**Goldfishes, Philosophers and Acrobatics: Michel Foucault’s impossible ethics**

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One day, when he was a child, Foucault asked his mother: «Mom, what does a fish think?». In a way, the query that Foucault carries out on the relationship among subjectivity and truth brings back to his curiosity as a child. We will never be able to identify ourselves with a goldfish, to understand what it thinks as it swims in its aquarium. In the same way, we are not able to completely understand the way antiquity thought the relationship between the human being and the truths of ethics and politics. That is why it is worth trying to understand it and undertake the difficult acrobatics of thought that have always characterized philosophy…

In a meeting on *cura sui*, a paper on the French philosopher is due. But do not expect Foucault to confirm the possibility of proposing the ethics of *cura sui* as valid for the present. In his last researches he shows an ambivalent attitude towards antiquity, which reveals a deep discomfort. Foucault’s last studies – although he never acknowledged it – represent the failure of his research project. Their value lies exactly in this: while observing the aquarium of the Greeks and Romans, the last Foucault came to question his whole method.

In the lectures at the *Collège de France* “*The Hermeneutics of the Subject”*(1982) he had to admit, in spite of himself, that in the Hellenistic age and in imperial Rome the “culture of the self” froze into a universal normative morality that disclosed the Christian hermeneutic of desire and thus modern subjectivity. In the lectures at the *Collège de France* of the following years, he sought after the origin of an alternative tradition to which he supposed both Enlightenment and his own critical attitude belonged, and he found it not in *cura sui* but in *parrhesìa.*In this way Foucault abandoned the hypothesis that different historical systems of thought are incommensurable, and he ascertained that from the beginning – at least in the Western tradition – subjectivity is compelled to make a choice between an epistemic and an ethical approach to truth, between the will to knowledge and the will to freedom. In so doing, he opened a new field of research, which this conference contributes to develop and further.

…At the end human beings are note one another as goldfish, even when they belongs to different historical systems of thought.