encounter of its limits, its tipping over the limits show well that the subject did not have that original and self-sufficient form that philosophy traditionally assumed (*DEII.234*, 590).⁷⁹

Here Foucault distinguishes limit-experience from the lived experience of phenomenology, explaining that the aim is not to describe the everyday experience of the subject, it is to take the experience of the subject close to the point of its own impossibility (*DEII.281*, 862; 868). Limit-experience as a concept, then, concerns the moments when the subject is fractured by encountering, or even transgressing, the limits of its own possibility (*ibid.*). Such experiences may involve considerable pain given that they tear subjects away from themselves and change the ways they act and think (O’Leary 2009, 84). Foucault questions the subject’s role in the philosophical tradition in the above quotation, and even speaks about the annihilation of the subject.

However, in the case of Foucault’s late notion of limit-experience in the 1980s, the complete dissolution of the subject remains impossible: only when the subject sustains the authority of the experience can limit-experience be communicated to others and reflected on afterwards precisely as an experience (Jay 1995, 164–165). The act or a sudden incident of transgressing the limit of currently possible experience cannot, then, be a permanent state of being. In his early essays on psychology from the 1950s Foucault argues against the idea of

⁷⁸ In an interview in *Mal faire dire vrai*, Foucault discusses limit-experience not only as a personal experience but as something that can be observed from a distance. He defines limit-experience as the (objective) relationship between medical knowledge and personal experience, such as the experience of the absolute point of death (*MFDV*, 238).

⁷⁹ “des formes d’expérience dans laquelle l’éclatement du sujet, son anéantissement, la rencontre de ses limites, son basculement hors des limites montraient bien qu’il n’avait pas cette forme originaire et autosuffisante que la philosophie classiquement lui supposait” (*DEII.234*, 590).

complete dissolution of the subject, for example in the experience of psychosis: he is convinced that once the subject realises the altered relationship with others, the realisation is also expressed (Chapter 1.1.3).

It is also worth asking how one should understand the concept of limit in limit-experience. As Johanna Oksala notes in her discussion of Foucault's essay from 1963, "Preface à la transgression", the limit would not be a limit if it could not be exceeded, and transgression would not be transgression if there was no limit (Oksala 2003, 69). Thus, if there is a limit and there is transgression, there must also be a beyond. Moreover, not only does transgression presuppose the limit, it also makes it visible in the movement of crossing, a movement that is not reducible to one singular act of violation (Oksala 2003, 70). Derrida argues in a similar way that Foucault's limit is in a continuous process of being shaped and reshaped by itself (Derrida 1994). He compares it to the movement of the sea on sand:

[T]he self-relation of a limit at once erases and multiplies the limit; it cannot but divide it in inventing it. The limit only comes to be effaced—it only comes to efface itself—as soon as it is inscribed (Derrida 1994, 260).

The reference to sea and sand implies that the limit is not a universal limit of human capacity, a permanent structure of knowledge or a clear-cut border. It is like the back-and-forth movement of waves on the beach, which simultaneously produces and erases the line between the sea and the sand. This example serves as a reminder that the limits of "normal experience" are not fixed and that acts of transgression are not necessarily pathological.

Oksala argues further that if one understands the concept of experience as a tripartite, spatial abstraction consisting of procedures of knowledge, government and practices in which the subject's self-relation is formed, one does not have to transgress all these elements at once in order for an experience to be a limit-experience (Oksala 2003). Each of them can be transgressed in turn, meaning that limit-experiences may take place at the limits of discourse, in practices of governing or in procedures in which the subjects form themselves in different ways. For example, one crosses the limits of discourse when a limit-experience does not fall into any of the current categories of mental disorders, especially if the transgression forces one to question the rationality of such a system. Alternatively, one could make visible the procedures of governing by violating the current limits of acceptable conduct.

Foucault uses the term limit-experience with reference to extremely intense experiences, which is reminiscent to some of the interviews from the early 1980s in which he describes experimentation with drugs and sex (*EST*, 165–166). It is true that he refers to recreational use of drugs in certain gay subcultures in his discussion of intense experiences in "Sex, Power,

and the Politics of Identity”. Oksala, however, discusses the body as the locus of resistance and argues that Foucault’s aim in discussing extremely intense experiences is to point out that corporeal occurrences of pleasure cannot be defined in terms of pathology (Oksala 2003, 70–71; Oksala 2005). She goes on to explain, specifically in the context of Foucault’s work from the 1970s, that bodies are not only docile vessels of disciplinary power, they are also anarchic and unpredictable, and cannot be fully defined or mastered (*ibid.*). In a sense, bodies are understood as spaces of resistance, too, because disciplinary forms of power do not necessarily involve abusing or mutilating them, at least not in the same way as violence does, which is why bodies cannot be forced or bent in any way (Heyes 2007).

One should note, however, that Foucault’s writing from the late 1970s and 1980s emphasises the *reflective* aspects of limit-experience more than the idea of anarchic bodies. In using the notion, he not only takes distance from phenomenology but also responds to Kant, arguing that philosophical tradition since Kant has assumed the role of preventing “reason from going beyond the limits of what is given in experience” (*Power*, 328). I explain above that Foucault criticises Kant for placing all possible knowledge and experience within universal limits that cannot be exceeded. Bearing this criticism in mind in “What is Enlightenment?”, Foucault characterises the philosophical way of being (*ethos*) as “a limit-attitude” (*EST*, 316; 317).

The task is to investigate and redefine the limits of the current field of possible experience in a way that would encourage one to test the possibilities of going beyond the imposed limits that affect one’s self-understanding (*EST*, 316; 317). Amy Allen also points out that Foucault’s late work encourages the questioning of historically delineated cultural limit-experiences, or social contradictions, to ensure understanding of current presuppositions concerning possible ways of being, thinking and acting (Allen 2016, 181). Foucault is of the opinion, however, that it would never be possible precisely to define the limits of the current field of possible experience, hence the statement:

It is true that we have to give up hope of ever acceding to a point of view that could give us access to any complete and definite knowledge [*connaissance*] of what may constitute our historical limits. And, from this point of view, the theoretical and practical experience we have of our limits, and the possibility of moving beyond them, is always limited and determined; thus, we are always in the position of beginning again. But that does not mean that no work can be done except in disorder and contingency. (*EST*, 316–317)

As has become clear, it is not enough simply to reflect on conceptions of the experiential limits or concrete gestures of exclusion: the task is to turn current limitations into *practical*

critique, and to question contemporary understandings of universality, necessity, contingency and singularity (*EST*, 315). Practical critique here means focusing on practices and techniques, and on how they are organised and justified (*EST*, 317).

Before discussing Foucault's practical critique in more detail (Part Two), I should mention that Martin Jay criticises Foucault in his article "The Limits of Limit-Experience" for presupposing a subject who is powerful enough to capture and coherently describe the limit-experience afterwards, and to make it available to others (Jay 1995, 159). Jay terms this recapturing "retrospective fictionalization", arguing that Foucault's notion of limit-experience is paradoxical in that it involves active self-laceration at the same time as the capability to write retrospective fiction such that others could appropriate it for their own purposes (Jay 1995, 159). He continues:

limit-experience, then, is a curiously contradictory mixture of self-expansion and self-annihilation, immediate, proactive spontaneity and fictional retrospection, personal inwardness and communal interaction (Jay 1995, 159).

The strength of Jay's overall argument is the claim that limit-experience is not some interior occurrence but a plea for a community: the very idea presupposes that the boundary between self and other is soluble, and thus from the start it stretches beyond that which could only be personal (Jay 1995, 163; 165). He makes a distinction between Heidegger's being-toward-death—one's own death—and being-toward-the-death-of-others, and he calls for a community that is based on a shared understanding of human vulnerability and finitude (Jay 1995, 166–167). The point is that a community is formed when people acknowledge the inevitable death of each other and live according to this realisation.

One could justifiably admit that Foucault's references to limit-experiences in his late interviews are theoretically sparse and fragmentary. In my view, however, the aspect of retrospective fictionalisation is one of the strengths of his notion of limit-experience, especially in the context of mental distress. The idea of retrospective fictionalisation is, in fact, a crucial presumption in any process of recovery: it is assumed not only that one day one will be capable of looking back on the current situation, but also that the future from which one will look back is already anticipated.

Moreover, there is no need to claim that retrospective reflection on limit-experiences is the solitary task of an individual, nor to reduce intense, perhaps life-changing or intolerable experiences to collective practices of the faceless masses. As mentioned above, retrospective fictionalisation presupposes that no-one can remain in a state of limit-experience: as a permanent state it would no longer be "as close as possible to being unliveable", because it

would then be unliveable *de facto*. It is not difficult to imagine that such a state could take an horrific form and paralyse the subject instead of enabling change or the exploration of new ways of being.

Thus, it is not only the aspect of reflection but also the aspect of dealing with social contradictions together as a community that should be stressed. Foucault's discussion of limit-experience is of course, inspired by Nietzsche and post-Nietzschean thinkers such as Bataille and Blanchot (*DEII.281*, 862; 869). It is not uncommon to accuse Foucault of individualism and heroization of the subject because of this influence (e.g. Heyes 2007), but it is not really praise of individualism that is at stake here. In this context, too, limit-experience should be understood as an intense and momentary personal experience that is reflected upon in retrospect, but at the same time the concept can be used as a plea to recognise and face collective processes in which marginalisation is produced.

Foucault refers to Nietzsche also in *History of Madness* when he claims that people turn their attention away from the societal processes of exclusion when they wish to avoid facing the tragic aspects of life (*HM*, xxx). He follows Nietzsche in referring to "tragic experience", and he discusses Greek tragedies at length also in the late lectures. In Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*, the experience of tragedy involves a strong sense of unity and the dissolution of boundaries between pre-established categories—in other words divisions between an individual and the community, human beings and nature, men and women, or men and men (Seaford 2006, 6). In this sense, the notion signifies the transient possibility of letting go of one's individuality. Such an aim is more understandable if individuality is defined not as the uniqueness of each human being, but as being a member of a population, a mass or a flock, or being an object of knowledge.⁸⁰ In Foucault's view, political struggles revolve around the question of who "we" are, and who are included in the "we" (*DEII.306*, 1045–1046; Chapter 2.4.4). These struggles involve defining individuals and placing them in identity categories, even if people would not recognise themselves in such definitions (*ibid.*).

⁸⁰ Foucault's conception of an individual has a Hegelian tone. Hegel explains the individuation process in terms of a culture that exists and is formed only through individuals (or *self-consciousnesses*) (Hegel 1977, §489). Hegel's argument is not that the individual is simply moulded by culture, it is that individuality *moulds itself* by culture, and even if the cultural world comes into being through individuals, culture is already different from each of them (Hegel 1977, §490). In Hegelian vocabulary the world is *alienated* from the self-consciousness, which means that culture is a given reality, but at the same time one cannot fully recognise oneself from it (Hegel 1977, §484). Culture is an actual, objective reality, in which every individual could be perceived as an object (Hegel 1977, §490). He further argues that "everyone is like everyone else" in the *objective* world, and that individuality is imaginary. Rather than being particularities, people are *kinds* of beings. These 'kinds' are nevertheless distinguishable from species: Hegel quotes Diderot, who describes *espèce* as "the most horrid of all nicknames; for it denotes mediocrity and expresses the highest degree of contempt" (Hegel 1977, §489). To Hegel 'a kind' is not as bad: it implies that one is not *yet* aware of what kind of being one is, or what kind of culture one is living in. This forms a link to Foucault's biopolitics, the idea of governing people as entire populations, as species: to Foucault, the individual is not a singular, unique human being, but a member of a flock.

Moreover, Nietzsche, as well as French historian Jean-Pierre Vernant, characterise tragedy as a cultural practice that entails *contradictions* (Nietzsche 1999, §5; Vernant 1988, 41–42).⁸¹ In other words, tragedy should be understood not simply as an experience in which the subject is dissolved but as a collective practice in which contradictions are presented, faced and reflected on in a society. In *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, Foucault presents tragedy as a collective, reflective space for exploring the limits of human beings, their suffering and conflictual relationships with one another (*HeS*, 426). Vernant, in turn, argues in his article “The Tragic Subject” that tragedy involves creating “a kind of subject”, not in the modern sense as a foundation of knowledge, but as someone who reflects on their own position in the world, their own actions and relationships with others, and tensions between different collective practices, laws and institutions (Vernant 1988, 240). The point is that limit-experiences and forms of exclusion can be reflected on when tragedy (not necessarily in the form of stage art but as a collective practice) places characters in front of an audience, points out their actions and presents them as questions. In other words, the function of tragedy is to enable collective reflection on the public space and on political experiences in which different laws, discourses and values do not seem compatible (Vernant 1988, 41–42; *DEL.139*, 1438–1439).

As noted in Chapter 1.1.6, Foucault’s early essays on psychology reflect on contradictory experiences—social conflicts that intersect within an individual. In this way, one has come full circle back to Foucault’s early essays, in which the aim is to include both societal contradictions and personal experiences in the analysis.

At the beginning of this chapter I argued that Foucault introduces a new concept of experience, “the field of experience”, in his texts in the early 1980s in looking for a novel way of including the subject in his research. When the objects of an investigation are the subjects reflecting on their own actions, making decisions freely and understanding themselves as subjects of their own behaviour, it is no longer sufficient to criticise the subject as the locus of the anthropological structure of knowledge. In the late articles and interviews the “field of experience” includes the elements of knowledge formation, processes of governmentality and

⁸¹ Foucault was clearly influenced in his discussions of tragedy, and especially in his inaugural Collège de France lecture series *Lectures on the Will to Know*, by historians of the Parisian Circle, a collective that was organised around Jean-Pierre Vernant. Vernant explains in “Oedipus without the Complex”, and in *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, that tragedy takes root in a specific political setting, in a city-state in which new political institutions are in conflict with more traditional values (Vernant 1988, 88).

ethics of the self. Different variations of these three constitutive elements of experience are identifiable throughout his work. I also claimed that concepts such as governing, care and conduct all include the aspect of forming a relation with the self through techniques and practices of guidance—guiding oneself, guiding others and letting someone do the guiding.

Second, I discussed Foucault's concepts of background experience, transformative experience and limit-experience. In previous chapters I characterised Foucault's concept of background experience (*expérience fondamentale*) as a perceptual horizon that enables perceiving and knowing phenomena in different ways. I also argued that background experience in *History of Madness* and *The Birth of the Clinic* refers to the underlying processes or structures by which distinctions are made and phenomena are placed in different categories. In this chapter I claimed, however, that Foucault stresses the concrete and visible, material reality of (fundamental) experience in his late work, passing on the task of investigating the current field of possible experience and contemporary ways of being.

I have drawn attention to the fact that Foucault refers to madness, sexuality, criminality and suffering as not only fundamental but also transformative experiences, and as limit-experiences. In other words, the different concepts of experience overlap to some extent, but it is nevertheless possible to make distinctions between the different meanings and to discuss them separately. Foucault tends to characterise the experimental and creative aspects of his own work in his descriptions of transformative experiences. I have also noted his use of the word "fiction" in this context and argue that in his discussion of the fabrication of experience he questions the Kantian conception of experience, which is closely connected with empirical knowledge.

In the final section I singled out Foucault's notions of limit-experience, experience that he describes as almost unliveable. I explained that the limit does not mark the universal border of cognitive capabilities, because the very concept is understood as movement that becomes apparent only following acts of transgression. One can stress the bodily aspects of limit-experience, a passing moment of intolerable pain or even unbearable pleasure, but in his late work Foucault also argues that its role is to create a rupture and a reflective distance from the processes of governing, knowledge formation and self-understanding. Limit-experiences (or fundamental experiences) such as madness, sexuality, criminality and suffering are related to societal processes in which people are pushed into the margins of society. As personal experiences they are profound, meaningful and possibly life-changing. Thus, Foucault continues to discuss the question of exclusion he raises in *History of Madness*, but here he reflects also on the possibilities of moving beyond the categories of marginalisation—

singularly and collectively. Especially “tragic experience” refers to a reflective, collective process of facing social contradictions.

Conclusions to Part One

I have investigated different concepts of experience in Foucault's work and explicated their different meanings and theoretical functions. He operates with concepts of experience especially in his early and late works, and some of these concepts run throughout his oeuvre even if their meanings are not always the same. Foucault uses notions such as "background experience" (*expérience fondamentale*) in his early essays, and "limit-experience" and "forms of experience" also appear in *History of Madness*. "Forms of experience" indicate different, historically delineated normative systems that make it possible to perceive and know phenomena in specific ways, whereas background experience means, for the most part, the horizon against which phenomena stand out. Limit-experience tends to refer to phenomena that are excluded, either from the sphere of reason (madness, dream experience) or concretely from society, although in his late work it also connotes intense personal experiences that are close to impossible or unliveable. The meanings of fundamental experience, transformative experience and limit-experience overlap at times: they all refer to phenomena such as madness, delinquency, sexuality, death and suffering, but Foucault also uses them separately with reference to specific types of personal experience.

At the beginning of the thesis I discussed the ways in which Foucault operates with "experience" in his early essays on psychiatry and psychology. I focused especially on *Mental Illness and Psychology*, in which he makes a distinction between two parallel theoretical frameworks: existential analysis, or phenomenological anthropology, and social history. Phenomenological anthropology provides Foucault with an alternative way of discussing mental disorders from the first-person perspective. Most importantly, he characterises mental disorders as *intersubjective* phenomena—they are realised in interpersonal relationships. He does not reduce mental illnesses to individuals and their symptoms, but he does not reduce personal experiences to cultural, discursive practices, either, as is often claimed. On the contrary, in the early essays he investigates personal ways of responding to situations and occurrences in life, and in "Dream, Imagination, Existence" his aim is to give the patient the full authority of personal experience. However, the role of therapy in the early Foucauldian context is to focus on interpersonal relations with the objective of forming ruptures in repetitive modes of being and forming spaces in which "coping with every sort of being becomes possible" (Dreyfus 1987, xviii).

When Foucault traces the social history of mental disorders he uses the notion "contradictory experience" to articulate the societal aspects of mental distress, such as

concrete forms of exclusion, economic injustice and exploitation. He continues his investigation into mental illness on the path of social history in *History of Madness*, focusing especially on the topic of exclusion—the intellectual exclusion of madness from the realm of reason and also the processes through which madness is subject to social exclusion.

Foucault positions *History of Madness* and *The Birth of the Clinic* as investigations of different “forms of experience”, such as “the experience of madness” and “medical experience”. In thus referring to forms of experience he formulates a method that rejects the analysis of history as a dialectical process. As noted above, forms of experience are understood as different fields of knowledge in which phenomena and the subjects and objects of knowledge can be perceived and discussed in specific ways.

“Experience” also has a significant theoretical function in Foucault’s *Introduction to Kant’s Anthropology*, but he uses the concept in a different meaning. Kant defines experience (*Erfahrung*) as empirical knowledge, but also in a more theoretical way as knowledge that is formed of perceptions organised by synthetic activity. Foucault argues that in Kant’s *Anthropology* the activity that organises and grounds experience is constantly under the threat of being ruptured, which is why Kant discusses mental illnesses and gives instructions for sustaining mental health. In other words, mental illnesses are understood in Kant’s *Anthropology* as possible errors of experience that concern everyone and come from within. As Foucault criticises Kant’s a priori distinctions as rather arbitrary, he also questions the view that severe mental illnesses could be based on Kant’s concepts and localised in the synthetic activity of the mind.

I drew attention to the fact that Kant’s objective in *Anthropology* to develop cognitive powers is political: he gives *citizens of the world* instructions for proceeding further as a humanity. In some sense the citizen of the world is a concept implying intersubjectivity—it emphasises the aspect of interaction between human beings. However, Foucault also understands it to be an exclusive category for specific types of subjects who are considered capable of using language and social codes, and of submitting themselves to their own moral laws. Thus, even if Kant asks, “What is a human being?” and “What can and should human beings make of themselves?” his advice for health improvement is addressed to a limited number of people. Foucault reminds his readers that the practices through which the self is formed are culturally codified, shared and unacceptably exclusive, and that Kant overlooks the aspects of power and exclusion when he formulates the task of improving the current state of humanity.

Some Foucault scholars argue that Foucault rejects experience both as the *Erlebnis* of phenomenology and as Kantian *Erfahrung* (Jay 1995, 197).⁸² However, at times, especially in *The Birth of the Clinic*, he uses the concept of experience in a Kantian way as empirical knowledge that is reflected upon and tested. This may not always be a conscious choice.

Kant's philosophy also influenced Foucault on a very conscious level. As I note in Chapter 1.3.4, he continuously returns to Kant in his late work with a view to combining aspects of political activism and the critical history of subjectivity. He finds this combination in Kant's political essays as well as in *Anthropology* in which Kant uses virtue ethics in defining the subject who aims at improving the self and changing the world by participating in social interaction and public discussions. I have shown in this part of the dissertation that, in his early work, Foucault also investigates topics such as meditation techniques, well-being and dietetics as philosophical, ethical and political concerns. He continued to study these themes in the 1980s, especially in the context of ancient virtue ethics. His late work on ancient ethics is well known for focusing on dietetics and the pragmatics of the self, both of which aim at self-transformation.

I have also argued that Foucault is not as detached from phenomenology as he sometimes claims. The connection is explicit in his early essays in which he investigates phenomenological anthropology. Gary Gutting states that his later rejection of phenomenology was a serious mistake that led him to ignore significant philosophical options (Gutting 2002, 80–85). It is true that the different concepts and conceptions of experience can be confusing: unless they are explicated properly their theoretical functions may well remain unclear to the reader, and there is a risk of their remaining only fragmentary notions unless they are developed further as theoretical tools.

For these reasons, I used distinctions that are familiar from the phenomenological tradition in my discussion on *The Birth of the Clinic*. The specific focus in the clinical context is on the doctor-subject's knowledge and perception (experience), and on the ways in which these specific types of subject use their senses. *The Birth of the Clinic* is a critical investigation of the relationship between different forms of knowledge and different ways of perceiving patients who are treated as objects of knowledge.

One of the reasons why Foucault does not describe personal experiences or disclose their structures in detail after the first essays is that he is looking for different strategies for changing

⁸² Martin Jay interprets *Erlebnis* as referring to the lived, pre-reflexive relationship between the self and the world, and *Erfahrung* to wisdom that is produced over time through interaction between the self and the world (Jay 1995, 197). He further suggests that Foucault uses different notions of experience to avoid founding the concept merely on the subject.

current, perhaps stagnated ways of being. What most of his concepts or less fixed notions of experience have in common is the objective of change: the aim is to theorise so as to formulate the possibility of not being the same as before, and to find new ways of constituting the relationship with previous occurrences in life.

Throughout this first part of my thesis I have argued that there is no need to decide whether to emphasise the personal, cultural or discursive aspects of experience. In fact, the different concepts facilitate different types of analysis. In his late work, Foucault combines the (micro) perspective of subjective experience with the externalist, objective analysis of experience, introducing a tripartite concept in which the aspects of governing, knowledge production and subjectivity formation intersect. I therefore argued in Chapter 1.5 that “the field of experience” in Foucault’s late work comprises the elements of self-relation, knowledge formation and procedures of governmentality.

Part Two

Experience of the Self

“Self-care: that can be an act of political warfare [...] self-care is about the creation of community, fragile communities, assembled out of the experiences of being shattered. We reassemble ourselves through the ordinary, everyday and often painstaking work of looking after ourselves; looking after each other. This is why when we have to insist, I matter, we matter, we are transforming what matters.”

Sarah Ahmed, “Selfcare as Warfare”

Introduction to Part Two

In contemporary societies many people recognise in their everyday lives the recommendation to listen to, turn towards and be true to oneself. One is encouraged to take care of oneself and of others, to take a deep breath, and to exhale. Westernised versions of ancient meditation techniques are familiar not only from the covers of women’s magazines and yoga retreats, self-help books and therapists’ offices but also from the front pages of major newspapers and the language of employment consultants. In ancient philosophy these practices were profoundly connected to ethical and political aims, which is not necessarily the case with contemporary techniques of the self.

Foucault discusses techniques of the self as ethical and political concerns in his late work, and he is critical of contemporary advice to pay attention to the self. Volumes II, III and IV of *The History of Sexuality* and *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* investigate a historically delineated “experience of the self” (*l’expérience de soi-même*)—the specific ways of knowing, perceiving and understanding the self within a cultural context—on which I focus in this second part of my thesis. The study of “a certain experience of the self” investigates the historical and cultural conditions in which a specific type of experience becomes possible (*HeS*, 221).

I explicated the different meanings and functions of the concepts of experience in Foucault’s work in Part One. I argue in Part Two that clarifying the concepts and notions of experience in his earlier work also helps to foster a deeper understanding of his late work. I will continue to show the continuities between his late writing on ethics and his early work on psychiatry, and to discuss the themes that run through his work, such as medicine, health, style, exercise and meditation.

I argued at the end of Part One that Foucault’s work from the 1980s is organised around the tripartite concept of experience: in *The Use of Pleasure*, “fields of knowledge”, “types of normativity” and “forms of subjectivity” intersect and form “the field of experience”. He

explains in *The Use of Pleasure* that it is not sufficient in the investigation of ethics only to demarcate the broad field that conditions possible experience, as one needs to ask what happens in the relation to the self when people judge their own behaviour, regret, feel remorse or perhaps punish themselves (*HS2*, 13). It is a question of how thinking, knowing and speaking subjects reflect and act upon themselves and constitute themselves as moral subjects. In other words, the domain of ethics concerns the investigation of how subjects constitute themselves as the subjects of their own behaviour, make themselves act in a specific manner and modify themselves using various techniques (*HS2*, 12; *ABHS*, 202–203).

“Experience of the self” in the context of ethics thus refers to the ways in which subjects can recognise themselves as moral subjects. Instead of formulating a set of moral codes, Foucault focuses on texts that have a real effect on people’s lives in terms of encouraging them to reflect on, monitor and modify their own behaviour: these texts are meant not only to be read but also to be acted on and examined in practice (*HS2*, 18–19; *DEII.338*, 1365). Whereas Foucault takes ethics to mean the processes and the ways in which subjects form a relationship with the self, morals refer to certain behavioural codes, prohibitions and sets of values (*HS2*, 36). He criticises attempts to prescribe universal moral codes and argues that the aim should not be to define universal necessities when it comes to modes of being: “[s]earching for a form of morality that would be acceptable by everyone—in the sense that everybody should submit themselves to it—seems catastrophic to me” (*DEII.354*, 1525).⁸³

Following the publication of Volumes II and III of *The History of Sexuality* Foucault’s ethics attracted substantial criticism. The debate in the 1980s and 1990s tended to rest on the assumption that the period between 1976 and 1984 was one of silence and marked a gap in Foucault’s thinking. However, the publication of his lecture courses filled these gaps and brought to light the shifts and continuities in his work. Accusations were made that Parts II and III of *The History of Sexuality* were too individualistic, relativistic and withdrawn from the political realm on account of the focus on the history of subjectivity.

According to Richard Rorty and Jürgen Habermas, Foucault represents “Nietzschean anarchism”, “extreme individualism” and even “neo-conservatism” that makes common, future-oriented goals impossible (Habermas 1984a, 13; Rorty 1992, 329–331). Recently Noam Chomsky has expressed similar concerns (Chomsky 2018). Habermas accuses Foucault of formulating an omnipotent subject who is somehow capable of rising above discourses to criticise them, whereas Rorty claims that Foucault assumes the privileges of a poet who

⁸³ La recherche d’une forme de morale qui serait acceptable par tout le monde—en ce sens que tout le monde devrait s’y soumettre—me paraît catastrophique (*DEII.354*, 1525). See also “Vérité, pouvoir et soi”, *DEII.362*, 1598.

advocates private attitudes in the public sphere without being concerned how they match with theoretical commitments (Habermas 1984b, 106; Rorty 1992, 333).

It is true that Foucault analyses ethics as a way of being (*ethos*) with a whole variety of arts, or skills, of existence (*l'art de l'existence*) that are realised in everyday conduct. Commentaries that stress the individualistic aspects of his ethics tend to be based on the following quotation, in which he refers to life as a work of art:

[A]rt 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 lives? (*EST*, 261)

Pierre Hadot, for example, is concerned that Foucault is promoting a new form of dandyism in his interpretations of ancient classics (Hadot 1992, 230). Richard Shusterman, in turn, points out that after making a significant critical contribution Foucault disappointed many when he defined his work on ethics as a study of the relationship one forms with the self (Shusterman 1997, 25). It was not uncommon to accuse Foucault of advocating narcissistic self-fashioning in Volumes II and III of *The History of Sexuality* and in his late articles and interviews (*ibid.*). Instead of explicating the political significance of Foucault's ethics, Shusterman continues the debate, claiming that in his late work he indulged in hedonism and created ethics in different literary genres (Shusterman 1997, 26). The loudest critics of Foucault's late work in more recent, contemporary debate claim that in his references to poietic self-transformation he supports neo-liberal policies aimed at decreasing state power and turning people into entrepreneurs of the self (Zamora 2014; Dean 2015). In general, what has annoyed Foucault's critics is his use of *style* and vocabulary that is familiar from aesthetics: "the arts of existence", "the aesthetics of existence" and "the aesthetic criterion" of moral conduct.

I believe, however, that the aesthetic vocabulary should be understood in a sufficiently philosophical context. I argued in Part One that throughout his career Foucault investigates the possibilities of perceiving the subjects and objects of knowledge in specific ways.⁸⁴ The focus in his late work is thus on the possible *ways* of perceiving the self, and the ways in which

⁸⁴ Jacques Rancière refers explicitly to Foucault when he defines his political project in terms of aesthetics. Rancière understands aesthetics as a priori systems or forms that define what it is possible to experience. Politics, then, is about making things visible or invisible and defining what can or cannot be said or done (Rancière 2006, 9): "Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time" (Rancière 2006, 13).

people conduct themselves as moral beings and form relationships with others in historically delineated fields of experience.

One of the starting points of my investigation is that Foucault's late work on ancient ethics forms a continuum from his political thought. Aristotle similarly frames his virtue ethics as part of his political philosophy in *Nicomachean Ethics* (*EN*, 1094b10). Aristotle is, of course, more conservative than Foucault, who encourages people to form social movements and agitate for social change (Chapter 1.5.1), but the contemporary distinction between ethics and political philosophy is not justifiable here. Reflecting on the relationship between governing oneself and governing others in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, Foucault concludes that the study of governmentality must include an analysis of the relationship the subject has with itself, because then it is possible to connect the questions of ethics and politics together (*HeS*, 242). I have demonstrated (Chapter 1.5.2) that the key concepts in Foucault's late work, such as governing, conducting, care and "the field of experience", do not fall into the distinction between politics and ethics.

Foucault does not always explain what he means when he uses the term "the experience of the self", but it is possible to identify integral aspects that characterise these specific types of experience. First, he refers to the experience of the self in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* as he investigates activities and techniques of therapeutic guidance that focus on the self and self-transformation: turning the gaze to the self, purifying the self, withdrawing to the self, renouncing the self, preparing the self and finding the self, listening to the self and healing the self (*HeS*, 151; 172; 207–208). Second, he locates his study within specific cultural contexts, and discusses recommendations to take care of the self as collective practices (*DVSS*, 78). Third, he explains that he is interested in "the expressions of experience", especially those that imply the objective of telling the truth about oneself in therapeutic and confessional relationships, for example, but also in political interaction.

I structure my investigation of Foucault's late work in this second part of the thesis according to these three aspects of "the experience of the self". When the type of experience he explicates is closely associated with activities that form the self—testing, exploring, observing and transforming the self—one should begin by asking how "the self" is understood in this context. I argue in Chapter 2.1 that the concrete techniques on which he focuses are integral to his definition of the self, and not merely an empirical concern. His conception of the self is profoundly relational, and he never suggests that individuals invent themselves or practices of the self independently of others.

I pointed out in Part One of the thesis that Foucault discusses medicine and dietetics as philosophical and political concerns also in his early work. He describes the function of dietetics in *Introduction to Kant's Anthropology* as to regulate health and mental well-being and, in the long run, to affect societies by transforming its subjects. At the end of Chapter 2.1 I show how medicine and dietetics assume significant theoretical functions when Foucault returns to these themes in the context of ancient moral philosophy in his work from the 1980s. He argues that the ancient Greeks were not worried about normality, or whether some form of behaviour was normal. Ideals of ethical conduct are much closer to the regulation of health by dietary routines than the formulation of explicit rules to ban or permit certain actions. Ethics revolves around questions concerning regulation, moderation, the right proportions, the right timing and avoiding excess, and these elements constitute the aesthetic criterion for conduct (*DEII.344*, 1435). Foucault also points out that the Socratic imperative to take care of the self is described in Stoic philosophy in medical terms and is compared to healing and therapy.

Second, in Chapter 2.2, I show how Foucault discusses the care of the self (*le souci de soi*) as a “form of experience” (*mode d'expérience*). I argue throughout Part One that he refers to forms of experience in his conceptualisations of the ways in which phenomena, or in this case “the self”, can be perceived, formed and discussed in a cultural context. In other words, practices of taking care of the self are framed as both personal and collective experiences. When he refers to “forms of experience” with regard to care of the self, he characterises the broad fields of Western, Greek, Hellenistic and Christian experiences of the self, not only singular, one-time experiences of individuals. In this sense, he returns to the theoretical framework he uses in *History of Madness*, *The Order of Things* and *The Birth of the Clinic*.

One should therefore ask to what extent the practices are simply internalised and to what extent they can be appropriated and altered by the subjects. Foucault claims in *Dire vrai sur soi-même* and in “Technologies of the Self” that the experience we have (*faïsons*) of ourselves appears immediate and original, but, at the same time the experience of the self involves historically formed practices and ways of thinking: this is why it may be difficult to make a distinction between spontaneous, personal experiences and adopted cultural techniques (*DVSS*, 29; *DEII.363*, 1603). Instead of recommending people to adopt specific types of techniques that invite them to focus intensively on the self, Foucault claims that when practices of self-care are generalised as a collectively recognised ethic, in practice only a small group of people can live according to their ideals (*HeS*, 122). The question, then, is not how to access happiness, freedom, well-being, harmony, or whatever the objectives of self-care appear to be, but what are the *stakes* of taking care of the self. I argue that Foucault continues

to verbalise different, subtle forms of exclusion, but he does not completely reject practices of the self, either: he invites reflection on one's own stance towards them.

Third, my focus in Chapter 2.3 is on the procedures of truth and the practices in which people are committed to or obliged to tell the truth about themselves. I argued in Chapter 1.1 that in his early essays he aims to capture experiences on their own terms, which is why he focuses on explicit statements and expressions. In this part of the thesis I will connect Foucault's investigation of truth-telling (*parrhēsia*) in his late lectures and in Volume IV of *The History of Sexuality, Les aveux de la chair*, to his early texts on psychiatry and therapeutic practices. He positions *Les aveux de la chair* as an investigation into the "formation of the new experience" that deals with confessional practices (*HS4*, 49–50; 99).

In other words, not only does Foucault form a genealogy of Christian confession in his late lectures, he also offers a genealogy of "the confessional sciences"—psychiatry, psychology and psychoanalysis (see Lorenzini 2016).⁸⁵ He notes in his investigation of the practices of truth-telling in antiquity that the concept of *parrhēsia* (frankness, truth-telling, all-telling) occurs first in a political context, but this specific type of truth-telling makes a gradual shift from politics to confessional and therapeutic relationships: in this way he demonstrates a transition from political to ethical, more private forms of *parrhēsia*. In *The Government of Self and Others*, however, he identifies also forms of truth-telling in which political practices are combined with techniques of taking care of the self. My specific focus in Chapter 2.3, therefore, is on the medical vocabulary that is used in these mixed forms of truth-telling: in his investigation into the political role of philosophical guidance in Plato's dialogues he remarks that the philosopher-advisor "diagnoses" and "heals" the city.

In Chapter 2.4 I discuss Foucault's late work more explicitly as a critical study and ask in what sense normativity can be understood in this context. This debate has been ongoing since the publication of Volumes II and III of *The History of Sexuality*, and my contribution is to suggest including "forms of experience" in the analysis as well the aspect of personal experience. I open my discussion on normativity in Foucault's ethics by pointing out that he investigates *different* ways of conducting oneself as an ethical subject, and especially the points

⁸⁵ Foucault explains, on several occasions, in his late work that he uses both archaeological and genealogical methods in his analysis. Despite stating in "Structuralism and Post-structuralism" that he was no longer using the word archaeology, he claims in the Howison lecture that he never stopped doing archaeology. He further explains in *The Use of Pleasure* that the archaeological dimension of his research enables him to analyse the ways in which questions are posed, whereas the genealogical approach traces the changes in different practices (*HS2*, 17–18; *ABHS*, 233n4). He also states in "What is Enlightenment?" that his critical study is "genealogical in its design and archaeological in its method" (*EST*, 315). He describes genealogy not only as the historical study of how ethical concerns emerge, but also as the *aim* of desubjugating the subject, enabling subjects to detach themselves from the categories in which they are placed (*ibid.*; *ABHS*, 233n4). The simultaneous references to archaeology and genealogy call into question Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow's distinction between the archaeological and genealogical phases in Foucault's thought. See Dreyfus & Rabinow 1982.

at which a feeling or a form of conduct becomes the object of moral concern and causes anxiousness and worry.

Even if he does not recommend the adoption of ancient practices of the self as such, he uses his sources in defining critique as a virtue and a way of being (*ethos*). In the Howison lectures from 1980, Foucault characterised his analysis of techniques of the self as a critical study stating that the objective is to form “another kind of critical philosophy”. I will explain what he means by this alternative type of critical philosophy, and at the end of this thesis I defend Foucault’s critical ethics as a project that calls people together to form meaningful relationships and to make a change. The aim of combining political involvement and practices of self-care is familiar from Kant’s *Anthropology*, in which he refers to virtue as the ongoing process of forming oneself as an ethical and political subject.

Foucault, of course, formulates his own type of critical philosophy. In this regard, he refers explicitly to Heidegger in the Howison lectures and in the lecture course *Dire vrai sur soi-même*. He rarely does this in his published works, even though Heidegger’s influence on Foucault’s late work comes up in several interviews (*DEII.354*, 1522; *DEII.362*, 1599; *EST*, 257). I discussed Heidegger’s role in Foucault’s early work above in Part One, noting that Foucault does not address the question of Being from the ontological perspective in the same way as Heidegger does, focusing instead on historical sources, explicit statements and concrete practices. I pointed out, however, that Heidegger’s influence is evident in Foucault’s formulation of the relational and situated subject who is practically involved with the world. The relationship between Foucault and Heidegger is not the main theme of this thesis, being a broad field of study in itself that could be addressed from various perspectives, but I explore the links between them in my discussion on Foucault’s critical ethics. In this part of the thesis I show that Foucault uses Heidegger’s analysis of technology in formulating his own approach to techniques of the self and, without a doubt, he is influenced by Heidegger’s concept of care (*Sorge*).⁸⁶

Finally, in Chapter 2.5 I connect Foucault’s late work to those public discussions in which he participated. He states in an interview from 1984 that he is not a Hellenist or a Latinist, and that he uses ancient sources only for asking certain questions (*DEII.354*, 1523). When asked what he thinks about the Greek idea of a style of existence, he responds: “Not so great”

⁸⁶ Robert Nichols’ (2014) *The World of Freedom: Heidegger, Foucault, and the Politics of Historical Ontology* focuses on the relationship between Heidegger’s *Being and Time* and Foucault’s *Hermeneutics of the Subject*. He discusses the concepts of freedom and care from an ontological perspective. On Foucault and Heidegger see also Milchman A. & Rosenberg A. (eds.) 2003.

(DEII.354, 1517).⁸⁷ *The Use of Pleasure* reveals a slight concern about being too carried away by ancient sources—when in fact he wants to discuss moral subjectivity (HS2, 14). He explains the task of critical philosophy as being to investigate our current ways of being, ontology of ourselves, by responding to the following questions: 1) What is the present moment? 2) What is the field of experience? 3) What is the current field of possible experiences? (GSA, 22). Hence, Foucault’s main objective is not to provide a scholarly analysis of the classics but rather to encourage reflection on current, everyday ways of being and experiences of the self that our own historical and socio-political circumstances enable.

⁸⁷ In “Le retour de la morale” Foucault is asked : “*Un style d’existence, c’est admirable. Ces Grecs, vous les avez trouvés admirables?*” He responds: “Non”, and the interview proceeds:

- *Ni exemplaires ni admirables?*
- Non.
- *Comment les avez-vous trouvés?*
- Pas très fameux. (DEII.354, 1517)

2.1 The Self, Subjectivation and Techniques of the Self

[I]t is a question searching for another kind of critical philosophy. Not a philosophy that seeks to determine the conditions and the limits of our possible knowledge of the object, but a critical philosophy that seeks the conditions and the indefinite possibilities of transforming the subject.

Michel Foucault, About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self

2.1.1 The Subject, Subjection, Subjectivation and the Self

When Foucault reorganises his late work around the concept of experience in the last three parts of *The History of Sexuality* and in *Subjectivity and Truth, The Hermeneutics of the Subject* and “Structuralism and Poststructuralism”, he positions his study as a history of subjectivity. In his late work he no longer addresses the question of how categories such as mad and non-mad, normal and abnormal or ill and healthy are produced (*EST*, 88). His concern is rather with how subjects reflect and act upon themselves, and how they become the objects of their own thoughts and actions, justify their own behaviour and engage in activities of forming the self (*AME*, 461). The question to be asked, then, is: How Foucault understands the concept of the self? I argue at the beginning of this chapter that techniques are integral to Foucault’s definition of the self and to the historically delineated field that makes a “certain experience of the self” possible. I discuss techniques of the self in more detail in sections 2.1.2–4 and explicate their function in formulating Foucault’s critical ethics. Finally, I argue in Chapter 2.1.5 that when Foucault returns to the questions of dietetics and medicine in *The Use of Pleasure*—themes he discusses in his early work—his interest in dietetic regulation is not only as a cultural phenomenon but also as the basis of ethical conduct.

It is a commonly held view that Foucault does not develop a theory of the subject. Moreover, concern has been expressed that he makes subjects incapable of political action because they cannot anchor themselves in anything. Richard Rorty claims in “Moral Identity and Private Autonomy”, for example, that Foucault formulates a coreless subject, a “centerless bundle of contingencies” in his late work (Rorty 1992, 332). I claim, however, that even if he compares different conceptions of the self and possible ways of experiencing oneself as a

subject, he also uses concepts such as *the subject*, *subjectivity*, *subjection*, *subjectivation* and *the self* in specific meanings that should be explicated. In making a distinction between the subject and the self, one could argue against the view that Foucault understands the subject only as a random flux of experiential streams and social determinants.

Foucault describes his task in investigating “the experience of the self” and the history of subjectivity as follows:

to study the constitution of the subject as an object for himself: the formation of procedures by which the subject is led to observe himself, analyze himself, interpret himself, recognize himself as a domain of possible knowledge. In short, this concerns the history of “subjectivity”, if what is meant by the term is the way in which the subject experiences himself. (*AME*, 461)⁸⁸

Here he defines subjectivity as the *way* in which subjects experience themselves. As the subject of ethics, for example, one might experience oneself as blameworthy, liable, sinful, pure, guilty, virtuous, responsible or respectable depending on the moral paradigm.

The subject, in turn, is defined as the (somewhat) stable point from which the self is worked upon. In other words, the subject could be understood as a position and a situation from which the relationship with the self is formed.⁸⁹ This definition resonates, to some extent, with Foucault’s early Nietzsche lecture in which he characterised the subject as a system of deformations and perspectives, and as “the point of emergence of the will” (*LWK*, 212). This earlier definition, which implies the element of will, serves as a reminder that subjects have interests that may be conflicting, and that the aspect of power should be included in any analysis of the subject. Foucault argues in the Nietzsche lecture that attempts to erase the distinction between the subject and the object are highly problematic, and he even states that the subject and the object should be kept as far apart as possible. He defines the object as the point of the application of categories, marks and signs (*ibid.*).

However, in his writing from the 1980s Foucault positions his study precisely as an investigation into the ways in which subjects become objects for themselves. The question of whether he constructs a theory of the subject in his late work is slightly misconstrued given

⁸⁸ “d’étudier la constitution du sujet comme objet pour lui-même: la formation des procédures par lesquelles le sujet est amené à s’observer lui-même, à s’analyser, à se déchiffrer, à se reconnaître comme domaine de savoir possible. Il s’agit en somme de l’histoire de la “subjectivité”, si on entend par ce mot la manière dont le sujet fait expérience de lui-même.” (*DEII*.345, 1452)

⁸⁹ Judith Revel defines the concept of subjectivity in a similar way, as the stable point of forming a relationship with the self (Revel 2016, 164). However, it seems to me that this definition characterises the subject, whereas subjectivity refers to the ways in which the subject is experienced and formed.

that his interest is not much in the ontological question “What is the subject?” He is rather asking “How the subject must be” and “What the subject should *do*” to become the subject of a specific type of conduct (*AME*, 459; 461). It is worth noting that he frames Kant’s *Anthropology* in a similar way: in his *Introduction to Kant’s Anthropology* he investigates how the field of experience is managed by means of exercise (see Chapter 1.3.1). He wonders what kind of work subjects carry out on themselves and how, what the objectives of such work are and what makes these efforts meaningful to the subjects (*DEII.304*, 1032; *EST*, 87).

However, one should not confuse the notion of subjectivity—the way of experiencing oneself—with the concept of subjection (*assujettissement*), which Foucault discusses especially in the 1970s. *Subjection* refers to the ways in which subjects are produced, sustained and subjugated by the mechanisms of power (Davidson 2016, 58). In the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault famously defines power as the “name for a strategic situation” in which it is exercised through multiple points that constitute a whole network of differentiations and divisions (*HSI*, 123).⁹⁰ As pointed out, he claims in his works of the 1970s that the subject is produced, scientifically defined and normalised by patterns of thought and codes of behaviour. It is not, then, an entity that one could take for granted, know or find within oneself.⁹¹ In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, for example, Foucault does not conceive of the subject as a unique point at which the will emerges. He claims, instead, that discourses are not open to all and that they form their participants: only those who are able to fit into the subject-position that is available can participate, and one must learn the language and the habits of the discourse in order to adjust to it (*AK*, 50–55; 65; 95). Individual expressions are given new, collective formations in discourses, which is why an expression is never quite the same once it has been uttered (O’Hara 1999, 89). However, Foucault’s point is not that subjects are fully

⁹⁰ Foucault’s analyses of the mechanisms of power have been debated extensively for decades, and it has been repeated, to the point of exhaustion, that for him, power is not about domination or repression, but about producing these relations and their effects. The point is that power is not something that is external to societal relations, it is immanent in them, and movement of the relations presupposes resistance that opposes the movement (*HSI*, 123–124). Foucault points out that he does not formulate a theory of power; his interest is rather in the ways in which the mechanisms of power operate, hence he identifies several forms of power, such as pastoral, disciplinary and sovereign power.

⁹¹ Foucault claims in the introduction to his work in the 1980s that he has always been interested in the question of the subject (*DEII.345*, 1451). It should be noted, however, that Foucault uses the notion of subject in different meanings. In his 1970s texts in particular he defines the subject as someone who is *subject to* various practices. The word “subject” derives from the Latin word *subjectum*, which implies being subordinate to something or someone: people may be “the King’s subjects”, for example. The French word *sujet* means being subject to, prone to or inclined to, as well as being an object. Foucault explains in “The Subject and Power” that the subject means someone who is under control and dependent—the definition implies the presumption of oppressive forms of power (*DEII.306*, 1046). In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* his focus is on discourses and possible subject positions—his perspective is not that of an expressive and reflecting subject (*AK*, 55). The subject Foucault characterises and criticises in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* is that of the anthropological structure of knowledge—such as the doctor-subject I described in Chapter 1.4—the subject who is simultaneously the foundation, the limit and the source of knowledge.

determined, because the movement of the power relations stems from the grassroots—and subjection can be resisted by modifying these relations (Davidson 2016, 58).

Subjection should be distinguished not only from the concept of subjectivity but also from *subjectivation*. Foucault defines subjectivation as *the process* through which one obtains a certain experience of the self (*DEII.354*, 1525).⁹² The distinction between subjection and subjectivation is in line with the division between the analysis of mechanisms of power and the later framework of governmentality—power relations and governmentality should be understood as two different abstractions, and they relate differently to freedom (see Davidson 2016; Revel 2016; Lorenzini 2016).⁹³ Subjectivation implies the ethical aspect of forming a relation with the self and conducting oneself in certain ways: as a concept it does not grasp what the subject *is*, it is a concept for doing and making (Revel 2016, 164). Describing practices of the self among early Christian church fathers, for example, Foucault claims that they are permanently committed to the ongoing task of observing and expressing the truth about themselves (*DEII.312*, 1126).

Moral subjectivation is ensured by means of various practices, and it cannot be distinguished or abstracted from techniques: this is why sets of arts (*tekhnē*) or techniques of the self are central concepts in Foucault's ethics (Davidson 2016, 59). He distinguishes subjectivation from the practices of domination. Simultaneously, he distances his thought from the Althusserian concept of subjectivation, for instance, which encompasses the idea that subjects are encouraged to adopt self-conceptions that motivate them voluntarily to take on tasks that serve pre-existing systems of oppression and behavioural expectations (Honneth 2007, 324). Foucault's concept of subjectivation, in turn, is less suppressive in that it includes the ethical components of reflection and free movement that the subjects implement in their unique ways. He states clearly that techniques of the self enable individuals to influence the kinds of operations to which they submit their bodies, thinking, and ways of being, either by

⁹² One should note that in “The Subject and Power” Foucault organises his earlier works with regard to the concept of subjectivation and does not use the concept consistently in the same meaning: he explains that his objective in his early work was to analyse how subjects become objectified by scientific knowledge; in his middle career he investigated the practices that divide subjects, either by separating out different parts within them or separating the subjects from each other; finally, in his late work he asks how subjects transform themselves by themselves as the objects of their own actions (*DEII.306*, 1042; *DEII.345*, 1451).

⁹³ The distinction between the mechanisms of power and governmentality is not always clear-cut in Foucault's thought, such as when he defines governmentality as “a strategic field of power relations in their mobility, transformability, and reversibility” (*HSe*, 252). However, when he defines governmentality as the intersection of techniques of domination and techniques of the self (Chapter 1.5.1), one should distinguish governmentality from the framework of power. In his last two Collège de France lecture series he explicitly detaches his work from the old conceptual framework of knowledge-power (see Chapter 2.3.1). In the 1970s he insisted that knowledge and power were inseparable, but in the late 1970s and early 1980s he no longer found the framework of power sufficient to explain the personal involvement with techniques and practices of care that imply a whole variety of nuances and tensions between freedom and constraint.

themselves or with the help of others (*DEII.363*, 1604). Judith Revel thus argues that subjectivation as a concept includes the aspect of objectifying oneself, which may involve naming, identifying and categorising oneself, *and* the movement in which the subject modifies and experiments with itself (Revel 2016, 167). I should point out that Foucault investigates different ways (*modes de subjectivation*) in which the objectivation of the self is carried out, none of which is necessary.

If one now focused on the notion of *the self* in this context, one could conclude that the self is characterised as *a relation*, as the relationship the subject has with itself. As pointed out, the type of experience of the self that Foucault articulates is associated with activity, techniques that focus on the self and self-transformation, such as knowing and finding oneself, turning one's eyes towards the self and exercising and preparing the self (*HeS*, 46; 172; 207–208; 466). The self is defined in *Dire vrai sur soi-même* as follows:

the self is nothing less and nothing more than the relation we have with ourselves. [...] That relation is, in any case, always the object, the theme, the base and the aim of a technology, technical conduct and a *technè*. (*DVSS*, 285, my translation)⁹⁴

This is, in fact, a strong philosophical commitment: the self is not a substance, a thing or an object but a relation that implies the aspect of subjectivation, the process in which the subject makes itself an object for itself. Judith Revel sums this up by suggesting that the self is “an effect of the gesture of subjectivation” (Revel 2016, 167).

In making these distinctions between subjectivity, subjection, subjectivation and the self, one could argue that Foucault's ambiguous relationship with phenomenology did not lead him to ignore the first-person perspective of experience. He does not claim, for instance, that the subject is entirely contingent and incapable of political action. His interest lies in ancient ethics, on the grounds that the Greeks did not constitute a theory of the subject who is the foundation of all knowledge, but he does not argue that the first-person perspective does not matter or that it is insignificant in terms of his analysis, on the contrary.

It is true that Foucault's concept of the self is profoundly relational, and he does not aim at grasping the minimal moment of self-awareness (the “minimal self”)⁹⁵, for example. However, the self is not the same as the subject, or subjectivity, the way of experiencing

⁹⁴ “[L]e soi n'est rien de plus, rien de moins que la relation que nous avons à nous-mêmes. [...] Cette relation est en tout cas toujours l'objet, le thème, la base, la cible d'une technologie, d'une conduite technique, d'une *technè*.” (*DVSS*, 285)

⁹⁵ Dan Zahavi's concept *minimal self* has been widely discussed within phenomenology and the phenomenology of psychiatry. It refers to the minimal and formal, experiential sense of the self (Zahavi 2005, 105).

oneself from a certain viewpoint. One could argue further that this viewpoint is affected by various conditions that do not depend merely on the individual. Relations between subjects constitute a specific type of *existential a priori*, but the multiplicity of these relations makes the standpoint unique.

Moreover, in the context of limit-experience, I discussed the aspect of retrospective fictionalisation, the idea that even in cases of unbearable experience the subject sustains the authority of the experience and has the ability to reflect on it afterwards (Chapter 1.5.4). Even though he points out that certain personal experiences can transform the subject in a significant way, the *someone* who reflects on the experience afterwards cannot be completely different, someone else. Foucault does not develop a narrative theory of the self, however: I argued in Chapter 1.1.6 that the point of therapeutic practice is not so much to integrate unconscious contents of experience into a coherent whole, but rather to emphasise the aspect of breaking away from the excessive influence of past occurrences by reflecting on them as contingent and thus putting them into perspective.

What Foucault does explicitly claim is that constituting the self involves techniques and practices. When these techniques are theoretically tied to the concepts of subjectivation and the self, the point is not to study empirically the different procedures subjects went through in antiquity. It is true that for the most part, Foucault investigates different conceptions of the self in the context of ancient philosophy. He argues, for example, that in Plato's *Alcibiades I* the self is equated with the soul, which is detached from the body (*HeS*, 5; *Alc I*, 130e–131a; Chapter 2.2.2). However, Foucault defines the self, albeit very briefly, in *Dire vrai sur soi-même*, referring to our *contemporary selves (nous-mêmes)* (*DVSS*, 285). In this context he compares his study of techniques of the self to Heidegger's analysis of technology.

In the following sections I first explain what Foucault means by “techniques of life”, and then I discuss the connections with and differences between Heidegger's conception of classical *techne* and Foucault's analysis of techniques of the self.

2.1.2 Revisiting Techniques and the Concept of Life

I have argued in this chapter that Foucault understands the self as the relation the subject has with itself, and that techniques of the self are integral to the formation of this relationship. I continue my study on the experience of the self in this section by investigating these techniques. I pointed out in the introduction to Part Two that Foucault's late work has been widely criticised on the grounds of extreme individualism. Interpretations that emphasise artsy

individualism do not really clarify what is meant by the art of existence (*l'art de l'existence, tekhnē tou bion*) and the aesthetics of existence (*esthétique de l'existence*), however.

In his explication of the roles and tasks that were projected onto philosophy in Greek society, Foucault uses the Greek notion *tekhnē tou bion* as equivalent to expressions such as “the process of thinking about existence” (*la procédure réfléchie d'existence*) and “the technique of life” (*la technique de vie*):

[P]hilosophy had more and more been looking for its definition and focus, and set a goal around something that was called *tekhnē tou bion*: a skill [*l'art*], the process of thinking about existence and the technique of life. (*HeS*, 171).⁹⁶

In other words, *tekhnai peri ton bion* refer to arts that modify existence, which implies the ways in which the self is modified. Foucault argues that the techniques of life facilitate the modifying and transforming of life in a reflective and rational way, and in a sense, the arts of life could be understood to encompass biotechniques that constitute different forms of subjectivity and subjectivation (*SV*, 36; 37; 265).⁹⁷ *Tekhnē*, roughly defined, means the systematic assemblage of actions and *bios* is the object of these techniques (*SV*, 36; 253). Foucault argues that the recommendation to take care of the self “was a question of making one’s life into an object for a sort of knowledge, for a *tekhnē*—for an art” (*EST*, 271).

Before discussing the concept of *tekhnē* in more detail, I should explain what Foucault means by life (*bios*) in this context.⁹⁸ He explains in *Subjectivity and Truth* that even if the Greeks were not familiar with the modern notion of subjectivity, the concept of *bios* is quite close to it (*SV*, 255). Giorgio Agamben famously revives the Aristotelian distinction between *bios* and *zōē* in his book *Homo Sacer*, but it is less well-known that Foucault uses the same distinction. Aristotle defines *bios* as cultivated life distinguished from other forms of life, or the bare life, of living creatures (*zōē*) (*SV*, 36; Agamben 1995; *EN*, 1098a5). Foucault uses the word *zēn*

⁹⁶ “[L]a philosophie avait de plus en plus cherché sa définition, son centre de gravité, fixé son objectif autour de quelque chose qui s’appelait la *tekhnē tou bion*, c’est-à-dire: l’art, la procédure réfléchie d’existence, la technique de vie (*HeS*, 171).”

⁹⁷ When Foucault uses the concept *bios* in the Greek context he does not refer to the concept of biopolitics, which he associates with the modern science of biology. He makes a distinction between *biopolitics* and *biopoetics* (*biopoétique*) in *Subjectivity and Truth*. He defines biopolitics as the normalisation of conduct in a population: it is a term for the management of life and everything that conditions and affects it—processes of health, reproduction and birth, death, the body and longevity—by means of measuring techniques (*HST*, 183). On the individual level, biopolitics involves adopting a mode of being as a specimen of a population, someone who has a body that is representative of the species, certain life and health expectancies, a recommended diet, medication and ideal ways of modifying modes of being (*ibid.*). Greek biopoetics, in turn, refers to modifying one’s own life, to ethical conduct on which individual existence is based (*SV*, 37n).

⁹⁸ Foucault defines *bios* in a slightly different way in *The Government of Self and Others* and in *The Courage of Truth*, see Chapter 2.3.4.

(*zōē*) to signify the mere fact of being alive. *Bios*, in turn, may be qualified as good or bad: one can make decisions concerning how it is shaped and carry out actions to modify it. *Bios* is not something to be discovered or revealed by means of conversion, it is the object of techniques it has worked on as an infinite task (*SV*, 256). Foucault characterises *bios* as a relationship with the world—as the ways in which one places oneself in the world, puts one’s own goals and objectives into perspective, and works upon them (*SV*, 255–256).⁹⁹

In its classical meaning the word *tekhne*, in turn, refers to arts, crafts, skills and knowledge (*HeS*, 171; Heidegger 1977, 5; O’Leary 2002, 51). *Tekhnē* is not only a concept that concerns making things or using tools to achieve a certain objective, it is also closely connected to knowledge (*epistēmē*) in the sense of being expert at something or being entirely at home with it (Heidegger 1977, 5). Foucault explains that Plato and the Stoics use the word *tekhne* in the context of medicine, horse-breeding and making shoes, which they grouped together as crafts.

In sum, the word “art” (*tekhne*) mostly refers to *savoir-faire* (*HS2*, 73; 105–106). Even if it implies a wide range of personal choices and actions, the art of existence always presupposes the whole cultural reality (*HeS*, 171; O’Leary 2002, 51). The aim is to develop skills that are needed in life, which implies submitting oneself to processes of modification and examination. The subject has not invented these techniques in isolation, and they are constantly redefined and modified in the community.

2.1.3 Techniques of the Self and “Another Kind of Critical Philosophy”

Explaining the relationship between ethics and politics in his late work in “About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self”, Foucault claims: “one of the main political problems would be nowadays, in the strict sense of the word, the politics of our selves” (*ABHS*, 223). Mark Blasius argues that the reason Foucault’s late work is undeservedly overlooked by political theorists is that the ethics of the self is mistakenly understood as a private matter (Blasius 1993, 198–199). *The Politics of Our Selves* is the title of one of Amy Allen’s main works, but she claims that Foucault does not explicate or develop the idea at length, which is why she leans on other philosophers in her own discussion (Allen 2008, 46).

⁹⁹ “[C]e qui caractérise le *bios* [...] ce n’est donc pas le statut, ce n’est pas l’activité, ce n’est pas ce qu’on fait, ce ne sont même pas les choses qu’on manipule. C’est la forme de rapport qu’on décide d’avoir soi-même avec les choses, la manière dont on se place par rapport à elles, la manière dont on les finalise par rapport à soi.” (*SV*, 255)

In my view, however, Foucault analyses “the politics of ourselves” in all his late lectures. He explains the political dimensions of his study on the techniques of the self in the Howison lectures of 1980 thus:

I mean an analysis that relates to what we are willing to accept in our world, to accept, to refuse, and to change, both in ourselves and in our circumstances. In sum, it is a question searching for *another kind of critical philosophy*. Not a philosophy that seeks to determine the conditions and the limits of our possible knowledge of the *object*, but a critical philosophy that seeks the conditions and the indefinite possibilities of transforming the *subject*, of transforming ourselves. (*ABHS*, 224, italics mine)

In speaking about “another kind of critical philosophy” Foucault is obviously distancing his work from Kant’s investigation of the necessary conditions of possible knowledge, but in the text, he refers explicitly to Heidegger and his essay on technology. These references are brief, and Foucault leaves the task of making the connection mainly to the reader. Nevertheless, he contrasts his own discussion about the techniques of the self with Heidegger’s analysis of classical *tekhnē* (*DVSS*, 285). The main difference between them is that whereas Heidegger investigates the Greek *tekhnē* as a way of gaining knowledge of objects, *Foucault turns the question around and connects techniques with the formation of the subjects* (*ABHS*, 223–224n4).

Moreover, Foucault characterises Heidegger’s analysis as a more philosophical (ontological) study, whereas his own objectives are political (*DVSS*, 285). He explains that the political task is to discover how subjects could change, imagine and create the relationship with themselves in new ways (*ibid.*). Hence, the point is not to accept the current, historical conditions but to change them and simultaneously ourselves (*ABHS*, 224n4).

In *The Use of Pleasure*, Foucault distinguishes four different aspects that are integral to the processes in which one modifies oneself as a moral subject in Greek thought (*HS2*, 33–35; *DEII.338*, 1375–1376). The four-field division is probably the most well-known part of Foucault’s ethics. A comparison with Heidegger’s analysis of *tekhnē* reveals not only the differences but also their striking similarity.

Heidegger uses Aristotle’s notion of four causalities when he contrasts the modern, instrumental conception of technology with the classical Greek *tekhnē*.¹⁰⁰ “Causality”, in this context, does not refer to contemporary, scientific conceptions of causes and effects but to

¹⁰⁰ In Foucauldian terms, one could argue that the modern understanding of technology is embedded in a specific *historical a priori* that Heidegger calls *Enframing* (*Ge-stell*). The assembly of things that constitute what is understood as technology does not comprise or bring about the *Enframing* as such: it is unveiled only in conformity with the work that is done by technology (Heidegger 1977, 9–10). Similarly, I argue above that Foucault’s concept *historical a priori*, a set of rules according to which the objects of knowledge can be perceived in specific ways, becomes apparent only within phenomena, not beyond them.

the process in which things come about as objects that appear (Heidegger 1977, 4–6).¹⁰¹ Aristotle defines *tekhne* as a rational quality and a capability that concerns making (*poiesis*): *tekhne* brings things forth to existence in a way that could also be different (*EN*, 1140a10–15).

According to Heidegger, therefore,

1. Aristotle’s *material cause* means the material of the object, such as the clay of which pottery is made (Heidegger 1977, 2–3).
2. The *formal cause* refers to the shape the material assumes, such as that of a vase.
3. Heidegger defines the *effective cause* as bringing forth or being responsible for making something appear—such as making a vase.
4. The *telos* of a vase refers to the finished product: usually *telos* is understood as the aim, but Heidegger argues more precisely that the *telos* of a vase is realised when the conditions that make a piece of clay a finished product are met.

In the *Use of Pleasure*, Foucault identifies four, apparently very similar aspects that characterise the ways in which one modifies oneself in ethical labour. In other words, his concern is not with how knowledge of the objects is acquired. Instead, he uses the division to analyse the formation of ethical subjectivity, the ways in which subjects understand themselves as “ethical” in a certain cultural context. He describes the four aspects as follows:

First, *determination of the ethical substance* (*détermination de la substance éthique*) refers to the parts of oneself that one understands to be the most important *material* for ethical modification and evaluation (*HS2*, 33). It involves asking if ethical judgments concern feelings, actions, intentions, motivations or desires, for example.

Second, *the mode of subjectivation* (*le mode d’assujettissement*¹⁰²) is the *form* that ethical self-formation takes. In other words, it refers to the ways in which an individual recognises moral obligations and feels obliged to implement them in practice (*HS2*, 34). How one recognises one’s moral obligations creates a link between the moral code and the way in which it takes hold (*ibid.*; *DEIL.338*, 1375–1376). The sense of moral obligation may be connected with a divine law, a tradition, a community, or the aim of acting as a reasonable human being, for

¹⁰¹ Aristotle begins his discussion on four causes in *Metaphysics* by making a distinction between *experience* (*empeiria*) and *tekhne*. He explains that experience is knowledge about individual things and *tekhne* requires knowledge about common principles (*Met*, 981a15–25). If, for example, a doctor only knows common principles but does not have any experience, he is not capable of curing an individual patient. Equally, those who only have experience do not know about causes and why things are as they are. This is why it is necessary to investigate causes, the basic principles (*Met*, 982a5). Even if Aristotle’s concept *empeiria* is translated as experience, “causality” in this context does not refer to contemporary, scientific conceptions of causes and effects but rather to causing something to come about and setting something on its way to arrival (Heidegger 1977, 4–6).

¹⁰² Foucault uses the word *assujettissement* here, which is translated as subjection in the 1970s context. In *The Use of Pleasure*, the word refers to subjectivation, not to submission or repression.

example (*ibid.*). Foucault argues, however, that moral obligation is not recognised as a law, or as a list of permitted or forbidden actions in the classical Greek context, but concerns the ways in which one moderates, controls and reflects upon such actions (*HS2*, 67). He also points out in “On the Genealogy of Ethics” that the mode of subjectivation is a personal choice about accepting a certain type of existence (*EST*, 266).

Third, *elaboration* and *ethical work* refer to all conduct in which one engages when one modifies oneself as a moral subject (*EST*, 267). Ethical work on the self thus implies the techniques that are needed in self-formation (*HS2*, 33–34). Foucault’s point is that people should not be seen as individual agents, but as ethical subjects of their thoughts and actions. There are different ways of conducting oneself morally, such as being “faithful” or “reliable”: if the objective is to become “pure”, for example, one conducts purification rituals, and if it is to be a good citizen, one performs the actions that are connected to citizenship, such as voting or volunteering for the nation (*DEII.338*, 1376).

Fourth, *telos* refers to the aim of the ethical work. Forming oneself as the subject of one’s own moral actions implies choosing the mode of being that corresponds with a broader moral objective, and the question is what one wants to become: free, a master of the self, pure, or perhaps respectful. Working out the ultimate moral objective involves self-observation and testing, improving and modifying the self. Foucault argues further that actions are not “ethical” as singularities because their morality depends on the whole pattern of conduct and the ways in which they relate to each other (*HS2*, 34–35). In his view, singular actions connect and commit people to their other actions, values and rules, and further to the whole mode of being (*HS2*, 35). Heidegger similarly explains in his essay on technology that *telos* should not be understood only as the aim but as the element that unifies the causes (Heidegger 1977, 3).

Deleuze argues in his book on Foucault that these four domains of ethics form folds within the subject, which is how subjectivation—the process of forming oneself both as the object and the subject of moral conduct—takes place (Deleuze 1986, 111). In Deleuze’s view, Foucault expresses interest in Greek ethics because the processes of subjectivation form “a fold of force” within the subject without losing the efficiency of force (Deleuze 1986, 108).¹⁰³

¹⁰³ Davidson makes a distinction between power and *force relations* (*pouvoir* and *puissance*) (Davidson 2011, 28–29). He explains that power is the strategic field and the situation in which the different relations of forces take place. By force, he means the factors that affect the relations. He claims that a “force relation can be immanent in a physical environment, in a social configuration, in a pattern of behavior, in a bodily gesture, in a certain attitude, in a way of life” (*ibid.*). It is worth noting that Heidegger also connects *tekhne* and the analysis of force relations in his *Introduction to Metaphysics*. He argues, in fact, that it is not sufficient to understand *tekhne* merely in the classical sense as a skill of a craftsman. He claims, instead, that in the pre-classical era it meant a continuous way of looking beyond that which happens to be apparent, in that it captures and brings to a halt that which appears in the whole network of relations, in a field of different forces (Heidegger 2000, 18; 169–170). Heidegger argues further that by bringing to a halt something that appears in these relations, *tekhne* can question the justification of the field of perceivable things and the ways in which they are seen—as well as the limits of the

The point of the four-field division of ethics is not then to explain how people are manipulated to govern themselves as moral subjects.

It is worth pointing out, however, that Foucault questions the division as a necessary structure of ethical subjectivity (*DVSS*, 285). He states quite clearly that the analysis involves only the way in which the ethical subject is formed in a specific historical context. The aim in Greek ethics is to form a glorious, unforgettable and harmonious way of being, but one could also imagine other forms of subjectivation that might include self-destructive, harmful or painful features that could just as well be adopted willingly and with devotion. Moreover, the subject forms the relationship with the self in a different way as a political subject than as the subject of love relations, for example (*EST*, 290). This division could nevertheless be used for analysing different aspects of ethical labour regardless of the cultural context.

2.1.4 Political Dimensions of Techniques of the Self

Foucault connects ethical work on the self very closely with freedom: ethical concerns arise when there is no constraint or prohibition. As argued above, freedom cannot be understood here as a property, something one could have, but as something one practises (*HS2*, 76; 91; Nichols 2014, 2). Robert Nichols characterises freedom using Heideggerian vocabulary, as a mode or a style of Being-in-the-world, meaning that it is always situational, a relationship (Nichols 2014, 5–6). The aspect of style in this context reflects the fact that freedom is a certain way of relating to others and modifying the shared world, and thus oneself.

I have thus far not emphasised sufficiently strongly the obvious fact that freedom is essentially a political question: the subject of ethics is a free subject who also governs others. Given that the classical Greek political system was based on inequality, techniques of the self involve disturbing, explicitly exclusive features that need to be addressed.

As Foucault explains in “The Ethics of the Care of the Self as a Practice of Freedom”, the ancient Greeks understood their freedom as practising a way of being (*ēthos*). Moreover, when ethics means practising one’s freedom, the idea of freedom presupposes aspects such as the restriction and deliberation of conduct (*EST*, 286).¹⁰⁴ When associated with *ēthos*, freedom

field (ibid.). Changing the very framing and contextualising things in new ways enables them to be perceived in a new light. Following these ideas from Heidegger, Foucault characterises the *ēthos of genealogy* as “the critical ontology of ourselves as a historico-practical test of limits that we *may go beyond*, and thus as work carried out by ourselves upon ourselves as free beings” (*EST*, 316, italics mine).

¹⁰⁴ The aim of Plato’s ethics is to achieve a permanent state of moderation (*sōphrosynē*), which is characterised as freedom (*HS2*, 76; 91). In this context, freedom is understood as practice that involves the continuous exercise of self-mastery (*enkratēia*) (ibid.). *Enkratēia* means the intense efforts that are needed to sustain a continuous state

simultaneously becomes a question: Greek free men problematized their own individual freedom and “practised their freedom” by making their lives as respectable and as unforgettable as possible (*DEII.356*, 1533; *HeS*, 405; 429). *Ēthos* is close to Greek words that refer to moral character and moral excellence (*ethikē aretē*), and to habits (*ethos*). As Aristotle explains in *Nicomachean Ethics*, moral excellence is a result of a habit, which is why the words are so close to each other (*EN*, 1103a15).

Thus, in Foucault’s understanding *ēthos* is a way of being that implies the aspect of on-going modification, which in turn gives being a visible form: by modifying themselves, free men develop a comprehensive style of existence (*EST*, 286). Foucault uses the word *ēthopoiein* in both *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* and *Dire vrai sur soi-même*: it is a verb for changing and forming the way of being, producing and transforming *ēthos* as the individual’s mode of existence (*HeS*, 227–228; *DVSS*, 122). A person with a beautiful, good *ēthos* has a certain way of being, which appears in his or her way of walking, behaving and facing future situations.

I argued in Chapter 1.1 that Foucault’s conception of style refers to the unique ways in which people respond to situations, and that the style of existence embodies past events one has gone through and their social contexts. In the Greek context, preferable ways of responding to situations are thoroughly reflected upon, philosophically thematised and culturally codified.

Foucault points out in “The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom” that constructing an *ēthos*, a way of being, is entirely a political question. For the Greek, non-slavery was a necessary condition for ethics because a slave cannot practice the ethics of free men (*EST*, 286). Moreover, constituting an *ēthos* includes finding ways of caring for and governing others, because free-born men govern their households, wives, slaves and children (*ibid.*). Their way of being also enables them to occupy positions in the city and in their community: their position could be accepted as rightful if they care for others in a respectable way (*EST*; 287).

Foucault refers to political texts such as Plato’s *Republic* and *Laws* and Aristotle’s *Politics* in *The Use of Pleasure* to support his argument that exercises of the self form the citizen—the political subject—as a free man (*HS2*, 89). Strict self-control is described in these texts as a skill of a good political leader who is capable of using his authority over others (*HS2*, 94). Exercising self-moderation is part of the general education (*paideia*) of those who govern. Plato points out that, in the ideal case, the *polis* and each individual soul are in synchrony, and then

of self-mastery (*HS2*, 74–76). It is described in Plato’s *Laws* as an agonistic struggle that is comparable to victory, which is more impressive than winning an athletic contest (*Laws* 674d; 840c; *HS2*, 75–76).

the whole *polis* can flourish: when the permanent condition of self-moderation is spread throughout all parts of the soul, harmony between the souls and society is achieved (*Rep*, 432a).

However, students of philosophy know that Plato's political views are based on the acceptance of inequality: on the individual level, the permanent state of self-control is achieved by good education, but on the societal level the permanent condition of harmony involves accepting a division of labour according to which everyone focuses only on their own tasks.¹⁰⁵ The continuous struggle for self-mastery (*enkerateia*) and a permanent state of temperance (*sōfrosynē*) are described in the *Republic* as the two distinctive qualities of the few and the best:

[F]or the State, as you will acknowledge, may be justly called master of itself, if the words "temperance" and "self-mastery" truly express the rule of the better part over the worse. Whereas the simple and moderate desires which follow reason, and are under the guidance of mind and true opinion, are to be found only in a few, and those the best born and best educated. (*Rep* 431b–c)

Thus, in Plato's view everyone should simply agree that the better part should always govern the worse part, both in the state and in the soul (*ibid.*).

Coming back to Foucault's quotation about the arts of existence, to which I refer in the introduction to Part Two, I suggest it can be read in a new light. One could argue that in saying "art is something that is specialised or done by experts who are artists" and asking "couldn't everyone's life become a work of art?" Foucault is questioning the authority of the few. Moreover, he shifts focus from Heidegger and his analysis of objects (such as the lamp) to the *subjects* of techniques when he states: "art has become something that is related only to objects and not to individuals or to life" (*EST*, 261). He asks why a certain small and exclusive group of people should define what is included in the arts of life that concern us all.

I have focused in this section on techniques of the self as a political question, even though at first glance dietetic practices, for example, might not seem a political concern at all. Foucault's analysis encourages one to ask to what extent current practices of the self are exclusive and produce social distinctions. My discussion in the following section turns to the ethical and political aspects of dietetics. Foucault shows an interest in the ancient Greek art of health not only because of its exclusiveness, but also because he investigates the principles of dietetic regulation as a basis for everyday conduct that forms also the free, political subject.

¹⁰⁵ "Most truly then may we deem temperance (*sōfrosynē*) to be the agreement of the naturally superior and inferior, as to the right to rule of either, both in states and individuals" (*Rep* 432a).

2.1.5 Ethics and Dietetics—the Distinction between Disciplinary and Ascetic Techniques

Dietetic regulation has a significant theoretical function in Foucault's analysis of Greek ethics. I argue above that the arts of everyday existence are integral to "the certain experience of the self" that Foucault formulates. He defines dietetics in *The Use of Pleasure* as an art of existence and as the regulation of activity that concerns the body and is important for health (HS2, 107; 115; 126–127). I discussed dietetics in *Introduction to Kant's Anthropology* in Chapter 1.3.3 and pointed out that Greek medicine plays a central role in the anthropological discourses of the late German Enlightenment (IKA, 47–49; Mahler 2014, iv).¹⁰⁶ Dietetic regulation is closely connected to the aims of moral perfection and overcoming the current state of the self, as well as to political objectives (Mahler 2014, v). In this sense, there is a connection between Foucault's discussion on dietetics in *The Use of Pleasure* and his lifelong interest in the history of medicine, anthropology and the tradition of Enlightenment.¹⁰⁷

He states on several occasions that the relationship between medicine and ethics was an immense question in antiquity, a much greater concern than sexual relations, for example (DVSS, 270–271; EST, 259; HS2, 127–128; CV, 290–291). According to Greek ethics, evaluation and modification of one's life should comply with an aesthetic criterion that is closer to dietary and medical recommendations than explicit prohibitions or sanctions (DEII.338, 1375–1376). Dietetics refers to the management of one's whole being and involves compensating for and counterbalancing the elements that affect the overall balance of being (ibid.). Foucault argues that none of the actions that concern dietetic regulation are compulsory or prohibited, good or bad as such, but they are evaluated in relation to previous and forthcoming actions (HS2, 120). For example, pleasure is not considered dangerous, but one is encouraged to establish an art (*savoir-faire, tekhnē*), a practice of controlling its use (*chrēsis*) (HS2, 67).

Foucault distinguishes dietetics from medical therapeutics: they both concern health, but the former involves moderating and managing one's health by engaging in activities, assessing and producing favourable conditions for taking care of one's body, whereas the latter involves

¹⁰⁶ On Greek medicine, see Phillips 1973; Jouanna (et al.) 2012.

¹⁰⁷ Greek medicine also has a central role in Nietzsche's philosophy, and thus in Foucault's genealogy. Foucault explains the central role of the body in Nietzsche's philosophy "Nietzsche, genealogy, history": in his view philosophers should have the skills of a doctor, and their task is to diagnose the weakness of the body (DEI.84, 1010–1011). The body is understood as the locus that attempts to keep the "I" together, but it also manifests the past, which can be "badly digested" and inscribed in the nervous system (ibid.). The idea is not only that the past has a corroding influence on the body but also that the body fights back.

intervention and curing (*HS2*, 112). It might be easier, however, to understand the relationship between ethics and dietary recommendations if one was familiar with the basic principles of humoral pathology, and if one read Foucault and Plato alongside each other.¹⁰⁸

Plato believed that a good life was closely related to a healthy organism, because the harmonious, ethical, healthy, beautiful and righteous individual is one and the same (McDonough)¹⁰⁹. He discusses the origin of disease in *Timaeus* as if it was the most obvious thing: different bodily states are caused by an imbalance of the four elements—earth, fire, water and air—and the bodily fluids that are aligned with them (*Timaeus*, 82a). If someone falls ill it is attributable to too much or too little moisture, dryness, heat or coldness in inadequate proportions, in the wrong places in the body or at the wrong time in terms of the seasons. Everything in the changing environment and everything that enters the body through the senses affects its balance. Thus, treating a disease in Greek medicine involved balancing the bodily liquids by different means: purgatives or laxatives, bloodletting, sweating and regulating the diet.

Most significantly, Plato connects bodily illness and diseases of the soul to the questions of education and morality: a balanced state between the body and the soul causes virtue, whereas asymmetry causes sickness and vice (*Timaeus*, 87d). He makes a distinction between sickness of the body and illness of the soul, madness (*mania*) and ignorance (*amathia*), but he also claims that diseases of the soul are caused by diseases of the body (*Timaeus*, 86b). An imbalanced state of the soul should be understood an illness, but the person is not bad (*kakos*) of his own will—the imbalance is attributable to unskilled nurturing and inadequate education (*Timaeus*, 86d–e).

Foucault explains how the dietetic practices in Greek medicine cover every possible instance of life from waking up, living through the day and going to bed again: the proportions of food and drink, sexual behaviour and sleep are measured in relation to the seasons, age, the climate, other activities and the current condition of the body (*HS2*, 115–116). Questions of food, for example, revolve around qualities (humidity, dryness etc.), the seasons, the climate and how to choose and when, but not around how to cook (*EST*, 259).

This emphasis on regulation raises the question of how one should understand the relationship between control and the willingness to participate in processes in which the right timings and proportions are learned. Some commentators equate dietetic practices with

¹⁰⁸ Foucault discusses the long tradition of humoral pathology also in *The Birth of the Clinic*, arguing that it did not refer to normality or seek deviations from the regular functioning of organisms (*BC*, 35).

¹⁰⁹ McDonough Richard. “Plato: Organicism” in the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. <http://www.iep.utm.edu/platoorg/> (cited Jan 16, 2018).

techniques of subjection and disciplinary power. Mahler, for example, argues that the roots of dietetics lie in modern social hygiene, and that dietetics individualises the body and imposes “a constant imperative on the self to lead a healthier existence” (Mahler 2014, iv; 6). Sebastian Harrer, in turn, observes that dietary practices and disciplinary techniques are organised in a similar way (Harrer 2005, 88). As Foucault explains in *Discipline and Punish*, discipline involves decomposing activities and spaces into smaller, functional units and organising individual exercises in a timetable (*SP*, 173, Harrer 2005, 80). Harrer points out that also routines of dietetic regulation are broken down into different elements and smaller units that are proportioned and exercised according to the right timing and in appropriate measures (*ibid.*). Moreover, both disciplinary practices and dietetics involve internalising the virtual gaze of the other—a Panopticon guard or a mentor.

It should be pointed out, however, that despite these resemblances, Foucault does not follow the conceptual framework of disciplinary power in the last three volumes of *The History of Sexuality*—the connections between medicine, politics and ethics should be sought elsewhere. One could actually identify both restrictive and transformative aspects of dietetics: the cultural codes and personal ways of implementing them intersect in dietary practices. Foucault frames his study within “the field of experience” on the grounds that ethical conduct, governing and knowledge formation are all aspects that should be included in the analysis (not only knowledge and governing).

Foucault admits in *Dire vrai sur soi-même* that it can be difficult in practice to recognise the differences between disciplinary and ascetic techniques, but he makes a clear distinction between them (*DVSS*, 119–122; 162). Disciplinary techniques of the self refer to the restrictive regulation of conduct by which one acquires abilities and knowledge (*DVSS*, 120). Ascetic techniques of the self, in turn, involve self-transformation (*ibid.*).¹¹⁰

Foucault further reflects on the tension between control and the willingness to receive instructions in the context of the relationship between doctors and patients. Plato makes a distinction between slave doctors and “doctors with dignity” in his political dialogues (*Laws*, 720b–c; *VII Letter*, 330c–d; *HS2*, 121–122).¹¹¹ The relationship between freedom and control

¹¹⁰ He makes a further distinction between ascetic practices that turn towards *reality* and those that turn towards the *truth* (*DVSS*, 121). These two types of practice have different functions. Christian asceticism, for example, involves the processes of changing one’s spirit or soul, but the ultimate objective is to move from one type of reality to another (*ibid.*). Techniques that turn towards reality have a *metanoethical function*. Ancient ascetic techniques of the self, in contrast, turn towards the truth, and they have an *ethicopoetic function* the aim of which is to change one’s way of being so that one can acquire the truth here and now (*ibid.*).

¹¹¹ Plato and Aristotle have quite different views about the doctor’s authority. Aristotle claims that people have the choice of not falling ill if only they comply with the doctor’s prescriptions (*EN*, 1114a). Plato, in contrast, questions the authority of doctors: he argues that their interventions should be avoided because they intervene with natural processes and might even prolong the course of disease (*Rep* 404; *Timaeus*, 89b). In general,

is quite different depending on whether the doctor is a free man or a slave. Slave doctors merely give prescriptions and do not engage in conversation with patients, whereas freeborn doctors gather information about patients and their friends, enter into conversation and instruct, convince and guide them towards the right kind of life (ibid.). It is noteworthy that conversation between free men and doctors is possible because they are educated in the same way: the freeborn patient expects to develop a rational framework for his whole existence in which the doctor participates (*HS2*, 121). Successful dietetic regulation involves submitting oneself willingly to the influence of persuasion (*GSA*, 264). As Plato argues in the *Laws*, for example, results are more effective when patients actively participate in the treatment because they are committed to the whole process of finding a balanced state of health (*Laws*, 720d–e).

Foucault argues on the basis of these remarks on Plato and Greek medicine that the patient, if he is a free man, does not blindly obey and passively adopt everything the doctor says: dietetics is an art (*tekhnē*) that involves individual reflection and deliberation on oneself and one's body (*HS2*, 121–122). Good medicine, then, is not only about intervention, medication and imposing methods of curing.

It is also noteworthy that on several occasions Plato warns against athletic excess and against going overboard with exercise. He claims in the *Republic* that concentrating too much on taking care of one's body is a serious threat to virtue (*Rep*, 407b). In *Timaeus*, too, he argues that if the body is too strong it starts to dominate the soul, which in turn becomes stupid and ignorant, and ignorance is the “greatest of diseases” (*Timaeus*, 88b). The concern is that people who take too much care of their physical condition become hyper-concentrated on themselves. The only way to fight against the worst diseases of the soul is to exercise both the body and the soul, and to keep them healthy and symmetrical by engaging in gymnastics, philosophy, mathematics and art in a balanced, harmonious way (*Timaeus*, 88b–c).¹¹²

Dietetic regulation of one's health is also a political concern because the balance between the body and the soul affects the whole environment of the *polis*. Plato characterises Asclepius, the god of medicine, as “a true statesman” in the *Republic* (*Rep*, 408e). In *Timaeus* he explains that fluids, acidic and saline phlegm and bitter humours, mingle with the soul and cause bad

Plato's political stance on medical care is brutal: only those who are in good health should be cured if they are suffering from a sudden and localised disease, whereas those who do not practise moderation should not be cured or their lives prolonged because they are not useful to the *polis* (*Rep*, 407e).

¹¹² The Greek conception of harmony differs significantly from contemporary conceptions that presume a lack of tension. In Plato's *Symposium*, which Foucault discusses in *The Use of Pleasure*, Doctor Eryximachus gives a speech from the perspective of medicine. He emphasises the aspects of balance and imbalance in health. Harmony is compared to a taut bow or a lyre. Eryximachus argues that the doctor's task is to bring together the extreme opposites of hot and cold, dryness and moisture, by creating love and agreement (*Symp*, 186e). Low and high, fast and slow elements are brought together in musical harmony and take place at the same time (*Symp*, 187a–c).

temper, stupidity, cowardice and forgetfulness, for example, and he argues that if men of the polis are in these imbalanced states, so is the whole political administration and public discourse (*Timaeus*, 87a–b).¹¹³ The view is that regular gymnastics is beneficial for the balance of the city, but excessive training is detrimental to learning and thinking, taking care of household duties and economics, warfare and administration.

In sum, Foucault does not only claim that the ideals of dietetic regulation are rigorous and exhausting, he also explains why such regulation is appealing: it enables subjects to control their own conduct. As he claims in *The Birth of the Clinic*, dietetics as the art of health forges a “privileged relation between medicine and health” that involves “the possibility of being one’s own physician” (BC, 35). Moreover, his main point in *The Use of Pleasure* is that subjects engaged in the dietetic regulation of health are capable of observing themselves with all their knowledge, and of making the right decisions and the best possible choices for themselves in specific situations (HS2, 121; 122–123). Foucault also characterises dietetics as a strategic art the aim of which is to enjoy health (HS2, 156). He reminds his audience that the objective of dietetics is to constitute a harmonious body, which is in accord with the harmonious soul like a musical composition, and subjects who can regulate their own being are compared to a doctor or a statesman who governs the city (HS2, 118; 156).

Thus, one could argue that Foucault’s discussion on ancient Greek medicine is connected not only with ethical labour on the self but also with critical, political questions concerning how to become a political, fully acknowledged subject. Fully acknowledged subjects have privileged access to healthcare: because of their education, they have mastered the art of good health and face “doctors of dignity” as equal partners with whom to discuss and negotiate the right health-improvement measures.

I argued in this chapter that Foucault positions his study as a history of subjectivity in his late work, meaning a history of the ways in which subjects experience themselves. I began my analysis of the “certain experience of the self” by asking how Foucault defines *the self*. Even if it is a common view that he does not formulate a theory of the subject in his historical analysis, it is nevertheless possible to distinguish between the concepts of *subject*, *subjectivity*, *subjection*

¹¹³ “[W]ith men in such an evil [*kakos*] condition, the political administration also is evil, and the speech in the cities, both public and private, is evil” (*Timaeus*, 87a–b).

and *subjectivation* and to specify their meanings. I pointed out the distinction between the subject and the self and claimed that Foucault does not formulate a theory of a coreless subject that is only a flux of contingencies and is incapable of political action. He defines the self as the relation one has with oneself, and his definition of the self includes the aspect of techniques. The subject, in turn, should be understood as the standpoint from which the relation with the self is formed.

Rather than defining what the subject *is*, however, Foucault shows more interest in asking what the subject must do to become a particular kind of subject, such as the subject of ethical conduct. His four-field division of ethics, which distinguishes different aspects of forming moral subjectivity, does not represent a general model of subjectivity that is universal and always valid. Foucault rather uses it for analysing historically delineated “forms of experience” in which subjects can experience themselves as ethical subjects in specific ways.

I claimed in my discussion of the arts of existence (*tekhnē tou biou*) that the word *tekhnē* does not refer to the arts of individual artists: the concept implies the aspects of collective knowledge, know-how and practical skills that are applied in everyday life. I returned to the notion of style I discussed in Chapter 1.1, explaining it as a concept that concerns personal ways of relating to others and carrying oneself through situations and reacting to them.

In the last section of this chapter I focused on dietetics—the theme Foucault also takes up in *Introduction to Kant's Anthropology*—as the basis of Greek ethics. The shared task of medicine and ethics is to prepare the individual so as not simply to react blindly when a certain situation arises: dietetics may not change the course of events straight away, but it helps the subject to respond to situations in the best possible way (HS2, 120). However, techniques of the self cannot be understood only as personal choices to exercise oneself in a certain way: they are also of political concern in that they constitute free subjects who are capable of political action and acknowledged as subjects of health. As I have shown, Foucault connects freedom with self-modification within a community, implying that forming oneself as an ethical subject presupposes a particular type of socio-political space.

2.2 Experience of the Care of the Self and the “Pathologization” of Self-Culture

“This then—the discovery of the natures and conditions of men’s souls—will prove one of the things most useful to that art whose task it is to treat them; and that art is (as I presume we say) the art of politics: is it not so?”

Plato, Laws, 650b

“[J]ust as some sores long for the hands that injure them and delight in being touched, and the foul itch enjoys anything that scratches it. Similarly I assure you that these minds over which desires have spread like evil ulcers, take pleasure in toils and troubles.”

Seneca, Of Peace of Mind, II

2.2.1 Care of the Self as a Form of Experience

Foucault sets out in his investigation of historically delineated “forms of experience”, especially in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* and Parts II, III and IV of *The History of Sexuality*, to capture specific ways in which subjects can perceive, observe and understand themselves. The starting point of the third volume of *The History of Sexuality*, *The Care of the Self*, is that the stricter moral codes in the first two centuries AD did not lead to severe sanctions or lists of forbidden actions but to advice to respect, take care of and pay attention to oneself (*HS3*, 55). The imperative to take care of the self is integral to the Socratic philosophical tradition, and Foucault investigates how different philosophical schools associate these recommendations with sets of concrete exercises—such as writing a journal or meditating—which intensify and deepen the relationship with the self (*HS3*, 57–58; *DEII.363*, 1613). He characterises an intensified relationship with the self as “a new experience of the self” (*EST*, 232–233).

The question I address in this chapter is how this “new experience of the self” should be understood. Certain commentators suggest that Foucault-informed scholars should explicate the intersubjective aspects of “the care of the self” (Fr. *le souci de soi*; Gr. *epimeleia heautou*) and explain how caring relationships could be extended from the self to others (Heyes 2007, 133; Nichols 2014). I will show that care of the self is a profoundly intersubjective and collective

practice, first by treating it as “a form of experience” and second by identifying the similarities and differences between Foucault’s and Heidegger’s notions of care.

Thereafter, I discuss the concrete practices of care of the self, and argue that one of Foucault’s aims is to show how such practices are organised as a kind of science described in medical terms during the first two centuries AD. At the end of the chapter, I consider its objectives and critical functions with a view to facilitating reflection on the troubling as well as the empowering and political features of practices of self-care.

I begin the analysis by making a distinction between two different notions of experience Foucault applies in his discussion on care: “the field of experience” (*champ d’expérience*) and “the form of experience” (*mode d’expérience*). As noted above, in his references to “the field of experience” Foucault insists that aspects such as subjectivation, knowledge and its effects, and forms of governing should be included in the study. I have also explained that “forms of experience” condition the ways in which objects or subjects of knowledge can be perceived.

I have shown in previous chapters that Foucault connects his study on ethics to the analysis of governmentality (the intersection between techniques of the self and techniques of guiding others). He frames the history of care of the self and the study of government of the self by the self in a similar way. In “Subjectivity and Truth”, he defines care of the self in this context as “experience” (*EST*, 88). He does not explain any further what is meant by experience, merely stating that he is investigating “a history of the “care of the self”, understood as experience, and thus also as a technique elaborating and transforming that experience” (*ibid*). However, if one reads the text carefully it is apparent that the care-of-the-self framework enables him to articulate *relations* with others, for example in counselling, pedagogy, spiritual direction or any life guidance.

One could argue that in texts such as *Dire vrai sur soi-même*, *The Care of the Self* and *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* Foucault analyses care of the self as a “form of experience”. In the context of the history of subjectivity this means the historical and cultural conditions that facilitate the perceiving and experiencing of oneself in specific ways. He describes care of the self as follows:

a practice that has its institutions, rules and methods; it is also a form [*mode*] of experience, an individual experience, but it is also a kind of collective experience with its means and forms of expression. In short, I would say that the care of the self is affirmed in experience as a confirmed value; it takes the form of regulated practices; it opens up a field of personal experience and collective expression; and

that is why, I think we can legitimately talk about a “culture of the self” (*DVSS*, 78)¹¹⁴

Hence, care of the self is simultaneously an individual and a collective practice, personally lived through by the subjects but collectively formed (*DVSS*, 78). The different, codified practices of care and self-governance presuppose the whole cultural world, and the techniques always involve others with whom or for whom the exercises are carried out. Foucault explains that the history of hermeneutic labour on the self is not systematised as a set of doctrines, but occurs as “conveyed and diffused through Western culture by multiple channels; it is gradually integrated into the models of experience” (*DVSS*, 29).¹¹⁵ In other words, the attitudes to care-taking that are integrated into personal experiences are not imposed from any one direction that could be easily recognised and specified (*DVSS*, 29; *DEII.363*, 1603). Moreover, recommendations “to know oneself” and “turn towards the self” are diverse in nature, and it is difficult to isolate them as a singular phenomenon. One could, he argues, speak of “a self-culture” when recommendations to take care of the self have institutional support, and when they have been absorbed into general attitudes concerning ways of being and patterns of behaviour (*DVSS*, 29).

Foucault also refers to care of the self “as a technique elaborating and transforming” experience (*EST*, 88). He applies the same theoretical framework in the fourth volume of *The History of Sexuality* as in the two previous parts of the series, and he similarly positions his study as an investigation of

a form of experience—understood at the same time as the mode of being present to the self and as a schema of transforming the self [...] as the form of knowledge (connaissance) and of transforming the self by the self (*HS4*, 50).¹¹⁶

Accordingly, the “form of experience” (*forme d’expérience; mode d’expérience*) is at the same time personal, being present in oneself, and a form of knowledge that concerns self-transformation. Foucault thus describes a whole variety of meditative and physical exercises in his study of

¹¹⁴ “une pratique qui a ses institutions, ses règles, ses méthodes; c’est également un mode d’expérience, d’expérience individuelle, mais c’est aussi une sorte d’expérience collective avec ses moyens et ses formes d’expression. En résumé, je dirais que le souci de soi s’affirme dans l’expérience comme une valeur confirmée, il prend forme des pratiques réglées, il ouvre un champ d’expérience personnelle et d’expression collective; et voilà, pourquoi je crois qu’on peut parler légitimement d’une “culture de soi”.” (*DVSS*, 78)

¹¹⁵ “véhiculée et diffusée à travers la culture occidentale par de très nombreux canaux; elle est peu à peu intégrée aux modèles d’expérience, aux types d’attitude qui étaient proposés aux individus; au point qu’il est souvent difficile de l’isoler et de la séparer de ce que nous croyons être l’expérience spontanée que nous faisons de nous-mêmes” (*DVSS*, 29).

¹¹⁶ “une forme d’expérience—entendue à la fois comme mode de présence à soi et schéma de transformation de soi—[...] comme un mode de connaissance et de transformation de soi par soi” (*HS4*, 50–51).

care of the self, the aim of which is to change the self and prepare subjects for possible occurrences and future circumstances, for poverty and even for facing death.

2.2.2 Culture of the Self and Care as Practical Involvement

I should emphasise that when Foucault investigates the rigorous ethics of care from the perspective of self-relatedness, he consistently refers to culture of the self (*culture de soi*). He even claims that there is no point in writing a history of subjectivation, experience of the self, without a description of self-culture (*HeS*, 172–173). The common translation “cultivation of the self” may be misleading if practices of care are understood as individualistic activities. As explicated above (Chapter 1.5.1), Foucault defines “care” as the ethical and political conduct that modifies the way of being (*ethos*): it involves taking care of the self, taking care of others, letting oneself be taken care of, and the actual practices of care. Care of the self implies a whole variety of relationships, including governing and taking care of others. One could speak of a culture of the self if the following conditions are met (*ibid.*):

- 1) Culture comprises a set of values with a required minimum of exchange, coordination and hierarchy between them.
- 2) Individuals embrace certain practices and norms in order to have access to these values. Moreover, subjects need to commit themselves to these values with their lives, and to make sacrifices to achieve a way of being that is in line with them.
- 3) The values of a culture are presented as universals, even if only some individuals have access to them.
- 4) Achieving the values of a culture involves mastering regular techniques in daily life; the techniques change, they are strengthened, transmitted and taught, and they are always connected to the field of knowledge and conceptual systems.

In sum, Foucault identifies interaction between shared values as a prerequisite of a self-culture and, as shown, he includes concrete exercises and techniques in his definition. Moreover, even if he locates practices of care in specific cultural contexts, the conditions that define a self-culture can be met regardless of the historical era.

He is also very explicit about the exclusiveness of the culture of the self, and on several occasions, he emphasises the aspect of ethical differentiation (*la différenciation éthique*), the production of differences between those who know the codes of care-taking and those who do not. He points out in *The Care of the Self*, for example, that even if care of the self was a social practice in the golden age of self-culture, it meant something real only to a limited

number of people (*HS3*, 59). In *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* he similarly argues thus: “[C]ertain individuals, and only these, could accede to the full and complete status of subject through the practice of the self” (*HSe*, 127). He also states in *The Courage of Truth* that moral discourse is never only about morality, and one should ask from which perspective a way of being is valued and formed, and who can achieve knowledge of it (*CV*, 63).

Foucault makes a distinction between two forms of exclusion. First, one can be marginalised in a society or excluded from a group of people, such as from a religious movement. Second, social and economic forms of exclusion imply unequal possibilities for using time as well as unequal access to the necessary means for carrying out daily activities (*HeS*, 122). In other words, this latter form of exclusion involves unequal possibilities in terms of participating in daily practices. The point is that one should aim at recognising the forms of exclusion even if they are not necessarily manifested in the explicit requirements of inclusion (*HeS*, 116). He explains in “The Subject and Power” that investigating the system of differentiations includes identifying

legal or traditional differences in status and privileges; economic differences in the appropriation of wealth and property; space differences in production processes; linguistic or cultural differences; differences in know-how and skills, etc. (*DEII.306*, 1058).¹¹⁷

The study of care of the self focuses especially on the differences in know-how and skills, but in practice the production and realisation of these differences (economic differences, status and cultural distinctions, access to education) often overlap.

Instead of advocating extreme individualism, Foucault identifies various relationships, both professional and social, that support the self-culture and are necessary for the care of the self.

Nevertheless, he does reflect on the relationship between individualism and self-culture and distinguishes between different conceptions of individualism. First, as he explains, individualism may refer to attitudes implying that individuals are singularities and quite independent of institutions and social groups (*HS3*, 56). Some of the techniques of the self can take individualistic forms in this sense, but it does not mean that they only emerge from cultures in which people are understood as individuals who are independent of others (*DVSS*, 162). Second, individualism could be understood as the general appreciation of private life and domestic activities, including family relationships. Third, it may also reflect

¹¹⁷ “différences juridiques ou traditionnelles de statut et de privilèges; différences économiques dans l’appropriation des richesses et des biens; différences de place dans les processus de production; différences linguistiques ou culturelles; différences dans le savoir-faire et les compétences, etc.” (*DEII.306*, 1058)

recommendations to intensify the relationship with the self, listening to the self and transforming the self (*HS3*, 56). The point of making these distinctions is to show that self-culture may have certain individualistic features but also to question the view that an intense relationship with the self is only valued in cultures in which subjects are understood as independent agents, or that care of the self necessarily includes withdrawal to the domestic field.

In Chapter 1.1 I positioned Foucault's early work on mental disorders as a study on intersubjectivity. In light of Heidegger's influence on Foucault's thought, the analysis of care-taking should also be located within the intersubjective context. I explained above that Heidegger uses the concept Being-in-the-world to characterise the relationality of *Dasein*. He argues in *Being and Time* that Being-in-the-world is best characterised as care (*Sorge*), which as a concept concerns *practical involvement* and ways of encountering things, others and the world in everyday existence. He uses the well-known example of hammering, explaining that using a hammer is a very different way of approaching a hammer than describing it: describing a tool in terms of what it is made of cannot capture the way in which it is used in practice and "at hand" (*Zuhandenheit*).

When the starting point of the analysis is intersubjectivity, care is not a concept that connotes solitary attitudes:

Being-alongside something is concern, because it is defined as a way of Being-in by its basic structure—care. Care does not characterize just existentiality [...]; on the contrary, it embraces the unity of these ways in which Being may be characterized. So neither does "care" stand primarily and exclusively for an isolated attitude for an "I" towards itself. (Heidegger 1978, §41)

The statement that care "does not characterize just existentiality" means simply that one is situated in the world and the self is not, obviously, the only thing one encounters. People do not necessarily pay attention to the multiplicity of things that have already been taken care of or have been subjected to care in the environment, but even if one sees no one, one always presupposes the involvement of others. Robert Nichols' reading of Heidegger stresses the ethical aspect of *Sorge*, meaning that the concept does not mean the same thing as the word "care" when one says that someone "takes care of a child", for instance. It is a concept for pre-ethical, "ontological involvement", which means that before one can make ethical choices one is always already situated in and involved with a world that is meaningful and *matters* in certain ways (Nichols 2014, 170). Nichols further argues that Foucault's discussion of care with his concrete examples realises Heidegger's *Sorge*. As shown above, Foucault's notion of care similarly stresses the aspect of practical engagement.

However, even if Heidegger's definition of care furthers understanding of the intersubjective framework of Foucault's thought, there are significant differences in their respective concepts of care. The most obvious of these is that Foucault's discussion is not ontological, as he investigates explicit statements on the care of the self, and he does not focus on everyday involvement with objects. Moreover, Heidegger makes a distinction between care and scientific observation. As he explains, care, the everyday way of encountering the world, precedes any practical or theoretical focus. The problem is that as a mode of encountering it is easily concealed by the theoretical attitude, because theorising requires orienting towards things in a specific way. He emphasises that the everyday mode of being involved with things is not ignorant or uninformed in any way, even though it involves a different type of knowledge.

Foucault's question is not, however, how objects such as the hammer are faced in the everyday mode of encountering, but rather how subjects form relationships with themselves and with one another. As noted previously, Heidegger emphasises techniques in the context of acquiring knowledge about *objects* in specific ways, whereas Foucault's interest is in techniques as a way of analysing the formation of ethical subjects.

Moreover, whereas Heidegger makes a distinction between scientific observation and care as a mode of encountering, Foucault's main point is to investigate how practices of care of the self become widespread and how they are turned into a science. He writes:

What is meant by these remarks is that the principle of the care of the self became rather general in scope. It also took the form of an attitude, a mode of behavior; it became instilled in ways of living; it evolved into procedures, practices, and formulas that people reflected on, developed, perfected and taught. It thus became to constitute a social practice, giving rise to relationships between individuals, to exchanges and communications, and at times even to institutions. And it gave rise, finally to a certain mode of knowledge and to the elaboration of science. (*CS*, 44–45).

The last sentence implies a similar type of research question than Foucault formulates in *The Birth of the Clinic*. Whereas in his early study he investigates how different ways of perceiving objects of knowledge are turned into scientific language, the question in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* and *The Care of the Self* is how the knowledge and practices that concern the self become described in medical terms.

2.2.3 Foucault's Cartesian Alcibiades: the Soul as the Object of Care

Plato's dialogue *Alcibiades I* functions as the point of comparison for Foucault in his investigation of the Stoics, who describe care of the self by means of medical vocabulary. These two frameworks are understood as two different "forms of experience", and in comparing them Foucault investigates the integration of medical terminology into the recommendations to take care of oneself. He calls this process of integration "medicalisation". Foucault refers to *Alcibiades I* not only in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* but also in his other late lectures, articles, interviews and published works. In *Alcibiades I*, Plato closely connects the care of the self to theoretical knowledge and education, and the object of care is the soul (*psukhe*), not the body. My task in this section is also to comment on the discussion that criticises Foucault's interpretation of the title character's education, and in general the relationship between education and love relations in ancient Greek ethics.

In *Dire vrai sur soi-même*, Foucault differentiates three aspects he finds particularly noteworthy in *Alcibiades I*. First, care of the self is targeted on a specific age group, and it has the pedagogical function of supplementing inadequate education (*DVSS*, 69–70; *HeS*, 74). Second, care of the self is closely connected to politics and to the formation of political subjectivity: self-care only concerns young men who are entering adulthood and are destined to take up the task of governing. In the dialogue, Alcibiades, a young aristocrat and a future leader of Athens, discovers through Socrates' guidance that he does not have the skills and knowledge to govern others because he does not know himself (*Alc I*, 128e; 133e; *HeS*, 45). Taking care of oneself is related to the justice of the *polis*, because when a leader knows himself and the structure of his soul he will also know the structure of society. When Socrates proves himself right and Alcibiades agrees that he must take care of himself, Alcibiades states that by doing so, he will develop right-mindedness (*dikaiosyne*) (*Alc I*, 135e).

Third, Foucault is interested in *Alcibiades I* because Plato connects care of the self to self-knowledge, which he distinguishes from both medicine and exercises that focus on the body (*DVSS*, 68). Socrates advises Alcibiades to work out what the self *is*, and the conclusion is that one must look after the soul (*psukhe*), because the body is not what one truly is (*Alc I*, 130e–131a, 133e; *Phaedo*, 64e; *HeS*, 54–55). One of the arguments is that when people have a conversation, they talk to each other's souls, not to each other's faces (*Alc I*, 130e). Plato argues that one should look at the most precious, noble part of the soul, to thinking and knowing (*to phronein, to eidenai*) (*Alc I*, 130e; *HeS*, 54).¹¹⁸ Moreover, when one looks into the

¹¹⁸ Plato distinguishes self-knowledge from the body, but also from economics because property management is a material concern (*HeS*, 57; *Alc I*, 128d, 131a, c). Physicians, trainers, money-makers, farmers and craftsmen

eyes of the other, one can focus not only on the sight that is the immaterial and most divine aspect of looking, but also on the self that is reflected in the eye of the other (*HeS*, 54, 68; *Alc I*, 133a–c).

This notion of gaze can be contrasted to the notions of gaze in Foucault's earlier work: as noted above, in the *Birth of the Clinic* he discusses the observing gaze of the doctor whereas in *Discipline and Punish* it is the gaze of the guard that is meant to be internalised. However, his interest in his late work is in gaze that is willingly focused on the self in the presence of and with the help of the other (*HeS*, 68; *Alc I*, 133a–c; Luxon 2008, 387).

It is worth pointing out that in *Alcibiades I*, Plato emphasises the aspect of *theoria* which differs clearly from *Timaeus* with its stress on the importance of exercising the body and the soul with the same amount of concern in order to keep them in perfect balance (*Timaeus*, 88b–c; Chapter 2.1.5). This different focus could be attributed to the fact that Plato's analysis of sickness and health in *Timaeus* is based on the scientific, medical explanation that concerns all human beings as living creatures, whereas in *Alcibiades I* he discusses the education of the few.

Foucault contrasts care of the self in *Alcibiades I* with Cartesian doubt, and in some sense, he returns to the themes he takes up in *History of Madness*. As I explain in Chapter 1.2.2, he stresses the aspect of exercise in his reading of Descartes' *First Meditation*. He goes on in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* to argue that Descartes requalifies the ancient notion of knowing yourself (*gnōthi seauton*) (*HeS*, 76). As anachronistic as it sounds, Foucault even claims that there is a "Cartesian moment" in *Alcibiades I* (*ibid.*). The point is that the dialogue creates a climate for rationalism that stresses knowledge of the self as giving access to truth. However, he points out the differences between Descartes' exercise and the ancient notion of care of the self. In Cartesian thinking consciousness is capable of self-evidence without any doubts and the challenge is to evade the trickeries of sensory perception, whereas in ancient spirituality accessing the truth requires self-transformation through engaging in different ascetic exercises, purification, renunciation and so on (*HeS*, 16–17). In other words, care of the self in the latter is the condition for accessing the truth (*ibid.*).

The reader will notice that the student's role in *Alcibiades I* is basically to follow Socrates' guidance, and the young student does not oppose the teacher's claims. The conventional relationships between young men and their mentors, loved ones and lovers, are complex in Plato's dialogues and other sources Foucault uses in *The Use of Pleasure*. His reading of the

are far from knowing themselves and are incapable of governing others because their concrete arts dealing with the material world are instrumental, whereas everything that truly matters takes place in the invisible soul and in between the souls (*Alc I*, 131a–b).

Symposium in particular has been discussed in the context of sexual ethics, and it is not entirely surprising that he has been heavily criticised for emphasising the distinction and difference between active and passive partners.¹¹⁹ James Davidson and T.K. Hubbard, for instance, accuse him of adopting K. J. Dover's (1964) influential reading of the *Symposium*, which does not question the opposition between activity and passivity (Davidson 2001; Hubbard 1998).

It seems to me, however, that instead of simply accepting the active-passive distinction, Foucault focuses on the most problematic relationships that are tinged with anxiousness and are the object of special philosophical concern and worry. His main concern is not with providing a historical description of what love relations were like in ancient Greece. His study should rather be understood as part of a broader philosophical framework in which he investigates changes in recommendations for taking care of oneself and conceptualises the culture of guidance. The reason for Foucault's interest in love matters in ancient Greek philosophy is that they are included in the transformative processes of care. As pointed out above, care of the self is not a matter of passive adaptation but an activity regardless of the different forms it takes (*HeS*, 17).

Daniel O'Hara argues that when Foucault discusses friendship as the highest ethical ideal in the context of classical Greek philosophy, he simultaneously formulates a theory of subjectivity. The starting point of O'Hara's interpretation is that the relationship between a young boy and a mature man creates an asymmetrical relation between the subject and the object. The problem is, however, that young men cannot remain objects if they are going to become respectable figures of the *polis* in a culture that emphasises strength and glory (O'Hara, 1999, 94). In O'Hara's view, Foucault's main point is that the problematic subject-object relationship is negotiated anew through *askēsis*, exercises of everyday life that modify ways of being (O'Hara 1999, 94–95; *Symp*, 222b). In the ideal case, the position of an object is transformed into the status of a respected man and the contradictory aspects of the

¹¹⁹ The loudest opponents of Foucault's reading of the *Symposium* are those who seek to describe sexual relations in an ancient, cultural context. James Davidson finds it disturbing that Foucault associates the active/passive distinction with Greek sexual practices and even calls the division "disgusting" (Davidson 2001). Feminist scholars have also criticised him for leaving female subjects outside of his analysis. See: James Davidson (2001). "Dover, Foucault and Greek Homosexuality: Penetration and the Truth of Sex," *Past & Present*, No. 170; T. K. Hubbard (1998). "Popular Conceptions of Elite Homosexuality in Classical Athens," *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics*, Third Series, Vol. 6, No.1; Amy Richlin (1998). "Foucault's *History of Sexuality*: Useful for Women?" *Rethinking Sexuality. Foucault and Classical Antiquity*. Princeton: Princeton University Press; K. J. Dover (1964). "Eros and Nomos, Plato on Symposium 182a-185c," *Bull. Inst. Classical Studies*, xi, 33-4; David M. Halperin (1990). "Why is Diotima a Woman? Platonic *Eros* and the Figuration of Gender," *Before Sexuality. The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 271-275; Michèle Le Dœuff (1989) on erotico-theoretical transference: *The Philosophical Imaginary* London: The Athlone Press; Berenice A. Carroll (2000). "Diotima," *Women's Political and Social Thought. An Anthology*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press; Ruth Mazo Karras (2000). "Active/Passive, Acts/Passions: Greek and Roman Sexualities," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 105, No. 4, 1250–1265.

relationship are turned into a friendship with oneself and with the other (*HS2*, 247; O'Hara, 1999). He further argues that discourses take shape within the subject as otherness, but through the exercise of reflection the relationship between oneself and that which comes from the outside is formed so that the strangeness within the self becomes accepted even though it never ceases to exist (O'Hara, 1999, 90–91, 94; Deleuze, 1986, 105). In other words, the objective of an educational relationship is to produce this double subjectivity and to transform the otherness within into a friendship with the self (O'Hara 1999, 91).

The problem with O'Hara's interpretation is precisely that it presupposes that Foucault formulates a positive, ahistorical theory of the subject in his reading of the *Symposium*. This would require accepting the asymmetrical relationship as the starting point for a theory of subject-formation. Foucault's reading is, in fact, more ambiguous. He argues at the very beginning of *The Use of Pleasure* that matters of love (*aphrodisia*) imply the asymmetric relationship between the active and the passive partner, but in his interpretation of the *Symposium* he rather makes a distinction between 1) the conventional conception of love based on the division between activity and passivity, and 2) the Socratic-Platonic conception of love that takes place in spiritual guidance (*HS2*, 255–256).

In his discussion on traditional conceptions of love, in fact, Foucault questions the conventional conception of passivity based on the distinction between the lover (*erastēs*) and the loved (*erōmenos*). He shows that the role of the beloved is more complicated than passivity, and being the object of love requires a considerable effort: the beloved one cannot yield too easily or accept too many gifts or tokens of love, and appropriate behaviour includes graceful gestures, gaze that signals dignity, acquaintanceships that show quality, and a way of talking that displays both engagement with serious matters and the ability to have pleasant, casual conversations (*HS2*, 217; 228; 246; 264). In other words, forming the conventional model of love involves a special kind of stylistics that leads to “intellectual and all other excellence” (*Symp* 184d-e; *Symp* 185b; *HS2*, 213).

At the end of *The Use of Pleasure* Foucault turns his attention to the procedure of reversing the problematic subject–object relationship in Plato's *Symposium*, and one could agree that by the end of the dialogue Socrates' students have become active subjects.

Most importantly, however, as Foucault understands the Socratic-Platonic ideal of love it differed radically from conventional games of honour: he claims that Socrates introduces a new character in the love relation—the master—and his truth. The young men in the dialogue are presented as active subjects at the end of the *Symposium*, but they revolve around Socrates, whose wisdom is the object of their love and to whose guidance they aspire. In some sense, therefore, Alcibiades marks a failure in Socratic education. As Foucault points out in *The*

Hermeneutics of the Subject, there is a difference between the Alcibiades who is a promising future leader of Athens and the drunk, adult Alcibiades who crashes the party in the *Symposium* (*HeS*, 169). It is apparent that the Alcibiades of the *Symposium* has not taken care of himself in the way Socrates would have wanted him to do. Instead, he has fallen victim to hubris and has become a democratic leader.

To conclude, one should place Foucault's reading of the *Symposium* in the broader philosophical context of the history of care of the self, self-transformation and guidance. Focusing only on activity and passivity overlooks the main argument, which involves problematising the figure of a spiritual guide who leads others towards the truth. One of the main points is to make a contrast between two "forms of experience": practices of self-care that focus on the soul (*Alcibiades I*) and care of the self that is characterised as medicine (Stoic philosophy), to which I turn next.

2.2.4 Interrogating Philosophy as Therapy and Medicine

I have addressed some aspects of the concrete exercises (*meletai*) of the self that Foucault studies in the context of Stoic philosophy, and in the following I discuss these techniques and their problematic features in more detail. As I state above, in *Alcibiades I* Plato distinguishes care of the self from medicine and practices of dietetics. In *The Hermeneutics of the Subject, The Care of the Self* and *Dire vrai sur soi-même* Foucault contrasts *Alcibiades I* with Stoic philosophy in which care of the self is described in medical terms (*HeS*, 58; *HS3*, 69–73; *DVSS*, 84). He even claims in *Dire vrai sur soi-même* that the Stoics pathologize care of the self: "There is something like a pathologization, a great medicalization of the relation to oneself. And I think that is very important."¹²⁰ (*DVSS*, 84) Anthony Mahler refers to Foucault in his investigation of dietetics as follows:

Criteria of health could be applied to almost any decision and, as Michel Foucault has suggested, dietetics often became a framework for choreographing entire lives. The history of dietetics is thus a history of the penetration of medicine into everyday existence, a history of how various hermeneutics of health have contributed to different forms of human subjectivity. (Mahler 2014, 6)

However, it is rather perplexing that Foucault refers to a great pathologization and medicalization in the context of Stoic thought because he also argues that the long tradition

¹²⁰ "Il y a comme une pathologisation, une grande médicalisation de la relation à soi. Et je crois que c'est très important." (*DVSS*, 84)

of Greek medicine is solidly based on dietetic regulation. One could also question whether *Alcibiades I*, a dialogue with its later additions and whose authenticity is not certain is a valid point of comparison or a good representation of Plato's thought.

How, then, should the claim about pathologization be understood?

Foucault's response is that the Stoics describe the Socratic imperative to care for the self using a wide variety of expressions referring to medicating, therapeutic processes and different physical exercises: in other words, care of the self is associated with healing, medical treatment and therapy rather than with the general, theoretical education of the young (*HeS*, 477; *HS3*, 62). Moreover, recommendations to pay attention to the self extend to all age groups, involve physical exercise and cover the whole spectrum of daily life (*HS3*, 85).¹²¹

Foucault also questions the pathologization of passions. Investigating the connections between philosophy and medical care he refers to Galen (129–199/217 AD), the physician who significantly influenced early Stoic thought. He notes Galen's use of the notion of *pathos* in connection with both bodily disease and the soul's passions: the object of medical care-taking is, apart from intensive concern for the body, the intersection of the body and the soul (*HS3*, 70–71; *HeS*, 94; 477).¹²² Foucault's concern here is that when passions (*pathos*) that obstruct the objective of managing emotions (*apatheia*) are characterised as illnesses they simultaneously become pathological (*HeS*, 94–95). He expresses a similar worry in his lecture series *Abnormal* and in *The Psychiatric Power*, for example, arguing that the door is left open for psychiatrization when instincts that concern everyone are understood as the cause and the source of pathology (*Abnormal*, 132–133; *Psych*, 215; 222). According to Plato, in contrast, passions and desires are completely natural, which is why youngsters should be exposed to situations in which they can learn to control their desires (*Laws* 636c; 647d).

Foucault refers specifically to Epictetus (55–135 AC) and Seneca (4–65 AC) in his investigation into the connections between ethics and medicine. These two Stoics describe care of the self in terms of curing and healing, carrying out amputations and finding blisters and boils, and they portray students of philosophy as people who suffer from aches as if they

¹²¹ One should note that dietetic regulation is also described as a lifelong activity in Plato's *Timaeus*, for example, and that in the *Laches* Socrates stresses the need to take care of the self regardless of age, but at this point Foucault builds up his argument with reference to *Alcibiades I*.

¹²² According to Foucault: "[T]he focus of attention in these practices of the self is the point where the ills of the body and those of the soul can communicate with one another an exchange their distresses: where the bad habits of the soul can entail physical miseries, while the excesses of the body manifest and maintain the failings of the soul. The apprehension is concentrated above all on the crossover point of the agitations and troubles, taking account of the fact that one had best correct the soul if one does not want the body to get the better of it, and rectify the body if one wants to remain completely in control of the self. It is to this point of contact, the weak point of the individual, that the attention one gives to the physical ills, discomforts, and complaints is directed." (*CS*, 56–57)

had dislocated joints (see *Of Peace*, II; *Enchiridion*, §29). The relationship between taking care of the soul and the medical treatment of the body also characterises the role that is given to philosophy, which is compared to a medical operation that comes to the rescue when the disease concerns movements of the mind (*HeS*, 93–96).¹²³ When philosophy is associated with medicine, it involves carefully reflected routines and the forming of relationships with the environment, the body and the self (*HS3*, 122).

As he points out, Epictetus compares his school of philosophy to *iatreion*, a dispensary or a clinic, and describes his students as patients who need other people's, a philosopher's, assistance to cure their imperfections and sicknesses (*HeS*, 96; 320; 477; *HS3*, 71; 73; *DVSS*, 56). Those who wish to engage with philosophy should recognise themselves as sick and needy, imperfect and ignorant, and should understand that the objective of philosophy is to cure illnesses of the soul: students of philosophy should acknowledge and remember that they are not at all well, and no-one should leave a philosophy school feeling pleased and content (*Discourses*, III.23; *HeS*, 96). In Epictetus' view, one should not settle for the impressions one has of oneself but should make every effort to affect them (*Enchiridion* §1; Perälä 2004, 48).

Foucault defines curing (*therapeuein*) and its function in philosophy, as follows:

Therapeuein means, of course, to perform a medical action whose purpose is to cure or to treat. However, *therapeuein* is also the activity of the servant who obeys and serves his master. Finally, *therapeuein* is to worship (*rendre un culte*). Now, *therapeuein heauton* [therapeutics of the self] means at the same time to give medical care to oneself, to be one's own servant, and to devote oneself to oneself. (*HS*, 98)

Hence, the definition of the therapeutics of the self implies a structure that is similar to the concepts of governing and conduct (Chapter 1.5.2): one is at the same time the subject who provides medical care and the object of one's own activity of medicating.

The techniques that Foucault investigates include mental training and visualising, but also concrete exercises (*meletai*) such as listening, speaking and writing. He distinguishes between the different types of exercise Epictetus recommends for self-modification: reflection (*meditatio*), writing (*graphein*) and practical training (*gymnazein*) (*HeS*, 343). *Gymnazein*

¹²³ The Stoics believe it is part of human reasoning to be able to accept or reject appearances and impressions that occur to oneself. Epictetus, for example, argues at the beginning of *Enchiridion* that a tranquil state of mind requires the capability of making a distinction between things that are in one's power (*ef hemin*)—one's own actions and opinions—and things that are not (*oukh ef hemin*) (*Enchiridion*, §1).¹²³ He suggests that one does not have full power over one's body, offices, reputation or property, because such things do not depend entirely on one's own actions. The advice is thus to examine all conceptions and representations that may enter the soul (*entrer dans l'esprit*) but also one's own actions and attitudes and the ways in which one is affected by the representations (*HS3*, 80–81; *HeS*, 209; 261–265; *Enchiridion*, § 1). Aristotle in fact expresses similar lines of thought in *Nicomachean Ethics* (EN, 1114a25–30).

encompasses the practical, codified exercises that require adjusting oneself in different situations but also improvising and testing (*HeS*, 399). Even though the Stoics believe that the body is not entirely in one's power, the purpose of bodily exercise is to strengthen the ability to encounter external occurrences (*Discourses*, II.18; *HeS*, 222). The aim of testing the self is to reveal whether exercises of thought are realised in one's conduct and properly incorporated into one's way of being (*ibid.*).

Epictetus instructs student-patients to exercise in the same way as wrestlers preparing for a competition:

[E]xamine your own nature, if you are able to sustain the character. Do you wish to be a pentathlete or a wrestler? Look at your arms, your thighs, examine your loins. [...] You must either cultivate your own ruling faculty, for external things; you must either exercise your skill on internal things or on external things; that is you must either maintain the position of a philosopher or that of a common person. (*Enchiridion*, §29)

The point of this example is to compare physical exercise with ethical conduct and self-perfection. The right way of conducting oneself lies in one's immediate reaction, which in fact is not a mere reaction because it follows from the truth to which one is committed.

Moreover, wrestling—or ethical conduct—obviously does not depend only on one's own performance, because it involves the others to whose movements one adjusts and reacts (*Discourses*, II.18; *HeS*, 222). Epictetus' athletes-of-life do not prepare themselves in solitude. Wrestlers are familiar with the rules of their sport, but wrestling requires the ability to adjust one's movement to the movement of the other. Similarly, those who participate in the same conversation are familiar with the codes of communication, but the debate may proceed spontaneously in diverse directions (*HeS*, 407–411). Adaptation and application do not take place exclusively between two people, either, in the same way as in the Hegelian dialectic of recognition that presupposes an asymmetric relationship between a master and a bondsman. The comparison between an athletic contest (*agon*) and ethical conduct encompasses the event, the sphere of relationships, the other athletes, the audience, the judges—the whole atmosphere (*HeS*, 213, 307–308). In bringing up this example, Foucault reaffirms that ethics is not about thought experiments or intellectual exercises, it is about responding to others in real-life situations.

Even if Foucault is not always explicit about his normative stance, the reader gets the impression that some exercises are more problematic than others. As I argue in Chapter 2.2.1, he includes the aspect of exclusion in his definition of the culture of the self. It is thus worth

pointing out that some of the exercises reveal the privileged status of those who practice them. When Epictetus compares ethical perfection to the wrestler's physique in the previous quotation he makes a distinction between philosophers and the "common" people.¹²⁴

Similarly, the exercise of poverty, which Foucault describes in *The Care of the Self*, can be included in the category of exclusive practices of the self. One of the meditation techniques (*praemeditatio malorum*) exercises the imagination and prepares the subject for the worst possible misfortunes and sufferings (*DEII.363*, 1620). The exercises of poverty, in turn, consist in living willingly in poverty for a while with the objective of testing coping skills and attitudes. In reality, only a selected few can carry out these exercises. Foucault refers to Plutarch, for example, who describes an exercise in which tables are set and laden with dishes after hard physical exercise, but the food is only looked at and is given to slaves (*HS3*, 75). Such an exercise hardly makes sense to anyone who is suffering from famine.

Foucault also notes how Seneca gives the advice to exercise poverty every month to find out if one is attached to worldly things only because of one's habits, education, common opinions or admiration of others (*HS3*, 76). The instructions include sleeping in an uncomfortable bed, wearing coarse clothes, eating low-quality bread and mixing with the common crowd, because withdrawal requires much less moral strength than participating in festivities (*HS3*, 76–77). As I have shown, the reference group of the instructions in *Introduction to Kant's Anthropology*, and of course in the *Symposium*, is a gentleman's dinner party. Epictetus gives the following advice to those attending parties:

Avoid banquets which are given by strangers and by ignorant persons. But if ever there is occasion to join in them, let your attention be carefully fixed, that you slip not into the manners of the vulgar (the uninstructed). For you must know, that if your companion be impure, he also who keeps company with him must become impure, though he should happen to be pure. Take (apply) the things which relate to the body as far as the bare use, as food, drink, clothing, house, and slaves: but exclude every thing which is for show or luxury. (*Enchiridion*, § 33)

The point is that when participating in festivities as an exercise, one should appear similar to others, but one does everything in a different way because one never indulges in luxury (*HS3*, 77). The conclusion these Stoics reach is that it cannot be so painful to be poor, after all (*ibid.*). The assumption is, however, that the experiment is not a continuous state but an exception after which one can return to life that is wealthy and comfortable.

¹²⁴ Foucault notes that theoretical reflection, physical comportment and ways of reacting to events in life tend to be part of the same *habitus* in Diogenes Laertius' *Lives of Philosophers* (*GSA*, 310). The book contains anecdotes of famous and privileged free men, including descriptions of the philosophers' physical appearance and their ways of being.

2.2.5 Objectives of the Care of the Self: Ethical Equipment and Appropriation

Sara Ahmed argues in a contemporary context that care of the self can radically alter not just one's own relationship with oneself but also one's political and everyday environments. She characterises care of the self as an initiative for forming new communities:

Self-care: that can be an act of political warfare [...] self-care is about the creation of community, fragile communities, assembled out of the experiences of being shattered. We reassemble ourselves through the ordinary, everyday and often painstaking work of looking after ourselves; looking after each other. This is why when we have to insist, I matter, we matter, we are transforming what matters. (Ahmed 2014)¹²⁵

As Ahmed points out, new types of community should be based on caring relationships that acknowledge the fragility of all those who wish to join them.

In the following I consider in more detail the objectives of ancient care-taking practices and distinguish their different functions so as to recognise not only their problematic but also their valuable features. I argue that the objective of Foucault's analysis of self-care is not merely to claim that one incorporates instructions and teachings into one's everyday conduct. He also identifies several different functions of care of the self, including the critical and the political.

Foucault characterises the Stoic experience of care of the self as an attempt to discover what they should do with their freedom. The ultimate aim of their activities is to form the type of relationship with the self that fosters a permanent state of tranquillity, a state that requires the development of a permanent predisposition to respond to unexpected situations in life in the best possible way. In other words, the goal of the repetition of practices (*askēsis*) is to create equipment (Gr. *paraskenē*, Lat. *instructio*) for daily life so that everything that is learned is internalised and at hand (*sous la main*) in every situation (*HeS*, 306; 310–311; 349; *DEII.329*, 1238). When Epictetus compares ethical self-formation to athletic contests (*agon*) and portrays athletes and wrestlers as people with whom one should ideally identify, he describes the creation of equipment (*Discourses*: I.4; I.24; 1.29; III.15; IV.4). Foucault also takes examples from Marcus Aurelius and Plutarch, who compare equipment with the surgeon's kit, an aid or

¹²⁵ Ahmed, Sara (2014): "Selfcare as Warfare" in <https://feministkilljoys.com/2014/08/25/selfcare-as-warfare/> (Last cited 13.3.2018.)

a remedy (*logos-pharmakón*) and argue that one should prepare oneself with medical knowledge and skills so that one could be a specialist of one's own health (*HS3*, 122; *HeS*, 310; 480).

On the theoretical level, Foucault's discussion on equipment could be interpreted as another reference to Heidegger, who closely connects care as a mode of encountering to the concept of equipment. He defines equipment as "those entities which we encounter in concern [care]" (Heidegger 1978, §15).¹²⁶ Equipment is not a single entity, it is a totality comprising different items that imply a variety of actions and specific ways of carrying them out (*ibid.*). In other words, one piece of equipment refers to the whole arrangement of things. He also explains that even if one uses equipment as something that is as at hand, it already directs attention to something other than itself.

Constituting equipment—the predisposition to respond to situations—could be understood in a similar way in Foucault's analysis of care of the self: neither appropriate reactions nor right decisions are understood only as singular deeds, because they need to be evaluated with regard to the totality of other acts. Moreover, ethical equipment is not an end in itself, but a way of achieving higher ends such as tranquillity, wisdom or purity.

However, as mentioned, practices of care-taking cannot be understood as free play invented by the individual. Does it not seem, in fact, that before taking up exercise one has already learned and has been persuaded that it is somehow useful and good for one? For example, Epictetus gives explicit advice to remain silent if one is a beginner in philosophy: he explains that one should not "vomit forth" everything that one has learned as if one were suffering from a stomach disease (*Discourses*, III.21). Students of philosophy are sometimes required to remain silent and to listen for years (*HeS*, 324). Moreover, Foucault distinguishes Stoic practices of thought from the contemporary practice of meditation—which he describes as intensifying certain thoughts and letting the rest go—because the objective of Stoic practising (*meletan*) is to become so convinced about a truth that it is immediately at hand whenever needed (*HeS*, 340).

Foucault describes equipment as comprising *logoi*, "true discourses" that do not perhaps prescribe straightforward orders, but which are supported by practical arrangements (*HeS*, 309):

¹²⁶ Heidegger states in *Being and Time*: "To the Being of any equipment there always belongs a totality of equipment, in which it can be this equipment that it is. Equipment is essentially 'something in-order-to...' ['etwas um-zu...']. A totality of equipment constitutes various ways of 'in-order-to', such as serviceability, conduciveness, usability, manipulability. [...] Out of this 'arrangement' emerges, and it is in this that any 'individual' item of equipment shows itself. Before it does so, a totality of equipment has already been discovered." (Heidegger 1978, §15)

They [*logoi*] are persuasive in the sense that they bring about not only conviction, but also the actions themselves. They are inductive schemas of action which, in their inductive value of effectiveness, are such that when present in the head, thoughts, heart, and even body of someone who possesses them, that person will then act as if spontaneously. (*HSe*, 323)

“Inductive schemas of action” could be understood as patterns of conduct that one recognises in one’s everyday environments, and which imply certain norms and values. One could, for example, recognise that people organise their daily lives and carry out concrete actions in pursuit of certain ends such as happiness, health, respect, wealth, harmony, a fit body, envious neighbours, a family, or whatever. These patterns of behaviour further imply that such ends are valuable without the explicit prescription to lose weight, have children, take yoga classes, do drugs or resist them, for example, or signal happiness by communicating positive emotions, but the patterns are implicitly normative. If one conducts oneself without conflicting the implicit values of a culture, actions seem spontaneous even though they require considerable effort, detailed knowledge of the practices and an environment that supports the type of conduct. In a similar way, ethical equipment is built up in an environment that supports specific types of relationship and certain practices of care: for the Stoics this meant writing, making notes, repeating phrases, reading, fasting and following very detailed daily routines.

Foucault also discusses the creation of ethical equipment (*logos bioéthicos*) in his essay “Self Writing”, focusing specifically on notebooks characterised as “books of life” and “guides of conduct” in which people gather together pieces of information from here and there, record dietary details and collect thoughts that may be useful in the future (*EST*, 216–217). The interesting aspect of the notebooks is that the writing exercises are not intended to produce life narratives in the same way as journals are, the aim rather being to constitute the subject as someone who literally digests and incorporates a collection of truth. Foucault refers to Seneca, who compares the written fragments to honey and food that is first gathered, then digested and incorporated into the body, its tissues and blood (*EST*, 213; Revel 2016, 165).¹²⁷ In other words, through the writing exercises the heterogeneous elements become part of the body, and the unified elements form a concrete corpus. The *logoi* are not prescriptions but are rather precepts for circumstances—they are justified by the conviction that they will save one if one is in trouble (*HeS*, 308–309), and one is sufficiently prepared when the significant things that have been said, heard, written down and rewritten have become part of one’s muscles and

¹²⁷ Foucault continues to draw attention to the metaphors of incorporation in the fourth volume of *The History of Sexuality*. He picks out a passage from Clement of Alexandria, who explains that the teachings of Christ first blend with blood and then go through a process of metamorphosis in which logos turns into nourishing milk that is given to a baby (*HIS4*, 46–47).

nerves (*HeS*, 326; 309). The notebooks thus function as tools for reflecting on, embodying and putting into practice everything that has been heard, read and collected in them (*EST*, 209).

However, as Foucault emphasises in *Dire vrai sur soi-même*, the objective is not simply to assimilate the techniques and their discourses into ways of being: the techniques of the self and of knowing oneself are intended to control the ways in which one integrates discourses of truth into oneself and changes oneself because of them (*DVSS*, 124). Exercising, then, is not about blindly adopting truths, it is about testing and contesting oneself and asking to what extent one is the subject of one's ethical convictions (*HeS*, 444). Foucault complains that all too often philosophers are given only two possible ways of approaching knowledge of the self: either by looking for that which is supposedly hidden from the view, by "finding ourselves" (hermeneutics of the subject), or by investigating the structural and transcendental conditions of knowing the truth (critique in the Kantian sense) (*DVSS*, 124). Moreover, those who criticise Foucault either for extreme individualism or for suffocating his subjects with all-encompassing power structures offer only two options: one should either accept that human beings are atomistic individuals or that they are determined by different mechanisms of power.

He argues, however, that one should rather look for a third alternative, the active appropriation of truth. Foucault refers to this approach as gnostic knowledge of the self: *gnomic* (Greek *gnome*) refers to integrating one's will into one's knowledge (*connaissance*) (*DVSS*, 127n6), which involves also a constant test of the truth (*ibid.*).¹²⁸ In his view, one of the objectives of the exercises is to "make the truth one's own" (*facere suum, faire sienne la vérité*) (*HeS*, 444). The point is that subjects modify themselves according to the truth to which they are committed and of which they want to be worthy (Han-Pile 2016, 89).

One should, in fact, distinguish between the different functions of care of the self in Foucault's analysis. As pointed out earlier, care of the self has the therapeutic function of healing the soul, bodily imbalances and errors of thought (*DVSS*, 56–57). Second, the function of practices of care is to prepare the subject for a life-long battle facing everyday situations, a battle that is described in terms of contests and warfare. Foucault uses military metaphors because the point is to equip and arm the soul with the truth rather than to discover its structure, for example (*EST*, 102; *HeS*, 481). Third, Foucault argues that care of the self

¹²⁸ In fact, Foucault uses the verb "appropriation" on several occasions (*HeS* 340–341; 350; 444; *DVSS*, 121–122; 124). In his analysis of the *ethicopoetic* function of ascetic techniques, for example, he points out that the capability of having access to truth is not about adopting and accepting certain truths as they are told to one, it is about appropriating them (*DVSS*, 121–122). Similarly, contrasting the Stoic exercise of reflection with Descartes' meditation, he argues that the objective in the latter is to clear out the appearances of sensory perception to proceed to certainty, whereas Stoic exercises aim at investigating them in order to become a subject of truth who appropriates useful thoughts (*HeS*, 340–341; 350).

has a critical function in that the exercises allow one to get rid of the detrimental habits, beliefs and opinions acquired as a result of educational or parenting shortcomings and failures (*HeS*, 476–477). In this sense, the function is to promote unlearning. Finally, Foucault claims in an interview that care serves to manage the space of relationships in a non-authoritarian manner, thereby to facilitate the building up of a city that functions well: care of the self limits and controls the excessive use of power because it implies that one conducts oneself in a good way in one’s relationships with others, and subjects who take care of themselves are difficult to manipulate (*DEII.356*, 1535). Taking proper care of oneself does not thus mean failing to form caring relationships, on the contrary (*DEII.356*, 1533–1534).

In sum, care of the self has a critical function in providing the means of getting rid of beliefs and attitudes adopted in childhood that are no longer appropriate. For these reasons Sara Ahmed, whom I quoted at the beginning of this section, believes that caring relationships could be understood as a radical force. Even though these practices include the art of listening, it is not enough to remain silent. The idea of appropriation might not sound revolutionary to contemporary readers who are familiar with and used to the 21st-century mainstream feminist vocabulary of appropriation, but it is noteworthy that also Foucault refers to the notion in his late work and intends his objectives of change to be gradual and well-informed rather than revolutionary.

I explained at the beginning of this chapter what Foucault means in defining care of the self as “a form of experience”. I argued that in making such a reference he is analysing practices and guidance of self-care as both a personal experience and as a collective phenomenon that is culturally codified (*DEII.356*, 1533–1534). Thus, care of the self should be understood not as an individual endeavour but as a practice that implies a whole variety of relationships and shared forms of knowledge. As Foucault understands the culture of the self, it connotes the interaction of shared values and techniques, and the aspect of exclusion is included in the definition.

Foucault contrasts the approaches to care of the self in Plato’s *Alcibiades I* and in Stoic thinking. It is depicted in Plato’s *Alcibiades I* as an abstract exercise of the soul that takes place under the guidance of a master with the aim of supplementing the inadequate education of young aristocrats who are destined to become leaders of the polis. The Stoics, in turn, describe

care of the self as medicine and therapy. Hence, there is a thematic connection between Foucault's late study on ethics and his early work on therapeutic practices.

Even if Foucault investigates the conditions of culture of the self, he does not simply reject all self-care objectives. He is concerned about the pathologization of emotions, but care-taking practices also serve to help people to disentangle themselves from detrimental beliefs and customs. Care of the self does have healing and medicinal functions, as well as functions such as appropriating the truth and equipping oneself for possible circumstances and future events. Moreover, there is a political function in practices aimed at restricting oppressive forms of power by encouraging people to become subjects engaged in critical action who aim at breaking free from guidance.

2.3 Truth-Telling and Pragmatics of the Self as Two Axes of Experience

A layman will no doubt find it hard to understand how pathological disorders of the body and mind can be eliminated by 'mere' words.

Sigmund Freud, Psychological (or Mental) treatment

2.3.1 A Set of Theoretical Shifts: Truth-Telling and Two Different “Fields of Experience”

Foucault's late lectures investigate the history of specific expressions of truth (*parrhêsia*) and procedures in which truth about oneself is formed. There are two different delineations of “the field of experience” in his investigation of truth-telling. I begin my discussion by explicating both of them, after which I construe Foucault's main arguments in his late lecture courses on the history of truth-telling and in the last volume of *History of Sexuality*.¹²⁹ I focus especially on the aspects of healing and therapeutic practices, with a view to linking his late analysis of truth-telling to his early work on medical, and especially psychiatric knowledge (Chapter 2.3.3). I argue that regardless of the theoretical shifts, the themes of therapeutic practice and health are at the heart of his last two lecture series in which he investigates the use of medical metaphors in Plato's political advice and in Cynic radicalism (Chapters 2.3.4–5). The object of healing in Plato's *Seventh Letter* is not the citizen but the city-state and its leader, and in the opinion of the Cynics the whole of society is mad.

I referred in Chapter 1.5 to the different definitions of “the field of experience” in Foucault's late work. He argues in *The Use of Pleasure* that a philosophical study should investigate the “correlation between domains of knowledge, types of normativity and forms of subjectivity within a culture” (HS2, 10), but in the late lectures this knowledge-power-ethics trinity does not constitute a necessary matrix.¹³⁰

Initially, in texts and lecture courses such as “Structuralism and Poststructuralism”, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* and *Dire vrai sur soi-même* Foucault describes his study as the history of subjectivity, of the ways in which the self can be experienced, and he investigates the

¹²⁹ The late lectures on truth-telling include *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, *Discours et vérité*, *Dire-vrai sur soi-même*, *The Government of Self and Others*, *The Courage of Truth* and *Fearless Speech*.

¹³⁰ Foucault supplements the field of experience with critical expressions of truth in *The Courage of Truth*, and in his analyses of Plato's dialogues he tends to separate four aspects: *êthos*, *politeia*, *alêtheia* and *parrhêsia* (frank truth-telling) (CV, 64). In other words, the field of experience is not necessarily a tripartite structure.

procedures in which the truth about oneself is formed and manifested. He asks why telling the truth about oneself plays a significant role in different practices of guidance, and how these processes constitute subjects (*GV*, 13–15; Lorenzini 2016, 67). Therapeutic practices and different communities of guidance, for example, are based on practices of truth-telling. When Foucault investigates the history of confession in *On the Government of the Living*, he explains that the study deals with “alethurgic procedures” (*GV*, 8), alethurgy here meaning verbal and non-verbal expressions of truth that are tied to concrete procedures and rituals (*ibid.*). The fourth volume of *The History of Sexuality* is also positioned as an investigation into the history of experiences of the self, and he asks what made it possible to introduce practices in which sinners are obliged to tell the truth about themselves in confession (*HS4*, 99). In these cases, procedures of truth-telling are understood as more-or-less institutionalised practices.

However, Foucault frames “the field of experience” in a new way in *The Government of Self and Others* and *The Courage of Truth*. At first glance, the new delineation seems to be a variation of the previous knowledge-power-ethics axis, but in fact it implies significant theoretical shifts. It is described in the last two lecture series as “forms of veridiction”, “procedures of governmentality” and “pragmatics of the self” (*GSO*, 5; *CV*, 10). Forms of veridiction refer to processes in which subjects express that which they understand to be the truth. The redefinition also implies that the history of subjectivity, meaning the ways in which subjects perceive themselves and understand their own conduct, is no longer his major concern: it is the pragmatics of the self, meaning the practices of working on life and forming a way of being by means of concrete actions. As pointed out above, he focuses on daily exercises also in the context of Stoic philosophy, but within this second framework he stresses the aspects of critical expression of truth and political intervention, and he investigates the history of the critical attitude (*GSO*; 5; *CV*, 10).

This reorganisation of the field of experience coincides with another distinction that Foucault articulates in his late lectures. He distinguishes two genealogical lines of thought in his own research—and in Western thought in general: “the metaphysics of the soul” and “the aesthetics of existence”. The former focuses on historical, ontological conceptions of the soul and the self, whereas the latter investigates expressions of truth and modes of being as objects of experimenting (*expérience*) and testing (*épreuve*) (*CV*, 149–150).

Foucault explicates this distinction in *The Courage of Truth* in his discussion on the connection between care of the self and truth-telling in Plato’s dialogue *Laches*. In his view, *Alcibiades I* and the *Laches* form two different starting points from which he draws two parallel lines of investigation in his study of care of the self. He argues that care of the self is significantly different in the *Laches* compared to *Alcibiades I* which emphasises the aspect of

knowledge and turning the gaze towards the eye of the other and towards the soul to find the divine truth within oneself. In the *Laches*, the object of investigation and testing is not the soul but the way of living (*bios*), and the objective is to give life a certain form and make words and deeds correspond (*CV*, 148; 310). This is why Foucault refers to the pragmatics of the self in the latter context. In other words, he refers to the pragmatics of the self in the last two lecture courses because the focus of self-care is not on the soul but on life that is modified.

The shift of focus significantly affects the functions assigned to the concepts of *bios* and *tekhne*. As I explain in Chapter 2.1.2, in positioning his work as the history of subjectivity, Foucault is equating *bios* with subjectivity that is modified by techniques, but now he stresses that *bios* is the material and the object of testing and experimenting (*expérience*). This division is not entirely clear-cut, because he emphasises different aspects of *bios* depending on the context, but in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, for example, he makes a distinction between 1) *bios* that is conceptualised, thought, known, measured and mastered by techniques (*tekhne*), and 2) *bios* that is understood as experimenting with ways of being as an open-ended test (*épreuve*) (*HeS*, 466–467). He wonders—without responding to the question—how *bios* can be the object of the subject’s experience and at the same time a place for the subject to experiment with the self. In other words, for him it is a problem that *bios* is, simultaneously, one’s relationship with the world *and* the world in which one experiences and tests oneself.

He then focuses on this latter aspect of life in the last two lecture series: in *The Courage of Truth*, he makes a clear distinction between *psykhē* and *bios*, and in doing so he emphasises concrete, visible or audible forms of expression rather than the internal processes (of reflecting on and justifying one’s own thoughts and actions, for example) through which one’s relationship with the world is formed (*CV*, 148; 310; *EST*, 300). He uses this concept of *bios* in an interview from 1983, explaining that he is interested in the ways in which life is modified as *matière bios*, as “the stuff” that is shaped (*EST*, 260).

It is noteworthy that Foucault refers to *tekhne* almost in a pejorative sense in *The Courage of Truth*, especially in his interpretation of the *Laches* in which he stresses the aspect of examining the way of being. He claims that Socrates refuses to be the type of master who transmits techniques like a schoolteacher:

[Socratic *parhēsia*] will not speak of competence; it will not speak of *tekhne*. It will speak of something else: of the mode of existence, the mode of life. The mode of life appears as the essential, fundamental correlative of the practice of truth-telling. Telling the truth in the realm of the care of men is to question their mode of life, to put this mode of life to the test and define what there is in it that may be ratified and recognized as good and what on the other hand must be rejected. (*CT*, 149)

I argue above that techniques are integral to Foucault's conception of the self (Chapters 2.1.1–2), but when he distinguishes between the metaphysics of the soul and the aesthetics of existence, techniques seem more mechanic and less significant to him.¹³¹

2.3.2 Truth-telling (Parrhēsia) from Politics to Therapeutics

Various narratives could be constructed of Foucault's late lecture courses and different aspects emphasised. The focus in my interpretation is on the topics of medicine, health and therapeutic practices. Foucault dedicates his last lecture courses, as well as other lectures he gave in North America in the 1980s, to the investigation of a specific type of truth-telling (*parrhēsia*) in antiquity. He identifies the conditions for and different ways of using the notion of *parrhēsia*, which can be translated as frankness, fearless speech, truth-telling or all-telling. Foucault's analysis covers a variety of texts from Euripides' plays and Thucydides' depictions of Pericles' speeches to Plato's dialogues, Hellenistic philosophy and the writings of early Christian church fathers. Organising Foucault's study on *parrhēsia* in chronological order makes it easier to trace his main argument, which is that this specific type of truth-telling is initially associated with political activity but is eventually used in the context of therapeutic and confessional practice.

Foucault distinguishes *parrhēsia* from performative or illocutionary speech acts such as “I declare the meeting open” (*GSA*, 60–61). He describes, performative speech acts as inadequate in terms of disrupting discourse because they are effective only if the interlocutors agree that the one who enunciates the words is qualified to do so, and the desired outcomes are known in advance (*ibid.*). In contrast, there is no guarantee that a *parrhēsiastic* speech act will function or result in the desired aim. *Parrhēsia* is a form of truth-telling that leads to uncertainty (*GSA*, 60–61, 63; *FS*, 18). One could also perform the illocutionary speech act “I declare the meeting open” as a ritual, without any personal commitment. The conditions of *parrhēsia*, in turn, include personal commitment, sincerity and an element of risk—it functions as a breaking point, as a caesura of discourse, because one cannot fully predict how expressions of truth are received and what their consequences are.

In *The Government of Self and Others*, Foucault contrasts his analysis of *parrhēsia* with his objectives in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, in which he attempts to find out how the status of

¹³¹ It should be noted, however, that in *The Government of Self and Others* Foucault draws attention to the distinction between a genuine or authentic technique (*etimos tekhnē*) and other forms of techniques (*GSO*, 368; 374). He argues that Plato defines philosophy as an authentic technique, whereas techniques of rhetoric, for example, are used as an instrument, which makes it indifferent in terms of the just and the unjust (*ibid.*).

the subject affects the value of utterances (*GSA*, 64). He explains that his aim is not to articulate how the subject's status affects how the statement is received, it is rather to study how sincere expressions of truth affect the ways of being of the subject who utters them (*GSA*, 64). *Parrhēsia* differs from other regimes of truth, such as prophesying or teaching a curriculum, because this specific form of truth-telling is associated with *ēthos*, in other words to well-thought and carefully modified ways of being. In other words, Foucault characterises *parrhēsia* as a free, reflective and well-practised way of connecting and committing oneself to the act of expression and to its unknown consequences (*GSA*, 62–63).

Parrhēsia first occurs in Euripides plays in a democratic context (*GSA*, 69; *CV*, 33–34). As an act it is distinguishable from the mere right to free speech (*isegoria*), but in the democratic context acts of free expression require the status of a citizen. In the Greek political context it could be characterised as a critical expression that is useful to the city-state because it prevents leaders from falling into hubris and it protects citizens from the excessive use of force: truth-telling is practised in front of those who have power.¹³² The notion of *parrhēsia* is evident on multiple occasions in Plato's dialogues: at the end of the *Symposium*, for example, Alcibiades uses *parrhēsia* when he appears at the banquet unexpectedly and speaks out the truth—he has become an active subject and has broken free from the guidance of others (*Symp*, 222c). In the *Republic*, too, rejecting democratic government Plato uses *parrhēsia* in a negative sense when he states that everyone in a democracy says whatever comes into their minds without any control (*Rep*, 561d). However, in his *Laches* the practice of truth-telling is used in conversations among aristocratic men who need Socrates' advice and guidance concerning their souls.

Foucault makes a distinction between political and ethical *parrhēsia*, the point of which is to show that *parrhēsia* was used not only in confessional settings or in different practices of care but also in public spaces, political discussions at the agora and in front of the assembly. Ethical *parrhēsia* is associated with practices in which one turns towards the soul, whereas political *parrhēsia* is acted out in a public space with the aim of affecting political decision-making (*CV*, 67). He discusses truth-telling in public spaces and political arenas especially in

¹³² Foucault draws attention to cases in which political *parrhēsia* is used with negative connotations. As he argues, in political crises it is a question of what kind of expressions are good for the *polis*. He refers to Isocrates (436–338 BC), for example, who criticises those who merely aim at flattering the masses: it is not useful to the *polis* if speakers merely claim to represent common opinions or feelings (*GSA*, 166–167). A further example of bad truth talk is Plutarch's (45–125 BC) *atburglōssas*, a person who speaks without wisdom, control or direction, or in emotional roars devoid of words (*CV*, 12; 36). Plato, in turn, assigns a positive value to *parrhēsia*, although convinced that it cannot occur in a democracy in which anyone can say anything, and he considers it a threat that people can adopt diverse lifestyles (*CV*, 36; *Rep*, 557b). He connects the negative aspects of *parrhēsia* to talking without control and merely disclosing streams of consciousness without reflection or justified argument (*CV*, 12, 36). Foucault's main point in this discussion is that the mere right to free speech (*isegoria*) is not enough for democracy to function (*GSA*, 167–168). The paradox of democracy is that it enables the expression of truth, which simultaneously threatens it by establishing differences with a silencing effect (*ibid.*).

his last two lecture series at the Collège de France, in contexts such as resisting a tyrant, confronting an unjust god or questioning customary practices (*GSA*, 56; *CV*, 11; 13–15; 33–85).

Foucault presents the Socratic practice of truth-telling as a form of ethical *parrhesia*, even if it also tends to take place in public spaces. Discussing Plato's *Laches*, he wonders why the interlocutors accept Socrates' interrogation in the first place: it seems peculiar to him that even though they may be prominent political figures or famous war heroes, they are like "happy and consenting victims", active participants in the game who even enjoy Socrates' company (*CV*, 131). In response he suggests that Socrates is portrayed as a technician of care and therapy (*teknikos peri psukhēs therapeian*), who introduces the technique of care (*psukhēs therapeia*) to others (*CV*, 126). Interlocutors in the *Laches* are genuinely seeking help in their troubles and feel obliged to engage in *parrhesiastic* practice. Two of them admit that their own education has been insufficient, that their lives are not as worthy as they could have been, and they want something better for their children (*Laches*, 179c). In admitting their vulnerabilities and submitting their lives to a test they form a community of equals who require a different type of courage than that associated with fighting in wars (Luxon 2008). Foucault remarks, however, that even if the free men in the dialogue are equals in their community, they form a specific type of relationship with Socrates, who examines others, reminds them about the importance of care and, in the end, enables it (*CV*, 135; 142). At the end of the dialogue the participants come to the conclusion that they all need to take care of themselves continuously, throughout their lives, so that their words would be consistent with their deeds: expressions of truth should be in line with one's whole way of being, which in turn reflects the truth to which one is committed (*Laches*, 201b).

Foucault argues in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* and *Dire vrai sur soi-même* that ethical *parrhesia* involves practices of care in which the truth about oneself is told to a friend or a professional guide. *Parrhesia* in fact first appears in Foucault's lectures is his discussion on Stoic writing exercises, and in Seneca's letters care of the self requires a relationship with an emotional connection, a friendship (*DVSS*, 263). The Stoics regard *parrhesia* (Lat. *libertas*) as an advanced, sincere practice of telling the truth about oneself to the other (*HeS*, 347; 371–372). Even if the letters comprise health reports and detailed descriptions of possible disorders and bodily sensations, Foucault distinguishes letter-writing from *hypomnēmata* (the notebooks I discuss in Chapter 2.2.4) because in correspondence one offers oneself to the gaze of the other as if being face-to-face with the other (*EST*, 216–217). Just as *parrhesia* is a codified practice and a discourse that involves a controlling gaze, the practice of truth-telling is a therapeutic process

(*therapeia*) that helps the subject to become a subject of truth who can renew the discourse by personal engagement (*HeS*, 347; 350–351).

Second, Foucault identifies practices of private truth-telling, which involve relationships that do not require the type of emotional connection that friendship entails. I argue above that in Stoic thought the ethical imperative to take care of the self is integrated into medical vocabulary, and its disciples are equated with patients who need guidance. Foucault notes in *Dire vrai sur soi-même* that Epictetus, who compares his philosophical school with a dispensary, and Galen, who is a doctor, refer to a professional relationship when they discuss practices of care and telling the truth about oneself (*DVSS*, 264). Galen, in *The Diagnosis and Treatment of the Affections and Errors*, gives advice for exercises that moderate affections, and one of his instructions is to find a suitable person who could tell frankly the truth about one's condition (Galen 2013, 8K.–9K.).¹³³ The practice of taking care of the self thus requires someone else's judgment. This suitable person does not necessarily need to be a doctor, but he must live a moderate life with excellent dietetic regulation. He must be someone who is mature and reputable—someone with *parrhêsia* (Galen 2013, 9K; *GSA*, 43–44).

Foucault argues that the notion of free truth-telling, which once referred to critical activity, is used in the texts of early Christian church fathers in the context of confession (*CV*, 296–312). In *Les aveux de la chair*, the confessional practices are discussed in the chapter entitled “The formation of new experience”. In general, Foucault uses Christian code-based morality as a point of comparison in his investigation of ancient ethics, arguing that in the Christian tradition, expressing the truth about the self includes the obligation to confess one's innermost secrets, sins and evils of the soul. *Parrhêsia* is used in early Christian practices when communicating with God, but God gradually becomes the truth-teller, the one who possesses the truth, proclaims love, power and even hatred (*CV*, 298–300). The objective of exercise is thus no longer to find the truth within the soul, it is to demolish delusions and seductions so that one does not become their victim. Moreover, *parrhêsia* is connected to obedience: one needs to observe and monitor the self, because no sinful human being is capable of salvation alone—which is why institutionalised practices of confession are needed (*HeS*, 245; *CV*, 305–307).¹³⁴

¹³³ The idea is that errors of the soul derive from false opinions, but one can guard against making errors by turning to a person who has special qualities (*ibid.*; *GSA*, 44). In Galen's words: “If you find a man who does not greet, attend upon or dine with men of power and wealth, a man who follows a disciplined daily regime, you may hope that he speaks the truth. [...] If you find that he is that kind of person, take some opportunity to talk to him in private [...] he will be your savior, even more so than the man who saves you when you have a bodily sickness.” (Galen 2013, 9K)

¹³⁴ Foucault argues in *Aveux de la chair* that confession should not be understood only as a private practice between a priest and a member of the congregation: it can also be a public practice with a specific type of

However, in *Les aveux de la chair* Foucault argues that in early Christian practices of veridiction, it is common to appeal to the medical functions of truth-telling, and not only to obedience (*HS4*, 100). In the medical model of confession, sins are compared with injuries and wounds: they can be healed if one does not hide the illnesses and pains but always discloses them (*HS4*, 101). These metaphors are familiar from the Stoics, who likened sicknesses of the soul to blisters and sores (*Discourses*, II.18; Chapter 2.2.3).

Most significantly, not only does Foucault claim that *parrhêsia* as a specific type of truth-telling is integrated into religious, confessional practices, he also formulates a genealogy of the confessional sciences, psychology and psychiatry, and procedures of care and cure that involve expressing truths about oneself. How, then, should the relationship between Foucault's analysis of ancient practices of truth-telling and his discussions of modern psychiatric practices be understood?

2.3.3 Truth-telling and the Confessional Sciences—Telling the Truth about Oneself

In "Structuralism and Post-structuralism" Foucault connects the theme of truth-telling to his project on the history of subjectivity and his early work on psychiatry. Even though he operates in specific historical contexts, he defines the study as an investigation of "the present field of possible experiences" (*GSA*, 22). He characterises the connections between his earlier work and his later research on truth-telling in terms of the following questions:

How is it that the human subject took itself as the object of possible knowledge? Through what forms of rationality and historical conditions? And, finally, at what price? This is my question: At what price can subjects speak the truth about themselves? At what price can the subjects speak the truth about themselves as mad persons? At the price of constituting the mad person as absolutely the other, paying not only the theoretical price but also an institutional and even an economic price, as determined by the organization of psychiatry. An ensemble of complex, staggered elements where you find that institutional game-playing, class relations, professional conflicts, modalities of knowledge and, finally, a whole history of the subject and of reason are involved. [...] How does the subject speak truthfully about itself? (*AME*, 444)

Foucault's questions are not about how subjects could heal or emancipate themselves in therapeutic processes: the quotation rather implies a profound mistrust concerning the stakes and possible outcomes of expressing the truth about oneself. He is highly aware that if people

dramaturgy that is not only about verbal expressions but concerns the whole comportment of the body and intense actions of penitence that are visibly manifested (*HS4*, 96–97).

proclaimed that they were mad, or homosexuals in a society in which homosexuality is a crime, they cannot know what price they would have to pay for the truth, or if they could carry the cost.

Foucault begins his talk on “Sexuality and Solitude” by describing a scene from the 1840s in which a patient is placed in a cold shower until he admits that his delusions are madness (*EST*, 175). When the patient states that he admits his madness only because he is forced to be in a cold shower, he is given another cold shower, because he is expected to perform a specific act that confirms “I am mad”. Foucault links the shower treatment to his late study on truth-telling on the grounds that truth therapies have existed since antiquity: ancient therapeutic practices also require patients to be sincerely committed to the truth that they express.

He distinguishes different forms of truth in *Psychiatric Power* and stresses the difference between “truth-event” and “truth-demonstration” (*Psych*, 237–238; 246– 247). If one combines “truth-demonstration” as the scientific form of truth with Foucault’s analysis of the transformative techniques of the self, the connection between his discussions on psychiatric practices and his late work on truth-telling becomes clear (Lorenzini 2016). First, truth-event here refers to an archaic form of truth, which Foucault associates with “the medicine of crisis”: truth is understood as a sudden revelation that is comparable to a thunderbolt (*ibid.*). In the medicine of crisis, for example, the role of seizures, or psychotic episodes, is understood as a revelation of truth that is necessary in the process of recovery (*Psych*, 237). This is why a seizure is not perceived in the same way as in modern science as a symptom.

Second, Foucault refers to “truth-demonstration” as the modern, scientific conception of truth that is to be found anywhere in the empirical reality, in the tiniest details of conduct, in the visible and that which is as yet invisible (*Psych*, 246). Truth of this kind can be captured by specific methods. Truth-demonstration implies the idea of universal access to truth, which however requires mastery of the methods and instruments of investigation and of their correct use. It also requires adequate language skills and the ability to categorise objects of knowledge appropriately (*ibid.*). In other words, nobody is qualified to state scientific truths only on the basis of personal characteristics, and few people can access the truth because it requires education, merits and specialisation (*Psych*, 247).

The ascetic techniques discussed in this part of the thesis are connected to the third type of truth, “truth-transformation” (Lorenzini 2016, 64; *Psych*, 238; 247), for which one needs to change oneself and to carry out a series of procedures on oneself (Lorenzini 2016, 64–65; *HeS*, 46–47). Forms of truth that are based on self-transformation are not accessible by empirical

means or observation, which depend on scientific qualification. They can only be accessed by privileged bearers at favourable moments (ibid.).

Daniele Lorenzini characterises the human sciences (psychiatry, psychology and psychoanalysis) as hybrid forms of “truth-demonstration” and “truth-transformation” (Lorenzini 2016, 64–65). These hybrid forms of truth, the confessional sciences, form one of the links between Foucault’s early work and his late study on ancient practices of truth-telling and self-formation. The methods of the confessional sciences are based on truth-demonstration, but they also involve confessional procedures aimed at engaging the subjects in procedures of self-transformation, curing, helping, and in some sense saving them, too (Lorenzini 2016, 72–73). Foucault remarks in his discussion about shower treatment in *Psychiatric Power* that truth is accessed not by means of perception but by the spoken word (*Psych*, 159–160). When human beings are perceived as the objects of scientific truth, the details of their observed appearance, utterances and behaviour respond to the question “What are you in truth?”, but when they are perceived as both the subject and the object of the confessional sciences the question is the more specific “Who are you in truth?”, which engages the subject in the process of forming the truth (Lorenzini 2016, 64; *Psych*, 234).

I argue in Chapter 1.1 that Foucault defends Binswanger’s phenomenological anthropology in his earliest essays because the method is aimed at addressing the question of *who* by investigating patients’ descriptions of their personal experiences. In the context of Foucault’s later work, however, the *who* question cannot be addressed without a critical analysis of the procedures people go through to understand themselves as the subjects of care.

It is characteristic of therapeutic and confessional processes that they are not very successful unless the patients are willing to participate in them and to subject themselves to processes in which they verbalise the truth about themselves: the only way of achieving well-being, happiness or salvation is to repeat the original consent (“I want”) (Lorenzini 2016, 73). It should be pointed out, however, that the truths one expresses, and the procedures in which one participates, are not always imposed from the outside in the same way as in the shower treatment: hence Foucault’s interest in critique as the possibility of not being guided in particular ways (“I no longer want”) and in procedures of truth in which the truth is revealed about oneself (*GV*, 67; Lorenzini 2016, 70).

In sum, Foucault’s notion of the confessional sciences connects his earlier work on psychiatry to his late work on expressions of truth. Expressions of truth cannot be understood simply as obligations or ways of subjecting patients to treatment, because people willingly engage in practices of truth-telling in their search for change.

As I explain above, in the last two Collège de France lecture courses Foucault reorganises his theoretical framework and makes a shift from the history of subjectivity to the history of the pragmatics of the self. The history of the confessional sciences is part of his history of subjectivity, but the new framing emphasises the aspects of practical engagement with communal life and political involvement rather than private or institutionalised exercises. I focus in the following two sections on the pragmatics of the self, which is one of the aspects of the redefined field of experience.

2.3.4 Diagnosing and Healing the City—Intersections of Political and Ethical Truth-telling

Foucault positions his study explicitly as an investigation of “the field of experience” in *The Government of Self and Others*, even though the content of the lectures does not immediately bring to mind the most common conceptions of experience. “The field of experience” here means that forms of truth-telling, the aspect of governing and pragmatics of the self are included in the study (*GSO*, 5). Foucault’s lectures on Plato’s *Seventh Letter* are a perfect example of this combination.

As argued above, Foucault makes a distinction between ethical and political truth-telling (*parrhêsia*), but his particular interest is in the intersections and the gradual transformations—the points at which truth-telling is combined with self-care and political activity. Moreover, he acknowledges that his distinction between “the metaphysics of the soul” and “the aesthetics of existence” (Chapter 2.3.1) is Kantian in origin. Most importantly, he claims that Kant aims at *combining* these two perspectives in his political writings:

Kant tried to maintain both things at the same time. He tried to analyze how philosophical truth-telling has two sites simultaneously which are not only compatible, but call on each other: on the other hand, philosophical truth-telling has its place in the public; it also has its place in the Prince’s soul (*GSO*, 292–293).

Thus, one could argue that Foucault is interested in Plato’s *Seventh Letter* because *care of the self is concretely combined with political intervention* in the dialogue, and the letter introduces a mixed form of political and ethical *parrhêsia*.

Continuing his discussion on medicine and care, Foucault investigates the use of medical metaphors in political advice. He argues that the space of truth-telling is no longer the agora in which citizens debate—truth-telling is monopolised by philosophical counselling (*GSO*,

210; 213; 217). It is noteworthy that the object of healing in the *Seventh Letter* is the city and its leader rather than the individual citizen. One might well ask what this healing involves.

As Foucault remarks, even if Plato is a political advisor in the dialogue, a *parrhēsiast* who tells the truth to the tyrant, he gives no instructions as to the kind of governance structures the city should adopt. Instead, the philosopher is compared to a doctor who diagnoses diseases, observes patients, prescribes medicines and speaks frankly if the illness is attributable to unhealthy habits (*GSO*, 263; 266). The philosopher, who embodies the proper practices of care of the self, knows the diseases and their cures, and the task of the truth-teller is to help the patient (the city-state) to restore its health (*GSO*, 321). Plato's counselling in the *Seventh Letter* is based on the analogy between human patients and city-states: they should both be understood as living beings (*VII Letter*, 330d–e). Foucault refers to Plato's role as a political advisor as *diaitētēs*, a juridical term for a person who is consulted outside of court proceedings, an arbitrator (*GSO*, 278). The etymology refers to dietetics—*diaitētēs* is also someone who prescribes a regimen, a diet aimed at balancing the opposing qualities of the humours, such as dryness and humidity, or coldness and heat (*ibid.*).

As noted above (Chapter 2.1.5), a good doctor persuades the patient instead of giving orders. In the same way, the philosopher-advisor gives advice only to those who wish to listen and does not make prescriptions against the patient's will (*VII Letter*, 330c–d). The philosopher's task, then, is to explain why changes need to be made and to design a regime, just like the physician who takes into consideration the patients' whole way of being, not only their sicknesses (*GSO*, 278). Foucault points out that medicine is a form of dialogue, and that the philosopher intervenes when something is wrong such that a sickness needs to be identified (*GSO*, 232–233). The regime should not be changed abruptly, and no force should be involved (*VII Letter*, 331d).

The first point in Plato's diagnosis is that the way of living in Sicily differs too much from the philosopher's regimen, which is ideal for thinking: those who should be governing are incapable of reasoning because instead of practising moderation they party, eat, drink and pursue pleasures excessively (*VII Letter*, 326c–d). Plato associates these bad habits with governmental instability and continual changes of constitution (*politeia*):

[N]o State would remain stable under laws of any kind, if its citizens, while supposing that they ought to spend everywhere to excess, yet believed that they ought to cease from all exertion except feasting and drinkings and the vigorous pursuit of their amours. Of necessity these States never cease changing into tyrannies, oligarchies, and democracies. (*VII Letter*, 326c–d)

To clarify the connection between medicine and political constitution further, Foucault turns to Plato's *V* (non-authentic) letter in which he characterises each *politeia* as a living organism with a voice (*phōnē*) of its own (*V Letter*, 321d–e). He argues that every city should have its own political regime, institutions, constitution and laws (*GSO*, 211; 265–266; 268). When the living organism and its *phōnē* are in balance, the city-state can work together with other states as a harmonious *sumphōnia* (*GSO*, 269).

Foucault refers to different “political experiences” in his discussion about the various forms of constitution, such as democratic experience and oligarchic experience (*GSO*, 216). Plato's point is that it is better to adopt any type of regime and be committed to managing and sustaining it than to change the type of government frequently. The philosopher's task is thus to listen to the *phōnē* through conversations and debates, find the essence and nature of each *politeia*, and counsel the city according to its essence as a truth-teller (*GSO*, 213). If the city speaks through its own voice it flourishes and remains safe, but if it listens to the voice of some other constitution it will be destroyed (*GSO*, 211; *V Letter*, 321d–e).

The second point in Plato's diagnosis is that the city lacks *philia* and *kairos*, friendship and the favourable moment to change the course of events (*ibid.*; *VII Letter*, 332c): it is ill and cannot function as a symphonic whole because the tyrant is set on reducing the whole geographical area to one and the same city, and the different city-states do not form a healthy community of power (*GSO*, 264–265; *VII Letter*, 332c). A balanced community of power, in contrast, requires friendship and reliance: the tyrant needs to trust his allies so that different cities could form a harmonious network and defend each other (*ibid.*).

Besides diagnosing the city-state, Plato's intervention also diagnoses its leader: he should be harmonious (*sumphōnos*) with himself, have a good sense of the state's *phōnē* and live in a way that enables him to control himself, his diet and his desires to perfection (*GSO*, 269; *VII Letter*, 332d). The problem is that the tyrant of Syracuse is not educated properly from early childhood, has not spent his life in the right kind of company, and is only superficially involved with philosophy (*VII Letter*, 330d; 344e).

This is why Foucault asks, how Plato understands the core, “the thing itself” (*to pragma*) of philosophy. In his letter, Plato tells the tyrant of Syracuse that philosophy is not a collection of items of knowledge (*mathēmata*) that is passed by the teacher to the student, who learns the details by heart, adopts some fragments of information or forgets them (*GSO*, 247; *VII Letter*, 341c). Instead, he continues, the tyrant should take care of the internal affairs of Syracuse by taking his own theoretical and moral education seriously: spending time with friends and relatives who seek virtue and engaging in philosophical practice (*GSO*, 272).

Foucault's response to the question, "What is the thing itself of philosophy?" is well in line with his earlier investigation of concrete exercises. Here he claims that the thing itself (*to pragma*) of philosophy are its practices (*pragmata*): they constitute its whole reality (*pan to pragma*) (*GSO*, 238).¹³⁵ Second, philosophy is a practice that should be carried out with others, not in solitude: philosophical practice is a detailed process of differentiating the thing itself from other forms of knowledge (naming, defining, representing or having intellectual knowledge) (*VII Letter*, 343d; *GSO*, 255).¹³⁶ Plato describes this lengthy work as "rubbing" or "friction" (*tribē*), a process of ascending and descending, testing and afflicting the different degrees of knowledge together:

[T]ogether also must be learnt, by complete and long continued study, as I said at the beginning, the true and the false about all that has real being. After much effort, as names, definitions, sights, and other data of sense, are brought into contact and friction one with another, in the course of scrutiny and kindly testing by men who proceed by question and answer without ill will, with a sudden flash there shines forth understanding about every problem, and an intelligence whose efforts reach the furthest limits of human powers. (*VII Letter*, 344b–c)

Foucault understands the friction as exercising and training: Plato is testing the extent to which the tyrant comprehends that philosophy requires considerable effort and full dedication in terms of engaging in practices of care (*GSO*, 251).¹³⁷ Whereas the young future leader of the *polis* in *Alcibiades I* is advised to convert his gaze inwards, towards the soul, the requirement of

¹³⁵ There are, of course, other responses to this question. In the context of Stoic education, Foucault translates *pragma* as "signification" and "a true thing". He argues that *pragma* refers to the philosophical content of teaching, and explains that in Stoic philosophy, good philosophical listening requires a specific kind of attention: it is necessary to look "towards the *pragma*", the signification, at the same time as looking at the self, memorising what one has learned and eventually becoming the subject of truth (*HS*, 351). Giorgio Agamben, in turn, argues in his article "The Thing Itself" (1987) that Plato contrasts both writing and speaking with thinking, but that the main point is to show that using language implies forgetting and presupposing the language itself and its structures. Thus, the knowability and sayability are the thing itself. Agamben goes on to explain that by using language one objectifies things and presupposes a lot about them, but the task of philosophy is to aid the "word with the word" so that one would not simply presuppose the words and the ways in which language is used (1987, 23; 25).

¹³⁶ Plato's argument proceeds by differentiating the thing itself of philosophy from other forms of knowledge—naming, defining, representing and knowing by intellect. He explains that things have names, one can define them, draw a picture and understand them if one has the right view or opinion (*orthē doxa*) of them (*GSO*, 249; *VII Letter*, 342a–e; 344b). The problem is that names, definitions, images and understandings of things are vague, and perceptions and words can be contradictory. Intellectual knowledge that is characterised as *epistēmē* resides in the soul and is the closest to the thing itself—the fifth way of knowing—but the thing itself cannot be achieved unless one is familiar with the four other ways of knowing (*VII Letter*, 343e).

¹³⁷ Foucault's argument does not seem entirely solid: at the same time as claiming that practices are the thing itself of philosophy, he also points out that the fifth degree of knowledge is achieved via the constant practice of rubbing up against the other forms of knowledge (*GSO*, 251). Thus, it is not entirely clear whether the practices are the thing itself or the means with which to approach the thing itself. Plato states, in fact, that the student and the master gradually approach the fifth element of knowing by means of the exercises. If one is willing to accept a more conventional reading, one might suggest that the practices are instrumental and the thing itself refers to the essence or the idea of the thing (*VII Letter*, 343c).

philosophy in the *Seventh Letter* is to make a concrete choice from which there is no return (GSO, 239). The choice involves relentless work in everyday life.

In this context, too, Foucault brings up the exclusive aspects of philosophical practices of care and guidance. Plato explains in the *Seventh Letter* how true philosophers adopt a mode of daily life that enables them to pursue philosophy in the best possible way (*VII Letter*, 340d–e). For many, however, the philosophical path seems impossible, and Foucault claims, once more, that in Plato’s political dialogues, philosophical exercises distinguish not only between good and bad ways of being, but also between good and bad people (*CV*, 135; *Rep* 537b; *Statesman* 308d).

In sum, Foucault argues that philosophy is understood as practice in its very essence in Plato’s *Seventh Letter*. I have focused especially on medical references in Foucault’s reading, and claimed that he is interested in the letter because it combines the aspects of self-care and political intervention: the philosopher gives advice on forming a harmonious, healthy city, and his skills are compared to the arts of a doctor. Foucault points out that the “thing itself” of philosophy can only be approached with the help of the other, who in this case is the philosopher-guide. Even if philosophy involves activity on the self by the self, philosophical practice is passed on by *sunousia*—being-with and living with others (GSO, 248).

2.3.5 Health as the Manifestation of Truth—the Cynics and Foucault’s Genealogy of Critique

Foucault continues his investigation of “the field of experience” in his last lecture series *The Courage of Truth* and examines connections between care of the self and truth-telling in the context of Cynic radicalism. He picks out Diogenes Laertius and Epictetus’ references to Diogenes of Sinope (Diogenes the Dog), who is probably best known for his dog-like behaviour, beggar-like appearance and disrespect for authorities and traditional customs. There is a clear Cynic influence in Epictetus’ thought, even though he criticises some of the practices for being too showy (Ahonen 2014, 110n26). Ideas such as creating equipment, arming oneself with the truth and taking care of oneself like a wrestler stem from the practices of Cynic philosophy. When Epictetus describes athletes-of-life who measure themselves and look at their shoulders, thighs and loins in the mirror, he is referring to Diogenes of Sinope (*Enchiridion*, §29; *CV*, 285).

How, then, should Foucault’s interpretations of Cynic philosophy be understood in relation to his other works, and what conclusions could be made about his last lectures?

He positions his last lectures as a historical study of the critical attitude, as well as an investigation into the roots of the critical tradition and, simultaneously, of his own thought. One does not have to be for or against the Cynics: Foucault describes their teaching as commonplace and trivial (*banal*) with its focus on short, often fictitious anecdotes (*kebreiaia*) and everyday occurrences. Nevertheless, he places several of the themes he discusses in his other texts into a new context in these lectures, which shows his earlier studies in a new light. Thus, I agree with those who argue that Foucault reflects upon his own work from a critical distance in his last lectures (Gros 2009, 155).

As I explain above, Foucault's interest in his late lectures is in texts that form a bridge between the critical attitude and philosophy that focuses on care of the self. The anecdotes about the Cynics and Plato's *Seventh Letter* function as texts that enable him to reflect on the relationship between care of the self and political intervention. The Cynics do not give political advice to heal the Prince's soul in the same way as Plato does in the *Seventh Letter*. Instead of serving the sovereign, Diogenes of Sinope is king in his own, twisted way. According to Diogenes Laertius' well-known anecdote, he asks Alexander the Great to step aside from blocking the sun, and in so doing he plays with the asymmetry between a king and a man in a barrel and questions conventional symbols of power and inequality (*Lives*, IV.2.38; *CV*, 253). He appoints himself true king above worldly kings and equates his beggar-like being with sovereignty.

Discussing the critical attitude of the Cynics, Foucault returns to the themes he takes up in *History of Madness* in the context of Diderot's *Rameau's Nephew* (Chapter 1.2.3). Diderot takes Diogenes seriously as a figure of the Enlightenment, and in *Rameau's Nephew* the philosopher (called *Moi*) advises Nephew to live like Diogenes who has nothing, needs nothing and eats very simply (Diderot 2007, 62–63). The Cynic is contrasted with the Nephew, who is a lazy hedonist and a coward: if the Nephew is a beggar, it is only because he indulges in luxury and makes everyone else pay for it.

However, in Foucault's view these two characters, the Cynic and the Nephew, have a similar role in expressing madness and unreason in society. As I argue in Chapter 1.2.3, Foucault's reading of *Rameau's Nephew* situates madness and unreason on the surface of the individual, in his or her reflected gestures and utterances that manifest the truth about society's condition. Similarly, the role of the Cynic is to show that ordinary lives are mad and mistaken—in fact, everyone is mad in the Cynics' view in that they suffer from false beliefs and questionable customs (Ahonen 2014, 103). The point is that people should change their ways of being and thinking, and they are encouraged to modify the relationship they have with themselves (*CV*, 288–289). Foucault argues that one of the main objectives of Diogenes'

conduct is to show society what it despises and depreciates. By showing that which is considered inappropriate and shameful in society—by means of inappropriate and shameless behaviour—the Cynics aim at making visible the norms and values that are taken for granted (*CV*, 169). That is why the Cynic's life hits a nerve and becomes a scandal (*ibid.*).

When Cynics lead their unconcealed lives, they function like a broken mirror of society and of the philosophical tradition: their conduct mirrors society as distorted, ugly and twisted, and by looking into the broken mirror the tradition has the opportunity to recognise itself and reflect on what it really wants to be (*CV*, 214).

Interestingly, health and truthfulness are closely connected in Foucault's reading of the Cynics: he explains that Epictetus portrays Diogenes of Sinope as a picture of truth because of his impeccable health (*CV*, 284). Committed to working relentlessly on the self to attain unflinching endurance, the Cynic rolls in burning sand in the summer and hugs cold statues during the winter (Ahonen 2014, 110; *CV*, 255–256). Foucault remarks that Epictetus characterises Diogenes as a man of truth, *parrhēsia*, which in this case means that his life is unconcealed (*alēthēs bios*) because the barrel in which he lives hides absolutely nothing (*CV*, 153–154; *FS*, 83). Moreover, Cynics lead a natural and dog-like life (*bios kynikos*) in that they can differentiate between genuine, animal needs and unnecessary customs, opinions and beliefs (*CV*, 233). Thus, Foucault argues that healthy life operates as the manifestation of truth:

Stripped of all vain ornament, of everything that would be, as it were, the equivalent of rhetoric for the body, he appeared at the same time in full, blooming health the very being of the true, rendered visible through the body. This is one of the first ways, the first paths by which the Cynic life must be a manifestation of truth. (*CT*; 310)

Foucault points out that Diogenes does not merely perform health: the point is that the truth takes a visible form in the body, its gestures, expressions, postures, habits and actions, which in turn modify the surrounding environment (*CV*, 159–160).

The objective of the Cynics' physical interventions and manifestations of the truth is, apart from fighting against convention, to bring medicine to others so that they could heal themselves (*CV*, 256–258). It is noteworthy that the Cynic, who became a figure of the Enlightenment in the 18th century, is on a mission to fight for the whole of humanity. Diogenes cannot be described as a gentleman who would sit with Kant and his peers around the dinner table and relax for the sake of mankind: in his words and actions he aims at biting like a dog and fighting in battles like a wrestler or a soldier (*CV*, 166; 256–258; 276–277).

I argue above that Stoic practices of care involve objectives such as unlearning and appropriation. One of the objectives of Socratic education, which is also discussed in Plato's *Laws*, is to create a sense of shame in students, because shame teaches them to moderate and reflect on their own behaviour and thereby discourages them from doing wrong (*Laws*, 649c–d). In Foucault's discussion, however, the Cynics appropriate the use of shame: on the one hand, self-humiliation is a test of persistence and a physical exercise, but on the other hand, humiliation is a way of distancing oneself from others' opinions, which gives the Cynics a sense of power and a sense of having control (*CV*, 261). In other words, the Cynics turn the ethics of honour, respectability and splendour on its head by acting in public in a way that is conventionally shameful (begging, having a bad reputation, living in poverty and being animal-like) (*CV*, 272). Poverty is not just an exercise for them, as it is for the Stoics, it is a permanent state of being: the Cynics are literally stripped of wealth, clothes and housing, and they exclude themselves from traditional status games.

I should point out that in his discussion on the Cynics and their everyday activism Foucault touches on several aspects for which his own philosophy is criticised: extreme individualism, the aesthetization of ethics, a lack of normative justification, the use of irony and blurred boundaries between the private and the public. He also addresses, from a distance, issues that Richard Rorty and Jürgen Habermas criticise in his late work. Foucault is evidently familiar with some of Rorty's comments as he responds to him briefly in "Polemics, Politics and Problematizations", and the debate between Habermas and Foucault has been widely discussed (*DEII.342*, 1413; Dreyfus & Rabinow 1996; Chapter 2.4.4). One should not conclude that Foucault simply uses Cynic philosophy in defending his own views: some aspects of his discussion can be used as counter-arguments to Habermas and Rorty's criticisms, but he frequently presents Cynic views as rather troubling.

Rorty criticises Foucault for turning private objectives such as self-overcoming and self-invention into political goals (Rorty 1992, 331–333). In his view these are bad political objectives because if the whole political system is intent on overcoming itself it would lead to anarchism. He argues that (liberal) societies should be based on certain principles that enable its citizens to do whatever they wish in their private lives. In this sense, he sustains a clear private/public distinction, and complains that Foucault is not explicit enough about his own political and moral principles.

I should emphasise, however, that Foucault's intent in his late work is to show that care of the self is not only a private or domestic concern in philosophical tradition but also a cultural and political matter. I have argued that Plato and the Stoics understand care of the self as a

common concern with ethical and political functions, and the Cynics blur conventional boundaries between the private and the public even more radically. Foucault certainly discusses the private/public distinction in the context of the Cynics, but he also notes that even if they make their own lives public, dedicate themselves to the community and restrain themselves from taking on private obligations, they do not intervene in other people's domestic lives (CV, 233; 287). It is one thing to question current private/public distinctions and it is quite another matter to claim that people should not have any private life or privacy whatsoever.

Habermas, in turn, claims that Foucault gives subjects very inefficient tools (parody and irony) with which to combat normalizing discourses at the same time as suggesting that the mechanisms of power are lurking everywhere behind new masks and different disguises (Habermas 1984b, 106–107). Dreyfus and Rabinow point out that irony, which Foucault uses especially in his essay on Nietzsche from the early 1970s, is a problematic strategy for anyone who takes philosophy seriously (Dreyfus & Rabinow 1996, 113). I have argued, however, that Foucault investigates *parrhēsia* as a sincere and serious practice to which its proponents are committed, and the commitment that interest him involves becoming the subject of one's own truth by means of well-thought-out exercises. The Cynics might laugh and make others laugh for a moment, but the aim of the laughter is to highlight the double standards of society—hypocrisy, inequality and corruption—which are obviously serious matters.

Finally, Rorty criticises Foucault for distinguishing himself from others by struggling endlessly like a “knight of autonomy” who has nothing in common with other human beings (Rorty 1992, 331; 333). It is worth noting, however, that the concept of autonomy does not feature strongly in Foucault's work, and when he discusses continuous struggle in the context of the Cynics he cannot really be accused of defending them. In fact, struggle links back to the question of exclusion. Foucault describes the Cynic way of being not only as healing but also as an open-ended, militant battle that involves making a distinction (*la vie qui fait la différence, diakritikos*) between friends and enemies (CV, 224). Acting like a watchdog or a spy (*kataskopos*) at the forefront of humanity implies the differentiation of friends—those who one should protect—from those one should fight against (ibid.).

The Cynics distinguish their “true life” from the everyday lives of others: true life is profoundly different, another life (*vie autre*), a scandal that is thrown at people's faces (CV, 245; 287–288). True life must be undisguised, unconcealed, pure and free from everything that is exterior to philosophy (CV, 193; 220; 253). In other words, when the Cynics manifest sovereignty and independence from others, they also marginalise themselves because “the common people” cannot live like they do (CV, 235–236; 283; Gros 2009, 324–325).

Paradoxically, their manifestations of truth are completely dependent on people's gaze: Cynics, like watchdogs, keep their eyes fixed on others, but at the same time, they can only realise themselves under the gaze of others (*CV*, 275–276).

In sum, Foucault's analysis of the Cynics continues his critical investigation into the intersections between political involvement, truth-telling and care of the self. The point is not to suggest that one should live like the Cynics but to investigate the historical roots of the critical attitude of the Enlightenment and the tradition that experiments with and questions the limits of our current ways of being.

In this chapter I have explicated the theoretical shifts in Foucault's last two Collège de France lecture series, *The Government of Self and Others* and *The Courage of Truth*. I pointed out that he reframes the field of experience and defines his study as comprising “forms of veridiction”, “the pragmatics of the self” and “the procedures of governmentality”. My specific focus was on the first two axes of experience.

I have organised Foucault's study on truth-telling in chronological order and constructed a narrative in which a specific form of sincere truth-telling (*parrhesia*) initially has a political function, but it gradually becomes integrated into confessional and therapeutic practices. I argued that in dedicating his last lectures to an investigation into the notion of *parrhesia*, Foucault goes back not only to the history of confession, but also to the history of the confessional sciences: psychiatry, psychology and psychoanalysis. The human sciences could thus be characterised as hybrid forms of two different conceptions of truth, “truth-demonstration” and truth that requires self-transformation. Foucault traces the moments at which processes of self-transformation are described in scientific terms or integrated into scientific practices.

I have shown how, in his last two lecture series, Foucault distinguishes between the history of subjectivity (experience of the self) and the history of the pragmatics of the self. In his discussion about the pragmatics of the self he concentrates on practices that do not focus on the soul or on the self, but which aim at modifying and experimenting with life (*bios*) in its concrete and visible forms. In Chapter 2.3.5 I framed Foucault's reading of Plato's *Seventh Letter* in the context of the pragmatics of the self and focused especially on the medical vocabulary he picks out in Plato's political advice. The object of the philosopher's concern in

the letter is the sick city and its political leader. Foucault's particular interest in *The Government of Self and Others* is in forms of truth-telling that combine political intervention and devotion to taking care of the self.

In the last section I argued that Foucault continues to study the connections between truth-telling and care of the self in his late lectures on the Cynics, who express the truth in terms of health, through their resilient bodies. His reading raises the question: What healthy bodies claim to represent? I portrayed the Cynics as figures of the Enlightenment to whom Kant and Diderot also refer. In his last lectures, he discusses several themes that he takes up in other works, for example in *History of Madness* and especially in his discussions of the Stoics. Foucault shows that in the light of Cynic radicalism, Socratic and Stoic practices of the self and manifestations of truth appear rather conservative. Instead of being for or against the Cynics, however, Foucault's last lectures should be understood as a critical, genealogical study of the critical attitude—the critique of critique.

I consider the critical aspects of Foucault's ethics in more detail in the next chapter, arguing that his concepts of experience should be included in the debate on normativity in his late work.

2.4 Critical Ethics, Experience and Normativity

“[O]ur expression “it sings to me” refers to something that does not belong to the order of duty at all, because it belongs to the order of pleasure, of freedom: “I do it because it sings to me”.”

Michel Foucault, The Courage of Truth

2.4.1 Experience of the Self and Problematization

The discussion in this chapter focuses more explicitly on Foucault’s late work as a critical project. I begin by dissociating Foucault’s ethics from the type of philosophy of life that gleans guidance for wisdom and instructions for everyday life from ancient philosophy. Given that his aim is not to formulate instructive content, one has to ask in what sense his late work could be understood as a normative study. As I explain in Chapter 1.4, he understands “forms of experience” as normative systems with specific conditions. In the following I argue that the normative aspects in Foucault’s ethics are better understood if “forms of experience” as well as the first-person perspective of ethical evaluation are included in the analysis. After clarifying what I mean by this, I explain in what sense Foucault understands critique as virtue.

Foucault’s late work differs considerably from the recommendations of popular philosophies of life, and also from the objectives Pierre Hadot articulates in *What is Ancient Philosophy?* Hadot’s book could be characterised as a modern classic of philosophy of life, and it is used and quoted in popular and introductory handbooks of philosophical counselling.¹³⁸ He refers to Foucault explicitly and explains that his investigations of ancient spiritual exercises have significantly influenced his own work (Hadot 2002, x).¹³⁹ Hadot further argues that academic curriculums of philosophy focus mainly on making students familiar with the different philosophies rather than on questions such as how to live a philosophical life (Hadot 2002, 1–2). In his view, the split between academic theorisation and ways of being is highly

¹³⁸ Cohen, Elliot D. & Zinaich Samuel Jr. (eds.) (2013). *Philosophy, Counseling and Psychotherapy*. Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing; Peter. B. Raabe (2002). *Issues in Philosophical Counseling*. Westport, Connecticut & London: Praeger.

¹³⁹ On Foucault and Hadot, see Flynn 2005. Flynn points out that Hadot comments on Foucault’s ethics in the context of ancient philosophy and stresses the aesthetic aspects of his late work, whereas Flynn locates Foucault’s study in the existentialist framework.

problematic in contemporary philosophical practices and does not characterise ancient philosophy. He criticises Foucault's claim that the aim of Stoic writing exercises is to collect pieces of knowledge eclectically from here and there in order to combine them as a corpus of knowledge, arguing that the Stoics rather focus on certain teachings that would give them access to the universal level of knowledge and to human community (Hadot 1992, 230).

Distinguishing ethics from code-based morality, Foucault argues that there is a limited number of moral codes, whereas ethical work on the self includes much more complex ensembles of practices. Hadot claims, conversely, that the search for wisdom and tranquillity yields a limited number of basic attitudes that different philosophical discourses in different cultures and historical contexts justify in their own way (Hadot 1992, 230). These basic attitudes include living according to norms of justice and serving the human community, practicing objectivity of judgment and becoming aware of one's own situation in the universe as a concrete, living and being subject (Hadot 1992, 230; Flynn 2005, 615). Hadot's main argument is that one still can, and should, engage in ancient exercises that reach out towards wisdom.

Foucault's objective, in turn, is to study practices of guidance in a critical light, which means investigating their conditions and analysing their functions and justifications. I argue above that such practices may have *different* functions from learning obedience, endurance and resilience to unlearning, disobedience and appropriation. Not all of these are bad: it is possible to identify productive, constraining and creative aspects in ancient practices and techniques of the self.

However, Foucault states in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* that there is nothing to be proud of in the contemporary, popular trend of paying attention to and listening to the self, finding the self, being oneself and emancipating oneself (*HeS*, 241). The contemporary culture of the self could be understood here as the atmosphere and the set of cultural values that were prominent in California where Foucault gave his lectures in the early 1980s (Beaulieu 2010, 144). He further states that it is an urgent task to investigate the ethics of the self, especially if it is indeed possible to resist the excessive use of power by reconstituting the relationship we have with ourselves (*HeS*, 241–242). Thus, Foucault's question is not simply how the subject could become wise or glorious—it is rather how the subject could become a subject of critique (Revel 2016; Lorenzini 2016).

In his essay "What is Enlightenment?" Foucault closely connects his late work on the experience of the self (*l'expérience que nous faisons de nous-mêmes*) with *problematization* (*DEII.339*, 1396). This focus on problematization separates his late study on ethics from philosophical life guidance. However, a closer look at his concept of problematization reveals that he uses

it in different ways—it may refer to the *object* of investigation but also to the *method* or the *objective* of his research.

First, problematization refers to the modes of conduct that become problematic in a society, especially in a moral sense, and cause anxiety. Foucault explains that he is interested in the points in history at which new problems come to light and people change the ways in which they modify themselves and their daily behaviour (*EST*, 117; *HS2*, 16). One of his starting points in his late study on ethics is to ask how people reflect on and modify their own being so that they could cope with their moral concerns. The task, then, is to interrogate the very problems, analyse their different manifestations and discover what they have in common (*HS2*, 17–18). He asks in *The Use of Pleasure*, for example, how and at what point certain forms of sexuality become associated with morality (*HS2*, 31; *DEII.338*, 1374; 1378). He also characterises Stoic care of the self as a way of being that problematises the body and the whole environment:

Between the individual and his environs, one imagined a whole web of interferences such that a certain disposition, a certain event, a certain change in things would induce morbid effects of the body [...] Hence there was a constant and detailed problematization of the environment, a differential valuation of this environment with regard to the body, and a positing of the body as a fragile entity in relation to its surroundings. (*CS*, 101)

Problematization of the body and the environment means carefully considering bodily fluids, moisture, dryness, heat and coldness, the seasons, food and all its ingredients, digestion, décor, exercise, movement, sleep and being awake in daily practices of care (*HS3*, 123–124; chapter 2.1.5).

Second, Foucault characterises “the history of problematization” as a *method* that is distinct from the history of ideas and the history of mentalities. As he explains, he does not want to represent different forms of conduct or to presuppose that they would somehow inhabit different ways of thinking:

Thought is not what inhabits a certain conduct and gives 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 question it as to its meaning, its conditions, and its goals. Thought is freedom in relation to what one does, the motivation by which one detaches oneself from it, establishes it as an object, and reflects on it as a problem. (*EST*, 117)

Thus, the point is not to organise representations of problems, but to identify the (historical) conditions from which different questions and solutions stem (*HS2*, 17–18). Foucault

purports to define the prerequisites for becoming awkwardly aware of one's own ways of being and ways of doing, and reflecting on them as a question (*HS2*, 18–19). In the above quotation he defines reflection as the movement that detaches people and their actions from everyday familiarity: when one's actions and forms of conduct become objects of thought, one can ask about their objectives and meaning. In other words, it is possible to reflect on forms of conduct as problems when they have lost their familiarity (*EST*, 118). He argues in “Polemics, Politics and Problematizations”, however, that responses and solutions do not simply stem from individual awareness, and that the proposed solutions are part of the whole network of possible solutions of which some remain unvoiced (*EST*, 117–118). These solutions do not necessarily fall into categories of good and bad: taking an example from his earlier study on 19th-century psychiatry he claims that medical knowledge problematized previous conceptions of madness, but at the same time normality was defined in a narrow way (*ibid.*; *HS2*, 18).

Third, one could argue that the *objective* of Foucault's research is to produce new problematizations: he aimed in his historical study to create a sense of unfamiliarity with and distance from current concerns and practices of the self in showing that they could be very different.¹⁴⁰ In sum, whereas Hadot suggests that there are only a few basic attitudes that need to be adopted in order to find wisdom, Foucault argues that ethics of the self involves complex sets of techniques and practices, and he advocates an attitude of constant critique.

2.4.2 Normativity and Experience—towards Ethical Sensitivity

Even though I argue that Foucault's investigation of ascetic practices is not explicitly a prescriptive study, I have made a whole variety of normative, evaluative claims. I suggested in Part One, for example, that freedom is better than constraint, the movement of imagination is better than a stagnated way of being, and inclusion is better than exclusion. I also claimed that the botanical model of classification and its ethical implications are highly problematic, and that in most cases it is better to be faced as a living person than as a physical body (unless the body is the object of surgery or other medical operation). Foucault states clearly in his late work that when he was working in asylums he could not accept the psychiatric practices he saw (*DEII.362*, 1598). In addition, even if ancient Greek practices of care are far from ideal,

¹⁴⁰ Nietzsche claims in *Beyond Good and Evil* that philosophers have created metaphysical systems in order to justify their moralities, and the problem is that they lack problematization (Nietzsche 2013, §188). “The most brilliant minds”, in turn, are excited about disproving theoretical systems and questioning their moralities. Foucault thereby formulates what problematization means in his own work.

he does not present them in the same light as Catholic confession in which subjects reveal their sins.

The question I address in this section concerns how normativity should be understood in Foucault's late work. In my view there is a need for a rethink, and I suggest including in the analysis: 1) "forms of experience" that are delineated by certain historical conditions (*the historical a priori*), 2) conditions of personal experience (*the existential a priori*) and 3) the subject's evaluative standpoint.

The debate on the normative aspects of Foucault's late work began in the early 1980s, and it flared up after the publication of the second and third volumes of *The History of Sexuality*. It all seems slightly dated nowadays, given that his late lecture courses are not included in the discussion. Habermas claims that Foucault adopts normative yardsticks from his private attitudes and accepts them implicitly as truths, even though in his comparative approach to ethics he simultaneously denies such principles (Habermas 1984b, 108). Habermas also argues that Foucault expects the scattered subject somehow to rise above the discourse, even though subjects cannot possibly have such powers, being the product of discursive struggles (Habermas 1984b). Amy Allen formulates the problem as follows:

Where exactly does the Foucauldian archaeologist or genealogist stand? If he purports to stand outside of his own episteme regime, then he seems to contradict his own claim that the episteme sets the necessary conditions of possibility for being a subject in a particular time and place. If, on the contrary, he admits to [be] standing inside his own episteme, then he no longer seems able to achieve the kind of critical distance that makes reflection on ones' own episteme possible, thus, his claims about it and how it sets conditions of possibility for subjectivity are called into question. (Allen 2003, 193–194)

However, I have argued throughout this thesis, especially in Chapters 1.3.4 and 2.3.4–5 that Foucault *investigates* the Kantian distinction between the conditions of possible experience and critical activity, and that he aims at reformulating their relationship. I further argued in Chapter 2.1.1 that the subject should be understood as the perspective from which the self is formed, observed, interpreted and transformed. Even if the self is understood as the changing relation the subject has with itself, it does not mean that the subject itself is formed only by discourses. The old debate does not seem as relevant when the basic assumptions of the subject are questioned.

Critics involved in the old debate attack the Nietzschean influences in Foucault's thought, but one should ask whether their criticism is up to date. Nietzsche argues in *On the Genealogy of Morals* and *Beyond Good and Evil* that the task is to investigate different moralities. In "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" Foucault describes genealogy as an investigation of the

emergence of different historical interpretations—of morality, freedom and ascetic practices, for example—and their relations (*AME*, 378). At the same time, the whole point is to overcome comparative relativism and set out new values (Nietzsche 2013, §253). Foucault describes this task as follows:

Nietzsche's version of historical sense is explicit in its perspective and acknowledges its system of injustice. Its perception is slanted, being a deliberate appraisal, affirmation, or negation; it reaches the lingering and poisonous traces in order to prescribe the best antidote. (*AME*, 382)

In other words, genealogists rely on a certain level of objectivity of the historical phenomena they investigate, but even if they cannot justify their moral claims by means of empirical knowledge, which is one of the objects of their investigation, they nevertheless make normative evaluations of society and its morals.

The concern in the debate is that Foucault cannot provide justification for his ethical claims, and without justification every hint of normative evaluation is at risk of being arbitrary or dogmatic (Han-Pile 2016). According to Dreyfus and Rabinow, the problem is that even if Foucault is not explicit about his own normative presumptions, he constantly makes normative judgments without justification (Dreyfus & Rabinow 1996, 115).

Brian Trainor and Christopher Norris claim that beside the anti-normative Foucault is a normative thinker, and that Foucault the activist wants to be part of truth processes and to transform them (Trainor 2003, 564; 575–578; Norris 1994, 160). Reflecting Habermas, what they find problematic in the activist Foucault is that his claims rest on truths that the antinormative Foucault denies.¹⁴¹ Trainor, however, defends Foucault's position as an anti-normative theorist, arguing that even if he does not devise explicit norms or standards, his work could be considered a toolbox offering different instruments and strategies depending on the situation. With Marxist undertones, Trainor states that Foucault's works should not only be interpreted but should also be used for changing the world (Trainor 2003, 577–578).

However, if one accepts that there is no normative stance in Foucault's work it is very difficult to understand what he means by *alternative* practices and ways of thinking and being. One cannot take a neutral stance on what is understood as alternative to the established interpretation of history, or on which practices or social phenomena should be resisted. According to Béatrice Han-Pile, Foucault uses the notion “the blackmail of the

¹⁴¹ Daniel Defert argues, in turn, that Foucault was an activist with a strong commitment to the issues he advocated and was far from an anti-normative thinker. (Daniel Defert in the subsequent discussion of “The Emergence of Power in Foucault's 1970's–71 Lectures” in *Foucault Effect* conference, Birkbeck University of London, 3 July 2011.)

Enlightenment” when he criticises those who insist on always providing a universal, rational justification for normative claims or risk collapse into relativism (Han-Pile 2016, 93).¹⁴²

However, one does not have to accept the presumption that there is a gap in Foucault’s work between his comparative investigation of ethics and his normative claims—as a solution, the gap would be unsatisfactory. This is why I have argued that Foucault is highly interested in texts that combine the aspects of a critical attitude and ethical work on the self.

Han-Pile contributes to the debate in recalling the distinction between normative evaluation and prescription (Han-Pile 2016). In a rather similar manner, Judith J. Thomson explicates the distinction between two types of normative judgments, directives and evaluatives (Thomson 2008, 1–2). Her examples of directives include statements such as “one should be nice to a little brother”, “one should get a haircut” or “this rook should be moved”, to which one could add “one should not commit acts of violence”, “one should save a drowning person” or “this wall should be torn down”. The second category of judgments involve *evaluating* the act, the person or the object in statements such as “she is a good director”, “that action was good” or “this ice cream is bad”. Statements such as “acts of violence are intolerable” and “equality is good” are also evaluative judgments.

Han-Pile argues in the Foucauldian context that one can evaluate states of affairs without providing lists of rules or sets of norms to justify the claims, and that there is no need to presuppose an underlying standard of prescription to which to appeal (Han-Pile 2016, 92). In her view, the rejection of the explicit prescription of rules is the strength of Foucault’s ethical thinking, and to demand an articulated set of propositions is not compatible with the reflective, ethical task he proposes (Han-Pile 2016, 96). Even if Foucault does not simplify ethical choices in listing interdictions or recommendations, ethical choices in everyday existence do not derive randomly from some inward flux: they are rather rooted in personal histories, interpretations of the situation and the skills and arts at hand (Han-Pile 2016, 93n). I have used the concept *existential a priori* to capture the conditions according to which the somewhat stable standpoint of the subject is constituted, the standpoint from which ethical skills can be developed and practised.¹⁴³

¹⁴² Amy Allen, in turn, refers to *the blackmail of the Enlightenment* as making a forced decision between rationalism and irrationalism (Allen 2016, 187). In other words, the blackmailing implies that if one investigates how mechanisms of power operate and affect our understandings of reason, one automatically advocates irrationalism. In “Structuralism and Post-structuralism” Foucault refers as blackmailing to the claim that one cannot present a rational critique of different rationalities (*AME*, 441). In his view, however, one should always question what is presented as the voice of reason.

¹⁴³ Richard A. Lynch compares Foucault’s critical ethics with Beauvoir’s *Ethics of Ambiguity*: he argues that they both presuppose freedom as the condition of possibility of ethics, and that ethics is not about giving recipes, because there can be no universal verdict for every singular case (Lynch 2016, 189). He quotes Beauvoir: “this does not mean that it [ethics] cannot justify itself, that it can not give itself reasons that it does not have [...] this

Moreover, Han-Pile makes a distinction between two types of *enabling conditions of possibility* for explicating how normativity is to be understood in Foucault's work (Han-Pile 2016, 85–86): those responding to “how possible” and to “whether possible” questions. She explains that “how possible” questions involve investigating the conditions of actual states of affairs, which includes asking epistemic questions concerning the conditions for something to be considered intelligible: she refers to these as *epistemically enabling conditions*. “Whether possible” questions, in turn, concern whether some states of affairs are better than others—these are evaluative questions that we need to pose in order to live our lives in the best possible, meaningful way (Han-Pile 2016, 86).

Han-Pile suggests that Foucault's work raises both types of question: one could ask “under which epistemically enabling conditions are such and such ethical assessments intelligible [...] and] whether certain epistemically enabling conditions can have more ethical legitimacy than others” (ibid.). I argued in the context of the clinic that structures of medical knowledge are closely connected to the ways in which patients are treated and perceived. Similarly, the structures of knowledge could be questioned by pointing out the ethical problems they involve (not only their epistemic justification).

Explicating what Foucault means when he defines “forms of experience” as normative systems also clarifies the different aspects of normativity in his work. As I explain above, forms of experience delineate a shared space of perceiving the objects and subjects of knowledge in specific ways.

I argued in Chapter 1.1 that *the historical a priori* as a concept captures the inherent rules and norms of the forms of experience and ensembles of statements that define the ways in which the objects and subjects of knowledge can be perceived and how they can be. I also pointed out that the historical a priori is an operational concept that cannot be grasped independently from the reality in which it functions (Basso 2012, 175; Flynn 2016, 61; Han-Pile 1998, 143–144). In other words, normativity should be sought in phenomena, not outside them: the immanent normativity of the historical a priori means that the different statements are connected to each other by sets of rules that are not imposed from the outside (see Chapter 1.4.1). For example, in *The Birth of the Clinic* Foucault investigates the clinic as a normative system—a structure of knowledge that implies the possible ways of perceiving phenomena.

Elisabetta Basso further argues that *the existential a priori* also implies the aspect of normativity (Basso 2012, 174). I explained in Chapter 1.1 that Foucault's objective is to

justification requires a constant tension. My project is never founded, it finds itself (Beauvoir 1947 in Lynch 2016, 189).

investigate personal experiences in their own terms, and I argued that in the early essays *the existential a priori* refers to the conditions of responding and reacting to situations in personal ways. In the context of the existential a priori, normativity refers to the idea that our behaviour encompasses internal rules according to which it appears to us and we direct it (Basso 2012, 171).

One could now argue that Foucault investigates ancient practices of the self as normative systems with specific historical conditions (*the historical a priori*) in his late work, but he also analyses the conditions of responding to situations and reacting to them in personal ways (*the existential a priori*). Moreover, he includes in his study the aspect of reflecting on the responses and exercising for future events.

This leads on to the question of how Foucault understands the evaluative stance of the subject who reflects upon possible decisions and actions. In other words, claiming that normativity is immanent to the phenomena does not yet answer the question of how to understand normativity, the ethical call, from the subject's own point of view. One could find out, in response, what Foucault accepts from Kant's moral theory and what he rejects.

It is worth recalling that Foucault criticises Kant in *The Introduction to Kant's Anthropology* for mixing the questions of what man *can* (description) and what man *should* (prescription) make of himself. Foucault's concern is not only that we would accept certain conceptions of the limits of human capacities but also that the experience of finitude might prevent us from seeing beyond the predefined limits and discourage us from seeking alternative ways of being (Chapter 1.3.4; Allen 2003, 188). *The historical a priori* is a concept that captures the changing, not the universal conditions that bind current ways of being and thinking (Allen 2003, 189; Boland 2014, 109). Kant, in contrast, does not and cannot ask which conditions of possible knowledge are more legitimate than others, because there are no alternatives for the necessary conditions of knowledge (Han-Pile 2016, 89).

Although Foucault rejects formulating universal maxims in the Kantian way in his ethical thinking, there are also similarities between them: Kant's categorical imperative is empty in terms of content, and the actual content of freedom cannot be defined in Foucault's non-universalist ethics. I pointed out in Chapter 1.3 that in *Anthropology* Kant defines virtue as "the moral strength in pursuing duty", and he even provides instructions for exercising our strengths. Hacking argues that in referring to *Sitten*—customs and practices—Kant is making something new out of ethics by connecting it with the internal and private duty of reason: the only way of making the moral law somehow *moral* and not blind obedience would be to constitute it by ourselves (Hacking 1984, 239; Allen 2011, 50).

In my view, however, Foucault does not appeal to duty or to a moral law because he rejects the assumption that moral conduct is best characterised in terms of jurisdiction—judging and giving a verdict.

In *The Courage of Truth*, in fact, Foucault distinguishes duty from pleasure. Discussing the Socratic task of taking care of the self as mentioned in Plato's *Phaedo*, he suggests that the call to take care (*epimeleia*) is appealing as pleasurable devotion, like a melody (*melodia*), but not as a Kantian duty (CV, 110). When he defines care of the self as a mode of individual and collective experience in *Dire-vrai sur soi-même*, he notes that “many individuals responded to its call” (DVSS, 78).¹⁴⁴ He argues that Socrates leaves his students the task of taking care of themselves and others in the *polis*.

The context of this discussion on duty and pleasure is the debate on Socrates' famous last words, reported in *Phaedo* as: “Crito, we owe a cock to Aesculapius. Pay it and do not neglect it” (*Phaedo*, 118a). Foucault questions Nietzsche's interpretation that the task of sacrificing a rooster to the god of medicine and healing means: “O Crito, life is a long sickness”, and that Socrates is suffering and wants to escape from sickly life (CV, 90). Foucault claims, by contrast, that Socrates is concerned about whether the infinite task of a philosophical life would continue (CV, 104–105). When he says: “Do not neglect it” (*mē amelesetē*), he is leaving the others the task of taking care of each other (ibid.). Foucault argues that Socrates does not say *I*, rather that *we* need to give the gift to the god of healing. He explains that Socrates' expression *mē amelesetē* is etymologically close to the word care (*epi-meleia*), and he connects the word to *melodia* which is appealing as a form of devotion:

[O]ur expression “it sings to me” refers to something that does not belong to the order of duty at all, because it belongs to the order of pleasure, of freedom: “I do it because it sings to me”. (CV, 110)¹⁴⁵

Thus, when things sing to one as a devotion in a magnetizing way, they convoke (*ça me chante, ça me convoque*), and convoking, Foucault suggests, could be understood as calling people to come together (CV, 110–111). He argues further that Socrates wants to free people from the sickly discourses of the *polis*, not from a sickly life: the point is that when people take care of and nourish themselves, they become free from common opinions and corrupt persuasions.

The notion of calling brings a new perspective to the question of normativity in Foucault's work. “The call” could be interpreted as another reference to Heidegger, who discusses

¹⁴⁴ “Beaucoup d'individus répondent à son appel” (DVSS, 78).

¹⁴⁵ “[N]otre expression “ça me chante” se réfère en effet à quelque chose qui n'est pas du tout de l'ordre du devoir, qui est de l'ordre du plaisir, de la liberté : “Je fais ça parce que “ça me chante”.” (CV, 110)

conscience as a call (*Ruf*) in *Being and Time*. He explains that with regard to *Dasein*, conscience cannot be a norm imposed from the outside—it would not be conscience if it was merely an external norm—and he wonders what it is, in fact, that is calling (Heidegger 1978, §57). Both Heidegger and Foucault reject the Kantian way of associating conscience with jurisdiction, to a moral law, but Heidegger also describes the call as empty in its content:

The call asserts nothing, gives no information about world-events [...] The tendency of the call is not such as to put up for ‘trial’ the Self to which the appeal is made; but it calls *Dasein* forth (and forward) into its ownmost possibilities, as a summons to its ownmost potentiality-for-Being-its-Self. (Heidegger 1978, §56)

As indicated in the quotation, Heidegger does not understand the call of conscience as an act of judging, nor as referring to the psychological state of having a good or bad conscience (Heidegger 1978, §59). Instead, he describes it as an ontological structure of existence: it is one of the concepts by which Heidegger ensures *Dasein* its unique existence and own movement of becoming in the intersubjective framework he characterises as care (Heidegger 1978, 55§; Chapter 2.2.1).

I argued in Chapter 1.1 that Foucault’s aim in discussing *the existential a priori* is to capture the very basic structures of existence, and I pointed out that the movement of coming-to-be is found in these basic structures. He does not refer to authenticity in the same way as Heidegger does in the above quotation, as he criticises and investigates the recommendations to “know oneself” and “become oneself”. However, it would not be very useful to speak about ethics if one were only subjected to disciplinary forms of power. I have therefore argued that in the intersubjective context of care, freedom takes place in interpersonal relationships and it is the outcome of constant practice. Robert Nichols expresses similar thoughts when he investigates the connections between Heidegger and Foucault’s ethics, suggesting that, to them, freedom means “to cultivate a certain ethical attitude of awareness within the activities of disclosure that constitute the ontological ground of the field itself. It is, in a word, to take care of the field and, through this, of oneself.” (Nichols 2014, 6)

Foucault frequently uses military terminology such as “battles”, “struggles”, “strategies” and “armament” in his discussions, but instead of emphasising the aspect of armament in practices of care (see Chapter 2.2.4), Han-Pile understands ethical sensitivity as the source of normative evaluation: it cannot be reduced to sets of rules. I believe that ethical sensitivity could be understood also as attunement and improvisation, at which we get better the more we practice. Foucault uses musical references such as melody and harmony throughout his late work, and he investigates descriptions of attuning and adjusting (not simply conforming)

oneself to the movements of others and improvising one's own actions in everyday conduct. Ethical sensitivity should not be understood just as a form of sheepish behaviour—which is why Han-Pile combines it with critical reflection. She argues that critique, to Foucault, means asking both “how possible” and “whether possible (permissible)” questions and reflecting on one's own relationship with them (Han-Pile 2016, 98–99). Critique could then be understood as a movement of reflection, which creates the type of space within the subject (and between subjects) that enables the exercise of self-displacement (Han-Pile 2016, 99).

The idea of ethical sensitivity could change conceptions and ideals of critical conduct. If one includes aspects such as care and attunement in the definition of critique, it is not enough to utter sharp comments without caring at all or adjusting one's own behaviour to that of others. This is why ethical devotion should be characterised as a call that invites everyone to participate in the shared task of care (understood in the Socratic sense), which is also a precondition for all critical activity.

2.4.3 Critique as a Virtue

Emphasising the aspect of ethical sensitivity as a task to pursue and a quality to develop does not mean that critique is a solitary pursuit. Foucault defines critique as a virtue and a way of being (*ethos*), both of which refer to concrete actions and practice. I will begin my discussion on Foucault's conception of critique by explicating what it is not. Foucault distinguishes critique from resistance and revolution, and one can also make a distinction between critique and judgment.

Judith Butler argues in her essay on “What is Critique?” that Foucault replaces the notion of resistance with virtue (Butler, 2000). The distinction between resistance and virtue is in line with the distinction between mechanisms of power and governmentality in Foucault's analysis (Chapter 2.1.1). Arnold Davidson further claims that in his texts of the 1970's, Foucault connects resistance with the subjection that is produced in power relations: because networks of power relations are a moving constellation, and are not fixed, subjection can be tackled by influencing such relations (Davidson 2016, 58; *HSI*, 124–127).

Referring to virtue, in contrast, Foucault emphasises the forming of ethical self-relations by means of concrete practices, techniques and exercises—subjectivation in its active and productive sense (Davidson 2016, 28; 58–59; Chapter 2.1.1). Foucault does not refer as much to resistance as to *counter-conduct* in this context: conduct, care and the arts of governing (Chapter 1.5.2) are tightly linked to the question of how *not* to be conducted, governed or taken care of in certain ways. It is not a matter of how to detach oneself from networks of

power relations in order to become an autonomous and omnipotent subject: counter-conduct involves finding a well-thought way of *not* letting oneself be governed quite so much and in particular ways, for specific objectives and by certain people (*WC*, 28; *EST*, 28–29).¹⁴⁶

Ancient asceticism, for example, differs from obedience and becomes a form of counter-conduct when it involves developing “the art of voluntary intractability” (Davidson 2011, 29–30; *EST*, 32; *STP*, 207). Foucault is interested in communities that revolt against certain forms of subjectivation such as gay communities, mystery religions and cultic groups, friendships between women and different forms of affection and commitment (*STP*, 208; Davidson 2011, 32–34).

Foucault also distinguishes critique from revolution, revolution being a decisive, singular event whereas virtues and forming an *ethos* are continuous tasks (Butler 2000). He even argues that having too much confidence in revolution inhibits recognition of the techniques that govern the everyday lives of individuals (*WC*, 39). In this context, he suddenly refers to Husserl without explaining it much further (*WC*, 38; 41). In the Vienna lecture, “Philosophy and the Crisis of the European Man”, Husserl defines revolutions as continuous tasks rather than singularities, and claims that Greek philosophy revolutionised culture:

With the appearance of Greek philosophy, however, and with its first definite formulation in a consistent idealizing of the new sense of infinity, there occurs, from this point of view, a progressive transformation that ultimately draws into its orbit all ideas proper to finitude and with them the entire spiritual culture of mankind. [...] Scientific culture in accord with ideas of infinity means, then, a revolutionizing of all culture, a revolution that affects man’s whole manner of being as a creator of culture. It means also a revolutionizing of historicity, which is now the history of finite humanity’s disappearance, to the extent that it *grows into a humanity with infinite tasks*. (Husserl 1965, 163–164; italics mine)

Husserl thus argues that the ancient Greeks revolutionised the sense of history by articulating humanity’s infinite task of self-improvement, a task that extends beyond our current selves (and which is also recognisable in Kant’s philosophy of Enlightenment). As argued above, Foucault describes care of the self, critique and *ethos* on various occasions as open-ended tasks. He uses the word *indéfîni* to characterise the Cynic attitude and whole way of being: the task is not to achieve a specific state of mind but to carry out undefined, endless, undetermined and unlimited work on oneself (*travail indéfîni sur soi-même*) (*CV*, 238). Rather

¹⁴⁶ Davidson points out that when Foucault is seeking a suitable concept for the specific way of refusing to be guided he rejects “disobedience”, “misconduct”, “revolt” and “insubordination” because they are too passive, too weak or too strong (Davidson 2016). Foucault initially disregards the word insubordination in *Security, Territory, Population*, but he uses the notion later in “What is Critique?” when he defines critique as an “art of voluntary insubordination” (*WC*, 32).

than believing in a unity of cultural transformation, he is concerned about the different, simultaneous processes of rationalisation that may lead to the excessive use of power, and that is why he also emphasises the continuous critique of the relationships between knowledge, techniques and rationalisation (*WC*, 39).

Judith Butler further remarks in her essay that Foucault distinguishes critique from judgment (Butler 2000). She does not really clarify the distinction, but judgment can, of course, be understood as an act of judging that is connected to jurisdiction and moral law, from which Foucault wants to distance his own ethical thinking. One could also refer to judgment in the Kantian sense as the use of understanding that all human beings have in common, and which enables us to understand that objects are real in the empirical sense. Defining judgment in this way, however, does not shed light on Foucault's notion of critique. As Merleau-Ponty points out, the ordinary (Kantian) understanding of judgment presupposes that it is always valid for oneself and everyone else, and once achieved it remains the same:

Ordinary experience draws a clear distinction between sense experience and judgement. It sees judgement as the taking of stand, as an effort to know something which shall be valid for myself every moment of my life, and equally for all potential minds. (Merleau-Ponty 2005, 39)

Merleau-Ponty's point is that if one understands judgment as a standpoint that is universal and always valid, one excludes individual variation and affective aspects, for instance, from the definition. Thus, when Foucault explains that his aim in his investigation of ethics is to formulate critical philosophy, he implies that critique cannot be equated with the act of judging or with the common understanding that judgment always remains the same: critical ethics is based on continuous reflection, exercise and alteration.

Moreover, if judgment is understood as *aesthetic judgment* as Hannah Arendt uses the term in her interpretation of Kant's political essays, one can contrast Foucault's political philosophy that focuses on struggle (*agon*) with Arendt's political thinking that relies on agreement. Arendt refers to Kant and also to Plato's *Seventh Letter* in her discussion about the relationship between politics and freedom, but her conclusions differ considerably from Foucault's. If one compares Foucault and Arendt one understands why Foucault does not give a central role to Kant's *Third Critique* and his work on aesthetics, even if he frequently uses words such as "arts", "techniques" and "aesthetics". Arendt uses the concept of aesthetic judgment to stress the aspect of possible agreement in taste judgment:

The power of judgment rests on a potential agreement with others, and the thinking process which is active in judging something is not, like the thought

process of pure reasoning, a dialogue between me and myself, but finds itself always and primarily, even if I am quite alone in making up my mind, in an anticipated communication with others with whom I know *I must finally come to some agreement* [...] such judgment must liberate itself from the “subjective private conditions”. (Arendt 1993, 220, italics mine)

Arendt stresses the public quality of taste judgments: she makes a distinction between privately held opinions, which lack “all validity in the public realm” and political activity—she is not interested in the moral concerns of the self (Arendt 1993, 222). She explains that judgments are open to discussion, in that “beauty generates pleasure” that is shared by others, and further argues that taste judges the world in appearance, and this “world” is shared, not merely an individual’s experience of it.

Foucault, in contrast, does not apply the concept of aesthetic judgment because it relies on an idealised conception of communication and consensus—and a belief that one can liberate oneself from privately held opinions. Arendt’s concept of appearance is also innocent in comparison with Foucault’s as she argues that one perceives and discusses the shared world without private interests. Foucault, in turn, does not expect consensual agreement or presuppose neutral or “objective” deliberation. He also blurs the distinction between the private and the public: referring to the aesthetics of existence, he includes all aspects of existence in the analysis, not only public debates, to show that the tiniest details of daily activities may, in fact, be of political concern.

In sum, critique is not reactionary revolt or a one-time event, it is not about sticking persistently to one’s own views, and it is not a concept for seeking and finally reaching agreement in communication. What is it, then, in a positive sense?

In “What is Critique”, Foucault defines critique as virtue and an art (*tekhnē*) (*WC*, 25; 32). Moreover, in his essay “What is Enlightenment?” he defines a critical attitude as an *ēthos*, a way of being that is continuously shaped and practised (*EST*, 309). He does not analyse in detail in these texts what is meant by virtue in ancient thought, and he is not very precise in distinguishing between arts and virtues. As noted above (Chapters 1.3.4; 2.1.3), in *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle defines *tekhnē* as an art or a skill of any kind, whereas virtues are classified as intellectual or moral, and moral virtues are associated with a good character (*EN*, 1103a15). Most importantly, both virtue and *tekhnē* are acquired through constant practice and concrete actions: “[I]he excellences [virtues] we get by first exercising them, as also happens in the case of the arts as well”, and one can affect the ways in which virtues are practised (*EN*, 1103a20–30).

Even if it is not enough merely to reflect on arts and virtues, they do involve reflection. As pointed out, Foucault characterises critique as well-thought disobedience, or as “an art of voluntary, reflected insubordination”, which can be understood as the ensemble of skills and voluntary choices not to be governed or guided in certain ways (*WC*, 32; 58). Aristotle, being more conservative than Foucault, does not advocate disobedience, but one could claim that in both cases virtue is always more about proportion than mere obedience. According to Aristotle, adequate actions and passions such as anger or fear take place in the right proportions and “at the right times, with reference to the right objects, towards the right people, with the right aim, and in the right way” (*EN*, 1106b20). He also admits that it is very difficult to define in advance what the right timing and the right way would be. Actions cannot be fully investigated or defined with precision, because

matters concerned with conduct and questions of what is good for us have no fixity, any more than matters of health [... the subjects] themselves must in each case consider what is appropriate to the occasion, as happens in the art of medicine or of navigation. (*EN*, 1104a5)

Here, Aristotle is comparing suitable conduct to medicine and navigation, which best describe the aspect of application, the ability that is needed in every unique situation.

I argue above in Chapter 1.1.5, that Foucault’s aim in his early essays on existential analysis is to show that our current ways of being, no matter how stagnated, do not have to determine the course of future events. Moreover, I explained that the point of therapy in Hubert Dreyfus’ discussion is to bring to light the breaking points that would otherwise get lost in the repetitive mode of being. This argument is familiar from Foucault’s essays on critique: a critical attitude involves showing that we have been formed out of contingencies, which helps us understand—not who we *really* are—but that we do not have to be the same as before (*EST*, 315). He refers to this active process and strategy of questioning permanent-looking fixations as *eventalization* (*événementalization*) but also as “a limit attitude” (*WC*, 49, 59–60; *EST*, 314).¹⁴⁷ Eventalization involves showing that a phenomenon stands on an unstable foundation, the disappearance of which is just as feasible as its existence (*Power*, 346; *WC*, 59). Butler calls this task “virtue in the minimal sense”, because identifying the limits and breaking points of

¹⁴⁷ *Eventalization* implies the idea of producing events, making something that seems fixed appear singular and contingent. It would be tempting to compare *eventalization* to Heidegger’s term *Ereignis*, which could be translated as an event of something coming into view. Heidegger refers to an “event of appropriation” and “creative appropriation” in this context (Heidegger 2012). However, *Contributions to Philosophy* in which Heidegger discusses *Ereignis* was not published until 1989.

current forms of rationality does not yet involve the concrete act of changing states of affairs (Butler 2000).

I should nevertheless emphasise that Foucault refers to *parrhēsia*, the specific act of truth-telling, as “a kind of virtue”, which cannot be understood only as a virtue in the minimal sense because as a concept it implies intervention and direct engagement. The conditions of *parrhēsia* include being genuine and sincere, taking a risk and being committed to a truth that is well reflected. Truthful, genuine expressions are risky precisely because they expose deeply personal, ethical commitments in front of others, with unknown consequences.

As Butler states, critique does not anchor the subject to a foundation, but rather involves making oneself vulnerable in that one risks the very foundation on which one stands (Butler 2000).¹⁴⁸ I pointed out in Chapter 2.4.2 that it is quite common to question Foucault with regard to where subjects anchor their own truth if they want to practise critique, but Butler argues that the virtue of courage is practised when the subject encounters the limits of the current epistemological field and does not yet know where to anchor the truth or even its value (ibid.). That is to say, the subject forms itself in disobedience in an ontologically insecure place that questions not only ways of being but also the ways in which the subject has been formed (ibid.).

I explained in the introduction to Part One that the French word “experience” connotes danger and failure, and throughout Part Two I have discussed the themes of testing and experimenting with ways of being. Compared to Arendt’s concept of aesthetic judgment, which rests on communication, Foucault understands political engagement and intervention as a much riskier practice. He encourages us to take the risk of interrogating current epistemic claims and exposing their ethical implications and, in the end, shattering the very conditions that have formed ourselves. One might well wonder if this type of risk-taking is too much to ask of the subject, but if one understands Foucault’s late work as a call for care and ethical sensitivity, one cannot claim that it is a solitary task.

2.4.4 Critique, Community and Friendship

In “What is Critique?” Foucault—who has been accused of extreme individualism—argues that Kant’s *Aufklärung* is both an individual and a collective attitude, as a shared task and the

¹⁴⁸ Butler states in *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* that vulnerability is “formed and lived in relation to a set of conditions that are outside, yet part of, the body itself” (2015, 148). She means that relations are historical and economic, and that we as our bodies are always exposed to them. However, her examples in *Notes* refer to sudden losses, accidents and violence, not to self-exposed vulnerability as in her essay on Foucault and virtue. Vulnerability denotes that which is uncontrollable and unpredictable.

subject's way of thinking and acting (*WC*, 61; *GSA*, 27; Chapter 1.3.4). He argues that if there is such a thing as societal improvement or development, or at least a certain course of continuity, it is defined by—and it depends on—us, the “we” (*GSA*, 14; 18). Events do not occur exterior to this we, but one should also understand the “we” as a question to be interrogated.

Foucault's discussion of “we” could be understood as a response to Richard Rorty, who claims that he is not appealing to any concrete or real “us” that would make social movements and collective action possible (Rorty 1992, 329–331). Foucault responds to Rorty's critique in an interview from 1984, admitting that he does not want to presuppose any particular groups of people who would have shared identities or values (*EST*, 114–115). He argues that one should not first identify oneself as part of a certain “we” and then defend the principles and values this presupposed “we” accepts and recognises, but should rather make possible a “we” without presupposing a homogenous identity—“we” should be understood as the consequence of action and as a temporary formation (*EST*, 115).

Foucault stresses the role of friendship, not only as a private matter but also as a relationship that could diminish the effects of unificatory objectivation, processes that form people as objects of knowledge that are placed in identity categories (Revel 2016). Foucault states quite famously in “Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity”: “I think now, after studying the history of sex, we should try to understand the history of friendship, or friendships. That history is very, very important” (*EST*, 171).

As Steve Garlick argues in his discussion of Foucault's conception of friendship, to Foucault, ethics is not about giving life any possible form—it is about giving it a beautiful form, meaning something one cannot express in language or define in advance. Beautiful (*kalon*) in the Greek context also means fine, good, respectful and worthy (O'Leary 2002, 51). Garlick refers to an interview in which Foucault states: “[F]or me, real beauty is a ‘phrase musicale, un morceau de musique’, that I cannot understand, something I can't say anything about” (*EST*, 130). He thus claims that a beautiful life is not something that can be defined: it is something that is not here yet, but that is recognisable as something different (Garlick 2002, 569). Moreover, constituting oneself as a beautiful, good and worthy friend requires that the other is perceived as the other, someone genuinely different and someone who one is not. This reading emphasises the possibility of creating something outside pre-established patterns of behaviour. Work that is done for friendship's sake makes it possible to establish a space of freedom between discourses that threaten forms of otherness (Garlick 2002, 567; 569).

In my view, however, it should be emphasised that Foucault also considered friendship a broader societal question than a relationship between two people, the self and the other. As

he explains in “Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity” he is interested in the processes in which friendship becomes reflected as a problem in a society. One should understand the emotional involvement that is connected to friendship as *the ethical substance*, the object of ethical concern (Chapter 2.1.3). In other words, longing for friendship becomes a questionable feeling not only to the subject but also on the level of society:

For centuries after antiquity, friendship was a very important kind of relation: a social relation within which people had a certain freedom, certain kind of choice (limited of course) as well as very intense emotional relations. [...] You can find, from the sixteenth century on, texts that explicitly criticize friendship as something dangerous. (*EST*, 170)

As noted above, Plato in his *Seventh Letter* refers to the possibility of forming friendships as crucial for the formation of a healthy *polis*. In his lecture series *Subjectivité et vérité* Foucault discusses friendship as a political concern also in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*. Aristotle argues, for example, that there is very little room for friendship in tyranny, whereas in democracy it can flourish between rulers and those who are ruled, because when people are equal they have much more in common (*EN*, 1161b10). Moreover, friendship exists in each type of government just as long as there is justice—and friendship is the bond that keeps the *polis* together (*EN*, 1161a10; 1155a 20). In general, Aristotle defines friendship as a virtue, meaning that mere goodwill as a hidden attitude does not suffice to characterise it because virtue is actualised by concrete actions (*EN*, 1155a5; 1156a5).¹⁴⁹

Foucault further claims that friendships can threaten the prevailing social order, even suggesting that intense relationships disturb the functioning of disciplinary mechanisms (*EST*, 170–171). Disciplinary institutions—including educational institutions that encourage individuals to compete against each other—cannot function properly if they leave room for strong relationships between individuals: attempts to decrease or minimise attachment play an integral role in governing the masses (*ibid.*). Thus, one could claim that intense, sincere and committed relationships disturb forms of governing that function by isolating individuals from each other.

¹⁴⁹ In *Subjectivité et vérité*, Foucault raises the question of how friendship is categorised in antiquity, and how the categorisation relates to the given status. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle makes a distinction between three types of friendship: one is based on common interests and does not last for long; one is the ideal type between virtuous people who wish good for others for their own sake; the third includes relationships between relatives, comradeship and hospitality, and different types of symmetric and asymmetric relations (*EN*, 1161b10). Foucault is interested in the third category because it includes love relations, and remarks that marital relations are not discussed as a separate category (*DVSS*, 264; *SV*, 136–137). In *The Care of the Self* and *Subjectivité et vérité* he investigates how marriage is distinguished from friendship and given a privileged status.

Judith Revel identifies three different ways of standing against processes of unification and objectivation in Foucault's work, and forming friendships is one of them. First, one can refuse unification by targeting and questioning the categories that organise the objects of knowledge: one could, for example, question the categories of different mental disorders and stereotypical characterisations of ethnic groups or different sexes. It is more difficult to establish practices and knowledge around specific objects of knowledge if one can question such objects as a unificatory category (Revel 2016, 167–168). Second, one can affect the processes of objectivation by refusing to belong to a category of subjects. One could also collectively appropriate the definitions of identity categories (e.g. names that have been used for labelling people such as “bitch” or “the mad”). Third, one could refuse unification by introducing new ways of being that involve acknowledging difference as a common denominator (Revel 2016, 169–170). At the end of Part One I suggested that being-towards-the-death-of-the-other, recognising vulnerability in others and in ourselves, could be understood as the common denominator between subjects in a well-functioning community.

In this chapter I have argued that even if Foucault investigates notions such as care of the self, techniques of the self and poetics of the self, his critical ethics differs considerably from “philosophies of life” that propose recommendations for daily living. I pointed out at the beginning of the chapter that in positioning his study of the experience of the self as an investigation of *problematizations* Foucault is trying to capture the ethical concerns, real worries and anxieties associated with feelings and relationships that become problematic in a society. He uses the concept of problematization not only to characterise the object of his study, but also to describe his methods and objectives. He is not suggesting that we should simply adopt ancient techniques of the self but form ourselves as subjects of critical reflection and action.

It is for this reason that I asked in what sense one should understand Foucault's work as a normative study, and how he defines critique. I began by engaging in the debate that arose after the publication of the second and third volumes of *The History of Sexuality* in 1984: Foucault was accused of forming an unbridgeable gap between his activism and his historical analysis in not clearly explicating his own normative stance or providing justifications for his normative claims. My point is, however, that the meaning of normativity in Foucault's work should be re-thought to include the different concepts of experience in the discussion. First,

it should be remembered that normativity is immanent in “forms of experience”, the different fields of knowledge in which phenomena can be perceived in specific ways. In other words, forms of experience imply the rules of perceiving phenomena in certain ways: *the historical a priori* is an operational concept covering the rules that are immanent in social arrangements, practices and discourses. Second, one could argue in a similar way that the *existential a priori*, personal ways of responding to situations, imply their own rules. However, what makes a moral task valid for the experiencing subject is a different question. I argued that even if Foucault adopts the Kantian idea that subjects prescribe their own moral laws in freedom, he rejects the notion of duty and refers instead to pleasurable devotion that calls people together to fight for shared objectives. This does not mean that one should only perform pleasurable actions: rather, each action should be evaluated against the horizon of other actions, which as an ensemble constitute a meaningful whole.

In Chapter 2.3 I asked how critique should be understood when Foucault defines it as a virtue and an *ethos*. I distinguished critique from singular events, resistance, objectives of reaching consensus and different concepts of judgment. In characterising critique as a virtue, Foucault emphasises the fact that it is a continuous and open-ended task. Moreover, both critique and virtue involve constant practice: they are realised in concrete, changing situations and require skills that are familiar from Greek medicine and dietetics—moderation, adequate timing and the right proportions. In my reading I stressed the aspect of ethical sensitivity in developing these skills. Hence, instead of suggesting that Foucault formulates a subject that should simply rise above discourses and forms of government, I have argued that he is, in fact, encouraging the formation of close relationships to make us more resilient to attempts to be governed as isolated individuals.

2.5 Discussion and Critical Remarks

2.5.1 Critical Remarks on Foucault's Philosophy of Experience

Foucault's thought could, of course, be criticised in multiple ways, some of which are more justified than others. In the following I highlight some of the problematic aspects of Foucault's philosophy of experience and connect the topics of my thesis to the public debates in which he participated.

One could, to start with, criticise Foucault for using concepts he does not clearly define. At the beginning of Chapter 1.1, I discuss a passage from the original introduction of *The Use of Pleasure* in which Foucault explains that he is not happy with his early concepts of experience because they are too unspecified and unfixed. I have argued that "the field of experience" is a focal concept to him precisely because it structures his whole work and captures the aspects he wishes to include in the analysis. However, when he organizes his work in the 1980s around the field of experience, the concept covers such broad areas of study (forms of governmentality, practices of the self and procedures of truth) that it is just as unspecified as in his earlier work, and the elements constituting the field of experience are constantly changing. Foucault also uses the terms "limit experience" and "transformative experience" fragmentarily, and his discussions on these topics are theoretically sparse. To be fair, however, it should be acknowledged that he generally refers to these two notions in interviews in which his intention is not to develop his concepts at length on the theoretical level.

One could also criticise Foucault for making unconvincing generalisations about "Western experience", "experience of madness" and "experience of the Insane", and about the Western philosophical tradition in general. Not wishing to rely on the idea of historical progress, Foucault takes on the task of demarcating shared forms of experience and investigating their historical conditions in *History of Madness*, *The Birth of the Clinic* and the last three parts of *The History of Sexuality*. It is not obvious, however, what comprises Western and Christian traditions and how they could be delineated. Foucault is interested in transitions from one form of experience to another, and especially in the connections between them, but at the same time it is impossible to know where the limits of one form of experience lie and where the next one begins.

I have claimed that many of Foucault's concepts of experience are spatial abstractions. This raises the question of whether one could think about experience in the Foucauldian context without a subject. I have argued that the answer is, 'No'. Even if he questions the status of

the subject as a foundation of knowledge and claims in a Nietzschean way that there is nothing self-evident about the “I”, his personal experiences function as a source for the research questions he poses. For example, when he explains his analysis of power mechanisms in an interview, he states that everywhere he looks in a society, power is at the core of his personal experience of it. This could be called a paradox or alternatively intellectual honesty of a normative thinker. Concepts such as “forms of experience” or “fields of experience” also imply the component of personal experience, even when the focus of the analysis is elsewhere. When he focuses on the practices of truth-telling in various fields of experience, for example, the practices imply a subject who relates and is committed to the truth that is uttered.

Another type of critique focuses on Foucault’s interpretations of the classics. Pierre Hadot and Arnold Davidson, for example, argue that his comparisons between ancient conceptions of the self and modern forms of subjectivity are too straightforward. As pointed out above, Hadot criticises Foucault’s claim that the Stoics construct the self by gathering different pieces of knowledge together and incorporating them by writing exercises. In his view, the objective of these exercises is to rise above singular individuality, find access to universal reason and become part of a larger unity (Hadot 1992, 229). For the Stoics, universal reason is that which ties people together, and for Hadot, the idea of global community is one of the most valuable aspects of Stoic practices of the self. Davidson, in turn, warns against confusing the Greek *psukhē* with modern terminology, because *psukhē* cannot be equated with the ego, the self or “my soul” (Davidson 1994, 127). He associates *psukhē* with a divine and impersonal force.

Hadot also points out that the Stoics keep pleasure (*hēdonē*) and virtue strictly apart, which Foucault ignores. Joy (*eupatheia*) is to be found in the best part of the self, but this best part is understood as reason that can be grasped if one looks at the good intentions in the self. These good intentions are associated with virtue and right actions, but not with pleasure (Hadot 1992, 226–227). Furthermore, when Foucault contrasts Stoic and Christian conceptions of the self, he argues that Christian souls are always haunted by the possibility of evil forces whereas the Stoics are not. However, one should note that the Stoics do not believe that bad intentions or distortions of thought are solely attributable to one’s environment and previous education as Foucault’s analysis suggests (Grahm 2006, 205).

In general, Foucault’s interpretations of the classics remain open to further debate. I have questioned for example the emphasis he puts on *Alcibiades I* as a representative of Plato’s philosophy and as a foundation of a whole line of thought in Western tradition, which Foucault calls “the metaphysics of the soul”. One could also question whether “practice” is the best equivalent of the Greek *to pragma* in Plato’s *Seventh Letter*, and whether the Stoics

pathologized care of the self. It is also problematic how Foucault connects concrete practices of confinement with the exclusion of madness in Descartes' *First Meditation* (Chapter 1.2.2).

However, as philosophically relevant as these topics are, they are not Foucault's main concern, which is the "present field of possible experience". In his late lectures and interviews he situates his own thought in the critical tradition that stretches from Kant to Nietzsche, the Frankfurt school, Max Weber and himself. Habermas, of course, rejects the way in which Foucault presents this lineage and argues that Kant's thought cannot be presented as an early form of Foucauldian philosophy (Habermas 1984b, 106). In his view, Foucault's thinking is incompatible with Kant's *citizen of the world* and the task to proceed further as humanity (ibid.). As I have shown, however, Foucault's aim is not to adopt Kant's philosophy as such but to form his own type of critical philosophy. Given that Foucault's main task is to investigate the present field of possible experience, one should consider the contemporary context of his late work.

2.5.2 The 20th-century Context of Foucault's Late Work

It is sometimes difficult to know whether or not Foucault took up a certain theme because he was participating in contemporary debate as a public intellectual. Sometimes his articles and interviews point to clear links between his lectures and public debates. Commenting on the general elections of 1978, for example, he states that the whole debate revolves around the questions of life and health:

I simply emphasize that "health" is a cultural matter in the broad sense of the word, that is to say, at the same time political, economic and social issue which is related to a certain individual and collective consciousness. Every era defines a profile for normality. (*DEII.325*, 1200)¹⁵⁰

Moreover, in "La philosophie analytique de la politique" he discusses the societal role of philosophy in general, and in this context, he refers briefly to Plato's role as a political advisor (*DEII.232*, 537). He explains that philosophy assumes an anti-despotic role in controlling the use of power in antiquity: a philosopher could take on the role of a legislator who defines laws (Solon), or of a pedagogue who tries to affect governors by educating them (Plato);

¹⁵⁰ "Je souligne simplement que le fait "santé" est un fait culturel au sens le plus large du terme, c'est-à-dire à la fois politique, économique et social, c'est-à-dire lié à un certain état de conscience individuelle et collective. Chaque époque en dessine un profil "normal"." (*DEII.325*, 1200)

alternatively, philosophers could try to be as independent as possible and laugh at the use of power, which was the strategy of the Cynics (*ibid.*)¹⁵¹

Foucault moves quite quickly from the ancient philosophers to 20th-century totalitarian governments in Europe, to National Socialism, Fascism and Stalinism. He characterises any attempt to form a state according to any philosophical system as catastrophic: the peculiar thing about these state philosophies is that they have been characterised as philosophies of freedom—whether they refer to Hegel, Marx or Nietzsche—but they have turned into terror and bureaucracy (*DEII.232*, 538–539).¹⁵²

Foucault's refusal to participate in party politics stems from the trauma caused by European totalitarian governments, but he also argues that the old battles between nationalism and fascism are obsolete, which is why an analysis of new forms of government and mechanisms of power is needed (*DEII.213*, 387). Most importantly, he points out in *The Government of Self and Others* that even if philosophers did stay outside the rhetorical games of institutionalised politics, it would not mean that philosophy had no political impact:

It is not for philosophy to say what should be done in politics. It has to exist in a permanent and restive exteriority with regard to politics, and it is in this that it is real. Secondly, it is not for philosophy to divide the true and the false in the domain of science. It has to constantly practice its criticism with regard to deception, trickery, and illusion, and it is in this that it plays the dialectical game of its own truth. Finally, third, it is not for philosophy to disalienate the subject. It has to define the forms in which the relationship to self may possibly be transformed. I think that philosophy as ascesis, as critique, and as restive exteriority to politics is the mode of being of modern philosophy. It was, at any rate, the mode of being of ancient philosophy. (*GSO*, 354)

In the above quotation Foucault describes the mode of being of philosophy as 1) restive exteriority, 2) a permanent critique and 3) ascesis. In other words, philosophy should not take an advisory role in politics but should stay out and aim at restricting the excessive use of power. Second, philosophy has the critical task of questioning the presumptions of scientific knowledge. Third, the ascetic role of philosophy involves creating possibilities for forming

¹⁵¹ Foucault compares Cynic ways of being with contemporary phenomena such as terrorism, anarchism and revolutionary movements that claim to be more real, genuine and true than other ways of being (*CV*, 170). Foucault argues that modern art also seeks alternative ways of being: rather than mimicking or being decorative, it purports to reveal and make visible that which is too close to see, and to seek alternatives (*CV*, 174). One of his examples is Protestant asceticism, which aims at embodying the truth in the here-and-now, and the truth that needs to be lived through in the earthly, material world (*CV*, 169).

¹⁵² “Le XIXe siècle a vu apparaître en Europe quelque chose qui n’avait jusque-là jamais existé: des États philosophiques, j’allais dire des États-philosophies, des philosophies qui sont en même temps des États, et des États qui se pensent, se réfléchissent, s’organisent et définissent leur choix fondamentaux à partir de propositions philosophiques, à l’intérieur de systèmes philosophiques, et comme la vérité philosophique de l’histoire.” (*DEII*, 538–539)

new relationships with ourselves and with others. Foucault rejects the philosophies of disalienation because the point is not to find the true self or to drag the subject away from false consciousness.

However, he does not claim that self-formation is a solution to severe political problems. The point is rather that subjects can carry out the critical task better if they stay outside of the games of daily politics, take care, form communities and understand that they cannot place themselves and their views on permanent and stable ground. When asked in a late interview if philosophy was about warning against the dangers of power, he responds:

This has always been an important function of philosophy. In its critical aspect—and I mean critical in a broad sense—philosophy is that which calls into question domination at every level and in every form in which it exists, whether political, economic, sexual, institutional, or what have you. To a certain extent, this critical function of philosophy derives from the Socratic injunction “Take care of yourself,” in other words, “Make freedom your foundation, through the mastery of yourself.” (*EST*, 300–301)

Foucault’s late work has been criticised for presupposing a subject who is extremely active and capable, and not sick or weak, for example (Oksala 2001, 64). It is true that concepts such as *the subject*, *subjectivity*, *subjectivation* and *the self* imply aspects of activity, doing and making. Foucault’s work has also been criticised for not explicating how subjects relate to one another in a caring way. I have therefore explicated the intersubjective framework of his analysis of the care of the self and argued that this care-taking presupposes different types of relationships. Continuing his discussion on care of the self as part of his study on truth-telling, Foucault identifies relationships between partners who in some cases are equal friends and in others are asymmetric: couples, lovers, kings and their subjects, doctors and patients, politicians and their advisors, individuals and the masses.

The problem is that even though one cannot be exterior to the power relations, the ethical relations Foucault investigates do not extend to those who are genuinely others, or the third ones, those one never faces. Foucault discusses the faceless masses in the context of Plato’s *Republic* and the Cynics, but in these cases the relationship with the many is rather negative. It should be noted, however, that Foucault points out in the interviews that the formation of a “we” should not presuppose that there is necessarily anything else in common with others than the call that brings the “we” together.

One could, perhaps, argue that one of the biggest problems in Foucault’s thought concerns his theorisation of interaction in terms of game-playing and struggle. In his interpretation of Plato’s *Laches*, for example, equal members of the group face each other as vulnerable and

incomplete, but Foucault characterises their relationship as a negotiation and a game that is won by the one whose actions, thoughts and words correspond. The possibility of always being predisposed to subjection and the tasks of not being governed quite so much seems like an exhausting way of being: this is why I have stressed the aspects of sensitivity and vulnerability in his work.

Noam Chomsky argued recently that 20th-century French intellectuals facilitated post-truth discussion and the era of alternative facts by claiming that there is no truth (Chomsky 2018). It is true that Foucault discusses different procedures of truth-telling as “games of truth” (*jeux de vérité*)¹⁵³ (*DEII.338*, 1361). Thomas Flynn asks, why would any of these forms of truth really matter, if truth were relativized and discussed only as a fragmentary notion, in the same way as Foucault discusses *parrhēsia* (Flynn 1987, 116).

Contrary to those who claim that Foucault only relativizes truth, however, I believe that the analysis of expressions of truth is more relevant now than it has been for decades. I have argued that Foucault is interested in specific expressions of truth that have clearly defined conditions: in public debate, for example, it is not enough simply to utter an expression, but one should be sincerely committed to it, which involves engaging in continuous processes of self-improvement and reflection. Foucault cannot possibly be characterised as a postmodern thinker, and he does not accept all claims of truth as equally correct. He argues in “La philosophie analytique de la politique”, for example, that one should not simply aim at participating in different public discourses, adopting their vocabularies and acclaiming the right to be part of them, one should rather make their conditions visible and actively reject being part of discourses if one cannot accept their conditions and rules (*DEII.232*, 543). In this context, Foucault refers especially to the games of truth that revolve around the questions of madness, medicine, sickness and sick bodies (*DEII.232*, 542). In this thesis I have contextualised the discussion about truth-telling in specific practices of care and therapy, in

¹⁵³ In referring to play, Foucault distinguishes his analysis from theories that give language a grandiose or too insignificant role: he rejects the idea that “language creates the relationship between us and the world” but also the view that “language is powerless and dead” (*DEII.232*, 541). He argues, instead, that language is always negotiated and applied (*DEII.232*, 540–541), thereby rejecting, once again, the view that discursive practices, or madness as it is lived through, could be reduced to language. He compares language to game-playing, wishing to stress the aspect of lived-through participation and to evade the idea that discourses simply produce personal experiences. He argues that one task is to make the rules of games of truth visible—to show how they operate and how they are justified. The references to play are, of course, influenced by Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein explains in *Philosophical Investigations* that one can participate in a language game without knowing the grammar rules or the meaning of each word: one could, for example, learn a game by looking at how others play it and joining in (Wittgenstein 1981, §31): participating in a game does not require that one knows the name of each pawn, but by observing a game such as chess one can work out what function each pawn has and what position it can take. Foucault argues in his interpretation of Plato’s *Laches* that the characters do not necessarily even know the rules of the Socratic process when they participate in his therapeutic game in the street, but they are still capable of playing along. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, in turn, he formulates a theory of discourses in which subjects can fill only particular types of subject positions.

which one should always acknowledge the possible negative effects of the asymmetric relationship.

2.5.3 The Care of the Self and Neoliberalism

Nowadays the loudest critics of Foucault's late work are Marxist scholars who claim that in framing his study as an investigation of governmentality, and inserting the component of freedom in the analysis, he is flirting with neoliberal politics. Mitchell Dean argues, for example, that the framework of governmentality displays "a necessary affinity with neoliberalism" (Dean 2015, 402). The critics link Foucault's late work on ethics with the neoliberal ideal of creating oneself as an active subject who adapts to contemporary job markets by engaging in practices of poietic self-transformation. Dean claims, for instance, that Foucault's analysis of neoliberalism and the creation of human capital in *The Birth of Biopolitics* constitutes a pathway to his later work on care of the self (ibid.). He also suggests that in analysing neoliberalism Foucault seeks a positive "form of regulation that minimizes internal subjectivation and tolerates difference and minority groups" (Dean 2015, 400).

However, it is somewhat peculiar that in the minds of critics the one who analyses neoliberalism becomes the advocate of this economic schema. One should carefully study how Foucault's argument proceeds in *The Birth of Biopolitics* and in the interviews in which he discusses state power. One should ask how he defines neoliberalism and what his conclusions are. The neoliberal schema involves the specific arts of governing, but Foucault analyses neoliberalism specifically as a general principle of intelligibility, an explanatory schema that implies its own ways of defining rationality.¹⁵⁴

In general, neoliberalism is a blurry term that is used for critical analysis. The whole point of Foucault's study is to show that economic vocabulary is used in this explanatory schema to conceptualise conduct in domains and relationships that are not reducible to monetary exchange. He points out how marital and familial relationships and education are characterised in the neoliberal schema as "investments" in human capital (BB, 243; 245). Those who operate within such a schema claim to deal with these issues rationally, which means "in economic terms". Foucault argues that this intelligibility involves criticising public institutions of health and education in terms of supply, demand, costs, inputs and outputs, benefits and efficiency,

¹⁵⁴ Johanna Oksala argues that Foucault's main point is to show that neoliberal governing is not based on the belief that the market would function most effectively without interference (Oksala 2016, 116–117). Instead, the neoliberal space must be produced by active intervention, especially by guiding human behaviour through competition (ibid.).

with the aim of showing the irrational and inconsistent nature of governmental policies that concern the public sector (*BB*, 246–247). Even if he does not analyse policies as such but the rationality of their justification, he argues that the rationale of the neoliberal schema affects social, educational and cultural policies.

Foucault is interested in neoliberalism as a form of critical morality. However, in this context suggesting that American neoliberalism presents itself in the form of a critique is not evaluated as a positive statement. I have discussed Foucault's late work as a study of the critical attitude, as a critique of critique. It could be characterised as a project that investigates the relationship between governing and the constitution of healthy subjects. The common denominator between the analysis of neoliberalism and his critical ethics is the objective of questioning the intensification of certain practices of the self.

It is true that Foucault connects social welfare with paternalism in a problematic way. I should point out, however, that the state to which he refers is not the ideal of the late-20th or early-21st-century Nordic welfare state. He is very sceptical of certain forms of state power, and even argues that the aim of the State is to control everything and to be totalitarian (*DEII*, 386):

[R]eason for dwelling on these problems of neo-liberalism is what I would call a reason of critical morality. Actually, going by the recurrence of certain themes, we could say that what is currently challenged, and from many perspectives, is almost always the state: the unlimited growth of the state, its omnipotence, its bureaucratic development, the state with the seeds of fascism it contains, the state's inherent violence beneath its social welfare paternalism. (*BB*, 186–187)

The state that Foucault criticises is the state that sterilises and hospitalises people for long periods of time and medicates excessively.

In the debate on state power he criticises forms of control that are justified in terms of *security*. State control includes measures that are taken in the fight against terrorism, for example, but also social security, understood as something that protects against a threat (*DEII*, 386–387).¹⁵⁵ Thus, the main point is to criticise the security discourse and to call for another way of conceptualising the social sector (*DEII*, 387; 1192).

It is true, as well, that Foucault refers in “*Omnes et Singulatim*” to “the welfare state problem” in a debate on the disadvantages of a specific welfare system (*Power*, 307; *DEII*, 1187). He claims in “*Un système fini face à une demande infinie*” that the social-security

¹⁵⁵ In *Security, Territory, Population*, Foucault contrasts “security” with disciplinary power. Disciplinary power is a permanent state of control that lets nothing escape from its view; it regulates, sees everything and uses techniques of documentation (*STP*, 45). Security is something different—it lets things happen and, in this sense, it is understood as a productive form of power that does not simply repress subjects (*ibid.*).

system, the specific system with which he is familiar, has positive effects but also perverted aspects (DEII, 1187–1188): a system is perverted *when it claims to support equality but at the same time produces marginalization* as the effect of ill-placed and unnecessary moralism. The problem, in Foucault’s view, is that one must either be fully integrated and accept “normal” and conservative ways of being, or one becomes marginalised or completely excluded from society (DEII, 1188).

Drawing a parallel between the active subject of Foucault’s ethics and the neoliberal subject seems rather odd in that Foucault is the one who analyses, critically and quite famously, the neoliberal economic human being as an entrepreneur of the self (BB, 226). Entrepreneurs of the self are not seen as partners of exchange, but as people who produce themselves simultaneously as capital and as a source of that capital (BB, 226). Foucault claims that creating a specific type of environment for this *homo oeconomicus* involves stimulating a permanent state of competition and continuously producing new things, innovations and techniques (BB, 231).

Foucault also questions the view that the neoliberal *homo oeconomicus* is an atomic individual who is concerned mainly with his own interests and benefits. In fact, building up human capital requires considerable investments, especially in education, health and family relations (BB, 229–230; 246). If one wishes to raise a child with high human capital, one needs to fulfil certain conditions:

[Y]ou will have to make an investment, that is to say, you will have to have worked enough, to have sufficient income, and to have a social status such that it will enable you to take for a spouse or co-producer of this future human capital, someone who has significant human capital themselves (BB, 228).

Foucault connects neoliberalism with the whole cycle of reproduction in which a child is understood as an abilities-machine-to-be: every moment that is spent with the child, and all the care and affection, are cultural stimuli for future human capital (BB, 229). The purpose of investing in the child is to make the child sensitive and adaptable to the environment, someone who accepts it as it is and who is capable of modifying oneself according the changes that take place in it (BB, 269–270). In other words, adapting to the environment requires an active way of being. Investing in education is thus a much broader duty than participating in schooling. Foucault claims that in the neoliberal scheme education is not only an academic but also a physical process, in the same way as health is not only about the functional state of a healthy organism. A child is not simply given nourishment, for example, because nourishment is part of the whole investment: the child gets the physical profit, but also profits from learning a whole pattern of eating and a relationship with food (BB, 244). In this way, the topic of style,

which runs through Foucault's work, recurs in the economic context. Without the ethical framework the objectives of sensitivity and adaptability sound rather cynical and manipulative.

Arnold Davidson points out Foucault's use of the word "conduct" in his discussion on the behavioural techniques of the neoliberal schema, but in this context, conduct does not involve any possibilities of counter-conduct (Davidson 2011, 37). Davidson further notes Foucault's similar use of "conduct" in *The Psychiatric Power* in his discussion of 19th-century psychiatry. In both contexts, behaviour is observed from the scientific perspective or in terms of an explanatory scheme. Reducing "conduct" to "behaviour" without the ethical component of freedom or the reflective aspect of self-relation narrows the options in terms of understanding forms of counter-conduct. As Davidson writes: "In this setting, counter-conduct is nothing more than a form of irrationality, just as in the history of psychiatry, it is but a form of abnormality (Davidson 2011, 37).

It is not a coincidence, then, that Foucault discusses the themes of education, health and diet in his late work in a critical light, neither is it a coincidence that he wants to discuss subjects as free beings who are capable of counter-conduct. His critical ethics provokes a question concerning the promises of freedom: what is promised when one engages in practices of the self? His thought also raises questions such as how to relate to these practices and how to form spaces and relationships of care.

Those who accuse Foucault of a "necessary affinity with neoliberalism" in his late work argue that he is mistaken in including the aspect of freedom in his analysis. They pine for the Althusserian concept of subjectivation from which Foucault wished to move forward: he felt that otherwise subjects would remain paralysed and oppressed by the mechanisms of power. Dean nevertheless argues that Foucault was a thinker whose problems are no longer our own (Dean 2015, 403). I claim, in contrast, that those who recognise different forms of exclusion, the culture of the self and the culture of competition in their everyday lives would agree that the issues Foucault discusses have not lost their topicality.

Conclusions to Part Two

Whereas I explicated the different concepts of experience in Foucault's work in Part One of this thesis, in Part Two I addressed the question of how "the experience of the self" in his late work should be understood. I argued that in referring to a *certain* experience of the self, Foucault delineates a set of historical circumstances, or "a form of experience", in which the self may be experienced in specific ways. I explained that he analyses how the Socratic imperative to take care of the self occurs in different historically delineated contexts, meaning that classical Greek, Stoic and Christian forms of experience enable different types of self-relations. Foucault discusses care of the self also as a cultural phenomenon, as a culture of care that is lived through and realised by subjects in their relationships with others. In other words, care of the self is both a collective and a personal experience, which emerges within a culture but that affects and is profoundly meaningful to the subject. I argued in Part One that Foucault positions his investigation of mental illness in his early essays as a study on intersubjectivity following in Heidegger's footsteps, and I continued the discussion in Chapter 2.2 by contextualising Foucault's concept of care in this intersubjective framework.

I have argued that the experience of the self in which Foucault is interested involves activities and techniques implying the aim of self-transformation and a recommendation to focus on the self. It is quite common to claim that Foucault's work on ancient ethics does not constitute a theory of the subject. It is true that he does not respond at length to the ontological question of what the subject is. Instead, he focuses especially on the question of what subjects must do to themselves in order to be particular types of subjects, such as political subjects or subjects of ethical conduct.

I nevertheless argued that it is necessary to explicate the meanings of *the self*, *the subject*, *subjectivity*, *subjection* and *subjectivation* when these terms are used. I explained at the beginning of Chapter 2.1 that "the self" as a concept refers to the *relation* one forms with oneself. The relation comprises activity based on specific techniques. Techniques are thus integral to Foucault's concept of the self, and he does not investigate them merely out of historical curiosity. I also argued that in Foucault's late work *subject* means the standpoint from which the relation with oneself is formed. *Subjectivity*, in turn, refers to the ways in which one experiences oneself. These concepts differ from *subjection*, the ways in which mechanisms of power form and affect the subject. I claimed, however, that in the late work Foucault replaces subjection with the concept of *subjectivation* which includes the aspects of objectifying the self by the self and transforming the self.

The types of “experience of the self” that Foucault investigates imply recommendations to form oneself as an ethical subject. These ethical paradigms differ from moral systems that are based on the prescription of prohibitions and sanctions. Foucault’s interest is in the relationship between dietetics and ethics, because in both practices the criterion for self-modification is based on moderation, the right timing, quality and proportion. He investigates the principles of dietetic moderation that maintain health and, simultaneously, constitute the foundation of conduct for those who are free and govern others. He discusses the theme of dietetics as early as in *Introduction to Kant’s Anthropology*, and it is clear that the art of healthy living is a political question to both Foucault and Kant. The sources Foucault uses in his late work for investigating techniques of the self include Plato and Aristotle’s political writings, and I have shown that the questions of health, ethics and politics are profoundly connected in Foucault’s late thought.

One of the main arguments in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* is that the Stoics describe practices associated with “care of the self” in medical terms. Epictetus, for example, states that anyone who wishes to engage in philosophical practices of self-care should recognise themselves as subjects who are ill. Foucault questions the Stoics about what they do with their freedom: they choose to submit themselves to various, detailed practices in their search for tranquillity. He then remarks that exercises of the self are often exclusive in practice, some more than others, but he is also looking for opportunities to apply the practices in new ways. I argued that such exercises have different functions and a whole variety of objectives ranging from incorporating truths into the spine to questioning harmful beliefs and appropriating discourses for new purposes.

In Chapter 2.3 I explicated a set of theoretical shifts in Foucault’s last two Collège de France lecture series. It is often presumed that his late work is structured along the axes of ethics, power and knowledge, but in his late lectures the field of experience comprises “the procedures of truth”, “forms of governing” and “the pragmatics of the self”. He no longer positions his research as the history of subjectivity focusing on techniques of the self: he is more interested in expressions of truth and the relationship between care of the self and political engagement. I argued at the beginning of the chapter that Foucault’s late lectures on truth-telling (*parrhêsia*) form a narrative in which a specific type of truth-telling—to which one is sincerely committed—first occurs in public spaces, but in therapeutic relationships it becomes a private matter.

In so doing I linked his early work on psychiatry to his late lectures on different procedures in which people tell the truth about themselves. I explained in Chapter 1.1 that in his early essays on existential psychiatry Foucault purports to understand personal experiences in their

own terms as they are uttered in explicit statements, given his insistence that one should not presuppose anything about people's experiences based on mere theoretical speculation. Furthermore, he identifies cases in *History of Madness* in which madness and social contradictions are allowed to be expressed as truths about society, not only as private truths. Hence, expressions of truth in his late lecture courses *The Government of Self and Others* and *The Courage of Truth* are then included in his analysis of the historically delineated "field of experience" as one of its integral components.

Foucault claims in his late lectures that Western thought is characterised by the split between philosophy that investigates conditions of subjectivity and philosophy that focuses on critical attitudes and expressions. On the basis of this division he makes a distinction between two genealogical lines of thought: "the metaphysics of the soul" and "the aesthetics of existence". One can recognise the distinction from Foucault's interpretations of Kant but also from commentaries that criticise his late thought and wonder how the subject who is conditioned by historical circumstances can become a critical subject. I argued, however, that he investigates Plato's dialogues and Epictetus' descriptions of the Cynics precisely because of his interest in texts in which ethical self-formation, in other words forming a relationship with the self in a particular historical context, is combined with political activity. When Foucault discusses Plato's political advice in the *Seventh Letter* he picks out references to medical vocabulary and shows that the aim is to diagnose and heal the city and engage its leader in philosophical practices.

I have discussed Foucault's late work and ethics of the self consistently as a critical project and as a part of his political philosophy aimed at conceptualising different forms of exclusion. I asked in Chapter 2.4, how normativity should be understood in Foucault's late thought. In response, I included the study of "forms of experience" in the analysis. In Part One I discussed forms of experience as normative systems with specific conditions that facilitate perception of the objects and subjects of knowledge in specific ways. I argued that in this context, normativity should be understood as implicit in phenomena, not as rules that are imposed on them from the outside.

I also argued that this conception of implicit normativity does not yet explain, why a decision or an action is meaningful to the subject. Foucault rejects Kantian, deontological moral theory, which appeals to duty. Instead, he stresses the ethical call as an invitation to take care of the self and others as a pleasurable devotion in which one would like to engage and invite others to join. This does not mean that one should only act in ways that one predicts will be pleasurable: the idea is rather to evaluate actions against the totality of other actions that form life as a meaningful whole. Instead of focusing on joyless duty one should take care

of the field of relationships with ethical sensitivity and acknowledging the vulnerability of others.

While participating in public discussions as an intellectual, Foucault also stresses the anti-despotic role of philosophy and explains that it derives from the imperative to take care of the self. In other words, care-taking and the critical function of philosophy are combined. Although he does not invite his readers to adopt techniques of the self as such—his aim is not to persuade us to shape ourselves neither as conservative figures of traditional virtue ethics nor as entrepreneurs of the self—he encourages people to become subjects of critique. He defines critique as a virtue, meaning a continuous task and a matter of constant practice that requires tolerance of insecurity and normative evaluation.

Thus, I characterised Foucault as a normative, critical thinker, whose aim is to create a reflective distance from current practices and techniques of the self through his investigation of ancient sources. I reflected on possible ways of rejecting the processes of unificatory objectivation, in which people are placed in unnecessary identity categories (such as “the mad” or “the disordered”) and are treated merely as specific types of objects such as patients, corpses or organisms. Foucault encourages us to form friendships, to investigate and question the presuppositions and justifications in systems of classification and to refuse to take part in the production and maintenance of identity categories that are harmful, maintain exclusion or distribute rights unequally.

General Conclusions

My task in this thesis was to explicate Foucault's various concepts of experience. These concepts have crucial theoretical functions, and it may well be impossible to understand his arguments without explicating them. Foucault's philosophy of experience does not form a system, and he assigns different meanings to the concepts and notions of experience. For example, "limit-experience" and "transformative experience" are not developed at length as theoretical concepts, their meanings vary and the reader has to patch them together from various sources. The signification and theoretical framework of "background experience" and "fundamental experience" (*expérience fondamentale*) change along the way as well: *expérience fondamentale* can refer to a perceptual horizon or an underlying structure of experience, to marginalised phenomena or a profound personal experience.

However, there are also continuities in how Foucault deals with the various concepts of experience, and I have drawn attention to the thematic connections between his early and late works. When he reorganises his work in the 1980s he continuously revisits his early work on psychiatry and reflects on the methodological problems of unfixed concepts of experience. He frames his late study according to a new concept, "the field of experience", which enables him to include the aspect of governmentality, procedures of objectivation and reflective self-analysis in the same study.

Little, if any, attention has been given to the integral theoretical function that the reintroduction of "the forms of experience" assumes in Foucault's late work. In his early works on the history of human sciences and medical knowledge they function as a conceptual tool in the objective investigation of the *ways* in which the subjects and objects of knowledge can be, and how they can be perceived and spoken about in specific historical-cultural contexts. Foucault uses "the forms of experience" in his later study on the history of subjectivity for investigating the historical-cultural conditions that enable subjects to perceive and speak about *themselves* in specific ways. Simultaneously, he uses the concept for theorising on the concrete ways in which subjects live through these experiences.

I argued that on all occasions, Foucault's philosophy should be framed as a study of intersubjectivity. In his analysis of the culture of the self, for example, he focuses on different *relationships* of guidance. I have shown that the concepts he develops in his late work, such as conduct, care and governing, characterise the ways in which subjects guide themselves and others in these relationships. These concepts also connect his ethics and his political thought. I claimed in Part One that, within this intersubjective framework, Foucault does not discard

the perspective of personal experience, not even when focusing on the conditions and the objective aspects of experience.

Instead, Foucault adopts different strategies for improving the ways in which patients are treated, how people treat each other and how we treat ourselves. Foucault's strategy in his early essays is to analyse the structures of personal experience, to show that mental disorders become manifest in intersubjective relations, and to argue that expressions of these experiences should be understood strictly in their own terms. Moreover, ever since his early essays Foucault is creating and defending theoretical positions that enable change in the current way of being, even in the most severe cases of mental distress. In *History of Madness*, in turn, he investigates the voices of "madness" before they were explained through psychiatric discourses, and he traces the concrete gestures of social and intellectual exclusion. Furthermore, *Introduction to Kant's Anthropology* deals with the connection between the Kantian conception of experience and his categorisation of mental illness and shows how Kant places mental disorders inside human beings. He goes on in *The Birth of the Clinic* to demonstrate the organisation of medical perception and the ways in which structures of knowledge form hierarchical relations between the subjects and the objects of knowledge.

Finally, I argued that Foucault's genealogy of ethics from the 1980s is a normative study that issues different instructions covering a healthy life, care of the self and care of others for us to compare and critically examine. Foucault shows, in specific historical contexts, how healthy subjects of dietetic regulation and ethical labour are simultaneously formed as political subjects who make decisions that concern everyone. Critique can be understood, first, as the investigation of the conditions of the current field of possible experiences, including the experiences we have of ourselves, and second, as a virtue. Virtue ethics enables Foucault to combine the study of the conditions that have formed us as subjects with the study of critical activity. Virtue involves the constant practice of forming a caring relationship with the self and with others, and when critique is understood as a virtue, it is, at the same time, an ongoing, well-reflected task aimed at questioning all forms of domination.

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