

Frank Ruda\*

## Courage

“Courage wants to laugh.”<sup>1</sup>

Friedrich Nietzsche

### I: Contemporary Aristotelian Republicanism

Why courage? Why should this concept still be relevant today? Why should one again bother to (re-)think it? One is immediately confronted with these questions when invoking the concept of courage today. Any project that seeks to return to or even revitalise courage (for) today might immediately appear to be peculiarly misplaced, anachronistic, and outdated, as if it speaks from a different time. The concept or, even worse, the virtue of courage seems to be problematically overdetermined by its own history: a history that is populated by quite worn and overly masculine clichés as to what a courageous person is or a courageous act might look like. Recently, even one of the cultural factories of courageous tales, namely Hollywood, started to avoid at least the most obvious of these clichés and modelled some of its protagonists accordingly (into morally dubious, often slightly nihilistic anti-heroes). Any attempt to revamp courage runs the risk of leading to just another instance of problematic praise of the classic grand heroic gestures that were almost always not only coded in a masculine fashion but were also, again problematically, mostly militaristic in nature. One may think of the pathos linked to facing the greatest threats, including death, the ultimate meat axe, for some greater purpose; of the idea of having to be ready to risk it all, facing the enemy where it counts, sacrificing one’s own life for some greater good. It seems almost impossible to get rid of these implications, since already one of the Greek names for courage, namely *andreia*, tellingly not only translates as courage or bravery (as in the brave soldier), but also means manliness, whereby it appears to be an obvious expression of all the problems inherent in the concept of courage.

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<sup>1</sup> F. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2006, p. 28.

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Courage immediately appears to be *the* militaristically heroic (and due to the history of militaristic heroism, thus masculine) sacrificial virtue par excellence. It seems difficult to make a plea for its renaissance. Yet, the American Senator from Arizona and well-known Republican John McCain defends the *virtue* of courage for today's political situation in his 2004 book *Why Courage Matters*. Courage's virtue appears when "our fear is overcome by our conscience and our beliefs and forces us to act."<sup>2</sup> An almost identical claim was made by George W. Bush a few years earlier and repeated by Rudy Giuliani in the face of the 9/11 attacks. The latter also explicitly referred to Winston Churchill's classification of courage as the first of all civic virtues. These appraisals of courage as the classic civic virtue are an unacknowledged – and perhaps even unintended – resumption of Aristotle's claim from the *Nicomachean Ethics* that courage is the virtue that provides the measure to all other virtues. This definition, highly influential on its own, gained even more explicit political impact with John Locke's reformulation stating that courage is the "guard and support of all other virtues" in the face of "pain, disgrace, and poverty."<sup>3</sup> Should one not take this as a symptom of the still prominent Aristotelianism linked to the concept of courage that also causes all the resistances that this concept of courage generates? To answer this question, it is instructive to first return to Aristotle – whom one can certainly not reproach for having been a US Republican.

Aristotle gives, as always, a refined definition of courage in the ninth chapter of his *Nicomachean Ethics*, where he first classifies courage as a virtue,<sup>4</sup> and virtue, as is well known, is formally defined as the middle between two extremes. A virtue is what measures two extremes by balancing them with one another. Measured and measurable extremes are thus due to virtue no longer too extreme. Virtue for Aristotle is thus essentially measurement, *Maßnahme*. This also holds for the virtue of courage. Aristotle claims that "in fear and confidence, courage is the middle."<sup>5</sup> Courage is located in between what makes us afraid and our own self-confidence, so that the courageous neither have too much nor too little confidence, nor too much nor too little fear. He subsequently specifies that courage does not describe confronting all kinds of things that we

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<sup>2</sup> John McCain, *Why Courage Matters: The Way to A Braver Life*, Random House, New York 2004, p. 24.

<sup>3</sup> John Locke, *Some Thoughts concerning Education*, Hackett, Indianapolis 1996, p. 86.

<sup>4</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2004, 1108b, 34f.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 1170b, 32.

might fear, but rather is the virtuous handling of very specific fearsome objects. For there are, first, things we might fear but such fear is not rational. These things are irrelevant for courage as a virtue – since a virtue can only be a virtue if it is something a rational being has. Non-rational beings, say animals, are not virtuous. Then, second, there are things that one cannot but fear and it is rational to do so, yet it is not at all virtuous to confront them. Some things make us ashamed in the eyes of others and therefore we certainly and rationally are afraid of them, yet it makes no sense for Aristotle to confront them confidently. Since committing shameful acts has nothing to do with virtue: Shameful acts are themselves an extreme and thus cannot coincide with courage (as it is a virtue and balances extremes).

Overly extremely confident ways of dealing with what one fears cannot be called courageous at all. They rather lead to shamelessness, which obviously is not a virtue and has nothing to do with courage. What then are the things that courage deals with? The ones we fear but need to confront with the right amount of confidence? Aristotle's first answer – here he is, to speak anachronistically, a Heideggerian – is: death. Death “is the most fearful thing of all [...]”<sup>6</sup> But Aristotle specifies again that it is not death as such that is the privileged object of courage, not any kind of death. It is certainly rational to fear death. Yet, confronting death does not imply courage in all cases. Because courage does not simply entail confronting whatever one fears most. If I do things that it is rational to fear but my reasons for doing so are stupid, I am not courageous, but stupid. Aristotle describes this as foolhardiness: For the rash person is he “who exceeds in confidence,” but, Aristotle continues, who “is also a boaster and a pretender to courage,”<sup>7</sup> who tries to appear courageous but is not. This implies that foolhardiness can appear as if it were courage but is ultimately closer to cowardice.

So, the privileged object of courage is death, not any kind of death, but one linked to the right and that is: rational reasons for confronting it. For Aristotle this means that it must be a death that is linked to honour: “the most noble [...] are deaths in battle, because they take place in the greatest and noblest danger, and this fits with the way honours are bestowed in cities and the courts of the

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 1115a, 49.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 115b, 50.

monarchs. So it is the person who does not fear a noble death, or the risk of immediate death, that should really be described as courageous [...].”<sup>8</sup> The object of courage is a death that is confidently confronted for the right – namely rational – reasons; a death that is confronted because one defends one’s own city or country, which if it is a just city or country is the best reason for defending it by confronting what one would otherwise avoid. The military confrontation is here turned into the paradigm of the courageous act.<sup>9</sup> Aristotle claims that the courageous person in general and in a military battle in particular is as confident as a human rational being needs to be but also fears those things that need to be feared as they exceed and defeat human power (bullets, for example).

Courage is the most rational way of being afraid – while being confident at the same time. Its rationality is defined by levelling fear and confidence for the right reasons. Virtue in general is, by definition, a quantitative measurement for Aristotle, a quantitative equilibrium. Which is why courage as a virtue is constituted precisely by the right amount of fear that determines exactly the right amount of confidence. Those who lack this adequate measurement, like “madmen or [the] insensible,”<sup>10</sup> do not fear anything. And those who fear too much are cowards. Cowards, madmen, and the insensible do not belong in the corps of courageous men because they lack the proper measure. However, the courageous person feels the right amount of fear and confronts it with the right and rationally measured amount of confidence and thus acts in absolute calm (even though sometimes, as Aristotle suggests, anger can help, but only an anger that can be transformed into a motivational energy within the virtuous framework of courage, as long as rage remains within *courage*). The courageous act is then characterisable as ethically good, whereas its converse (too much confidence, too much fear, or too little of either) is ethically bad.

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But Aristotle’s ultimate definition of courage adds another component that once again specifies this notion. This further component is that *one needs knowledge*. Not any kind of knowledge, but one acquired through practical, i.e. inner-situational, experience. This means that one can learn and acquire the virtue of

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 1115a, 49.

<sup>9</sup> To be exact, one must add that Aristotle does state that all courageous acts are essentially militaristic in nature, but he does state that death on the battlefield is, if it is in defence of a just country, the exemplary case of courage.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 1115b, 50.

courage by gaining practical experience in different situations in which one fears something and experiences one's own competence in dealing with these things whereby confidence in one's own capacities (and sometimes even these very capacities) is produced. In some sense, courage also springs from learning by doing. Courage is a virtue acquired through practical experience whereby knowledge of one's own capacities and their applicability within specific fearful situations is generated. One learns to measure what one is able to do and thereby when and how much confidence to have. This confidence is thus linked to practical knowledge: We know what we have to fear and why we have to fear it and we also know and are conscious of our own capacities, of what we can do. It is this knowledge that provides the measure. Courage thus ultimately derives from this concatenation of subjective and objective knowledge. Courageous are those who from their own subjective experience know what they can do and know what they objectively have to fear and how they have to fear it and are thus confident to the objectively right degree. Aristotle states this as follows: "So the courageous person is the one who endures and fears – and likewise is confident about – the right things, for the right reason, in the right way, and at the right time; for the courageous person feels and acts in accordance with the merits of the case, and as reason requires."<sup>11</sup>

So, we here obtain a quite solid definition of courage (and one can see why Elias Canetti once called Aristotle a conceptual omnivore<sup>12</sup>), but it is one that fundamentally links courage to a military paradigm since the ultimate object of courage is and remains an honourable death for a greater cause which one faces because one is confidently aware of and able to measure the relation of this object to one's own capacities. But one may now also see why the quoted Republican politicians have adopted this virtue, for it implements ethical heroism at the very heart of the political community, as the basic civic virtue on which all civic conduct is based. The political community thereby becomes a latently heroic one, and a latently masculine one (as all heroes *have* something: adequate knowledge of their capacities and when to invest them and for what). A remark by Susan Sontag apropos the 9/11 terrorists – a remark that angered many people – can help to depict what is problematic in this definition. She argued that "in the matter of courage (a morally neutral virtue): whatever be

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Elias Canetti, *The Human Province*, Seabury Press, New York 1978, p. 33.

said about Tuesday’s perpetrators, they were no cowards.”<sup>13</sup> And Kant in his *Anthropology*, as if he foresaw this problem, after Aristotle – and precisely therefore – introduces a distinction between courage as such and moral courage; only the latter is derived from genuinely moral principles that do not exist for he or she who acts just courageously.<sup>14</sup> So, Kant here clearly saw the problem – which he is usually accused of neglecting – between the form and the content (of courage).<sup>15</sup> In any case, Sontag’s comment complicates the Aristotelian rendering of courage as a virtue (and forces one to be even more specific). This happens not only because her remark could only be perceived as an affront to a certain American Republican understanding of courage, but worse: because it fits this understanding on a purely formal level all-too well.

If one takes this more or less contemporary American Republican defence of courage seriously for a moment and reads it as a kind of representative paradigm for how to conceive courage, the reasons are obvious why it seems controversial, to say the least, to return to courage today (at least if you are not an American Republican). If one starts with the McCain-Aristotle model, there are four options at hand as to what to do: Either one nonetheless attempts an Aristotelian-Republican defence of courage, arguing why it is right even when it seems to come with some problematic implications, or one attempts a non-Aristotelian but still Republican account, or an Aristotelian but non-Republican account of courage (emphasising how the Republicans got it wrong), or finally one attempts to unpack a non-Aristotelian and non-Republican account of courage. What follows is an attempt to opt for the last of these possible options. In principle, I side with those feminist critics of the so-called new “Manly Men”<sup>16</sup> and of the(ir) idea of courage that turns the latter into a conceptually male and military virtue (even though my reasons may in part differ from theirs). But I

<sup>13</sup> Susan Sontag, “Talk of the Town”, *The New Yorker* (24 September 2001), p. 32. That courage is useful but can also be destructive (that it is thus a morally neutral virtue) has also been argued by Shklar. Cf. Judith N. Shklar, The “Liberalism of Fear”, in: *Political Thought and Political Thinkers*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1998, pp. 3–20.

<sup>14</sup> Yet, one may say that Aristotle prevents this confusion by emphasising that only he or she is properly courageous who confronts death for the right reasons (that is, for defending a just city and not just any city or community).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2006, pp. 156ff.

<sup>16</sup> Patricia Leigh Brown, “Heavy Lifting Required: The Return of the Manly Men”, in: *The New York Times* (28 October 2001).

fundamentally concede that one needs to conceive of what Wendy Brown called a “post-masculinist courage,”<sup>17</sup> or: feminine courage.

## II. Philosophy and Courage, I

How to liberate courage from Republicanism (the American style at least) and the Aristotelian rendering that I reconstructed briefly? My methodological intuition is the following: To do this one has to separate courage from the concept of virtue. For it is virtue that provides the link between American Republicanism that is closet (and perhaps trivialised) Aristotelianism and the Aristotelianism that leads to (not so closet) heroic militarism. If there is any value to rethinking courage today, it can only be done by undoing this very concatenation that is held together by the concept of virtue. So, courage not as – and without all – virtue. What could this mean? With the Aristotelian-Republican model one has more than nothing at hand to proceed with: One can use this model as a negative matrix of all the things that one has to reshuffle, remodel, and avoid. Rethinking courage must therefore also imply separating courage from its relation to knowledge. Courage can no longer name the appropriately measured evaluation of practical actions that spring from the knowledge of one’s own capacities in relation to an appropriately known and evaluated situation of justified and justifiable fear. There certainly must still be a relation of courage to something like fear, but it cannot be an objective(ly measurable) fear, not a fear for good reasons that one knows of and about, and that would allow one to evaluate in advance how to practically deal with it.

Courage’s measure is not given. Rather, it is what is at stake or in question. But what can courage be if it is neither a virtue nor anchored in an objective knowledge of what we fear and what we are able to do. I will only be able to unfold a sketch of some of the constitutive elements of an answer here. Proceeding *via negativa* and in a rather abstract manner, I can nonetheless indicate the following: If courage is not considered to be a virtue, it has to be conceptualised as a specific kind of operation. This operation cannot be derived from an already constituted knowledge or given capacities. This means that in and with courage there must be a different relation to knowledge at stake. As Nietzsche once pro-

<sup>17</sup> Wendy Brown, *Manhood and Politics: A Feminist Reading in Political Theory*, Rowman and Littlefield, Totowa 1988, pp. 205–206.

claimed: “Only very late, one has the courage to assume that which one knew all along”<sup>18</sup> – pointing to a knowledge that we do not know we have – which is at the same time the shortest definition that Freud gave of the unconscious. This means that courage implies a different relation to knowledge or a different kind of knowledge; maybe one can even state that courage must be located against the background of the distinction between knowledge and truth famously propagated by Heidegger, Lacan, and others. Courage in this different meaning would entail the activation of a different relation to a different kind of knowledge, or to recall the title of Michel Foucault’s last lecture at the Collège de France, to which I will return subsequently, it would also entail courage to truth.<sup>19</sup> The general plan is thus: One replaces the concatenation of courage and knowledge – which is constitutive of the idea of courage being a virtue – in Aristotle with a concatenation of courage and truth. The operation of courage could not be conceived of as being derived from or from applying a given *objective* knowledge, because this would consider both as being already given (in the form of capacities and as objects that I fear). In conceptualising courage as a specific kind of operation one thus shifts the terrain: One will no longer speak of the objective knowledge of things already given, but rather refer to an operation involved in the becoming of subjects, in an operation that is a crucial component of subjectivisation.

In other words, courage is not an operation related to the being of already given subjects and objects, but rather to what is not or not yet. A courage not of what is but of what takes place, of what happens and might ultimately produce – as its material effect – subjects. Courage would then not be a virtue, but a kind of risky anticipatory reception of something that happens, (paradoxically perhaps) forming the very condition of possibility of it happening at all; an operation of identifying that there is something taking place *as* something taking place, which consequently forces one to assume that one already made a decision.<sup>20</sup> Courage lies in assuming that something has already happened.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nachgelassene Fragmente. 1885–1887*, in: *Kritische Studienausgabe*, Vol. 12, de Gruyter, Berlin 1989, p. 407.

<sup>19</sup> Michael Foucault, *The Courage to the Truth (The Government of the Self and Others II). Lectures at the Collège de France, 1982–1983*, Palgrave, London 2001.

<sup>20</sup> Courage may then, for example, lie in identifying that one has fallen in love as something that happened to oneself.

<sup>21</sup> This is why there is even a link between courage and a certain kind of fatalism. For the latter, cf. Frank Ruda, *Abolishing Freedom: A Plea for a Contemporary Use of Fatalism*,



Courage then also means assuming the responsibility for a decision that one did not consciously make, but that no one but oneself is responsible for, as it is a decision that makes one into who one is. Courage then is, to just in passing use the vocabulary of Alain Badiou, neither an event nor already the practice of a subject (thus it still could be a virtue); it is rather the operation that identifies an event *as* an event and is thus constitutive (or sometimes also reconstitutive) of a subject. Due to the fact that, for Badiou, any event appears in the form of a yes/no decision may also clarify why the operation of courage is internally linked to what Freud called condensation, namely a condensation of all given difference to an unavoidable A or Non-A choice, whereby one already made the choice that there is only this choice – the choice that there is only this choice, this identificatory gesture would be courageous. This might then also be close to what Nietzsche called in a note from 1870 “the courage to experience wonders (*Muth Wunder zu erleben*).”<sup>22</sup>

To more systematically return to the anti-Aristotelian matrix that develops by negating the fundamental coordinates of Aristotle’s account, one can resume the task of what needs to be systematically demonstrated by recourse to a series of oppositions: Courage is not a virtue but an operation; it is not inferable from knowledge but pertains to the activation of a different kind of knowledge. Or: It is not objective knowledge but subjective truth; it is not objective knowledge of something given, but related to something that happens and thereby to the constitution of subjects. One last element also and necessarily has to be inscribed into this abstract picture of a different notion of courage, and this element may actually be the most fundamental one: To distance courage from virtue, it is imperative to also account for yet another conceptual difference, namely the difference between fear and anxiety. Fear is always, as already Heidegger elaborated,<sup>23</sup> something that occurs in relation to an object (and thus can be known and communicated, in the form of: “I am afraid of frogs because they are so greasy,” or something comparable). Anxiety, on the other hand, does not have

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Nebraska University Press, Lincoln, NB 2016.

<sup>22</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nachgelassene Fragmente. 1869–1874*, in: *Kritische Studienausgabe*, Vol. 7, de Gruyter, Berlin 1989, p. 49.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Harper & Row, New York 2008, pp. 184–191. Heidegger states that the “They”, thus everyone absorbed by everyday practices, will never get to the point of allowing anxiety as it always already disciplined it so that it corresponds to an object in the world (and is thus turned into fear).

an object in this sense of the term. Heidegger was the first to insist that anxiety does not have an object of the world as its cause – and in *Being and Time* he emphasised that one needs the “courage to be anxious [*Mut zur Angst*]” to see the fundamental distinction between fear and anxiety. For Heidegger, anxiety is without any external causation and concerns the world as such – and the world is not an object but the very frame of and for objects to appear (whereby anxiety ultimately turns into a precondition for a proper *Entschlossenheit*, or: freedom). As is well-known, Lacan modified this Heideggerian account slightly, adding that anxiety does indeed not have an object in the mentioned sense of the term, but that it is at the same time not without object<sup>24</sup>: *l’angoisse n’est pas sans objet*. With this, Lacan indicates that even though anxiety does not have an object, it is not without (*pas sans*) an object. That is to say, the object of anxiety is a passing (*pas-sans*) object, something which passes, something that indicates a passing, brings something to pass, something that happens (to me).

To resume, if one seeks to liberate courage from the male-militaristic account as a virtue that one can find in Aristotle, one way of doing so is to investigate what it might mean that courage is an operation whose operative domain concerns this peculiar not-object, this un-object that is the object of anxiety. The central claim to be developed therefore must be: It is not only anxiety that does not have an object as also courage does not have an object (contra Aristotle). The object of courage is not an honourable death. But courage is also not without an object: There is no courage without *quelque chose qui se passe ou qui s’est passé*, without something passing. Courage, to give a preliminary or anticipatory definition, would then be a working on and with anxiety and its peculiar object, between condensing and dispersing its intensity, trying to find and never simply having the proper measure of how close it should get to be liberating and of how far away it should be so as not to be too incapacitating. And thus the difficult questions are: What is a measure that is constitutively operational and subjective, yet not quantitative? Or: Is there and can there be a measure of how to work with anxiety that nonetheless exceeds knowledge? All these determinations of a different notion of courage are gained by means of negation and are (not only) therefore highly speculative. How and where to find a positive elaboration of such a different account of courage?

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<sup>24</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Anxiety. The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book X*, Polity Press, Cambridge/Malden 2014, pp. 69ff.

## II: Philosophy and Courage, II

Some clichés are hard to avoid (as there is truth in them). And it cannot but sound clichéd to state that there is a kind of practice that has always declared that it stands in an intimate relationship with courage, namely philosophy. However convincing one may find this self-description, one can at least assume that by exploring their link what may emerge is a positive manner of understanding courage that differs from the Aristotelian picture – and one can then see if one finds this more or less enticing or problematic. Philosophy as practice does seem to be, at least sometimes, less manly and, at least sometimes, less militaristic than the practice of courage introduced by Aristotle. So, does philosophy presents us with a courage of a different, non-militaristic sort? What is that kind of courage (if it is such)? I will proceed in two steps: Does philosophy really have an intimate relationship to and with courage and what is that relationship?

The history of modern philosophy is prominently inhabited by references to courage: In Descartes' last published book, the *The Passions of the Soul*, the philosopher states that only a kind of courage – which he calls courageous generosity – can free us from the indecisions that are symptoms of a misconception of freedom. Only courage can ensure the proper use of our rational capacities, i.e. of thinking.<sup>25</sup> After Descartes, Kant famously deemed the enlightenment project to revolve around the “courage to use your *own* understanding,”<sup>26</sup> *Sapere aude*, implying that without courage we do not act as the ones we are (supposed to be). After Kant, Hegel stated that “the *courage of truth, faith in the power of spirit, is the first condition of philosophical study*,”<sup>27</sup> and at another place remarks that it implies a constitutive kind of passivity, a courage thus needed to follow “the inner necessity that is stronger than the subject, by which his spirit is then driven without rest [...] the impulse of reason [...]”<sup>28</sup> After Hegel,

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<sup>25</sup> René Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul*, in: *The Philosophical Writings of René Descartes*, Cambridge University Press, New York 1985, p. 380.

<sup>26</sup> Immanuel Kant, “What is Enlightenment?”, in: *Political Writings*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2003, p. 54.

<sup>27</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, “Konzept der Rede beim Antritt des philosophischen Lehramtes an der Universität Berlin”, in: *Werke*, Vol. 10, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1985, p. 404.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

Kierkegaard once hailed courage as being “the only measure in life”<sup>29</sup>: We do not know what a life is worth without those acts in which we put everything at stake that is dear to us in a leap of faith that provides us with a measure of how to live. After Kierkegaard, Heidegger argued for the liberating effects of anxiety and referred to a necessary “*courage for anxiety*”<sup>30</sup> that is needed to overcome the spontaneous ideology of everyday life. After Heidegger, Alain Badiou noted that “any philosophy is determined by the definition it gives of courage.”<sup>31</sup>

If there is a link between courage and philosophy and if there is no philosophy without a concept of courage (which is obviously the stronger claim), then the courage displayed in philosophical articulation must be essentially different than the virtue of courage that comes with militaristic implications. To show why that is, it is instructive to quickly turn to the last lecture series that Michel Foucault held 1983/4 at the Collège de France, as it addresses the courage to truth. Foucault investigates “the conditions and forms”<sup>32</sup> by means of which a true discourse, whose paradigm is philosophy, historically constitutes itself: Any discourse that seeks to claim to be a true discourse relies on a series of what one might call indifferenciations, of different operations of becoming indifferent: 1. A discourse articulating truth must be indifferent as to whom it is addressed to. Even though it is constitutive that someone is addressed, he or she must be an indifferent addressee. This indifferenciation leads to a structural equality of the addressee. Anyone, whoever he or she may be, is equally addressed by this kind of discourse. 2. It must be indifferent to the context in which it is articulated. This indifferenciation subtracts the true discourse from all historical, institutional, social, and objective settings. Truth can only be articulated out of context, not objectively but subjectively. 3. It must be indifferent to the consequences that this articulation may yield. This is an indifferenciation to the objective setting in which one says the truth and to whatever follows from

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<sup>29</sup> There is no such claim, to the best of my knowledge, in Kierkegaard, but there is an ongoing rumour that he mentioned this even several times.

<sup>30</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 298.

<sup>31</sup> Alain Badiou, *L'antiphilosophie de Wittgenstein (1993–1994)*, at: <http://www.entretiens.asso.fr/Badiou/93-94.htm>. Heidegger, here siding with Badiou, even goes so far as to state that a lack of courage leads to a lack of philosophy and to “the clear and inherent stunted growth of the liberal arts ‘faculty’ everywhere [...]” Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowing)*, Bloomington, Indiana 2000, p. 106.

<sup>32</sup> Foucault, *Courage to the Truth*, p. 2.

this articulation. Socrates is an example of this. 4. It must be indifferent to the specific ways truth is articulated. This is an indifferenciation with regard to the very means employed in the truth-articulation. It is never about the words, it is about the things (in) themselves.<sup>33</sup>

Foucault states that “the access to truth demands the transformation of the subject”<sup>34</sup> – and this transformation is precisely in-formed by this series of indifferenciations (the indifference to the addressee, to the context, to the consequences, to the ways in which it is brought about). And Foucault notes that it is precisely these acts of indifferenciation that demand courage. Courage is needed to perform this fourfold subtraction of address, context, consequences, and ways of speaking, or more specifically: The articulation of truth lies in this kind of subtraction, that is, in a subtraction that ultimately also leads to a concentration, a condensation of truth in language that practically brings it forth. Everything is subtracted such that in the very discourse that articulates truth, truth is condensed. Foucault then also – rather implicitly than explicitly – suggests how these types of subtractive indifferenciations can be measured. One can only say and bring forth the truth under the following condition (which provides the measure for differentiating between different types of discourses): having the courage “to say all the bad things [one is] thinking.”<sup>35</sup> In short, one must always be ready to say the worst. This is my own slight reformulation of Foucault’s claim (concerning the measuring condition of philosophy): One must always be ready to assume the worst. Or more precisely: One must always already assume the worst – and this takes courage. But it is also the precondition for thinking, not only for thinking differently, but for thinking in general. So, if in Foucault courage names the specific philosophical alignment of indifferenciating operations (it takes courage to perform all these indifferenciations), the only way to perform them is to always already assume the worst.

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Why should courage consist in assuming and possibly saying the worst and that only under this condition – of something like an absolute indifferenciation – is one actually able to say the truth and thus do philosophy? Does this turn

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<sup>33</sup> These types are more or less distinguished in the first two hundred pages of the above-mentioned book.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.

courage into another kind of virtue? Here, at the end, Hegel can help. He speaks of a courage that is constitutive not only of philosophy but of any kind of thinking. Thought needs what he calls “the will and courage for the truth.”<sup>36</sup> And at the very beginning – actually, before its proper beginning – one finds in his *Science of Logic* a similar claim: There is an implicit and hidden, yet constitutive and crucial, reference to courage before the book even properly begins, a book that claims no less than to depict from within the immanence of thought what happens in the creation of the world and with the advent of (the conditions of) history.<sup>37</sup> The *Logic*, as he states, is “*the exposition of God as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and of a finite spirit.*” So, Hegel speaks of courage in a book that places itself in a position before the creation of the world – and is this is not assuming the worst? That there is no world to which we can refer or on which we can rely? For Hegel, this is the precondition for elaborating what he wants to present: freedom. And it thus takes courage to start from such an absolute indifferenciation. But before Hegel begins his actual conceptual exposition, he states that something extraordinary happened, namely Kant.

Kant founded (or re-founded) philosophy because he demonstrated that there is and can only be philosophy if it overcomes all kinds of dogmatisms and unjustifiable beliefs, and is at the same time able to stand firm against the dangers of scepticism and indifferentism. Philosophy has to do with reason alone. Yet, Kant failed to derive a proper philosophy from this idea. Hegel gives a surprising depiction of what Kant achieved. He states that “critical philosophy did indeed already turn *metaphysics* into *logic*, but, like subsequent idealism, it gave to the logical determinations an essentially subjective significance out of an anxiety of the object [*Angst vor dem Objekt*] [...]”<sup>38</sup> Usually, this is read as proof that Hegel is attacking Kant’s subjectivism. Yet, one rarely considers why, for Hegel, Kantian philosophy regresses to such a subjective standpoint, namely due to anxiety: Kant was anxious in the face of the object of thought. What

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<sup>36</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic (with the Zusätze). Part I of the Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences*, Hackett Publishing, Indianapolis 1991, p. 5.

<sup>37</sup> Famously, Hegel states that *The Science of Logic* is “*the exposition of God as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and of a finite spirit.*” G.W.F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2010, p. 29) – which also implies that the end must also give an account of the creation of nature and of finite spirit and that at its end this creation will reach an end.

<sup>38</sup> Hegel, *Science of Logic*, p. 30, translation modified.

happened with Kant was a true novelty, because Kant was the first to introduce anxiety proper into philosophy,<sup>39</sup> the first to feel anxious with regard to the proper object of thought. Hegel's formula is in this sense an accolade; he credits Kant for being the first anxious philosopher. Yet, Kant was not courageous. He did not have what one must have as a thinker of the Enlightenment. This is the reason why one can claim that for Hegel there is not much to revisit or rescue in Kant, apart from this very introduction of anxiety and the peculiar object it comes with. One may forget Kant, but one should never forget what he did for and to philosophy in terms of anxiety.

That is to say, after Kant one must have the courage to think what Kant discovered, but also what he shied away from. That is to say, the first step is to conceptually re-introduce anxiety, not only into philosophy (where it is also certainly needed), but into thought in general. A re-introduction that will allow one to distinguish between two different types of objects, to split the objective realm and the realm of objectivity. But this is only the first step. One is also in need of courage to think that object which is different from all other objects. What to do with this? Hegel suggests that the only thing one can do with regard to this object, the passing object of thought, is to "set aside every reflection, [and] simply [...] take up *what is there before us*."<sup>40</sup> In German, this is *aufnehmen*, not *aufheben*. And what is there before us? Hegel again: "There is only present the resolve, which can also be viewed as arbitrary, of considering *thinking as such*."<sup>41</sup> It is a resolve that produces anxiety, a resolve that one has never consciously adopted but has nonetheless explored what this means, indifferent to all context (the world does not exist anyhow). Love is a good example – and it is not an accident that one finds in Lacan's seminar on anxiety a whole session on love.<sup>42</sup> Nobody decides to fall in love. It is decided for us in us and then we can see what follows from such a decision. It takes courage to assume, to take up a decision that one did not make consciously or voluntarily as an orientation in one's life. This also points to a possible re-definition of courage. It means to explore the consequences of and, that is, to be responsible for what one has never consciously decided but which is nonetheless a decision that has been

<sup>39</sup> He thereby has demonstrated that the safe distance of philosophy to its object cannot be uphold.

<sup>40</sup> Hegel, *Science of Logic*, p. 47.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>42</sup> Lacan, *Anxiety*, pp. 170–181.

taken, like a *Neurosenwahl*, a choice of neurosis, in Freud – and in this case, even contra Hegel – also like what Kant calls the primordial choice of character. Courage might need to be courage in the face of such impossible choices, of operations that entail in a condensed manner – and that condense – the kernel of subjectivity. Even though their appearance cannot but produce anxiety, they are nonetheless constitutive of the subject and the world. And courage may be needed to think them. A courage of the hopeless, a courage of fatalists, or feminine courage.