

TOWARDS A METAPHYSICS OF THE SOUL AND A  
PARTICIPATORY AESTHETICS OF LIFE:  
MOBILISING FOUCAULT, AFFECT AND ANIMISM FOR  
CARING PRACTICES OF EXISTENCE

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**Abstract:** In his *Lectures on Biopolitics* (1978-79) Foucault highlighted the contemporary intensification of neoliberal arts of government, which economic incentive structures are designed to control human behaviour and ‘life itself’ through market transactions framed as enhancing efficiency in the distribution of goods and bads. The human subject of this ‘truth game of the market’ seems critically disempowered: conceived as a machine-like agent, responding predictably to expert manipulations constructing a governmentality that simultaneously disavows the amplifications of inequity and ecological damage with which it is associated. In the last works of his life, especially *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* (1981-82) and *The Courage of Truth* (1983-84), Foucault turned again towards the possibility of seeking other rules of subjectification so as to play the games of power ‘with as little domination as possible’. His encouragement was to remember the philosophical strategy associated with Socrates, namely to attend to oneself through activating the soul’s contemplation of the actions of the self: thereby composing an ethical subject whose actions, through practices of freedom and truth-telling, are not enslaved by appetites; and whose *ethos* of care becomes extended through the conduct of relationships with others, including life (*bios*) itself. This paper extends Foucault’s expositions on ‘the care of the self’ and ‘the courage of truth’ to affirm animist and affective activations of the soul silenced through the consolidated colonial universality of so-called western knowledge. In doing so, the paper advocates a refraction of the games of truth infusing practices of domination in socio-ecological relations and ‘biodiversity conservation’, as a gesture towards amplifying an ethics of consideration for both human and beyond-human others.

**Keywords** Foucault, affect, animism, ethics, governmentality, subjectivity, freedom, ontology, biodiversity conservation

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... and here we come back again to that forgotten, outcast word, the soul.<sup>1</sup>

1. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space: The Classic Look at How We Experience Intimate Places*, Boston, Beacon Press 1994[1964], pxxi. (Hereafter *Poetics of Space*).

## INTRODUCTION: ON THE SEVERING OF SOUL FROM LIFE-BEYOND-THE-HUMAN

2. Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution*, New York, Harper and Row, 1989(1980); Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, London, Routledge, 2006; David Abram, *Becoming Animal: An Earthly Cosmology*, New York, Pantheon Books, 2010.

3. See René Descartes, *Discourse on Method*. London: Penguin Books, 1968[1637], pp75-76. (Hereafter *Discourse on Method*). René Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul: And Other Late Philosophical Writings*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015[1649]. (Hereafter *Passions*).

4. John Baird Callicott, 'Ecology and moral ontology', in D. Gergandi (ed) *The Structural Links Between Ecology, Evolution and Ethics: The Virtuous Epistemic Circle*, Boston, Boston Studies in the Philosophy of Science 296, 2013, pp101-116, p112; also Alf Hornborg, 'Animism, fetishism, and objectivism as strategies for knowing (or not knowing) the world', *Ethnos: Journal of Anthropology* 71, 1 (2006), pp21-32.

5. Matthew Hall, *Plants as Persons: A Philosophical Botany*, New York, SUNY Press, 2011; Michael Marder, *Plant-Thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2013.

6. René Descartes, *Discourse on Method*.

It has become common to locate an origin myth for contemporary environmental problems in the conceptual severing of mind from body, and culture from nature, characterising the reclamation of classical thought that precipitated the European Enlightenment.<sup>2</sup> Part and parcel of this mode of thought was a rigorous removal of soul from beyond-human life. Cartesian ontology stripped living creatures of the presence of soul so as to make humans exceptional in these terms, creating pacified objects and automata of beyond-human others.<sup>3</sup> This is an ontological move that is both a way of knowing and of making the world, in the sense that animals and other entities that become conceived as soulless objects are thereby also treated and performed as such.<sup>4</sup> Extending the hierarchies of soul distilled by Plato and then Aristotle,<sup>5</sup> Descartes extracted soul from beyond-human entities,<sup>6</sup> such that life became effectively *lifeless*: conceived and thereby enacted as passive and predictably machine-like, yet also morally in need of correction and subjugation.<sup>7</sup> Various dispossessed of the capacities of movement, perception, communication and self-directed *telos*, and thus usefully backgrounded as existing only for the instrumental ends of humans, beyond-human life became stilled and desecralised as the objects of human art and in(ter)vention.<sup>8</sup>

Somewhat paradoxically, much rhetoric and practice in contemporary environmental conservation reproduces the pacifying, objectifying, and ultimately mechanising orientation described above. Notwithstanding designations of 'wildness' and 'rewilding' as space-making strategies for the immanent and self-willed liveliness of diverse beyond-human natures, the sequestration of conserved, viewed and hunted 'wild natures' can reproduce rather than refract the relational and affective alienations between human and other-than-human natures associated with the modern era.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, new conservation technologies such as biodiversity offsetting have invigorated mechanistic approaches to natures-beyond-the-human in recent years. In biodiversity offsetting technologies, for example, the relational field of nature becomes disaggregated into discrete units whose subtraction and addition can seemingly engender improvements in an 'aggregate bottom line' (termed 'net gain' or 'no net loss' of biodiversity), even though losses through development-associated transformations have occurred.<sup>10</sup>

The severing of soul from a machine-like nature and the dominance over embodied life this severance makes possible is, however, only one variety of past thinking and practices that may inform present relationships with natures-beyond-the human. In this essay I extend prior engagement that mobilises the work of philosopher Michel Foucault to offer clarity regarding the neoliberal 'arts of government' structuring much recent and current environmental conservation work.<sup>11</sup> I draw on later works by Foucault which

encourage, in perhaps surprising ways, creative reconsiderations of practices of attending to self and other through both an expanded consideration of ‘soul’ (*psūkhē*) and an encouragement to tend to ‘the self’ so as ultimately to also attend well to others and to ‘life itself’ (*bios*).<sup>12</sup> The latter dimension is, of course, clearly relevant to the goals of contemporary ‘biodiversity conservation’. In the extraordinarily generous meditation on the nature and practice of truth that constitutes Foucault’s final lecture series delivered in 1983-1984,<sup>13</sup> Foucault extends his earlier work on the care of the self,<sup>14</sup> to ultimately frame care of the self as both care of the soul and care of *bios* – of embodied life. Such a focus seems critically relevant for societal understandings of practices that engender the care – *epimeleia* – for beyond-human others that constitutes a core concern of environmental conservation and care.<sup>15</sup> Instead, an intensification of fragmented selves, overwhelm, addiction, self-blame, self-harm and narcissism arguably characterises the contemporary moment, linking the atomising zeitgeist of neoliberalism with a contradictory *lack* of care of the self that extends into a brutal lack of care for human and beyond-human others.<sup>16</sup>

I open the following commentary, then, by re-thinking the notion of ‘soul’ in considering an expanded exploration of care of the self. I then move to propose that a ‘bioecoethics’ that encourages care for others, including the multiplicitous others constituting life itself, is central to this expanded conception of care of the self. Both these moves – a (re-)emphasis on a metaphysics of soul in care of the self, and an explicit understanding that care of the self includes care for others as well as care for life itself – draw me (again) towards observations of the resonance between such ethical reflections and animist arts of conduct.<sup>17</sup> Animist practices of existence emerge at least in part through an assumption of soul as the hypostatis of existence, and not limited therefore to exceptional humans.<sup>18</sup> In combination with perceptions and experiences of distributed agency in beyond-human entities, diverse other-than-human natures thereby become folded into moral economies of representation, choice, action, sharing and predation that are not solely human.<sup>19</sup> These perceptions and practices, and specifically the curtailment of appetites and accumulations they can effect, may emphasise affective and pragmatic modes of existence that constitute and work for an abundant and relatively egalitarian ethics and aesthetics of life itself.

Beyond these more general possibilities, the observations outlined above are relevant for pragmatic environmental, and specifically ‘biodiversity’, conservation endeavours for two additional reasons. First, because there is a correspondence between contemporary cultures that might loosely be described as animist and the territories of so-called ‘biodiversity hotspots’ globally.<sup>20</sup> Secondly, because territorial threats to such cultures are associated at least in part with the establishment and policing of protected areas.<sup>21</sup> In my concluding section I thus draw attention to ‘the courage of truth’ currently needed in order to articulate and enact varied ‘animist socialist’ practices

London: Penguin Books, 1968[1637], pp75-76.

7. Neil Evernden, *The Natural Alien: Humankind and Environment*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1985.

8. Sian Sullivan, ‘Nature on the Move III: (Re) countenancing an animate nature’, *New Proposals: Journal of Marxism and Interdisciplinary Enquiry* 6, 1-2, 2013, pp50-71; Jeffrey T. Nealon, *Plant Theory: Biopower and Vegetable Life*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2016.

9. Jonathan S. Adams and Thomas O. McShane, *The Myth of Wild Africa: Conservation Without Illusion*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1992; William Cronon, ‘Introduction: in search of nature’, in W. Cronon (ed) *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, New York, W. Norton, 1996, pp23-56.

10. Sian Sullivan, ‘After the green rush? Biodiversity offsets, uranium power and the ‘calculus of casualties’ in greening growth’, *Human Geography* 6, 1, 2013, pp80-101.

11. See especially Robert Fletcher, ‘Neoliberal environmentalism: towards a poststructuralist political ecology of the conservation debate’, *Conservation and Society* 8, 3, 2010, pp171-81.

(Hereafter *Neoliberal environmentalism*).

12. Greek terms for technical concepts in philosophy as used in the texts by Foucault drawn on here are italicised throughout.

13. Michel Foucault, *The Courage of Truth: The Government of Self and Others II, Lectures at the Collège de France 1983–1984*, (trans) G. Burchell, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. (Hereafter *Courage of Truth*).

14. Especially Michel Foucault, *Care of the Self. The History of Sexuality vol. 3*. London, Penguin, 1990[1976]. (Hereafter *Care of the Self*). Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France 1981–1982*, (trans) G. Burchell, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004. (Hereafter *Hermeneutics*).

15. Also Petra Hroch, 'Encountering the "ecopolis": Foucault's epimeleia heautou and environmental relations', *Topia Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies* online, <http://www.yorku.ca/etopia/docs/intersections2010/Hroch.pdf>, all URLs were last accessed April 2018, unless otherwise stated.

16. Sian Sullivan, 'We are heartbroken and furious!' Rethinking violence and the (anti)-globalisation movements' in B. Maignashca and C. Eschle (eds) *Critical Theories*,

of existence and of caring, given the apparent status of these practices as 'falsehoods' to be excluded in modern rationality and truth regimes. Throughout the essay, and after Eduardo Kohn in *How Forests Think: Towards an Anthropology of Nature Beyond the Human*, I use the terms 'beyond-human life', 'beyond-human nature(s)' and 'natures-beyond-the-human' as a way of signalling that humans are both part of the organic and inorganic materialities comprising the world and exist in diverse relationships with the multiplicitous differences in entities and processes comprising this world.<sup>22</sup> As encouraged by David Abram in *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World*, I avoid the term 'nonhuman nature' due to its defining of natures-beyond-the-human in negative terms, i.e. as 'not human'.<sup>23</sup>

## RE-THINKING SOUL IN EXTENDING CARE OF THE SELF

So I turn myself to face me.<sup>24</sup>

One of the keys of classical Greek thought seems to be an understanding of 'soul', *psūkhē* as ontologically distinct from 'the body'. As recovered in detail in various works by Michel Foucault, it is this soul that is able to contemplate the actions of the self, and thus to be mobilised or *activated* so as to foster practices of freedom, i.e. of will, that exercise labour on oneself in the form of care of the self. The implication is that the subject that turns round to the self and that attends to (cares for) oneself will ultimately also practice relations of power (arts of conduct) that tend towards freedom for all, because they practice freedom in the mastery of appetites (*Hermeneutics*, pp1, 206).<sup>25</sup>

From a dialogue attributed to Plato between Socrates and a young man (Alcibiades) about to enter public life, Foucault summarises care of the self as 'a mode of knowledge of self which had the form of the soul's contemplation of itself and its recognition of its mode of being' (*Courage of Truth*, p159). Care of the self initially means '[t]urning one's gaze on the self ... [and] turning it away from others first of all. And then, later, it means turning it away from the things of the world' (*Hermeneutics*, p218). Indeed, 'all is lost if you begin with care of others' rather than of the self (p198). In the precept and set of practices of care of the self in ancient philosophical and moral life:

the establishment of oneself as a reality ontologically distinct from the body, in the form of a *psūkhē* which possesses the possibility and ethical duty of contemplating itself, gives rise to a mode of truth-telling, of veridiction, the role and end of which is *to lead the soul back to its mode of being and its world* (*Courage of Truth*, pp159-160, emphasis added).

Care of the self is additionally identified as 'the principle that taking care of the soul is, for the soul, to contemplate itself and, in doing so, to re-cognise

[i.e. connect with] *the divine element which is precisely what enables it to see the truth*' (p126, emphasis added). For Socrates, 'the soul must look at itself ... it is like an eye which, seeking to see itself, is forced to look into the pupil of *another eye* in order to see itself, [through which] by contemplating the divine reality, we can grasp what is divine in our own soul'(p159).

For Socrates, then, the soul able to contemplate 'itself' is both 'relational' and 'divine'. Indeed, care of the self, which is also constituted as care of one's soul, 'calls for a number of operations by which the subject must purify himself [through arts of catharsis] and become, in his own nature, able to have contact with and to recognise the divine element within him' (*Hermeneutics*, pp173, 176). Through the encouraged presence of a listening other, care of one's soul was thereby conceived by the classical Greeks as imbricated with other selves so as to be(come) both polyvalent and dialogic rather than atomised and individualistic (*Courage of Truth*, p6). Both knowing yourself (*gnōthi seauton*) and caring for yourself (*epimeleia heautou*) were placed at the centre of human *community*: 'you must attend to yourself, you must not forget yourself, you must take care of yourself', as well as 'encouraging others to attend to themselves' (*Hermeneutics*, pp3-5).

Let us pause for a moment on the possibility of seeing what is divine in an other, in order to get a grip on 'what is divine in our own soul'. The notion of soul is variously associated with breath and brightness: with a relaxed inner light – 'the light, which at the same time is the source of being'(p216) whose *élan vital* engenders 'a feeling of *participation* in a flowing onward' in the sonorous reverberations of existence.<sup>26</sup> In ancient and classical times, the soul that flourished amplified *eudaimonia* overall. Associated with the goddess of happiness and prosperity, the term *eudaimonia* is comprised of words for 'good' or 'harmony' combined with 'soul'. Embodying *eudaimonia* in the time of Socrates thus literally denoted living in such a way that (one's) soul is nourished. A life lived well and *harmoniously* was thereby framed in terms of 'a good of the soul – not a material or bodily good such as wealth or political power'.<sup>27</sup> *Eudaimonia* remains a key term today in the philosophical domain of *virtue ethics*: the branch of philosophy inspired by the classical Greeks that considers what it means, and what is required, to live 'a good life'.<sup>28</sup> Perhaps more familiarly, it appears in translation as the vegetal, generative term 'flourishing', a concept central to a number of recent texts concerned with possibilities for caring entanglements of human with other-than-human lives.<sup>29</sup>

This brief detour around conceptions of *eudaimonia* gestures towards ways in which Socrates' encouragements to take care of the self through taking care of the soul (as invoked in Foucault's later work) were themselves connected with a *milieu* of past conceptions, practices and usages. As Foucault writes, the 'modes of valuation and generally accepted attitudes' of the classical Greek situation were themselves 'evidence of a rather widespread moral tradition, which was doubtless rather deeply rooted in the past' (*Care of the Self*, p9).

*World Politics and the Anti-globalisation Movement*, London, Routledge, 2005, pp175-94; Bruce Rogers-Vaughn, *Caring for Souls in a Neoliberal Age*, New York, Springer, 2016.

17. See Sian Sullivan, "Ecosystem service commodities" – a new imperial ecology? Implications for animist immanent ecologies, with Deleuze and Guattari', *New Formations*, 69, 2010, pp111-128.

18. See Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, 'Exchanging perspectives: the transformation of objects into subjects in Amerindian ontologies', *Common Knowledge* 10, 3, 2004, pp463-84.

19. Philippe Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2013.

20. Larry J. Gorenflo, Suzanne Romaine, Russell A. Mittermeier and Kristen Walker-Painemilla, 'Co-occurrence of linguistic and biological diversity in biodiversity hotspots and high biodiversity wilderness areas', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 109, 21, 2012, pp8032-37.

21. See <http://www.survivalinternational.org/conservation>

22. Eduardo Kohn, *How Forests Think: Towards an Anthropology of Nature Beyond the Human*, Berkeley, University

of California Press, 2013. (Hereafter *How Forests Think*).

23. David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World*, London, Vintage Books, 1996.

24. David Bowie, 'Changes', *Hunky Dory*, London, RCA Records, 1971, track 1.

25. Michel Foucault, 'The ethics of the concern of the self as a practice of freedom (an interview with H. Becker, R. Formet-Betancourt, and A. Gomex-Müller)', in P. Rabinow (ed), *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth. Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984, vol. 1*, London, Penguin, 2000[1984], pp281-301. (Hereafter *Concern of the Self*).

26. Eugène Minkowski, *Vers une Cosmologie*, Paris, Aubier, 1936 (after Bergson) quoted in *The Poetics of Space*, p xvi, emphasis added.

27. Brendan Cook, *Pursuing Eudaimonia: Re-appropriating the Greek Philosophical Foundations of the Christian Apophatic Tradition*, Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013, p21.

28. Michael Hannis, *Freedom and Environment: Autonomy, Human Flourishing and the Political Philosophy of Sustainability*, London, Routledge, 2016.

29. Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet*,

Two elements of these deep roots are worth mentioning here. One is the observation that the latter part of the term *eudaimonia* also referred to a prior and co-existing conception in the mythology of ancient Greece of 'daemons' as 'benign supernatural beings' associated simultaneously with beyond-human nature and 'an individual's personal spirit' or 'soul'.<sup>30</sup> To live well, i.e. to experience happiness as a result of living a harmonious life, was thus rooted in an older embrace of the communicative guidance of spirited agencies of nature. This (especially Pythagorean) embrace entailed an understanding that other kinds of being were also animated by a *daemon* (*daimōn*) or spirited soul, whose nourishment also made it possible for those beings to live well.<sup>31</sup> 'Flourishing' in these older expressions of a multifaceted *eudaimonia* or harmonious soul thereby connects with an animistic conception and experience of soul as distributed through diverse manifestations of existence (discussed further below), inviting daily lived practices of empathic 'co-participation' to amplify possibilities for the co-sustenance of varied bodies and materialities.<sup>32</sup> These beyond-human aspects have been almost completely written-out of later conceptions of *eudaimonia* as specifically human flourishing, although a resurgence of 'the acknowledged virtues of *ecological dependence*' is also noticeable.<sup>33</sup> A second 'deep root' links classical Greek practices associated with the soul contemplating itself so as to care for the self, with older established techniques of care including the interpretation of dreams as acts of and on the soul which is in connection with a world beyond the self (*Care of the Self*, p10). These conceptions and techniques are themselves embedded in a longstanding milieu of practices that might be termed 'shamanic arts of the soul',<sup>34</sup> connected additionally with animist ontologies of being.<sup>35</sup>

Returning to the resurgence of classical Greek thought, ethics and aesthetics that accompanied the European Enlightenment, the passions and practices of the soul again received great attention in this Cartesian moment (*Passions*). Descartes, however, seems to differ from the classical Greeks by conceiving of the soul 'as in a very real sense joined to the whole of the body' (via the pineal gland), whilst also emphasising the possibility of actions of the will in attaining mastery over the soul's 'passions' (p207). In combination with the shift towards the *cogito* – 'I think therefore I am' – a new impetus was ushered in, however, through which 'the condition for the subject's access to the truth is knowledge (*connaissance*)' that can be indefinitely accumulated via individualised trajectories and is relatively unmoored from earlier conceptions and practices of care (*Hermeneutics*, pp17-18). As Foucault puts it, this impetus then becomes a 'modern elimination of care of the self in favour of self-knowledge' (p1). Combined with the severing of soul from beyond-human life (as noted in the opening section), the *cogito* arguably plays a key role in sanctioning an individualistic mode of knowledge accumulation that exceeds and displaces the care for others effected through older practices of care of the self.

Foucault claims further that in these older practices of care of the self ultimately ‘what is designated as the object one must take care of is not the soul, it is life (*bios*), that is to say the way of living’ (*Courage of Truth*, pp126-127). This point seems to be of critical relevance in the contemporary moment, shaped as it is by the extinction of myriad forms of life. It leads Foucault to ask: ‘what in the way of ethics and rules of conduct follows from this ontological foundation of ... being’ constituted by care of the self? (p160). I consider this question in the following section.

## CARE FOR THE SELF AS BIOECOETHICAL PRACTICE

In his *Lectures on Biopolitics* (1978-1979), Foucault highlights the contemporary intensification of neoliberal arts of government by which economic incentive structures are designed to control human behaviour and ‘life itself’ through market transactions framed as enhancing efficiency in the distribution of goods and bads.<sup>36</sup> For Foucault, ‘arts of government’ as ‘governmentality’ were not effected solely through top-down institutions and policies of government, but instead were generated through multiplicitous, dynamic and distributed technical work and discourses. This is the ‘conduct of conduct’ of heterogenous ‘discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions’, that also sediments into particular and empowered institutional apparatuses or dispositifs.<sup>37</sup>

In a much-cited article in *Conservation and Society* drawing on Foucaultian understandings of neoliberal arts of governance, Robert Fletcher summarises neoliberalism as thoroughly imbricated in conservation policy and practice through:

- 1) the creation of capitalist markets for natural resource exchange and consumption;
- 2) privatisation of resource control within these markets;
- 3) commodification of resources so that they can be traded within markets;
- 4) withdrawal of direct government intervention from market transactions [whilst maintaining continual vigilance in relation to the maintenance of market structures and conditions]; and
- 5) decentralisation of resource governance to local authorities and non-state actors such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (*Neoliberal environmentalism*, p172).<sup>38</sup>

Neoliberal environmentalism through conservation thus endeavours ‘to provide [market-based] incentives sufficient to motivate individuals to choose to behave in conservation-friendly ways’ (p176). The human subject of this ‘truth game of the market’, however, seems critically disempowered: conceived as an individualised machine-like agent that responds predictably to expert manipulations engendering a capitalist governmentality that paradoxically seems to deepen, rather than redress, the inequities and ecological damage

Minneapolis,  
University of  
Minnesota Press,  
2008.

30. Carol Rose, *Spirits, Fairies, Gnomes and Goblins: An Encyclopedia of the Little People*. Oxford: ABC-CLIO, 1988, p77.

31. Sadie Plant, *Writing on Drugs*, London, Faber & Faber, 2001; also Hendrik Lorenz, ‘Ancient Theories of Soul’, in E.N. Zalta (ed.) *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, online (2009), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2009/entries/ancient-soul/>.

32. See discussion in Michael Taussig, *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2010[1980], p146. (Hereafter *The Devil*).

33. Michael Hannis, ‘The virtues of acknowledged ecological dependence’, *Environmental Values* 24 (2015), 145-64.

34. Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, London, Penguin, 1964[1951].

35. Graham Harvey, *Animism: Respecting the Living World*, London, Hurst and Co., 2005. m).

36. Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978-1979*, (trans) G Burchell, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

37. Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*:

*Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, C. Gordon (ed), (trans) C. Gordon, L. Marshall, J. Mepham and K. Soper, Brighton, The Harvester Press, p194; Michel Foucault, 'Governmentality', in G. Burchell, C. Gordon and P. Miller (eds), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, Hemel Hempstead, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991.

38. On 'neoliberal biodiversity conservation' also see Sian Sullivan, 'The elephant in the room? Problematising "new" (neoliberal) biodiversity conservation', *Forum for Development Studies* 33, 1, 2006, pp105-35. (Hereafter *Elephant*). Bram Büscher, Sian Sullivan, Katja Neves, James Igoe and Daniel Brockington 'Towards a synthesized critique of neoliberal conservation', *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism* 23, 2, 2012, pp4-30.

39. Philippe Pignarre and Isabelle Stengers, *Capitalist Sorcery: Breaking the Spell*, trans. A. Goffey, London, Palgrave Macmillan, pp28, 35; David Harvie and Keir Milburn, 'On the uses of fairy dust: contagion, sorcery and the crafting of other worlds', *Culture and Organization*, 24, 3, 2018, pp179-195. (Hereafter *Fairy Dust*).

40. Credit Suisse and McKinsey

with which it is associated. Indeed, Pignarre and Stengers describe this disempowering 'hold' by capitalism over the 'agents' that loyally perform its depoliticised and naturalised fabrications as 'sorcery', arguing that to understand this hold 'we must turn towards knowledges that have been disqualified'.<sup>39</sup>

In the last works of his life, especially his lecture series *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* (1981-1982) and *The Courage of Truth* (1983-1984), Foucault turned again towards the possibility of seeking other rules of subjectification so as to play the games of power 'with as little domination as possible' (*Concern of the Self*, p298). His encouragement, as highlighted in the preceding section, is to remember the philosophical strategy associated with Socrates, namely *to attend to oneself* so as to care for oneself and, through this attention, to care for others and for life itself. By the means of this 'continuous concern throughout life' (*Hermeneutics*, p8) an ethical subject would thereby be composed whose actions, through practices of freedom and of truth-telling, are not enslaved by appetites, and whose *ethos* of care becomes extended through the conduct of relationships with others, including life (*bios*) itself. Care of the self is again affirmed as the opposite of an atomising philosophy or set of practices. Instead, care of the self 'is an attitude towards the self, others, and the world' comprising 'a certain form of attention' that will 'produce or induce behaviour through which one will actually be able to care for others' (*Hermeneutics*, pp10, 174, 198, 202). This understanding is clarified in the following statements: '[t]he practice of the self links up with social practice or, if you like, the formation of a relationship of the self to the self quite clearly connects up with the relationship of the self to the Other ... [to constitute social relationships that] involve *soul service* as a dimension' (pp155-6); and '[g]iving an account of oneself [... leads us] to *bios*, to life, to existence and the way in which one conducts this existence' (*Courage of Truth*, p160).

The congruence of one's mode of existence with one's (care of the) self thereby engenders an additional congruence with the care of life (*bios*) more broadly (p149). In Foucault's analysis, then, *gnōthi seauton* – 'know thyself' – 'is valid both for the discovery of the soul and for bringing the problem of the *bios* to light', although different self-knowledges may arise depending on which form (of *psūkhē* / metaphysics and *bios*) the enquiry of *gnōthi seauton* is indexically linked to (p160). Whilst both 'the discovery of the soul' and the 'problem of *bios*' work towards an 'aesthetics of existence' (p162), it is the latter – namely 'bringing the problem of *bios* to light' – that approaches and constitutes existence (*bios*) specifically 'as an aesthetic object, as an object of aesthetic elaboration and perception': or '*bios* as a beautiful work'(p162). In this dimension of *gnōthi seauton*, then, 'a metaphysics of the soul' and 'an aesthetics of life'(p160) may become congruent in a 'stylistics of existence' that affirms 'life as possible beauty'(p164).

For Socrates and especially the Cynics (see below), a life of possible beauty was also a philosophical life that cared for 'reason, truth and the



constant improvement of your soul' (*Hermeneutics*, p6). Importantly, such a life was in contradistinction with one in which all one's 'care' was devoted to 'wealth, reputation and honors'(p6). Indeed, a lack of care of the self was understood to lead to an excess of 'the legitimate exercise of one's power' and an imposition of 'one's fantasies, appetites, and desires on others': as exhibited by 'the rich and powerful man who uses his wealth and power to abuse others, to impose an unwarranted power on them' (*Concern of the Self*, p288). Such a man is in fact 'the slave of his appetites', unable to regulate his power over others (p288). Later, Aristotle similarly proposed a moral opposition between the chrematistic wealth associated with money-making and the natural or householding economy (*oikos*), claiming the former to be intrinsically destructive of the latter's 'reciprocal interplay of natural forces that are responsible for production and growth' (*The Devil*, p133).

For Socrates, then, 'the greatest service' he could perform was to try to persuade the wealthy Athenian elite 'to care less about his property than about himself so as to make himself as excellent and reasonable as possible, to consider less the things of the city than the city itself, in short to apply these same principles to everything' (*Hermeneutics*, p7). The neoliberal rational actor today is instead encouraged to manifest 'her/his own self-interest through enterprise and competition for maximum profit', a tendency contributing to the extreme plutonomic and kleptocratic concentrations of material and financial wealth characterising the contemporary moment (*Neoliberal governmentality*, p174). The individualistic self bolstered by material accumulation and narcissistic attention to appearances is thereby in direct tension with a care of the self-oriented towards sustaining the truth of justice and injustice known by the soul (on which more below), combined with clarity of intention and service towards other souls. In this respect, it is paradoxical that a great deal of biodiversity conservation effort has become aligned with creating neoliberal incentive structures through which individual 'green' action is stimulated through the promise of financial profit.<sup>40</sup>

Foucault himself often invokes a revolutionary mode of existence as both 'a political project' and 'a form of life' (*Courage of Truth*, p183). In his final lecture series Foucault dwelt extensively on the 'philosophical life' exhibited through antagonistic renunciations of material wealth and attachment. Embodied in numerous ways by the Cynics, Stoics and Epicureans, Foucault sees these practices as revived especially from the nineteenth century onwards in what he terms 'revolutionary subjectivities' (*Hermeneutics*, pp154-55, 208).<sup>41</sup> As 'a mode of living' rather than an 'individualistic resort', the care of the self thus appears as 'an intensification of social relations' extending an *ethos* of care through the conduct of relationships with others, including life (*bios*) itself (*Hermeneutics*, pp23, 53, emphasis added). What I want to suggest, then, is that care of the self, in the terms recovered and elaborated by Foucault, may simultaneously 'repotentialise the world' through an intensification of *eco-social* relations and eco-ethical practices of care (*Fairy Dust*, p190). Eco-social

Center for Business and Environment, *Conservation Finance. From Niche to Mainstream: The Building of an Institutional Asset Class*, online (2016) <https://www.credit-suisse.com/media/assets/corporate/docs/about-us/responsibility/banking/conservation-finance-en.pdf>

41. 'Revolutionary subjectivities': see Sian Sullivan, 'On dance and difference: bodies, movement and experience in Khoesân trance-dancing', in W.A. Haviland, R. Gordon and L. Vivanco (eds), *Talking About People: Readings in Contemporary Cultural Anthropology*, New York, McGraw-Hill, 2006, pp234-241; Sian Sullivan, 'An other world is possible? On representation, rationalism and romanticism in Social Forums', *ephemera: theory and practice in organization* 5, 2, 2005, 370-92; Sian Sullivan, '(Re-) embodying which body? Philosophical, cross-cultural and personal reflections on corporeality', in R. Thomas-Pellicer, V. de Lucia, V. and S. Sullivan (eds) *Law, Philosophy and Ecology: Exploring Re-Embodiments*, London, Routledge, 2016, pp119-138.

intensifications associated with care of self and others are also resonant with animistic ontologies, relationalities and arts of conduct. It is to these arts that I turn in the following section.

## ANIMIST AND AFFECTIVE ACTIVATIONS OF SOUL

In order to know other cultures – non-western cultures, so-called primitive cultures – in order to know these cultures, we must no doubt have had not only to marginalize them, not only to look down upon them, but also to exploit them, to conquer them and in some way through violence to keep them silent. ... So, if you will, my hypothesis is this: the universality of our knowledge has been acquired at the cost of exclusions, bans, denials, rejections, at the price of a kind of cruelty with regard to reality.<sup>42</sup>

42. Foucault  
1971, The Lost  
Interview, viewable  
at <https://youtu.be/qzoOhhh4ajg>

In Foucault's schema of power, the exercise of strategic power relations between individuals becomes extended through techniques of government into distinct governmentalities. These techniques can become states of domination when truth-games of the subject favour mastery over others, rather than self-mastery. Nonetheless, and as articulated above, there is already divergence in the classical world regarding what should really be a focus of this care of the self that also constitutes a care of the soul, affirming that metaphysical frameworks can give rise to different regimes of truth and modes of existence that may become antagonistic (*Courage of Truth*, p164). It is an individual's soul – *psūkhē* – that is capable of 'ethical differentiation' (p61), yet from Plato onwards a divergence also appears in what becomes the focus of care of the self through its contemplation by the soul (pp126-127). As delineated above, one important thread is a chain of connection between caring for others and for *bios* – life itself – and caring for one's soul through care of the self. This thread of connection aligns with a Foucaultian expression of 'biopower' as the exercise of power in the interest of nurturing and sustaining 'life' (*Neoliberal Governmentality*, p178).

At the same time, these delineations are unclear on the nature of this 'life itself'. In response, I affirm two possible sets of correspondences. First, is a metaphysics of the soul that entwines ancient conceptualisations of *eudaimonia* (harmonious soul) involving an ontology of the soul as constituting the divine within able to recognise itself, with an understanding of soul as simultaneously animating the spirited agencies of nature, and whose nourishment made it possible for those beings to also live well. As mentioned above, 'soul' in this metaphysics becomes something like a possible perceptual hypostasis of existence, inviting co-participation and reciprocal care by human selves. Second, is an understanding of biopower as the exercise of power so as to nurture and sustain 'life' itself. Following these conceptualisations and correspondences towards a new 'art of government' (p178) or 'conduct of conduct', might it be possible to conceive and constitute something like an

'animist biopower' through which animist ontologies of being combine with ethical capacities for 'living intimately with other souls' in the nurturing and sustenance of life itself? (*Poetics of Space*, p27).

I have suggested that political (re)activations of the power-full 'anti-power' of animist arts of conduct, aesthetics and co-participation might offer critical refractions of the simultaneously excessive and deadening limitations and exploitations of capitalist 'world ecology'.<sup>43</sup> Humans everywhere clearly are dependent through pragmatic predations on the ecology of selves amongst which we live. Animist ontologies, however, tend to extend radically beyond these pragmatic relationships into relational dimensions beyond-the-human that encourage *care* (*epimeleia*) as a field of practices towards self, others and souls. *Affect* – the mobilisation of feeling and emotion – is critical to this care. In so-called animist contexts, practices of care thus frequently deploy what Jerome Lewis refers to as 'technologies of enchantment'.<sup>44</sup> These technologies affirm relationships between human and varied beyond-human others as simultaneously affective, aesthetic and moral, each dimension requiring care-full and differentiated forms of attention.

These skills, liberated through transforming exercises of the self on the self with the support of varied human and beyond-human others, encourage the 'significance of human interventions' in a perceptual context of a communicative more-than-human world asserting multiple kinds of agency.<sup>45</sup> Socioecologies thereby are known to be 'mutually constituted through processes of active, participative and affective relationships with landscapes and non-human species' (*Elephant*, p120). Specifically, through making and experiencing intricate and intimate 'technologies' of song, music, rhythm, dance, stories and attire, an array of connecting and caring affects may be stimulated with 'power-effects' in terms of the outcomes of engagement with the multifaceted embodiments of life itself. These effective affects include aesthetic appreciation, senses of delight, wonder and mystery, perceptual opening to the presence and forms of spirit-beings, and varied potent experiences of challenge, joy and trickery in connection with entities beyond-the-self.<sup>46</sup>

To provide an example, separately enacted songs-dances that are part of a diverse, dynamic and strictly organised Ju|'hoan musical heritage repertoire in north-east Namibia are connected with a diversity of specific and polysemous potent entities encountered and variously consumed in San everyday and symbolic life.<sup>47</sup> These highly technical musical sets, distinguished through rhythmic arrangements clapped by women, constitute 'songs invested with supernatural energy' (*n|om tzišì*). *N|om tzišì* songs connect with and evoke a diversity of 'beyond-human' entities and their culturally-inflected associations: 'elephant', 'giraffe', 'honey', 'wind', 'hyena', 'oryx', 'rain', 'porcupine', 'eland', 'water', 'kudu', 'wildebeest', 'buffalo', 'duiker', 'aardvark', 'springhare', 'scorpion', 'mamba', 'python', 'puffadder', 'g|úú bird', 'giant eagle owl', 'grass', 'python', 'lion', 'g|ú|óbo snake', 'g|àqrà plant', 'mangetti

43. Jason Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital*, London, Verso, 2016.

44. Jerome Lewis, 'Where goods are free but knowledge costs: hunter-gatherer ritual economics in Western Central Africa', *Hunter Gatherer Research* 1, 1, 2015, pp1-27, following Alfred Gell, *The Art of Anthropology: Essays and Diagrams*. London, Bloomsbury, 1999. (Hereafter *Where Goods are Free*).

45. Félix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, (trans) I. Pindar and P. Sutton, London, Continuum, 2000, p28.

46. Also Sian Sullivan, 'What's ontology got to do with it? On the knowledge of nature and the nature of knowledge in environmental anthropology', in H. Kopynina and E. Shoreman-Ouimet (eds.) *Routledge International Handbook of Environmental Anthropology*, London, Routledge, 2016, pp155-69.

47. Emmanuelle Olivier, 'Categorizing the Ju|'hoan musical heritage', *African Study Monographs Suppl.* 27, 2001, pp11-27, p15. (Hereafter *Ju|'hoan Musical Heritage*). Richard Katz, Megan Biesele and Verna St. Denis, *Healing Makes Our Hearts Happy: Spirituality and Cultural Transformation Among the Kalahari Ju|'hoansi*. Rochester,

Vermont: Inner Traditions, 1997. (Hereafter *Healing Makes Our Hearts Happy*)

48. Sian Sullivan and Chris Low, 'Shades of the rainbow serpent? A KhoeSan animal between myth and landscape in southern Africa – ethnographic contextualisations of rock art representations', *The Arts* 3, 2, 2014, pp215-44; Michael Hannis and Sian Sullivan 'Relationality, reciprocity and flourishing in an African landscape', in L.M. Hartman (ed), *Flourishing: Comparative Religious Environmental Ethics*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2018.

49. Megan Biesele, *Women Like Meat: The Folklore and Foraging Ideology of the Kalahari Ju|'hoan*, Witswatersrand, Witswatersrand University Press, 1993, pp74-75.

tree', 'spider', 'stone chat', 'tortoise', 'buffalo', 'duiker' and 'mouse', to name some of these lively entities (pp12-14, 17, 19, 26).

These song-dances and the healing possibilities they effect are infused with cultural imaginaries and experiential affects that connect people, diversely embodied natural and supernatural entities, ancestors/spirits of the dead, and primal time sensitivities – the latter emphasising cultural affirmations of a time when humans and animals had not been separated by language.<sup>48</sup> In 'giraffe songs', for example, the essence of 'giraffe' is invoked since this animal 'is considered to possess the most powerful supernatural energy, with the help of which shamans may go the most easily into a trance and exercise their healing power effectively' (*Ju|'hoan Musical Heritage*, p26). In other contexts a healer may affectively become a lion or other animal so as to travel more quickly beyond the physical body to the home of the great God where 'the souls of the sick' may be rescued (*Healing Makes Our Hearts Happy*, pp24-25). 'Healing' or curing in the context of San and Khoe medicine dances is enabled by combinations of complex and driving polyphonic vocal and clapped rhythms and rhythmic dancing, embedded within ritualised knowledges, practices and values regarding entities, hunting, gender, and significant life history transitions, all of which require stringent and sometimes fearful technologies of the self in correspondence with human and beyond-human others.<sup>49</sup> In combination, these actions and associations enable affective intensities that move both individual healers and the participating community into transformed states of perceptual awareness and attention that permit the application of techniques needed for healing to occur.

Anthropologist Jerome Lewis similarly describes the effects and affects of an array of 'spirit-plays' performed by the spectrum of BaYaka peoples who for millennia have inhabited the forested areas of central and west Africa:

Each spirit-play contributes to an economy of joy – a system of distributing practices and knowledge that ensure particular euphoric states are repeatedly produced and available to all present. ... Each spirit-play has its own characteristic style that creates a different quality of joyful experience. During the total darkness of no-moon *Malobe*, for instance, fires are put out and torches forbidden, participants huddle together in the middle of camp with their legs resting on their neighbours', and their voices intertwine in a complex polyphony until tiny luminous dots float into camp producing a calm, wondrous and expansive joy. In the pitch-black participants melt into one another and the forest (*Where Goods are Free*, p7).

These varied BaYaka rituals 'seduce non-physical entities (spirits) from the forest in order to establish something non-physical (spirit) in the sense of an uplifting or joyful atmosphere' that 'people, animals and the forest will feel' (p8). Skill and intention is deployed so as 'to enchant many senses', 'using strange sounds, stirring sights, beautiful songs and dance movements, humour

and parody, touch and smell, emotions and desires, ... trance and overlapping percussive rhythms' (p8). Through building enthusiasm amongst participants, 'the music takes on a life of its own' so as to reach 'astounding synchronicity' between singers, engendering euphoric experiences of connections between people, spirits and forest (p15). On a different continent entirely, Amazonian shamans deploy the singing of delicate spirit-songs known widely as *icaros* that are taught to healers especially by plant spirits. In conjunction with potent psychoactive plant technologies, *icaros* are sung so as to attain a focused perceptual openness in which forest spirit-beings can be seen, communicated with and sometimes contested, and sicknesses can be seen and healed.<sup>50</sup>

The exuberantly directed arts of enchantment, potency and healing described above seem less like 'care-work' or 'affective labor'<sup>51</sup> than perhaps arising through an immanent concern of 'the self' to become pragmatically and aesthetically resonant with what is already musical – or harmonious – in nature.<sup>52</sup> Foucault himself alludes directly to such resonance in meditating on the possibility of connections between the Greek roots of *mel* (care, cf. *epimelēia*) and *melos* (melody, song, rhythmic singing, music): thus '[t]here would be something like a musical secret, a secret of the musical appeal in this notion of care' (*Courage of Truth*, pp118-119). Indeed, the possibility of individuals acting 'musically' together in the dance of multispecies socioecologies inspires anthropologist Anna Tsing to assert that 'we should be studying polyphonic assemblages, gatherings of ways of being' in salvaging life from capitalist ruins.<sup>53</sup>

All these care-full technologies of potency can only be enacted through technical training and skill in arts of 'the self'. By enabling experiential practices of joy, enchantment and participation in connection with the agencies of beyond-human souls, these skills and techniques act to entwine human being, desire and imagination *with* the interests of an ecology of selves-beyond-the-human so as to ensure the continuity and sustenance of all. Ecological relations thus indeed are enacted as multifaceted social relations, through which the objectification and instrumentalisation of other-than-human entities is attenuated. As Neera Singh affirms, such affects and associated practices may assist with moving away from framing conservation 'as a burdensome activity that entails sacrifice and costs alone', to amplify instead 'the joyful and life-affirming aspects of conservation care labor and its transformative potential'.<sup>54</sup> In indigenous contexts, egalitarian socioecological relations may be additionally nourished through societal constraints on both material accumulation and consolidations of political authority and domination.<sup>55</sup>

The cultures of practice and decentralised acts of conduct gestured towards above are associated with landscapes of great conservation value for the biodiversity that remains in the company of the pragmatically animist cultures that have lived there. It is the modernity of particularly the post-Cartesian moment that rejects these poetic 'technologies of enchantment' and the soul though its cruelty towards foreign realities that can only become

50. Personal observations.

51. Neera Singh, 'The affective labor of growing forests and the becoming of environmental subjects: rethinking environmentalism in Odisha, India', *Geoforum* 47, 2013, pp189-98.

52. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, (trans) B. Massumi, London, The Athlone Press, 1987, p309; Jeremy Gilbert, 'Becoming-music: the rhizomatic movement of improvisation', in Ian Buchanan and Marcel Swiboda (eds), *Deleuze and Music*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2004, pp118-38.

53. Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2015.

54. Neera Singh, 'Payments for ecosystem services and the gift paradigm: sharing the burden and joy of environmental care', *Ecological Economics*, 117, 2015, pp53-61.

55. Pierre Clastres, *Society Against the State: Essays in Political Anthropology*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, MIT Press, 1990.

56. Michael Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1987.

57. Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics*, New Jersey, Aldine Transaction, 1974; Jerome Lewis, 'Maintaining abundance, not chasing scarcity: the real challenge for the 21st century', *Radical Anthropology*, 2, 2008, pp11-18.

known once excluded, contained, suppressed, exploited, observed and exoticised.<sup>56</sup> As Foucault notes in the quote that opens this section, 'the west' and its universality is asserted precisely through cruelty to the affective and ontological conceptions and practices of variously non-capitalist cultures that act as checks on human instrumentalisations of beyond-human natures.

It may seem a far stretch to invoke these other(ed) cultures and arts of conduct in a Foucaultian meditation on ancient western technologies of the care of the self and of *bios*, i.e. life itself. But how far is it really? The ancient world of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle invoked by Foucault was also a pagan one shaped by the actions of a pantheon of gods and goddesses in communicative relationships with mortals. Dreams connected the self with worlds beyond the self and required interpretation as part of care of the self, as is integral to self-other care in many cultural contexts. Indeed, the last words of Socrates himself were reportedly an exhortation to his followers not to neglect an appropriate sacrifice to the god Asclepius who cures humans. This request is interpreted by Foucault in two relevant ways. First, as an encouragement not to forget to care for the gods whose inescapable benevolence holds us in their care. In an interesting echo of an anthropology of 'original affluence' and an assumption of abundance that mitigates against accumulation,<sup>57</sup> Socrates' last words in Foucault's interpretation are thus an exhortation to his followers *not to forget that we exist in a metaphysical state of being cared for*. Secondly, Foucault interprets Socrates' last words as an encouragement to his followers to remember to give thanks for the cure of staying true to the soul's sense of good and bad, rather than to be swayed and corrupted by the opinion of others.

For Socrates, the part of us that knows one's truth is once again the soul: the part that is in tune with justice and injustice, good and bad (*Courage of Truth*, p104). It is in following this truth that 'we will avoid that ruin/destruction of the soul caused by [following] the opinion of the crowd'(p105). Here then, Foucault, via a meditation on Socrates' last words, speaks of the courage to stay close to the truth known through the soul. Living ethically, including 'eco-ethically', thereby requires the courage of truth.

## TRUTH-TELLING AS AN (ECO)ETHICAL MODE OF EXISTENCE SUPPORTING LIFE LIVED BY LIVES

In his final lecture series on *The Courage of Truth*, Foucault focused on the courage required to speak one's truth truthfully, knowing there may be a risk associated with doing this: what the ancient Greeks called *parhēsia* in contradistinction to the manipulations of one's audience valued in rhetorical skill. Socrates linked 'greatness of soul' with the courage required by the practice of open-hearted *parhēsia* – speaking one's truth truthfully – even when this speaking may carry the risk of alienating one's interlocuters, perhaps precipitating violent reactions to this truth (p12). In speaking of the courage of Socrates' truth-telling (*parhēsia*) in the face of his own death,

Foucault indelibly entwines truth-telling with *mode of life* and practices of existence (as described above). Following Socrates he asserts, for example, that:

[t]he 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 [*sic?*] is to question their mode of life, to put this mode 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 and condemned. In this you can see the fundamental series linking care, *parrhēsia* (free-spokenness), and the ethical division between good and evil in the realm of *bios* (existence) (p149).

This ethical mode of veridiction and of truth-telling is, then, an inescapably ‘ethical *parrhēsia*’, ‘[i]ts privileged essential object [being] *life and the mode of life*’ (p149 emphasis added). For Socrates, whose mission was *parrhēsia* (telling one’s truth truthfully and with courage in the face of risk), ‘[i]f we can have *phronēsis* [reason] and take good decisions, this is because we have a particular relation to the truth which is founded ontologically in the nature of the soul’ (p86). It is the nature of the soul to disaggregate justice and injustice, good and bad, and Socrates’ aim is:

to see to it that people take care of themselves, that each individual attends to himself [as] a rational being having a relation to truth founded on the very being of his soul. And in this we now have a *parrhēsia* on the axis of ethics. What is at stake in this new form of *parrhēsia* is the foundation of *ēthos* as the principle on the basis of which conduct can be defined as rational conduct in accordance with the very being of the soul (p86).

‘Ethics’ in Foucault’s last works thereby foundationally connects care, life / *bios*, truth, conduct, courage and the soul, to ask ‘[w]hat is the ethical relationship between courage and truth? Or, to what extent do the ethics of truth entail courage?’ And further, what are ‘the moral conditions which enable a subject to have access to the truth and to speak the truth’ (p124).

The contemporary moment, characterised as it is by both extreme inequality and extreme loss of life’s diversity, presents seemingly insurmountable ethical problems. But one thing seems clear. This is that *parrhēsia* – the courage to speak truth (to power) in the course of enacting caring practices of existence – is inescapable if one *cares* for the sustenance of continued human and beyond-human diversity. It is thereby a moment that seems to call for:

militancy as bearing witness by one’s life in the form of a style of existence ... ensuring that one’s life bears witness, breaks, and has to break with the conventions, habits, and values of society [through manifesting] 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 (p184).

The unbearable weight of the Anthropocene makes it urgent for this radically other future life – this life ‘that doesn’t yet exist and about which we cannot know how and what it will be’ – to be one that amplifies possibilities for structural resonance and mutuality between social, (in)organic and spirited diversities of existence (*Neoliberal environmentalism*, p178). The encouragement here, then, is to better play and refract the games of truth infusing practices of domination in socio-environmental relations so as to amplify care for both human and beyond-human others.<sup>58</sup> For Foucault, playing the games of truth and the games of power with which these are imbricated *with as little domination as possible* requires a care of the self as an ethos of freedom that simultaneously limits the concentration of power (*Care of the Self*, p298). The extension I am suggesting here is that animist socialist practices and perceptions of the soul and of life itself might energise a ‘post-conservationist’ ‘truth environmentalism’ that engenders practices of existence that are simultaneously less dominating and more affirming of life’s diversity (c.f. *Neoliberal environmentalism*, pp177, 179). A multiplicity of illustrations from past and present non-capitalist *realities* are of critical value in puncturing ‘the distortions of humanity that are wrought normal by the objective pretensions of the present’ (*The Devil*, p154). In doing so, these contexts offer post-capitalist ‘counter-truths’ towards possible, if necessarily different, structural mutualities.

Foucault contributed his final lecture series on *The Courage of Truth* in the knowledge that his corporeal time on earth was limited. From someone well-travelled in appetites and capacities for embodied and affective intensities that take one beyond the docile, limited self, it seems pertinent and poignant that his final works, like Socrates’, were infused with encouragements to live a truthful philosophical life characterised by a mastery of appetites and a care of the self.<sup>59</sup> This essay extends Foucault’s expositions on ‘the care of the self’ and ‘the courage of truth’ as counter-propositions to the incentivised and atomised neoliberal agent. The suggestion is that care of the self can be understood and mobilised as a re-connecting series of affective, ethical and aesthetic praxes that respond to and refract the multiple disconnections encouraged in the Cartesian moment and its privileging of the autonomous knowing subject (*Hermeneutics*, p26). Becoming, thereby, a refraction of the narcissistic neoliberal and plutonomic ‘truths’ that eat into our souls to amplify domination and unfreedom.

We are of course a long way from an ‘animist socialist’ conduct of conduct as a liberatory refraction of the modes of subjectification associated with neoliberal governmentality. This is a political moment in which white supremecism, plutonomy, kleptocracy and misogyny are (once again) shameless in their dominations of others, and environmental care is framed

58. Discussed further in Sian Sullivan, ‘What’s ontology got to do with it? On nature and knowledge in a political ecology of “the green economy”’, *Journal of Political Ecology* 24, 2017, pp217-42.

59. See James Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault*, New York, Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, 1994.



simply as a constraint to economic growth and profiteering. It seems more urgent than ever to imagine and articulate different possibilities to counter-balance the destructive 'truths' legitimising current socioecological trajectories. For many of us concerned with the sustenance of both biological and cultural diversity, then, this is perhaps the moment of our lives when we most need the courage to activate, and enact, a different sort of truth.

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