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## PEER-REVIEWED ARTICLE

### *Parrhesia* as therapy in ‘fragile times’

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#### ABSTRACT

This article approaches the question of the relation between *parrhesia* (truth-telling or truth-speaking) and (self-)empowerment from the perspective of Michel Foucault’s resurrection of the ancient Greek concept and practice by that name. This is done to be able to negotiate the present global terrain where there appears to be a dearth of such truth-telling, and an abundance of obfuscation, judging by the available evidence. A distinction is made between ‘truth’ and ‘truth-speaking’, to highlight the fact that *parrhesia* is not a theory of truth, before a negotiation of Foucault’s text—interspersed with references to other texts and practices—is embarked upon. Foucault took pains to distinguish *parrhesia* as truth-speaking from instances where one is indeed speaking the truth to an audience or a friend, such as where a lecturer in linguistics is telling her students the truth about linguistic theories. By contrast, *parrhesia* does not merely instantiate speaking the truth in such a safe, innocuous manner; it involves speaking truth under circumstances where courage in the face of danger is involved—either because one is telling a valued friend the barefaced truth about what is required from them to rescue your mutual friendship (which does not concern me here), or because you are speaking the truth in public and to powerful others, under dangerous circumstances where you take a significant risk by doing so. This, as well as the manifestation of evil, today, is elaborated on before the question is posed: what, if any, therapeutic consequences does such risky truth-telling have for the speaker, and by implication also for the listener(s)? This is pursued in light of Foucault’s observation, that the truth-teller or *parrhesiastes* takes up a specific relationship to herself—one which is a manifestation of her refusal to be false to herself. This, it is argued, has demonstrable ethical and therapeutic value for the truth-speaker as well as, potentially, for at least some of those who witness the act of truth-telling. In the final analysis it is a practice that cultivates a sense of autonomy and community during ‘fragile times’, such as the present.

**KEYWORDS:** autonomy; Foucault; *parrhesia*; risk; truth-speaking

I only know that there have not been many philosophies, since this point in time, that do not revolve around the question: 'Who are we at present? What are, therefore, these very fragile times from which we cannot detach our identity and which will carry it along with them?' (Michel Foucault, 2007, in *The Politics of Truth*, p. 121)

## INTRODUCTION: A QUESTION FOR OUR TIME

In response to a question by André Bertin about the 'driving force' of his thinking (in *The Politics of Truth*), Michel Foucault says:

It seems to me that if there is a certain coherence in what I do, it is perhaps linked to a situation in which we all find ourselves, far more than a basic intuition or a systematic thinking. This has been true since Kant asked the question '*Was ist Aufklärung?*' that is, what is our own actuality, what is happening around us, what is our present. It seems to me that philosophy acquired a new dimension here. Moreover, it opened up a certain task that philosophy had ignored or didn't know even existed beforehand, and that is to tell us who we are, what our present is, what that is, today. (2007, pp. 129–130)

I wonder if Foucault, had he lived in the present 'fragile times', would have said the same thing, because nothing is clearer to me than that, today, we live in an era of obfuscation, no matter how hard some of us are trying to bring some enlightenment (back) into it. I do not want to write at length about the pervasive signs of such obfuscation here, although such conspicuous signs can be, and have been addressed by some individuals who are trying to lift the obfuscating veil by writing 'the truth' in a sense that will be clarified below (Kennedy, 2021, 2022; Malone, 2022, 2023; Olivier, 2022a; 2022b; 2022c; 2023a; 2023c; Wolf, 2022). Suffice to state that the present marks a time of major upheavals in civilisational history, of which the advent of the so-called COVID-19 global 'pandemic' has been the most conspicuous manifestation, although the 2008 financial crisis may be placed in the same continuum of events. In this global context, the people of the world are at the mercy, largely (but not exclusively), of powerful media companies that disseminate officially sanctioned and coordinated, but misleading, news and opinion pieces about all aspects pertaining to the 'pandemic', the conflict in Ukraine and most recently in Israel and Gaza, as if in an echo chamber. Fortunately, the internet—as *pharmakon* (simultaneously poison *and* cure) – which makes this mainstream media hegemony possible, also enables alternative news sources to

circulate otherwise mercilessly censored news and critical analyses, with the result that one is witness to an information and communication-*differend* (Olivier, 2021) on an unprecedented scale. It is no exaggeration to say that we are in the throes of an information war, more fundamentally than its 'hot war' manifestations.

The incommensurability of views and beliefs characterising the informational and communicational exchange in contemporary media on various aspects of the 'pandemic', as well as other issues, is demonstrably directly related to the attempt, by a group of globalist technocrats, to bring about a worldwide totalitarian regime (see Grand Jury, 2022a, 2022b). Naomi Wolf, an exemplary public truth-speaker (*parrhesiastes*)—to be clarified below—sums up the first three years of this sustained, multi-faceted (would-be) global *coup d'état* as follows:

I had come to believe there was more afoot here than just human vanity, or culpability, or even conventional evil. Here was an infection of the soul, endured by so many in 2020–22. Here was the helter-skelter desertion of classical liberalism's—modern civilization's—most cherished post-war ideals; the sudden abandonment of post-Enlightenment norms of critical thinking; the dilution of parents' sense of protectiveness over the bodies and futures of their minor children; the acceptance of a world in which people can't gather to worship. We were faced with the suddenly manifested structures and their drivers, who erected this demonic world in less than two years and imposed it on everyone else; these heads of state and heads of the medical boards and heads of school boards and these teachers; these heads of unions and these national leaders and the state-level leaders and the town hall-level functionaries; all the way down to the men or women who disinvite relatives from Thanksgiving due to social pressure, because of a medical status which is no one's business and which affects no one. This massive edifice of evil, was too complex and really, too elegant, to assign to just human awfulness and human inventiveness. It suggested a spiritual dimension of evil. (Wolf, 2022, p. 253)

It is not difficult to see that this colossal, on-going assault on humanity—on our democratic freedoms, cultural activities, privacy, and physical as well as psychic wellbeing—makes a mockery of Kant's 18th-century belief regarding the 'age of enlightenment' (Kant, 2016; alluded to by Foucault, above), a time characterised by sustained debates on, if not always attempts to, balance freedom and equality (Baumer, 1977). Such (individual) liberty—and the universal right to it—has been enshrined, not only in the Charter of the United Nations in

1948, but also in the constitutions of many countries, for example those of the United States of America and of South Africa. Is there any semblance of freedom left? Anyone who believes this to be the case should reflect on the fact that everyone who uses a mobile phone or an internet-linked computer is subject to constant surveillance (Mercola, 2023) everywhere you go (except perhaps in the wilderness where there is no internet availability, and even there I would not be too sure). This is why investigative reporter, Whitney Webb, says (quoted in Mercola, 2023):

*There's a huge need for to divest from Big Tech as much as possible, and it needs to happen quickly, because the choice is either participate in the system being designed for you by crazy people and become a slave, or don't become a slave. And if you don't want to be a slave, you have to invest now in Big Tech alternatives, unless you want to live a completely analog life...*

*The easiest route is to go the slavery route, and that's how they've designed it on purpose. The whole selling point of that system is that it's convenient and easy. So, obviously, it's going to take some work to go the other route, but the future of human freedom depends on it so I think it's a pretty easy choice. (paras. 61–62)*

This choice is reminiscent of something from one of my favourite science fiction television series—Ronald D. Moore's *Battlestar Galactica* (Olivier, 2015). When the cylons (humanoid artificial intelligence robots created by humans) launch an attack on the planets inhabited by humans, killing 8 billion of them almost instantaneously, the aged 'battlestar'—the spaceship equivalent of an aircraft carrier today—named *Galactica* survives. Why? Because not being among the most state-of-the-art battlestars, it lacked the facility of constant communicational interconnectivity, and thus the cylons, who infiltrated all the other battlestars' on-board defence systems with neutralising viruses via the interconnected system, could not achieve this with the *Galactica*. There is some sense, now as in this instructive fictional series, *not* to be too connected, as Webb argues, above.

It may be an easy decision to make for Webb who, like Wolf (above), is also a (public) truth-speaker—something of which there is still a shortage worldwide; most people evidently don't find it easy to choose in favour of liberty, for understandable, but hardly forgivable reasons (much less to speak or write publicly about it). These reasons include repression in the psychoanalytic sense of an unwitting relegation, to the unconscious, of anxiety-provoking

events and experiences (Olivier, 2023c), such as growing evidence of mortality linked to COVID-19 (pseudo-) 'vaccines' worldwide (Redshaw, 2023). Small wonder that truth-speaking is in short supply; in the face of ostensibly overwhelming odds, few people have the courage to point out the proverbial 'elephant in the room'. Naomi Wolf (2022) comments as follows on this:

This is truly a time in history for the hammering out of heroes and heroines in the forge of crisis. And so it is also a time of cowardice, when those who choose collusion, when they know better, are allowing their souls to shrivel in that same heat. (p. 264)

People who shrink back in fear from speaking out (or writing) in public against the monstrosity that is threatening our very humanity—as Wolf demonstrates in this courageous book—do not understand that courage is not the absence of fear. It is doing or saying what should be done and said *despite being afraid*. Truth-speaking (*parrhesia*) requires this kind of courage. So, what is it?

### **WHAT IS 'PARRHESIA' OR 'TRUTH-SPEAKING'?**

*Parrhesia*—truth-speaking (or truth-telling)—is not the same as truth. At least not in the familiar sense of a correspondence between what is stated and the state of affairs to which it corresponds—the so-called correspondence theory of truth. Or, for that matter, the coherence theory of truth, which judges the truth of statements by the criterion of whether it coheres with the body of statements within which it functions. An empiricist epistemological approach would mostly adhere to a correspondence theory of truth, while a rationalist approach is more compatible with a coherence truth-theory. There are several other such theories of truth, for example the pragmatic theory of truth, which assesses truth in the light of what supposedly true statements *do*, that is, by their consequences for action (ancient Greek 'pragma': 'thing done'; 'act'; 'deed'). Then there is the more esoteric Heideggerian conception of truth, which he named *aletheia* or 'unconcealedness', as what must be presupposed by all other truth-theories. After all, one cannot assess correspondence between statements and states of affairs, or rational coherence, or implement pragmatic criteria unless that which one is assessing were already 'unconcealed', standing in the light of

cognitive accessibility. The point is, however, that these are *theories* of truth, that claim something putatively decisive about what *truth is* as quality of insights and statements.

Truth-speaking, truth-telling, or in ancient Greek, *parrhesia*, is something different. It is what one does when you speak the truth exactly *as you experience* or perceive it, with no euphemisms and no punches pulled. This does not mean that you necessarily have to call the proverbial spade a shovel (unless this is what it takes to get through to your interlocutor or audience), but you have to speak truthfully without holding back, that is, without any attempt at being tactful, which might blur what it is that must be said. This is particularly relevant for speaking (or writing) in public about something (potentially) controversial, where you run the risk of exposing yourself to harsh criticism and even outright denunciation (more on this below). It could even endanger your life, as David Webb (2023) intimates where he writes about having spoken in public about the globally planned 'grand larceny' (theft) pertaining to everything the world's people own, and subsequently being issued a thinly veiled threat by someone to whom he explained his findings. This is what he writes about his public presentations, which were conspicuously instances of truth-speaking, with all the attendant risks and dangers:

The title of my presentation was 'Paradigm Collapse.' It was the first time I spoke publicly about the gutting of investor protections, including ownership rights to securities, and of the context for understanding why this was happening.

I first spoke publicly in the U.S. about the subversion of property rights to securities at an investment conference in 2012. There was a tremendous response from the audience of some hundreds. When my time was up, there were shouts of 'Let him keep talking'. The organizers said that had never happened before. The conference was politically connected in some way. Their head of research told me that the CIA was certainly there. The next day there was an article in the online Wall Street Journal rebutting what I had said, but without mentioning me. (Webb, 2023, p. xxix)

That there were people in these audiences who had more than a passing interest in his topic, was confirmed to Webb later:

Less than a month after speaking at that conference in the U.S., a man contacted me who asked to meet in Stockholm. He had been the Chairman of a U.S. political party, and had a long career

related to the defense establishment. He stayed at a hotel within a short walking distance from my apartment. We had lunch. He suggested a pint of ale. He asked me to explain the subject of which I had spoken at the conference. I went through the evidence and implications. The odd thing is that he then asked no questions about the subject. Instead, he fixed me in the eye and said, 'Does your family know you are doing this?' He said nothing more; that was the end of the meeting. I paid the bill and left. Perhaps it had been a 'courtesy call'. We all have to die sometime, and being assassinated must be among the most honorable ways to do it. One must have been doing something right! Made a difference! No classier way to die, really. I always wanted to be like John Lennon! (2023, p. xxx)

Despite concluding this anecdote on an ostensibly cheerful, if realistic note, it is clear from his tone that Webb was fully cognisant of the dangers of exposing the truth, through truth-telling, about events—past or planned—that reek(ed) of criminality or malfeasance. This has always been the case. An obvious historical instance of such *parrhesia*, which requires courage in the face of power, is the self-defence of the archetypal ancient Greek philosopher, Socrates, who was prepared to speak the truth instead of honouring the 'gods of the *polis*' unconditionally, even when he could anticipate relentless hostility on the part of his Athenian audience. We should remind ourselves that, as exemplified by Socrates, the philosopher's task, by which she or he is recognised, is to question the things valued by the city; that is, they question convention. This is apparent in Plato's (1997) *Apology* where, referring to the charges brought against him, Socrates says to the members of the Athenian jury: 'It goes something like this: Socrates is guilty of corrupting the young and of not believing in the gods in whom the city believes, but in other new spiritual things' (p. 23). He proceeds by examining the charges systematically, and effortlessly demonstrates that he does believe in 'spirits', which an accuser admits to be 'gods' (Plato, 1997). He further argues that, having revealed that the accusations against him are groundless, he knows that his demise will be unrelated to this, because they are based on the fact that he is 'very unpopular with many people' who 'envy' him (p. 26).

The crux of his defence (*apologia*)—which did not endear him to the jury—becomes apparent where he remarks (Plato, 1997: 27) that the allegations against him would have been valid if he had forsaken his soldierly duty in the battles where he had fought, 'for fear of death or anything else... when the god ordered me, as I thought and believed, to live the life

of a philosopher, to examine myself and others...' (p. 27). However, fearing death, he further claims, rests upon the mistaken belief that 'one knows what one does not know'. As for himself, Socrates admits, he knows that he knows nothing of the things of the 'underworld' (including death), and he suggests that it is perhaps in this respect that he 'is wiser than anyone in anything' (p. 27). Small wonder that the jury would exercise its power over Socrates by finding him guilty and sentencing him to death. In his case the *parrhesia* he practiced clearly presupposed his awareness that he would be convicted and condemned to death. As I shall argue further, the courage Socrates fearlessly displayed when confronted by this virtual certainty, is an essential ingredient of *parrhesia*.

*Parrhesia* is also what you do when you feel obliged to tell a friend the barefaced truth about something that she or he has (not) done, or is doing, and which does not live up to the standards of friendship, honesty, or decency, and because you care for your friend and value your friendship, you nevertheless risk losing it by saying what has to be done to salvage it. However, it is not this kind of 'cruel-to-be-kind', friend-to-friend *parrhesia* which concerns me here, primarily, but rather the kind that sometimes, albeit rarely, occurs in the public domain. Michel Foucault (1999), in a rightly famous philosophy seminar—the *first*, presented as part of a series of seminars delivered in California in 1983—characterises it like this:

In *parrhesia*, the speaker is supposed to give a complete and exact account of what he has in mind so that the audience is able to comprehend exactly what the speaker thinks. The word '*parrhesia*' then, refers to a type of relationship between the speaker and what he says. For in *parrhesia*, the speaker makes it manifestly clear and obvious that what he says is his own opinion. And he does this by avoiding any kind of rhetorical form which would veil what he thinks. Instead, the *parrhesiastes* uses the most direct words and forms of expression he can find. Whereas rhetoric provides the speaker with technical devices to help him prevail upon the minds of his audience (regardless of the rhetorician's own opinion concerning what he says), in *parrhesia*, the *parrhesiastes* acts on other people's mind by showing them as directly as possible what he actually believes. (para. 6)

If this sounds very familiar to us today, it is not because we are familiar with such truth-speaking, but precisely because we are *not*—at least not in the public domain (mainly the mainstream media), in the vast majority of cases. On the contrary, today one is mostly witness



to the deliberate distortion of truth, and not even through the sophisticated use of rhetoric. It is usually unadulterated, blatant lying (Olivier, 2021, 2022b).

Foucault is circumspect enough to add that there are two types of *parrhesia*—sometimes the word is used to denote the genuine thing and sometimes it is employed pejoratively, to indicate that someone is just 'chattering', as Foucault calls it. Heidegger (1978) calls this 'idle talk', and regards it as belonging to the 'inauthentic' sphere of 'everydayness'. In both these instances it means that someone says virtually anything that comes to mind, without exercising any discerning judgement about the sense or implications of what they say, or simply because it is the fashionable thing to say. However, according to Foucault, most of the time when the term is encountered in classical Greco-Roman texts, it is in the affirmative sense of truth-speaking. Needless to point out, it is not a practice explicitly familiar to us today, in the specific sense with which it was endowed in antiquity. Nonetheless, it would not be difficult to find counterparts to *parrhesia* in contemporary society, particularly because there is an exigency for it in the present time. Why is that? The answer to this question will become apparent in what follows. In the text cited earlier, Foucault (1999) reminds one that:

The commitment involved in *parrhesia* is linked to a certain social situation, to a difference of status between the speaker and his audience, to the fact that the *parrhesiastes* says something which is dangerous to himself and thus involves a risk, and so on...

If there is a kind of 'proof' of the sincerity of the *parrhesiastes*, it is his courage. The fact that a speaker says something dangerous—different from what the majority believes—is a strong indication that he is a *parrhesiastes*. (para. 8)

Recall that this already became apparent in the paradigmatic instance of Socrates, discussed earlier. However, one should remember that not every case of speaking the truth can be considered as being *parrhesia*. Foucault (1999) explains:

Someone is said to use *parrhesia* and merits consideration as a *parrhesiastes* only if there is a risk or danger for him or her in telling the truth. For instance, from the ancient Greek perspective, a grammar teacher may tell the truth to the children that he teaches, and indeed may have no doubt that what he teaches is true. But in spite of this coincidence between belief and truth, he is not a *parrhesiastes*. However, when a philosopher addresses himself to a sovereign, to a tyrant, and tells him that his tyranny is disturbing and unpleasant because

tyranny is incompatible with justice, then the philosopher speaks the truth, believes he is speaking the truth, and, more than that, also takes a risk (since the tyrant may become angry, may punish him, may exile him, may kill him)...

Parrhesia, then, is linked to courage in the face of danger: it demands the courage to speak the truth in spite of some danger. And in its extreme form, telling the truth takes place in the 'game' of life or death. (para. 14)

The well-known saying, 'to speak truth to power', is obviously related to this, and probably derives from Foucault's (and also Edward Said's) work. Additionally, have we not witnessed exemplary instances of this today, in the face of what is arguably the largest attempt at a (global) *coup d'état* in the history of humanity! We all owe those brave souls who have risked their reputations, their incomes, and sometimes their lives, by acting as *parrhesiastes* in the face of almost incomprehensible institutional, technological, and media power a huge debt of gratitude for setting an example for the rest of us. There are too many to list here, but among the names that come readily to mind are those of Dr Naomi Wolf (2022), Dr David Martin (2021); Karen Kingston, Whitney Webb, Robert F. Kennedy (2021, 2022), Dr Joseph Mercola (2021 [with Cummins], 2022, 2023, Dr Robert Malone (2022), Dr Peter McCullough, Alex Berenson, Dr Meryl Nass, Dr Denis Rancourt (2023; Malone, 2023) and Todd Callender (Dustin Nemos, 2023).

Among those who have paid with their lives for practicing *parrhesia*, two names stand out to me—those of Dr Andreas Noack, who was murdered a few days after he posted a video online to show how the nanoscale graphene hydroxide 'razor blades' in mRNA pseudo-vaccines destroy one's blood vessels (Dustin Nemos, 2021); and Dr Rashid Buttar (RealWorldNewsChannel.T.ME., 2023), who (coincidentally?) died shortly after an interview with CNN, where he did not pull his *parrhesia* punches as far as ongoing post-'pandemic' iatrocronic murders were concerned, candidly comparing Dr Fauci with Adolf Hitler during the interview. As Foucault said, *parrhesia* is dangerous and risky. However, what choice does one have, if not merely your income, reputation, and your life, but also—more importantly—your moral integrity as a human being is at stake? It takes courage to be a *parrhesiastes*. This is why Foucault (1999) observes that:

When you accept the *parrhesiastic* game in which your own life is exposed, you are taking up a specific relationship to yourself: you risk death to tell the truth instead of reposing in the security of a life where the truth goes unspoken. Of course, the threat of death comes from the Other, and thereby requires a relationship to himself: he prefers himself as a truth-teller rather than as a living being who is false to himself. (para. 17)

Presumably by now—four years after the present nightmare began, with a supposed 'pandemic', accompanied by a host of oppressive measures, such as lockdowns, etc.—a fair percentage of people know what *evil* power is behind the attempts to cause the collapse of the world economy and decimate the world's human population (Grand Jury, 2022a). I use the word 'evil' advisedly, for there is no way of saying more clearly and accurately what animates the actions of those agents in the service of the Leviathan in question, which has several fronts, among them most prominently the World Economic Forum (WEF) and the World Health Organisation (WHO). Moreover, one cannot expect any *parrhesia* from them. On the contrary, as Foucault points out, 'It is because the *parrhesiastes* must take a risk in speaking the truth that the king or tyrant generally cannot use *parrhesia*; for he risks nothing'.

### **PARRHESIA AND THE QUESTION OF EVIL TODAY**

However, in case anyone should suspect that there is no real evidence for claiming that evil acts have been perpetrated in relation to things associated with, or following in the wake of, the 'pandemic', I shall quote from the transcript of a speech by Dr David Martin (2021)—a notable truth-teller—about the so-called 'vaccines':

And... let's quote, shall we, from the *New England Journal of Medicine*, and from the *Lancet*. And this is October, and this is December respectively and I'm just going to go ahead and read this quote. 'At the time of this writing, no correlate of protection from sars-cov-2 has been established'...

In other words, not a shred of evidence from the clinical trials, said anything about protection from infection with sars-cov-2, which means every single person who has value signal[ed] their vaccination because they're doing their part, not to be infected with sars-cov-2 and not to get COVID-19 newsflash, you have been violating the Federal Trade Commission Act by deceptive

practices. You've been telling people that there is a protection that the data itself does not afford.

Hey—but maybe that was just one report. So why don't I read from the second report, and I quote, and this is *Lancet*... 'no existing vaccines have been shown to be effective against infection with any beta coronavirus, the family that includes sars-cov-2, which causes COVID-19'...

This isn't my opinion, this is not me selectively choosing to take a spin on facts, this is in fact, fact, which then begs the question... What would motivate Pfizer and Moderna. And more importantly, felonious Fauci, the unsavory. What would motivate them and CDC [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention] and others, to lie to the American people about this being a vaccine because vaccines in the ordinary course of the use of that term invokes within the listener, a presumption of protection against infection and protection against transmission, neither of which have been established at all. Why would they use the term vaccine... (p. 5)

It is not difficult to perceive in the flow of his address that David Martin is a master rhetorician, building up from the publicly given statements in 'reputable' medical journals, that no 'existing vaccine' affords any protection against COVID-19, to the next stage of his argument:

As recently as 2018, Moderna was insisting that they were not making vaccinations. They were insisting that this is gene therapy technology and it was cutting edge and it was all this kind of nonsense. And suddenly, courtesy of sars-cov-2, it suddenly became a vaccine company. It wasn't a vaccine company before, it's not a vaccine company now, it's a gene therapy technology company, with an unproven gene therapy. That's what it is...

I think that if Anthony Fauci, if Moderna, if Pfizer and others—public health authorities around the country and around the world—actually called this gene therapy chemotherapy. Number one, people wouldn't want to take it. And they wouldn't want to take it for a good reason, because experimental gene therapy is a bad idea, no matter who it is no matter when it is no matter where it is. Experimental gene therapy should not be relentlessly and recklessly distributed to a population... that shouldn't happen. (Martin, 2021, pp. 5–6)

What does this prove about evil actions, one might ask. It depends, firstly, on whether one would regard it as acceptable for companies to market, and governments to mandate, injections ('jabs') misleadingly labelled 'vaccines'—with all the concomitant expectations

concerning protection against a putatively deadly 'virus'—and secondly, on whether there has been any evidence suggesting that this 'gene therapy' was not neutral in its effects, but harmful, if not lethal.

The answer to the first question is, of course, that it is undeniably unacceptable on moral and ethical grounds. The second question has been answered by several studies, including one that shows more than 17 million people to have died from the COVID-19 shots (Malone, 2023; Redshaw, 2023). Dr Denis Rancourt (undeniably a truth-teller), after discussing the correlation between all-cause mortality and COVID-19 'vaccines' across the world, sums up his findings as follows:

And so that's the conclusions about vaccines. So from this work, we're able to calculate how many people would've died globally, given that we've studied so many countries now and we find that 17 million people were killed by the vaccines on the planet. That's our number. (Cited in Malone, 2023, para. 40)

While some would argue strenuously that, even if this colossal mortality figure is granted, it is impossible to ascribe evil intent to anyone involved with the manufacture of the COVID-19 'vaccines', such an argument is patently disingenuous, and reeks of what has become known as 'gaslighting'—treating others as if they are stupid. One look at evidence-based information on the inadequacy of supposed 'clinical trials' of the COVID-19 'vaccines' (Kennedy, 2021) is sufficient to reject any suggestion, that the number of global deaths from the COVID-19 jabs was coincidental, and could not have been foreseen. In the absence of a convincing argument to that effect, it is difficult *not* to impute evil intent to those who manufactured and promoted these 'gene therapy' products, such as Albert Bourla (of Pfizer), Anthony Fauci, and Bill Gates (Kennedy, 2021, 2022; Olivier, 2023b). Referring to the advent of the COVID-19 'pandemic' and everything that has accompanied it, Naomi Wolf (2022; referred to earlier) does not hesitate to call evil by its name: 'This massive edifice of evil, was too complex and really, too elegant, to assign to just human awfulness and human inventiveness. It suggested a spiritual dimension of evil' (p. 253). This is truth-telling in the face of the tyrants who have engineered it.

## **PARRHESIA AS PSYCHOTHERAPY**

What can one infer about the psychotherapeutic implications of *parrhesia*—truth-speaking—from the earlier discussion of Foucault's characterisation of this important practice—not only among the ancient Greeks, but arguably today as well; perhaps, given the demonstrable mendacity, pervasively encountered in the mainstream media of today (Olivier, 2022b, 2023c), *especially* in the present time?

The first California lecture (by Foucault) on *parrhesia*, referred to above, has already furnished one with important clues as to the therapeutic nature of this ancient practice. Recall that there Foucault says: 'in *parrhesia*, the *parrhesiastes* acts on other people's mind by showing them as directly as possible what he actually believes' (n.d., para. 6). Put differently, when a person acts as *parrhesiastes*, he or she discards (as Foucault reminds one) all rhetorical devices that may be aimed at persuading an audience to believe something, which devices therefore presuppose some degree of disingenuity. In contrast with this, in terms of personal convictions the *parrhesiastes* stands 'naked' as it were, before their audience, baring their soul or psyche to the *fullest extent possible* for a human being gifted with language. I mention this because, psychoanalytically speaking, it is per definition impossible for anyone to gain direct access to their own unconscious, repressed beliefs, fears, and anxieties; one is here strictly referring to what one is capable of in the form of what might be termed *radical sincerity* and honesty about oneself. (The ancient Greeks lacked the vocabulary of psychoanalysis, however, even if tragedians such as Sophocles arguably grasped the concept of the unconscious—something that cannot be pursued here.)

What strikes one about this is the invaluable therapeutic value that such sincerity must have for the truth-speaker in question. Whether one is making a clean breast of some previously hidden feelings of guilt for having lied about something, or ill feelings felt towards someone, or dismay about a friend's behaviour towards this very person, or towards oneself, or—in a 'political' context, before an audience—courageously addressing divisive or contentious issues which might provoke the ire of (some of the members of) this assembly, in doing so one is at one with oneself to the greatest extent possible. One might say, in Aristotelian vein, that such a sustained action is unavoidably *cathartic*, despite (or perhaps precisely because of) the fact that, as Foucault (1999) says, 'Someone is said to use *parrhesia*

and merits consideration as a *parrhesiastes* only if there is a risk or danger for him or her in telling the truth' (para. 14). What does this imply?

*Catharsis*, according to Aristotle, is a kind of 'purging', and the term is in fact often translated as 'purgation' (*catharsis* means 'cleansing' in ancient Greek), as shown where, in Part 6 of Aristotle's *Poetics*, he describes tragedy as follows:

Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions. (n.d., p. 3315)

In the case of someone engaged in truth-speaking, which Foucault stresses entails courage on the part of the speaker (where asymmetrical power-relations, and hence risk and danger are involved), it does not seem that fear should *necessarily* accompany the act of speaking, although—the *parrhesiastes* being human—it probably does to some degree. One is reminded of the saying that 'only someone capable of fear is capable of courage'. Courage only makes sense where there is fear; could a person incapable of fear be called courageous? It seems to me that a creature sufficiently insensible to lack fear completely could probably not appropriately be said to have courage. Hence, it appears reasonable to claim that the same *catharsis* or 'purgation' of (pity and) fear that the audience experiences in the face of an unfolding tragedy, must be experienced by the truth-teller when risking their reputation, their livelihood, and possibly even their life. On the basis of having had the salutary 'cleansing' experience of witnessing a tragedy being enacted on a stage, I would argue that, analogous to that, *parrhesia* would be (in fact, *is*) therapeutic.

Another reason for claiming this, concerns what one might term the ex-centric structure of truth-speaking. When one decides to speak the undisguised truth, and acts accordingly, it presupposes a relationship of the self to the self (as Foucault argues, above)—in other words, a certain ex-centricity, grounded in the constitutively human capacity of reflexivity, or the ability to examine certain aspects of oneself 'reflexively' and critically. The truth-speaker therefore deliberately places herself or himself in the position of acting in a manner commensurate with the 'truth of the self', disclosed to the other, or others. This experience is therapeutic in so far as it 'brings the self back to itself' *as it is*, in this manner reducing

possible alienation from the self, in other words self-deception, optimally. This is why Foucault writes that the *parrhesiastes* (1999, quoted above): 'requires a relationship to himself: he prefers himself as a truth-teller rather than as a living being who is false to himself' (para. 17). Clearly, this has exceptional *ethical* value, given the experience of the truth-speaker, that he or she is 'true' to themselves. What could be more therapeutic than this?

In the *fourth* lecture on *parrhesia* given by Foucault in California in 1983 (Foucault, n.d.), he elaborates on what he terms 'Socratic *parrhesia*', which—in addition to what one may already have gathered in this regard from his *first* lecture, discussed earlier—provides further clues as to the possible psychotherapeutic value of *parrhesia*. In his discussion of Plato's dialogue, the *Laches*, Foucault distinguishes between the *parrhesia* practised in front of the Athenian Assembly and what he terms the 'Socratic parrhesiastic game', where the philosopher's interlocutor is 'tested'. While the former does not involve a face-to-face relationship with the *parrhesiastes* who is addressing the *demos* in the Assembly, the latter consists in precisely such a face-to-face encounter. In addition, Foucault points out, in this personal meeting, Socrates' interlocutor is directed by the philosopher's discourse, in the specific sense of not simply passively listening to him—as the audience in the Assembly listens to the *parrhesiastes* addressing them—but being 'tested', in the sense that he (in modern society it could also be a 'she') is led to 'giving an account' of himself (or herself). Foucault cautions against understanding this in terms of Christian (and no doubt psychological or psychiatric) conceptions of autobiographical information or a 'confession' of sorts, however. He goes on to observe:

In Plato's or Xenophon's portrayals of him, we never see Socrates requiring an examination of conscience or a confession of sins. Here, giving an account of your life, your *bios*, is also not to give a narrative of the historical events that have taken place in your life, but rather to demonstrate whether you are able to show that there is a relation between the rational discourse, the *logos*, you are able to use, and the way that you live. Socrates is inquiring into the way that *logos* gives form to a person's style of life; for he is interested in discovering whether there is a harmonic relation between the two. Later on in this same dialogue... for example, when Socrates asks Laches to give the reason for his courage, he does not want a narrative of Laches' exploits in the Peloponnesian War, but for Laches to attempt to disclose



the *logos* which gives rational, intelligible form to his courage. Socrates' role, then, is to ask for a rational accounting of a person's life. (n.d., para. 13)

A careful reading of this passage brings to light a similar structure to what was discovered earlier regarding truth-speaking as a reflexive way of bringing the self in accord with what one could characterise as the 'truth of the self', in so far as one conveys this to a friend or an audience. Here, too, Foucault discerns in Socrates' requirement of his interlocutor, that the latter *reflexively* reveal the *logos* (or reason) that imparts comprehensible form to his life. In other words, the Socratic 'test' is his interlocutor's demonstration—similar to that which emerged in the earlier interpretation of *parrhesia* (above)—of *reflexive* accounting aimed at yielding a kind of 'accord' between a way of living and the rational account of this. Again, one witnesses here different aspects of the self, brought into a specific configuration with each other, which might perhaps be described as 'congruence of character'. Attaining a rational assessment of a mode of existence which amounts to affirming the relationship between these two activities—rational estimation and manner of living—as one of 'congruence', would be equally therapeutic for the one 'tested' in this way by his or her philosophical interlocutor (in this case Socrates). It would be therapeutic because such a person would experience himself or herself to be 'at one' with themselves—with all the ethical implications this has—where 'at one' refers to the different aspects of a self that are shown to be commensurate with each other.

I used the term 'accord', above, advisedly, to resonate with Foucault's employment of the term 'harmonic' (relation) in the previous quotation. When one reads Laches' reply to Nicias in the eponymous dialogue, it becomes clear what spurred the French philosopher to use this musical term. Talking about 'discussions', Laches says:

I take the speaker and his speech together, and observe how they sort and harmonize with each other. Such a man is exactly what I understand by 'musical', he has tuned himself with the fairest harmony, not that of a lyre or other entertaining instrument, but has made a true concord of his own life between his words and his deeds... Such a man makes me rejoice with his utterance, and anyone would judge me then a lover of discussion, so eagerly do I take in what he says... (Cited in Foucault, n.d., para. 17)

What Laches says next, in order to contrast his experience of a speaker who is 'musical' in the specified sense with its opposite, is a striking characterisation of a person who lacks 'congruence of character' as described earlier:

But a man who shows the opposite character gives me pain, and the better he seems to speak, the more I am pained, with the result, in this case, that I am judged a hater of discussion. (Cited in Foucault, n.d., para. 17)

To be clear, it is the *lack* of congruence between what a person says and how he or she lives, that is unbearably painful to Laches. In ordinary language one might say such a person is a hypocrite, unlike Socrates, of whom Laches states that, 'I found him living up to any fine words however freely spoken' (quoted in Foucault, n.d., para. 17). Socrates is, in other words, an exemplar of 'character congruence', and it follows that someone who, through 'Socratic *parrhesia*', passes the test of such congruence between their way of life and their self-reflexive account of that life, has had a therapeutic experience in the course of playing the Socratic *parrhesiastic* game. Socrates' role in this game is said to be that of a 'basanos' (in ancient Greek), or 'touchstone'. As Foucault (n.d.) puts it: 'Socrates' "basanic" role enables him to determine the true nature of the relation between the *logos* and *bios* of those who come into contact with him' (para. 14). Clearly, for those who pass the 'basanic' test, it is a therapeutic experience.

What would a concrete instance be, in the fraught present we inhabit, of such *parrhesia*, taking into account all the facets of this ancient—but ineluctably also contemporary—practice? Speaking personally, because that involves direct (albeit linguistically mediated) experience, I can think of no more demonstrably 'better'—that is, exemplary—instance than a recent experience when addressing a relatively small group of fellow philosophers at a conference, with the highly relevant fact, that most of those present were also on friendly terms. This was the case because it was a meeting of a group of philosophers from three different countries who regularly meet for an 'intimate' conference in one of these countries on a rotating basis. This is of optimal value for practicing *parrhesia*: one is in the presence of friends (in varying degrees); one speaks the unvarnished and sometimes unpleasant-to-hear truth as you experience it, as directly as possible, knowing that one is 'testing' one's friendship in doing this, if not risking something more serious, such as public denouncement.

The topic of my very informal, direct, frequently-making-eye-contact-with-different-individuals talk—not a paper read formally—was 'How (most) philosophers have failed humanity' (based on a paper I had published earlier; Olivier, 2023c), with the clear implication that this included (at least some of) them. My focus was the COVID-19 'pandemic' (as well as other, related, issues), and having reconstructed this lamentable episode (arguably of a continuing series) in human history, I proceeded to relate relevant examples of prominent philosophers who, despite their presumed 'vocation' of speaking (and writing) the truth, have ignored demonstrable evidence of deception, disinformation, misinformation, disingenuousness, and most seriously, arguable malevolence, and instead, through their inaction, tacitly supported the agencies (demonstrably) guilty of such malfeasance and outright crimes against humanity. This I contrasted with countervailing instances of philosophers and other intellectuals and professionals who have done the (laudable) opposite, namely, to bring forward the terrible truth that mainstream media have hidden from the public, concerning what could only be described as a programme of democide (Malone, 2023).

Needless to stress, while I spoke, there were unmistakable, intermittent signs of discomfort among members of the audience—despite not showing anger or adopting an accusatory attitude on my part, but at the same time with as much firmness as I could muster. What I was trying to do, was to 'test' them in the manner of a Socratic *parrhesiastes*, because being a relatively small audience, seated not in front of me in rows of seats, but around me, allowed me to look them in the eye while I spoke. It was a matter of confronting friends and colleagues with an evidently unpleasant truth (as I already knew from having talked to some of them privately on the matter), and knowingly risking our friendly and collegial relations.

What was the outcome of my risky venture? When I had finished talking, and time for discussion arrived, I was expecting to be 'attacked', or at least vehemently criticised, by some members of my audience. That did not happen. Initially there was a protracted, mostly uncomfortable, silence. Then one person spoke up. He was a prominent philosopher from a university in our country, and he 'confessed' that, in the terms I had used, he 'supposed' that he was also guilty of having 'failed humanity', although—he added in exculpatory fashion—he had in fact written to a local newspaper to protest the infringement of our human rights

by the brutal lockdown measures that had been imposed in our country. This enabled me, in responding to his own *parrhesiastic* speech, to point out, quite truthfully, that in *that* case he had, in fact, acted publicly on behalf of, not just himself, but all of humanity. This seemed to reassure him, although he did not say anything further.

This colleague was the only one to speak during the discussion session, which initially surprised me, but on reflection it made sense: it must have been a difficult experience to be told that one had failed humanity as a philosopher, and in relation to a matter of life and death to boot! Several members of my audience—friends of mine—subsequently spoke to me at the coffee shop in the conference venue, and from their responses to my talk it seemed to me that, by and large, my risky *parrhesiastic* venture had 'paid off'. They were critical of some of what I had said, but not resentful. Instead, they thanked me for drawing their attention to what they had (knowingly or tacitly) ignored, and when we parted we were still friends. Some of them have remained in contact with me on the issue, which has been continuing to unfold (Olivier, 2024).

In sum, this seems to indicate, but without any guarantee, that a *parrhesiastes* who speaks the truth to an audience that comprises *a group of friends and colleagues*, may cautiously hope to 'get through' to at least some of them. After all, not everyone spoke to me after our meeting, so I have no way of knowing what the rest of them felt about my truth-speaking. Perhaps the impression of relative 'success', is due to the kind of audience it was, but judging from written responses to some of my *parrhesiastic* practice in online public spaces (frequented by thousands, if not millions of people), at least in some instances, one does seem to touch a nerve (Olivier, 2024).

## CONCLUSION

What can one learn from Foucault's explication of truth-speaking (*parrhesia*)? That today, given the darkening of the world that was touched on earlier—and of which more and more manifestations are appearing on a virtually daily basis—it is nothing less than a requirement, if not an imperative, for everyone who is aware of this imminent threat to our freedom as well as spiritual, psychical, and physical integrity, *to be a truth-teller*, simply because so much

depends on it. If at times one feels hopeless in the face of all the power—institutional, juridical, military, technological—wielded by the group of technocratic neo-fascists driving the attempted global *coup d'état*, recall American President Franklin D. Roosevelt's inspiring words, uttered in his inaugural address in 1933: 'that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself'. As he proceeded to remind his audience, fear 'paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance'. This is no easy task, but if I may turn to another inspiring source of courage, which—writing from experience—is far more psychologically effective than might seem at first glance, here are the lyrics of 'Whistle a Happy Tune' (by Rodgers and Hammerstein, 1951, from the musical, *The King and I*; sung by Deborah Kerr, in the film version, directed by Walter Lang in 1956):

Whenever I feel afraid, I hold my head erect

And whistle a happy tune so no one will suspect I'm afraid.

While shivering in my shoes, I strike a careless pose

And whistle a happy tune and no one ever knows I'm afraid.

The result of this deception is very strange to tell,

For when I fool the people I fear, I fool myself as well!

I whistle a happy tune, and ev'ry single time

The happiness in the tune convinces me that I'm not afraid.

Make believe you're brave and the trick will take you far;

You may be as brave as you make believe you are.

You may be as brave as you make believe you are!

For the full encouraging effect of this stirring song, it may be a good idea to listen to it—it should be easy to find online. If this does not move one to start practising *parrhesia* in these 'fragile times', I would recommend looking for a Socratic figure who would.

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