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From Biopolitics to Biopoetics and Back Again

On a Counterintuitive Continuity in Foucault's Thought

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1. Introduction

In the second lecture of his 1980–1 lecture course at the Collège de France, *Subjectivity and Truth*, Michel Foucault discusses various possible designations for the arts of living or techniques of the self, developed in Greek and Latin antiquity, that became the main focus of his research in the 1980s. The manuscript of the lectures features one curious fragment that was not uttered in the lecture itself. In this fragment, Foucault considers the term "biopoetics" as the term covering these numerous arts or techniques:

> Biopoetics would be justified because it is indeed a sort of personal fabrication of one's own life (note that in these arts the question often arises of whether or not an act is beautiful). One could thus follow the problem of sexual conduct: biopoetics where it is a matter of the aesthetic-moral conduct of individual existence; biopolitics where it is a matter of the normalization of sexual conducts according to what is considered politically as the requirement of a population.
>
> (Foucault 2017, 34n)

This note remains the only instance in Foucault's lectures where the concepts of biopoetics and biopolitics figure together, addressing different aspects of sexual conduct. Whereas biopoetics pertains to individual existence taken up in the "aesthetic-moral" aspect, biopolitics pertains to the normalization undertaken on the level of the population. The notion of biopoetics no longer appears in Foucault's texts after this course and has not been addressed in Foucault studies. In the contemporary literature, this notion has been applied

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primarily in the field of literary theory in two rather different contexts, quite at odds with the focus of Foucault's research. Firstly, biopoetics was advanced as a research program that applies the insights from evolutionary biology to the analysis of literary works (Turner and Cooke 1999). Secondly, it was offered as a synthesis of the problematic of biopolitics with the concerns of literary theory and the refoundation of the latter on an apparently materialist basis (Guyer 2015; see more generally De Boever 2013; Breu 2014).[1] However, none of the studies of biopoetics so far has ventured to explicate Foucault's own account of the relationship between biopoetics and biopolitics.

In this chapter, we explore the meaning and the significance of Foucault's note for our understanding of the relation between his more explicitly political writings and his turn toward the ancient techniques of the self in the 1980s. We argue that Foucault's distinction between biopoetics and biopolitics simultaneously functions as the *articulation* of the otherwise disparate research projects into a meaningful whole. Moreover, even though this articulation is not explicitly pursued in the remainder of the 1980–1 lecture course, its functioning is demonstrated in Foucault's extensive analysis of the transformations in the discourse on marriage in the Hellenistic period, in which biopoetic techniques are presented as the resolution to the problems that, only somewhat anachronistically, could be viewed as biopolitical.

Our reading will go against the more established approach to Foucault's dossier on biopolitics. According to this approach, by 1979 Foucault abandoned not merely the explicit theorization of biopolitics begun in "*Society Must Be Defended*" (Foucault 2003) and the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* (Foucault 1990), but also the wider inquiry into modern European governmentality in which biopolitics was recontextualized in the 1977–8 lectures (see Foucault 2007, 1–11). On a strictly exoteric level, Foucault's discourse on biopolitics expired at the latest with the 1978–9 lectures *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2008), which, as some commentators have correctly noted, were not really about biopolitics either (see Collier 2011, 16–17; Forti 2012, 242–66; Hoffman 2013, 57, 100–2 for alternative readings). Yet, given the abundance of both theoretical and empirical research on biopolitics in the last two decades, in which the concept was expanded and transformed far beyond Foucault's original articulation, sticking to this exoteric level appears to be an overly restrictive methodological choice that is, moreover, entirely contrary to Foucault's well-known vision of his work as a toolkit available for experimental use. In line with this vision, we take Foucault's note on

[1] The term has also been used in the context of biosemiotics to interpret the entirety of life as a meaning-making process (see Weber 2016).

biopoetics and biopolitics in *Subjectivity and Truth* as sufficient reason to reject the assumption of a strict discontinuity between the genealogical-governmental phase in Foucault's writings and his turn to the Greeks.

While the resonances between these phases have already been explored elsewhere (see Elden 2016, 2017; Forti 2012; Hoffman 2013), the dominant assumption in the studies of biopolitics remains that Foucault's work on the subject is limited to the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, *"Society Must Be Defended," Security, Territory, Population*, and, perhaps in name only, *The Birth of Biopolitics* (Foucault 1990, 2003, 2007, 2008). On the contrary, we argue that our understanding of Foucault's notion of biopolitics will remain incomplete unless it also takes account of his writings on the biopoetics of antiquity. Our argument in this chapter will proceed in two steps. First, we reconstitute Foucault's analysis of the Stoic discourse on marriage in *Subjectivity and Truth* as a paradigm for the articulation of biopolitics and biopoetics that opens governmental rationalities to various forms of reception, readjustment, or resistance by the subject. We then proceed to Foucault's study of the Cynics in his final lecture course *The Courage of Truth* (Foucault 2011), in which biopoetics is in turn submitted to a politicization that does not take the form of governmental rationality but rather consists in the constitution of a form of life through the confrontation with the existing order of the world. Finally, in the conclusion we address the implications of our reading for contemporary discussions of affirmative biopolitics.

2. Making Government Livable: The Conjunction of Biopolitics and Biopoetics

In the *Subjectivity and Truth* lectures, Foucault analyzes the philosophical discourse on marriage in the Hellenistic period, particularly in such Stoic authors as Musonius Rufus, Hierocles, and Antipater of Tarsus (Foucault 2017, 123–203). The focus of the analysis is the relationship between discourses of truth and the constitution of the subject (see Prozorov 2019 for a detailed discussion). These texts, which prescribe the restriction of sexual relations to the married couple, modified the earlier Greek ethics of *aphrodisia*, which did not privilege any particular type or setting for sexual practices. Instead, the Greeks of the classical period affirmed two principles regulating the "use of pleasures": the principle of activity that discredited any passive position in a sexual relation and the principle of socio-sexual isomorphism that required a proper sexual act to respect the partners' social standing and roles. Without prohibiting any particular type

of sexual act, this ethics of *aphrodisia* could nonetheless adjudicate between proper and improper acts (Foucault 2017, 75–93). For instance, a sexual act between a free man and a male slave was proper as long the free man was in the active position and turned improper when he assumed a passive position. On the other hand, a sexual act of a free man with a married woman conformed to the principle of activity but violated the principle of isomorphism insofar as it encroached on the rights of one's neighbor. In contrast to this ethics of activity and isomorphism, the approach to sexuality in the Stoic discourse increasingly privileges the family as the sole legitimate locus of sexual activity, limits sexual relations to the function of procreation, and transforms marriage from an economic relation into an affective bond that goes beyond mere carnal pleasure.

In Foucault's argument, it would be a mistake to view this discourse as an expression of a new moral code arising in the Hellenistic period. Instead, he approaches it as belonging to the genre of "techniques of the self" or, more strictly, techniques of living (*technai peri ton bion*), by which one analyzes, evaluates, and transforms one's existence. These techniques did not produce any break with the existing moral code of the time or the fundamental values of the period, but rather permitted reconciling the emerging Hellenistic code of behavior that valorized marriage with the fundamental values of the Greek ethics of *aphrodisia*. The valorization of marriage as a singular relation distinct from the wider field of social practices appears to exclude the principles of socio-sexual isomorphism and male activity. Nonetheless, the Stoic discourse brought the two together by transforming the relationship to the self at work in sexual practices. Instituting the division between private and public life, making sexual desire the privileged object of the relation to oneself, and linking sexual pleasure with the affective domain, the Stoic philosophers made it possible to continue to affirm male activity and socio-sexual isomorphism while at the same time abiding by the strict rules of conjugal fidelity and the prescription of the affective bond with one's spouse. It was precisely the inequality between husband and wife that now obliged the husband to guide and direct the wife by his own example, thereby proscribing all extramarital sexual relations that this inequality previously allowed and instituting the principle of reciprocity between spouses.

The isolation of conjugal sexuality as a privileged domain permitted to reinscribe the Greek principle of activity and the prescription of self-control it entailed in terms of the idea of self-mastery and the renunciation of extramarital desire (Foucault 2017, 275–6). The valorization of activity exercised on the other was thus converted into an active domination of oneself. Thus, Foucault is able to conclude that the Stoic discourse on sexuality neither

reflected nor prescribed a new moral code or a system of values but rather enabled the subject to "[be] transformed in such a way that he can live in this code of conjugality while still maintaining the value of socio-sexual continuity and the principle of activity" (267). In this manner, the old Greek aristocracy could maintain its traditional values in the condition of social and political transformations in the Hellenistic monarchies, marked by the rise of new elites and the weakening of traditional aristocratic privileges: "Philosophical discourse was proposing, was conveying techniques, precisely in order to be able to live, to accept the modes of behavior proposed and imposed from outside, techniques that literally rendered them livable" (275). Foucault's choice of words here is highly important. If we consider the transformations in the modes of governance in the Hellenistic monarchies to be biopolitical insofar as they proposed and imposed modes of behavior, then the discourses on the techniques of living were what made these biopolitical regulations "livable," in the sense of both being tolerable in actual existence and being endowed with some degree of viability, without which they would have remained dead letter. The biopoetic discourse on marriage transformed the subject's relationship to itself, making it possible for him (and never her!) to subjectivize the emerging moral code in a specific manner that would also permit upholding older values that nominally conflicted with it.

This example clearly demonstrates the articulation between biopoetics and biopolitics. While evidently different in many ways, these practices at least unfold on the same level and have ultimately the same object: one's life that could be formed, reformed, transformed, or perhaps deformed in both large-scale regulatory governance of populations and micro-level individual or group exercises that adapted, adjusted, or resisted the rationalities of this governance. Unless this articulation is rendered explicit, the importance of these micro-level exercises for political subjectivation is not appreciated, leading to the familiar interpretation of Foucault's turn to the Greeks as a turn away from politics in any meaningful sense.

Ironically, exactly the same reception appears to meet the work of the author who has arguably done most to popularize the notion of biopolitics since the 1990s, namely, Giorgio Agamben. In the final volume of his *Homo Sacer* series, Agamben performed a similar shift from the studies of sovereign power and economic government toward the quotidian domain of habits, manners, and lifestyles. Just as Foucault's "Greek turn" came as a surprise after decades of focus on European modernity, this new focus of Agamben's work at first glance appears unexpected. Having gained notoriety with hyperbolic claims about states of exception and concentration camps in the early volumes of the *Homo Sacer* series, Agamben has now isolated an almost

proverbially banal site of lifestyle, from dating and diet to sadomasochism and shopping, and ultimately including all the acts involving "nutrition, digestion, urination, defecation, sleep, sexuality" that we tend to file under the "private" domain, thereby precluding any understanding of their political significance (Agamben 2016, xx).

This makes all the more important Agamben's theorization of the ontological aspect of these quotidian acts and practices that may help us understand what Foucault intended by designating the techniques of the self as "biopoetic." In Agamben's reading, Foucault's overwhelmingly detailed study of the Greek and early Roman sexual regimen, mnemonic exercises, and techniques of the examination of conscience and truth-telling may have obscured for his readers the ontological question that all those inquiries were meant to elucidate: What is the subject that *is* only the care of its own *self*, whose sole consistency is its own self-fashioning?[2] Agamben's own inquiry into forms of life attempts to show that lifestyle, habits, and taste, which Foucault analyzed under the rubric of "aesthetics of existence" (Foucault 1992, 12, 89–93), are matters far too important to be abandoned to aesthetics: "[A]nyone who practices a *poiesis* and an activity . . . are anonymous living beings who, by always rendering inoperative the works of language, of vision, of bodies, seek to have an experience of themselves and to constitute their life as form-of-life" (Agamben 2016, 247). Thus, rather than treat lifestyle in aesthetic terms, Agamben proposes to reinscribe it in terms of ontology and ethics that, moreover, are found to coincide in it:

> It is necessary to decisively subtract tastes from the aesthetic dimension and rediscover their ontological character, in order to find in them something like a new ethical territory. It is not a matter of attributes or properties of a subject who judges but of the mode in which each person, in losing himself as subject, constitutes himself as form-of-life. The secret of taste is what form of life must solve, has always already solved and displayed. . . . If every body is affected by its form-of-life as by a clinamen or a taste, the ethical subject is that subject that constitutes itself in relation to this clinamen, the subject who bears witness to its tastes, takes responsibility for the mode in which it is affected by its inclinations. Modal ontology, the ontology of the *how*, coincides with an ethics. (Agamben 2016, 231)

Rather than merely adorn or embellish one's already constituted form of life, tastes, habits, and manners of living constitute both this form and the

[2] On this, see Prozorov 2017. On the care of the self and the aesthetics of existence in Foucault, see also chapter 4 by Kalliopi Nikolopoulou in this volume.

subject that takes a stance, bears witness, and assumes responsibility for this constitution. While this question is beyond the scope of the present chapter, the idea of biopoetic subjectivation suggests that it would be fruitful to focus not only on the relation between Foucault's "middle" period and his later turn to the Greeks but also on the relation of biopolitical thinking to Foucault's earlier analyses of the "untamed ontology" of life in *The Order of Things* (Foucault 1970, 282; see also Tarizzo 2011).

Interestingly, this poetic dimension is reserved by Foucault only for these quotidian, micro-level exercises. While all power was endowed with productivity in the methodological prolegomena of the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* (Foucault 1990, 92–102), the actual analysis of the kind undertaken in *Subjectivity and Truth* does not approach macro-level shifts in governmental rationalities as directly productive of transformations in subjectivity. In order to be rendered livable, these shifts required the biopoetic interventions that (re)constituted the subjects' forms of life, which also involved intricate adjustments and shifts of emphasis or focus in these macro-level rationalities of government. Biopolitics, on this reading, needs biopoetics to acquire some hold on the *bios* of the governed, which might come at the cost of substantial modifications in its rationalities that make them livable for the subjects involved.

This perspective suggests that biopoetics and biopolitics do not exclude or succeed one another but may rather be viewed as operating in conjunction in various historical contexts. The perception of a strong discontinuity in Foucault's work between the studies of modern biopolitics and the analyses of Greek and Roman biopoetics thus appears to be at least exaggerated and should rather be rethought as a question of emphasis. While Foucault's analysis of modernity focused on biopolitics and only rarely touched upon biopoetics (for example, in his discussion of counter-conduct, see Foucault 2007, 201–12), his studies of antiquity engage in overwhelming detail with the biopoetic dimension while offering only very general or skeletal formulations about macro-level biopolitical rationalities. This is certainly not because Foucault was unaware of the existence (for example, in ancient Greece) of rationalities of government that we may today easily recognize as biopolitical, be they the upbringing of children in Sparta or the designs of population management in Aristotle's *Politics* (see Ojakangas 2016). The reason that Foucault did not address these rationalities is, in our view, simply and precisely because they are already sufficiently recognizable to us, in contrast to the biopoetic techniques whose significance has declined in the modern era and which require a more detailed elaboration. Rather than suggest that antiquity

was biopoetic and modernity biopolitical, Foucault simply focused on what was more distinctive and interesting about each period.

3. The Cynics: Politicizing Biopoetics

Foucault's turn toward biopoetics began with his 1980 course *On the Government of the Living* (2014). Similarly to the lectures of the previous year, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, the course title is deceptive: just as there was nothing about the birth of biopolitics in the 1979 course, the 1980 lectures did not deal with the government of the living in any meaningful way, but from the outset adopted a focus on the subjectivizing aspects of the injunction to truth-telling in early Christianity. The shift of perspective toward biopoetics appears even more pronounced with the turn to the ancient Greece and Rome in the subsequent courses—*Subjectivity and Truth* (1980–1), *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* (1981–2), *The Government of Self and Others* (1982–3)—and volumes two and three of *The History of Sexuality*. However, in his study of the Cynics in his final course *The Courage of Truth* (1983–4), Foucault performs yet another perspectival shift, subjecting biopoetics itself to a kind of politicization that would not be reducible to the government of populations.

This politicization erupts within the very discourse of truth-telling (*parrhēsia*) that primarily preoccupies Foucault in his studies of antiquity. Whereas *On the Government of the Living* concluded by demonstrating how the obligation to tell the truth in Christianity was inextricably tied to one's complete and permanent obedience to the other (Foucault 2014, 265–78, 307–8), the Cynic *parrhēsia* explicitly inverted this relationship: truth-telling is only possible as an act of *disobedience* in the face of all social norms and conventions. In contrast to other forms of *parrhēsia* practiced in ancient Greece, the veridiction of the Cynics was no longer a condition for practicing politics or even an instrument for the attainment of political ends, but rather became itself political in demonstrating how one could live otherwise yet still in accordance with the truth, and thereby pointing to the possibilities of the transformation of the world at large (Foucault 2011, 217–19).

Resonating with Agamben's later inquiries into the "form-of-life," in which *bios* and *zōē* become indistinct, Foucault traced the way the Cynics' true life was constituted through an intricate operation that made life and truth reciprocally conditional: "The Cynics turn life into a vehicle of truth and truth into a vehicle of life, bringing forth a perfect communion between life

and truth, such that the body gives form to truth and truth gives form to body" (Lemm 2014, 210). In Foucault's reading, truth in classical Greek philosophy was defined by four attributes: it was something unconcealed, undistorted, straight, and sovereign. Rather than contest any of these four attributes in favor of some new idea of truth, the Cynics appropriated them as inherent in life itself, which evidently altered their conventional meanings. First, the Cynic's life "is without modesty, shame, and human respect. It is a life which does in public, in front of everyone, what only dogs and animals dare to do, and which men usually hide" (Foucault 2011, 243, 252–5). This scandalous behavior that does not recognize social conventions and insists on the complete publicity of all its actions is perhaps the most famous aspect of Cynicism. But this shameless or brazen life is only the literal and consistent application of the principle of unconcealment that defines the Platonic true *logos*. While the Platonic principle of unconcealment sought to secure the conventional and proper forms of life that had nothing to hide precisely because they were fully in accordance with the prevailing codes, the Cynics took this principle to the extreme, arguing that there could be nothing bad in whatever nature had endowed us with.

Second, the idea of true life as unalloyed or undistorted is converted by the Cynics into the principle of a life that is utterly indifferent to its own needs. The Platonic idea of a life purified from all disorder and discord, from all things material and physical, is "revaluated" by the Cynics through the relocation of the ideal of purity toward the very domain of the physical and the bodily that it was supposed to be purified from. In this domain, pure life is a life of poverty, stripped of everything superficial and inessential. For the Cynics, poverty is not an unfortunate accident or even a cultivated indifference to wealth but an active pursuit of ever greater dispossession that seeks to arrive at the absolutely indispensable.

Third, the Platonic principle of a straight life in accordance with the *logos* is converted into a life that accepts no law other than that of nature (Foucault 2011, 262–4). Only what is natural is truly in accordance with the *logos*, hence all social conventions and codes must be abandoned, be it marriage, family, or even the prohibition of incest. This is why the Cynics, in Foucault's reading, adopted the idea of animality as "a reduced, but prescriptive form of life. Animality is not a given; it is a duty. Animality is an exercise. It is a task for oneself and at the same time a scandal for others" (265).

Finally, the Cynics simultaneously apply and reverse the Platonic principle of the immutable and self-contained sovereignty of the true life. The Cynic infamously proclaims himself the true "king," precisely by virtue of his scandalous, dirty, and impoverished life. While in Platonism and Stoicism the

philosopher was often *compared* to a king because he was capable of governing both his own soul and the souls of others in accordance with the truth, the Cynic asserts that he is "the only true king. And vis-à-vis the kings of the world, crowned kings sitting on their thrones, he is the anti-king who shows how hollow, illusory and precarious the monarchy of kings is" (Foucault 2011, 275). Yet rather than live a life of contentment and enjoyment, the Cynic king submits his life to tireless tests in order to be able to take care of others, to lead them out of their untruth by his own manifestation of the true life. This care is undertaken in a characteristically confrontational or even "beastly" manner, "with a bark": "[The] Cynic is of service in a very different way than through leading an exemplary life or giving advice. He is useful because he battles, because he bites, because he attacks" (279).

In all these four reversals, the principle of animality remains crucial as a paradoxical *criterion* of truth. The name "Cynic" is of course translated from ancient Greek as "dog-like." While there are various explanations of this comparison, Foucault finds its basis in the destitute, brute, and stripped mode of existence of the Cynics, their "manifestation, in complete nakedness, of the truth of the world and of life" (Foucault 2011, 183). This mode of existence was not merely an extreme form of self-assertion or self-fashioning but also as the manifestation, the bearing witness to the truth, whereby the body itself became "the visible theatre of the truth" (179–80). Foucault argues that ancient thought generally approached animality as a "point of repulsion" for the constitution of the human being, an "absolute point of differentiation" that, in Agamben's later terminology, was "inclusively excluded" from the human as its negative foundation (Agamben 2004, 18–27). A true life was then the life that successfully excluded, subjected, or dominated one's animal nature. In contrast, the Cynics transform this negative foundation into a positive telos of human existence, whereby animality is not a given to be mastered or conquered within oneself but a *model* to be attained in one's existence through courageous practices of truth-telling that break with established ways of living. Yet there is nothing in this model that is not already *given* by nature, which therefore need not be subjected or dominated for this model to be implemented. On the contrary, the constitution of a true *bios* is conditioned by the prior grafting of its precepts onto *zōē* itself. Animality is not the other that must be subjected and mastered for a life of truth to be possible but rather the manner in which this life unfolds in the self.

This manner makes all the difference. Despite the fundamental identity between the ideational contents of the truths of the Cynics and their adversaries, their life remains radically *other* than the life lived by the ostensible proponents of truth:

> [T]he Cynic changes the values of the currency and reveals that the true life can only be an other life, in relation to the traditional life of men, including philosophers. . . . [I]t is from the point of view of this other life that the usual life of ordinary people will be revealed as precisely other than the true. I live in an other way, and by the very otherness of my life, I show you that what you are looking for is somewhere other than where you are looking for it, that the path you are taking is other than the one you should be taking. (Foucault 2011, 314)

We now understand the significance of the final words of Foucault's final lecture course: "[T]here is no establishment of the truth without an essential position of otherness: the truth is never the same; there can be truth only in the form of the other world and the other life" (Foucault 2011, 340). However familiar it is in its nominal content, the truth is made other by its relocation from the domain of discourse toward the realm of life. In the very same movement, life is also made other by the truth, attaining the status of a philosophical life without transcending or negating any of its natural dispositions. By disseminating the truth in its own transformed existence, this life can eventually change the world at large. While both Platonism and Christianity posited, in their own different ways, the existence of *the other world* beyond this one, the Cynics sought to attain another life right here in *this* world and thereby make it *otherwise* that it was. By virtue of their disobedience to all conventional moral codes, the Cynics made every act of veridictive subjectivation a part of the transformation of the wider world: "Through this dissonant irruption of the 'true life' in the midst of the chorus of lies and pretences, of accepted injustice and concealed iniquities, the Cynic makes 'another world' loom up on the horizon, the advent of which would presuppose the transformation of the present world" (Gros 2011, 354). While their orientation toward the transformation of the world renders Cynic *parrhēsia* irreducibly political, their embodiment of the principles governing this transformation in life itself makes it unmistakably *bio*-political.

In his 2010 review of Foucault's two final lecture courses, Michael Hardt briefly addressed the biopolitical significance of the Cynics. Making a distinction between (governmental) biopower and (emancipatory) biopolitics, Hardt argued that while

> [biopower] is a form of power in which the life of populations becomes the central object of rule, the militancy of the ancient Cynics is clearly an entirely different politics of life. Biopolitics is the realm in which we have the freedom to make another life for ourselves, and through that life transform the world. Biopolitics is

> thus not only distinct from biopower but also may be the most effective weapon to combat it. (Hardt 2010, 159)

In our view, this distinction between biopower and biopolitics is misleading for two reasons. First, it pits politics against power in a manner that is entirely at odds with Foucault's approach, as if there could be a politics without power relations. Secondly, and specifically with respect to the Cynics, their *parrhēsia* is biopolitical precisely and solely to the extent that it brings the power of one's life into play in one's affirmation of truth—it is an *exercise of biopower whose object fully coincides with its subject*. By virtue of this coincidence, biopower is no longer conceived as domination *over* one's life but rather as the power *of* that life itself, which enables the subject to dismantle the effects of domination within one's own existence and thereby open up the possibility of the transformation of the world at large. While Hardt is entirely correct about biopolitics as the realm of freedom for the late Foucault, it can only serve as such by the Cynics' singular operation of the mutual empowerment of truth and life through their very indistinction. Rather than merely resist biopower, the Cynics sought to exercise it in the actual transformation of their lives and the world at large.

Thus, the articulation of biopolitics and biopoetics in Foucault's thought permits us to rethink the problematic of biopolitics rather more broadly than as an episode in the genealogy of modern Western governmentality (or even its ancient prehistory). Life no longer figures solely as the object of politicization in governmental practices but also as the subject of politicization in the course of the confrontation with the world, including its governmental rationalities. While the studies of biopolitics often tend to view its operations as objectifying individuals and populations (and, especially in the Agambenian declension, even exposing them to extermination), Foucault's later work affirms that life is not the eternal victim of power and there is more to biopolitics than "bio-government." The "untamed ontology" of life not only underlies the subjection of living beings to governmental rationalities but also empowers dissensual subjectivities to confront and transform the world in which they dwell.

4. Conclusion

Our account of two patterns of interface between biopolitics and biopoetics in Foucault's late writings highlights the continuity between the two periods of his writings, conventionally seen as focusing respectively on power and

ethics. We have demonstrated how these two dimensions have been articulated in the Greek and Roman practices of the self, either through the biopoetic reception and readjustment of governmental rationalities in the Stoic discourse on marriage or through the politicization of biopoetics in Cynic *parrhēsia* that found in the animalistic and confrontational form of life the path toward the wider transformation of the world.

But what are the implications of our argument beyond the exegetical debates in Foucault studies? Both the Stoic emphasis on making governmental practices livable and the Cynic attempt to translate truth into life strongly resonate with the contemporary debates on affirmative biopolitics, which authors such as Agamben (2016) and Esposito (2008) interpret as a politics whose form (*bios*) is derived from *zōē* itself. This leads them to a fascinating (if also paradoxical) quest for a form that would consist in formlessness alone. In order not to negate bare life in the name of its privileged form, the only legitimate form must be somehow based on bare life itself, yet its very bareness evidently makes for a poor basis for the constitution of any form. In contrast, Foucault's reading of the Cynics suggests that a more fruitful alternative to the derivation of *bios* from *zōē* may be the reverse move of bringing the *bios* down to the level of *zōē*, whereby the truths of *bios* are verified as viable in bare life that thereby acquires a form from which it would nonetheless remain indistinct.

Moreover, in contrast to the discourses of affirmative biopolitics that envision it in terms of a radical rupture that lies entirely in the future, Foucault's Cynic version of affirmative biopolitics has the benefit of being based on a well-known historical example. This example was not restricted to antiquity but served as the point of descent of the idea of a militant or revolutionary life that would have enormous influence in the Western tradition. In the lectures on the Cynics, Foucault remarks that militancy was originally not merely a matter of ideological commitments but also a form of life that had to "manifest directly, by its visible form, its constant practice, and its immediate existence, the concrete possibility and the evident value of an *other* life, which is the true life" (Foucault 2011, 184). The radical break with the existing norms, conventions, and habits that the militant ideology promised on the level of the overall social order was to be immediately embodied in the life of the militant. Foucault then proceeded to ridicule the French Left of his time for abandoning this theme of the manifestation of the truth in life or, worse, practicing it in the inverted form of utter conventionalism and conservatism, adopting "all the accepted values, all the most customary forms of behavior, and all the most traditional schemas of conduct" (186). In our view, this criticism remains both timely today and generalizable far beyond France.

While there is no shortage of apparently radical ideas in circulation, there does not seem to be much radicality in the ways of life promoted and practiced by their supporters, which leads to the inevitable suspicion that these ideas were never meant to be lived but only preached. Yet the lesson of Foucault's final lectures is that "another world" may only be reached through an "other life," through making one's life otherwise than it was. Only in this manner may ideas about changing the world gain any kind of vitality.

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