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Paul Rabinow: *Anthropos Today*

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Introduction

Modern Equipment

Paraskeuē [equipment], [. . .] is the medium through which logos is transformed into ethos.
— Michel Foucault

This book is proposed as a meditation on Michel Foucault’s claim that “equipment is the medium of transformation of logos into ethos.” A good deal of work is required, however, to grasp what such a claim might mean. The difficulty in part lies in the fact that the terms “equipment” and “meditation” are used in a distinctive technical sense. Furthermore, why one would want to transform “logos” into “ethos” equally requires explanation. Hence the reader is alerted that reading this book will require a certain patience. Additionally, and unexpectedly, the book addresses the reader as a friend. Initially this appellation too is opaque. However, using as a guide Jean Paul’s wonderful claim that “Philosophy is the ability to make friends through the medium of a written text,” we at least have some sense of the terri-

Michel Foucault, “Hautes Etudes,” in *L’Herméneutique du sujet: Cours au Collège de France, 1981–82*, ed. Frédéric Gros (Paris: Editions de l’Ecole des Hautes Etudes, Editions Gallimard, Editions du Seuil, 2001), p. 312.

INTRODUCTION

tory to be visited in the following chapters, as well as the manner in which that territory is to be traversed.¹

A central purpose of the book is to assemble a toolkit of concepts. The goal of such a toolkit is to advance inquiry. The currently reigning modes of research in the human sciences are, it seems to me, deficient in vital respects. Those deficiencies are especially marked in the strained relations between an ever-accumulating body of information, the ways that information is given narrative and conceptual form, and how this knowledge fits into a conduct of life. No doubt all of this demands further elaboration, and this book attempts to respond to that demand.

The term “interpretive analytics” was coined by Hubert Dreyfus and myself and put to use in our book *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*.² Although the term cannot be said to have gained any special currency in the human sciences, I still find it useful. We arrived at the term while attempting to make Foucault’s method more precise and explicit. Our claim was that Foucault was trying to move beyond the two methodological poles then dominant in the human sciences: a version of structuralism in which human signifying practice is seen as generating object-like, rule-governed semiotic systems that produce subjects as a function of discourse; and various versions of hermeneutics that found subjects and cultures infused with deep meaning they themselves had spun, webs of signification requiring interpretation. Foucault, we wrote,

sought to avoid the structuralist analysis which eliminates notions of meaning altogether and substitutes a formal model of human behavior as rule-governed transformations of meaningless elements; to avoid the phenomenological project of tracing all elements back to the meaning-giving activity of an autonomous, transcendental subject; and finally, to avoid the attempt of commentary to read off the implicit meanings of social practices as well as the hermeneutic unearthing of a different and deeper meaning of which social actors are only dimly aware.³

Foucault had pieced together an innovative method through his tacking between so-called archaeological and genealogical emphases. Foucault, we argued, had gotten beyond structuralism and hermeneutics by showing how the historical relations of knowledge and power had produced an object of knowledge that was also the subject of knowledge: Man. Further, we concluded that the strengths and weaknesses of Foucault's writings could not be evaluated or appreciated adequately in terms of a correspondence theory of truth any more than through a deconstructive dissipation of the real. Rather, it seemed clear that the power of his work rested on its heuristic value.

There is a lineage of major work in the twentieth-century human sciences that has succeeded in bringing philosophical learning, diagnostic rigor, and a practice of inquiry that operates in proximity to concrete situations into a productive relationship. Such inquiry proceeds through mediated experience. It contributes to what used to be called a *Bildung*, a process of self-formation, that today might be called an attitude or an ethos. The proximity to concreteness is both the goal and the means through which inquiry operates when it works well. Understanding is a conceptual, political, and ethical practice. It is conceptual because without concepts one would not know what to think about or where to look in the world. It is political because reflection is made possible by the social conditions that enable this practice (thought may be singular, but it is not individual). It is ethical because the question of why and how to think are questions of what is good in life. Finally, all action is stylized; hence it is aesthetic, insofar as it is shaped and presented to others.

The goal of the meditations that follow is neither to systematically survey any specific domain of knowledge nor to solve any particular contemporary dispute. Rather, this book seeks to bring together a set of conceptual tools and to use them as a starting point to advance an experimental mode for the human sciences in which concepts and techniques could be made to function differently. By differently, I mean better. By better, I mean in a more

INTRODUCTION

sagacious manner. By a more sagacious manner, I mean a wiser one: logos serving phronesis, phronesis under the sign of philosophy, philosophy under the sign of ethos. By ethos I refer to that space of practice at the interface of ethics and culture. It is a premise of this work that both of the latter terms are very much in question today.

Hetero-Logoi

How to think about things human is a problem. Most attempts to solve this problem deploy one or another answer that claims to offer generality and stability. These attempts have produced incompatible answers. The fact that there is a problem in thinking about human things, and that part of that problem lies in the inability to provide a stable solution, is coexistent and cotemporal with the practice itself. This state of affairs has existed from the beginnings of Western philosophy, continued through the disputatious elaboration of theology, through the proliferation of what came to be known as the natural and social sciences, and through the strife of critical theory in the twentieth century, and again today is blazing afresh among, amidst, and between different sciences. However, the form of the problem—and therefore the practices that produce it and that it produces—has not always been the same. We can conclude with some confidence, in a pragmatic spirit, that future attempts to define what the “thinking,” or the “problem,” “really is” are themselves fated to fail, by which I mean they will not establish themselves as enduring solutions. They will join the cacophony of dispute that is such a vexing aspect of the subject matter itself.

No consensus has ever been reached about principles, methods, and modes of problem specification, or about modes, methods, and principles of verification, or about forms of narration in the human sciences. The hope for a positive science, or the end of metaphysics, or hermeneutical closure on the Bible or other authoritative texts, is like a cargo cult, which persists in the face of constant disappointment. How can thinkers fail to notice that

almost no one outside their own immediate circle is paying attention to their proofs, their prophecies, their purges? When attempts have been made to recognize and acknowledge the reality of heterogeneity—and there have been a multitude of such attempts, especially in the last two centuries (ranging from Hegel’s to Bourdieu’s)—they have almost exclusively been aimed at showing the underlying unity of what merely appeared to be diverse. Yet no consensus has been reached on what that unity might be.

An examination of “interpretive communities,” whether of the American pragmatist persuasion or the more recent post-Heideggerian stylizations, shows us that such communities pay no serious attention to one another. For communities of discourse, mutual engagement is fundamentally an internal matter (and a highly fractured one at that). Thus, for example, while there is an ongoing effort to disprove Freudian theory, most of those who use it don’t care; they continue to analyze patients, movies, et cetera in Freudian terms. And the overwhelming majority of literate, or semiliterate, knowledge producers, who have never read a word of Freud, don’t care either. As there are no sanctions except mutual contempt and the nasty book or grant review, this situation is unlikely to change. Different interpretive “federations,” or simply clusters, coalesce around different questions, different methods, different standards of evidence, different types of argumentation, different career patterns, different sources of symbolic capital, differential placements within the cultural, economic, political, and social fields. Then such clusters themselves produce other subclusters, and discursive battles ensue.

This state of things is partially the result of the fact that within the human sciences no stable mechanism has been invented to centralize policing, to enforce “order and progress,” to cite the old positivist motto. To make a long argument short, in the natural sciences the academies and granting agencies function as gatekeepers; without money and facilities there is no natural science. In the human sciences, no such mechanisms exist, or none, at least, approaching the same effectiveness. As salaries continue to be paid, discourses continue to augment. Only in authoritarian

INTRODUCTION

systems has a degree of consensus been reached and sustained. This claim extends from the hard authoritarianisms like communism or National Socialism to softer ones in which elites rule by habitus and class affiliation and thereby control boundaries through appointments and commissions alone.

So what is one to make of this dissonance? One way out is to adopt a metaposition that begins with a principled affirmation of the inevitable plurality of positions. An inevitable plurality of logoi and perhaps of ethē as well. Philosophers in the American pragmatist tradition made a number of attempts to think this state of pluralism through as a positive condition of thought and value. From John Dewey through Richard McKeon, they have provided significant reflections on maximizing the utility and public good attained through an acknowledgment and affirmation of pluralism. Their positions, however, have tended to constitute themselves as schools and have encountered eventually the same types of divisions and disputes as other schools of philosophy.

Equipment

Why, when it comes to thinking, is there this vexation? This irritation, this distress, this tossing about? Although logos, reasoned discourse, must be a part of the solution, as what we are doing is thinking, it seems also to constitute an essential dimension of the problem. This insight might lead one to conclude that logos is expendable. Nothing could be farther from my project. Rather, it seems to me that the starting point of inquiry and reflection, the anthropological problem, lies in the apparently unavoidable fact that anthropos is that being who suffers from too many logoi.

To say that relating logos to ethos is problematic is to rephrase what has just been said. Attempts to establish a relationship between these two terms have produced different affects. Among these affects is pathos.⁴ Remembering that pathos is both a medical and a theatrical term, its presence can be taken up as both diagnostic and representative. Its presence is diagnostic in the sense that something seems wrong: a form of care is called for. The presence of pathos is representative in that all staging of an-

swers themselves eventually pose the problem of how something can be represented. It follows that an attention to form is inescapable.

When Foucault undertook his famous detour into ethics during the 1980s, the topics of care and form became central. He turned to the genealogy of a type of relation between thinking and acting to which he had not given prominence, a relation that was pragmatic but not immediately political. He entitled his course at the Collège de France during the academic year 1981–82 “L’Herméneutique du sujet.” The course was devoted to exploring the techniques, practices, and reflections related to “care of the self” in the late antique world. The guiding hypothesis of Foucault’s rich and far-reaching lectures was that for almost two millennia the imperative to take “care of the self” had been linked to, and in fact primed, the imperative to “know thyself.” Knowledge was not an end in itself; it was an essential element of a life well led. Its function was to contribute to such a life.

In the early 1980s, Foucault devoted himself to archaeological explorations of the sundering of the imperative to “know thyself” from that of its lost partner, the “care of the self.” The genealogical dimension of Foucault’s work explored the possibility of recreating this alliance as a problem of actuality — not, of course, to return to the older solutions but to find among those solutions a way of formulating a contemporary problem with more clarity. Frédéric Gros, the scholarly editor of the 1981–82 course, in his excellent “Afterword,” succinctly sums up the core of Foucault’s concerns as follows:

- (1) Can one have access to truth without putting into question the very being of the subject who achieves that access? Can one have access to truth without paying the price of a sacrifice, of an asceticism, of a transformation, of a purification, that touches the very being of the subject?
- (2) Can self knowledge, understood as part of knowledge in general, take account of the care of the self?”⁵

There existed in late antiquity a corpus of arts and techniques considered by all to be essential to the care of the self. Much of Foucault’s inquiry in the 1981–82 lectures focused on this corpus,

INTRODUCTION

these practices, these exercises, constituent of, and essential to, self-formation and care. His preliminary working hypothesis was that in the Western philosophical tradition there had been three major forms of reflexivity. By reflexivity Foucault means exercises of thought in which the act of thinking is itself made an object of thought. The three forms were memory, meditation, and method. In this instance, as elsewhere, Foucault is using terms such as “memory” or “method” as topics to begin an inquiry. He starts by taking one of these terms — for example, “memory” — focusing on one exemplary use of it in the writings of Plato. He then analyzes the constituent elements of the exemplary case. The recombination of these elements, as well as the addition of new ones, provides the material means to articulate a space of variation and development. This space is not the historian’s space. Rather, it is a logical space, composed of historically defined and situated elements, close to that of Max Weber’s “ideal types” (as we shall see later).

It was with the emergence of program of method as certitude that the concerns with the ethical conduct of a life were sundered from the search for truth. Method was conceived as operating as a form of objectivity and autonomy. Method was *amoral* in the sense that the subject of knowledge no longer needed to be in a privileged ethical state to receive the truth.⁶ And the reception of objective truth had no necessary consequences for the ethical state of the subject who received it. The search for a method is a search for a “form of reflexivity that seeks a certitude that can serve as a criterion for all possible truths, and which, from that fixed point, can lead truth to a systematic organization of an objective knowledge.”⁷ Both of these forms, memory and method, are well known, even if their histories and fates have been complex. Neither memory nor method, however, is at the heart of Foucault’s analysis. Rather, they are topics that enable him to better define the space of “meditation.”

What is meditation? In the late antique world, meditation differed profoundly in its goals, practices, and forms, from meditation today. Today “meditation” carries the connotation of either an attention to inward states or of attempts to empty the mind.

The gulf that separates the older uses of this term from the current ones stands out in the definition Foucault provides. “The test of one self as a thinking subject, who acts and thinks accordingly, who has as his goal a certain transformation of the subject such that there is a self-constitution as an ethical subject of truth.”⁸ Meditation, then, was an exercise, an exercise of thought directed to thinking, an exercise whose goal was to connect thought to ethos.

One of the characteristic ways of describing the care of the self was as a set of exercises that prepared one for a lifelong battle against external events. Sometimes this preparation, and its associated exercises, was described as an athletic contest, sometimes as a battle. In either case, one needed a supply of proverbial weapons in order to endure and to triumph in the conflict. Foucault captures this dimension in one of those invigorating turns of phrase at which he was so gifted: “The Stoic athlete [. . .] had to be prepared for a battle, a battle in which his adversary was anything that might come at him from the outside world: the event. The antique athlete is an athlete of the event. As for the Christian, he is an athlete who confronts himself.”⁹ One needed a training in vigilance and agonism, because these tests were challenges at which one sought to excel, not merely to triumph or survive.

Further inquiry would reveal that historically these types would have been broken down into elements and these elements recombined in various manners. They would have been rethought and put to different uses in different contexts. Thus, for example, centuries later, work on the self, even the interior self, would come to be understood as coping with the inner significance of events. Such work, of course, would have its own distinctive practice of memory and method.

The care of the self, then, was not just a state of consciousness; it was an activity. Furthermore it was not an activity appropriate just for this or that occasion; rather, it was an essential dimension of a whole way of life. It was a constitutive element of a form of life. Thus, in one sense it was part of a broader pedagogy, in the ancient sense of *paideia*, or in the more modern sense of *Bildung*.

INTRODUCTION

However, the care of the self was more than that; it was more than a stage (or set of stages) one passed through. The care of the self was also a form of critique, a critique of the self that entailed perpetual self-examination, an unlearning of bad habits as well as the forming of good ones. In sum, meditation, *meletē*, was an exercise in the practical appropriation of thinking about and toward the self. It was an appropriation aimed at literally forming the subject. It was not aimed at merely enriching his knowledge, building his reputation, or polishing his style for its own sake. The care of the self was an essential aspect of how a moral existence had to be lived. Although this preparation and this exercise focused on the care of the self, it was far from being a solitary affair. In fact, the practice of the care of the self passed through an elaborate network of relationships with others. The care of the self was highly social, and it was oriented from the self outward to others, to things, to events, and then back to the self.

How was this work, how were these exercises, to be accomplished? In the late antique world there existed a whole range of “equipment” to aid those engaged in these exercises. The key “equipment” that was required to take care of the self, to aid it in its confrontations with the proverbial slings and arrows of the external world, or more generally to accomplish the complex task of facing the future, was an arsenal, if you will, of *logoi*.¹⁰ This inventory of *logoi* formed a kind of tool chest. The Greek word for this toolkit is *paraskeuē*, or “equipment.” As the name suggests, this equipment was designed to achieve a practical end. These “true discourses,” these “*logoi*,” were neither abstractions nor, as we say today, “merely discursive.” They had their own materiality, their own concreteness, their own consistency.

What was at stake in the use of this equipment was not primarily a quest for truth about the world or the self. Rather, it was a question of assimilating these true discourses, in an almost physiological sense, as aids in confronting and coping with external events and internal passions. The challenge was not just to learn these maxims, often banal in themselves, but to make them an embodied dimension of one’s existence. To have them ready at hand when needed: “to make of a taught, learned, repeated, and

assimilated logos the spontaneous form of the acting subject.”¹¹ True discourses were equipment to the extent that they had been assimilated thoroughly, made to function as rational principles of action. Learning these maxims was not hard; accomplishing the goal of making these logoi a principle of action was a lifelong process.

Throughout late antiquity, Epicureans, Stoics, and Cynics ardently debated the best use of this arsenal of logoi within the problematic of the care of the self. But all the schools of thought agreed on two things: (1) that care of the self and knowledge of the self went together, with the former priming the latter; and (2) that the deployment of true discourses was absolutely not a question of deciphering the hidden meaning of our thoughts and desires.¹² Thought was inseparable from the world, from the self, from others, from events. Thought was a practice. In sum, “*para-skeuē*, [. . .] is the medium through which logos is transformed into ethos.”¹³ The challenge of bringing logos and ethos into the right relationship was, and is, the challenge confronting anthropos.

Modern Equipment

In *French Modern: Norms and Forms of the Social Environment*, I traced some of the dimensions of how modern urban planning had gradually developed over the course of the nineteenth century. Urban planning had started with the rational reform of physical space but had gradually included more and more elements in its purview. By the time such planning had become a socialist project during the 1930s, it was proud of having expanded its scope from city planning, *un plan de ville*, to planning that included all those elements (spatial, social, psychological, architectural, hygienic, etc.) that contributed to shaping an individual life, *un plan de vie*. The goal of planning was social and individual health, a well-policed order. By 1942, the French “Plan d’Équipement National,” defined *équipement* as everything that was not a “free gift of the soil, subsoil or climate. It is the work of each day and the country as a whole.” One could say “equip-

INTRODUCTION

ment” had become the subject matter of method. In a parallel fashion, one could say that the subject had equally become an object of method.

Thus, viewed from our current perspective, we could say that a tool chest of logoi had been gradually assembled, and partially put into practice by the state. Further, new social technologies had been invented to oblige individuals to have these rational aids ready at hand on all occasions; or, failing that, at least to have social specialists nearby who could bring the corrective benefits of these technologies to bear with the shortest possible delay. The political rationality consisted in recuperating and subsuming, through method, the traditional functions of meditation.

The task of this book is neither to rehearse the archaeology of these changes nor to evaluate them. Rather, what I am attempting to do is to reflect on how it might be possible to transfigure elements of the equipment of modern method into a form of modern meditation, and to bring the benefits and effects of that transformation to bear on inquiry. The challenge is threefold: (1) to provide a toolkit of concepts for conducting inquiries into the contemporary world in its actuality; (2) to conduct those inquiries in a manner that makes the relations, connections, and disjunctions between logos and ethos apparent and available to oneself and to others, that is to say, to make those relations part of the inquiry itself as well as part of a life; (3) to take into account the pathos encountered and engendered by such an undertaking, and to find a place for it within the form under construction.