

The Socratic Parrhesiast as a Social Actor:
Towards a More Practical Communications Category

by

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ABSTRACT

The field of communication has steadily increased the range of concepts and categories at its disposal for describing and analyzing its subject matter. However, in one area it has made little progress in developing an analytical repertoire: that of the actual communicator as a social type. The purpose of this thesis is to help rectify this situation by developing a workable concept of the communicator as parrhesiast. In 399 B.C.E. Socrates was accused of corrupting the youth and not believing in the gods which the city believed in. In this same year, he was found guilty and put to death. With reference to the work of Michel Foucault, this thesis will provide a framework for identifying the parrhesiast using Plato's Socrates as the example.

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INTRODUCTION

The state is a great and noble steed who is tardy in his motions owing to his very size, and requires to be stirred into life. I am that gadfly which God has attached to the state, and all day long and in all places am always fastening upon you, arousing and persuading and reproaching you (Plato *Apology*, 30-31).

The field of communication has steadily increased the range of concepts and categories at its disposal for describing and analyzing its subject matter. Older concepts such as gate keeping, personal influence, and opinion leading have been supplemented by newer ones such as hegemony, polysemy, and conditioning. However, in one area it has made little progress in developing an analytical repertoire: that of the actual communicator as a social type. During the interwar period, when communication began to emerge as a separate field, the communicator as propagandist was a prominent trope, but it is now used more hesitantly and has not been replaced by other categories, particularly less negative ones.

In a recent edition of *Cultural Theory: The Key Concepts* (2002), edited by Andrew Edgar and Peter Sedgwick, 282 terms are covered. Of these terms, many are used within the field of communication. These include, but are not limited to: commodity fetishism, uses and gratifications, false consciousness, reification, and symbolic interactionism. In *New Keywords: A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (2005), edited by Tony Bennett, Lawrence Grossberg, and Meaghan Morris, 142 key terms are covered. This comprehensive list of interdisciplinary terms provides several additional terms which are used regularly in communications studies. However, many of these terms focus on groups of people like the Diaspora, indigenous peoples, feminists, queer scholars, and youth. Again, during the emergence of communication as a field, a key term which would have been found in these important key term encyclopedias would have been the opinion leader. It is interesting to note that this key term

has fallen by the wayside and new concepts have not been developed to replace it. A focus on the individual speaker rather than on groups as communicators has been emphasized significantly less in recent years.

We are able to identify and categorize many types of media and the content they relay. What the field currently lacks are categories for these producers, other than occupational terms such as the journalist, advertiser, public relations professional, and branding specialist. The purpose of this thesis is to help rectify this situation by developing a workable concept of the communicator as *parrhêsia*st – henceforth simply parrhesiast (though *parrhêsia* as a form of speaking will be retained in italics).

It is important to emphasize at the outset that the Greek term *parrhêsia* had several meanings, but was used essentially to designate a form of speech. Among modern scholars interested in the study of the concept, Arlene Saxonhouse sees it as the key to resolving the longstanding debate, which will be explored further along, as to how the Athenians, who supposedly believed in freedom of speech, could possibly have condemned Socrates to death. In *Free Speech and Democracy in Ancient Athens* (2006), Saxonhouse argues that in the late fifth century B.C.E. Athens, free speech did not mean what it means for us today; rather, it meant a belief in *parrhêsia* combined with *aidos* – two notions which we shall need to consider in due course. The point here is that *parrhêsia* is not used by Saxonhouse as the basis for a new social category: the parrhesiast.

Credit for this important step must go to Michel Foucault. In his six final lectures entitled “Discourse and Truth,” delivered between October and November 1983 at the University of California, Foucault pursued the idea of treating the parrhesiast as a social type. In typical Foucauldian fashion, he did so rather obliquely, so that it is difficult at times to know precisely

what he meant by the term. However, in a careful treatment of Foucault's lectures, Nancy Luxon has helped to clarify the concept by delineating three Foucauldian criteria for being a parrhesiast.

The problem with Foucault and Luxon's treatment of Foucault is that the bar for being a parrhesiast has been set too high, at least if one wants to find any actual parrhesiasts. Foucault took Socrates as the epitome of a parrhesiast. However, if one takes seriously his necessary conditions for being a parrhesiast, it is not clear that Socrates passes the test. Indeed, he probably falls short on more than one count. This assessment depends, of course, on whom we take as the "real" Socrates – that of Plato, that of Xenophon, or some combination of the two, a problem that will also need to be discussed as we proceed. Even using the more charitable account, however, it is doubtful this Socrates was a model parrhesiast, as the model is set forth by Foucault. If Socrates does not actually adhere to Foucault's very specific characteristics of a parrhesiast, though he is his primary example in his studies, then it is clear that a re-evaluation of his criteria must occur.

Do we therefore abandon the category? If Socrates was not a Foucauldian parrhesiast, it is hard to imagine who could be. We can lower the bar of course, but on what grounds can we do so? Certainly, the concept of parrhesiast still needs to be linked to the original meaning, or meanings, of *parrhêsia*. The thesis of this thesis is that the solution to this problem can be found in Socrates himself, or rather, in the Socrates of (primarily) Plato's *Apology*. In that work we can find a description of a social type that is consistent with the meaning of *parrhêsia*, applies quite well to Socrates himself, and can be applied to other communicators in both Socrates' day and, more importantly, our own. Delineating this modified Foucauldian parrhesiast and assessing its implication will be the task of this thesis.

The result does not constitute an entirely new analytical framework. It is based on the work of Michel Foucault, as well as that of Nancy Luxon, in providing more detailed categories as a starting point. It builds on these stepping stones on the assumption that what is needed is a more practical, realistic conception of a parrhesiast. While still highly idealistic, the Socratic parrhesiast is nonetheless a realizable ideal, one that could apply to figures like Rachel Carson, Bill Nye, and perhaps even Julian Assange.

CHAPTER ONE

EVOLVING CONCEPTS OF *PARRHĒSIA* AND FOUCAULT'S PARRHESIAST

We begin with an overview of ancient and modern conceptions of the term *parrhêsia*. This discussion will lead to a focus on the political and social values held by the citizenry in fifth century Athens. Finally, an overview of the Foucauldian parrhesiast will be provided.

The Ancient Context of *Parrhêsia*

Parrhêsia is something that the Athenians specifically laid claim to, naming one of the ships in their naval unit "*Parrhêsia*." In the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.E., Athens was known as the intellectual centre of Greece, tolerant of the radical questioning of values, and more importantly, supporting democratic values. In a system such as this, *parrhêsia*, which was understood generally as frankness of speech, was an essential component in the success of the political regime. Frankness of speech was considered essential in identifying the best course of action, ensuring truth in public opinion, and protecting the common good.

The term used by the Greeks for frank speech, *parrhêsia*, has been elucidated in somewhat different ways by contemporary academics. Holland suggests that this practice referred specifically to the "candor exercised by free men in the public assembly" and that the Athenians believed the welfare of the city depended on the willingness of its citizens to provide the best advice for its governance (Holland 2008, 126). Those who practiced *parrhêsia* could, in theory, be trusted to offer honest advice at all times, regardless of the consequences. Werhan states that *parrhêsia* is the ability to speak in complete openness about the truth as one understands it. It often had a confrontational or critical nature but was nevertheless well-

intentioned advice. This practice freed the ordinary citizen to criticize the current political system (Werhan 2009, 16).

Though *parrhêsia* was an extremely important and dear concept to the ancient Athenians, a small amount of ancient literature exists on the subject. What remains is from a handful of writers and philosophers, not all of whom were Athenian or even Greek. The term *parrhêsia* makes its first appearance in literature in Euripides' *Ion*. General concepts of democracy exist in other literary sources, few of them providing specific commentary on *parrhêsia*. The general concept of democratic freedoms is found in Ancient drama, in both comedies and tragedies such as Aristophanes' *Knights* and *Wasps*, Euripides' *Suppliants*, and Sophocles' *Antigone*. The term was also discussed apart from philosophy in historical texts by Herodotus and Thucydides. Work in the area of law and politics also added to this body of literature, specifically in Aristotle's work on democracy and freedom. Plutarch's later work "How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend" from *Moralia* provided a perspective on the importance of counsel. This work showcased the impact the ideals of *parrhêsia* had on governing practices long after the Classical period. The largest ancient source of literature on *parrhêsia* comes from Plato and his portrayal of Socrates (Raaflaub 1983, 518).

Although *parrhêsia* refers generally to the idea of frank speech, to understand the specific meaning for Athenians in the time of Socrates, it needs to be seen as a part of a system of both political and social values. As a political value, the meaning of *parrhêsia* was conditioned by the accompanying values of *isonomia*, *isegoria*, and *koinonia*. *Isonomia* was the term for equality before the law, meaning that citizens had equal access to all rights. *Isegoria* was the equality of speech given to all citizens. As an established right, *isegoria* encouraged extensive participation in public matters (Galpin 1984, 101). Finally, *koinonia* was the right to identify one's self as a

part of the citizenry. This right was of utmost importance, as we will discuss later, because the inability to identify oneself as a citizen, as a freeman was considered worse than death.

Parrhêsia took the notion of *isegoria* a step further, not only granting each citizen the right to speak, but also the right to say everything (Ahl 1984, 174). With rights that so heavily emphasize the need for public participation in political affairs, it is no wonder the English word ‘idiot’ stems from the Greek term ἰδιώτης, which was used to describe individuals who prefer “private pleasure to public endeavour” (Rahe 1984, 268).

As a social value, *parrhêsia* needs to be considered in the context of *aidôs*. The distinct lines between public and private that were drawn in Athens were important because shame and honour played a large role in ancient Greek life. The Greek word *aidôs* was used to describe a concern for the gaze of others. Shame was considered a very powerful motivator in this society, as it could force citizens to imagine how others perceive them and alter their behaviour accordingly. This situation may seem very similar to modern society; however, E.R. Dodds in his work *The Greeks and the Irrational* (1951) suggests that the concept of shame was much more heavily ingrained in ancient Greek society. If ever the private, or shameful self, were exposed to the public causing an individual to lose face, it was unbearable (Dodds 1951, 17-18). This value constituted an important limitation on *parrhêsia*.

Related Concepts

Parrhêsia must also be distinguished from other dominant oratorical forms of the time such as *deinotes* and rhetoric. The practice of *parrhêsia* was commonly understood as an essential part of the freedom the Athenians enjoyed as members of a democracy. The transition to democracy from previous ruling systems is marked by the purging of hierarchies. It emphasized a system that did not limit who could speak, or what they could say, regardless of

their position within the Assembly. It is also important to note that those who practiced *parrhêsia* did not approve of the use of rhetoric for individual gain.

A key aspect of *parrhêsia* is its existence for the common good. If this practice was used in order to achieve personal gain, pettiness, or eccentricity, then frankness of speech was considered a vice rather than virtue (Holland 2008, 126). The persuasive nature of *parrhêsia* was not considered the same as the persuasive nature of rhetoric. In fact, influential advocates for the practice like Socrates denounced those using rhetoric because it is a form of framing or diluting the truth. The oratory style *deinotes* was another method of avoiding the practice of *parrhêsia*, but through insinuation instead of frank speech. *Deinotes*, or “formidable speaking,” can be set in contrast with the Athenian notion of *parrhêsia* (Ahl 1984, 175). The importance of the message in this oratory style is not in what is said, but in what is intentionally left out, allowing the speaker to be free of criticism for what he or she says. The important information is not stated, but must be ascertained by the listener, disconnecting the speaker from the meaning. It is used in two situations: first, is when it would violate good taste to speak directly; and secondly, when it is dangerous to speak directly (Ahl 1984, 185-186). This device attempts to create messages that are as compact as possible, ones relying on the receiver of the message to fill in the blanks, which is a very different technique than speaking bluntly. *Deinotes* supposes an audience that has the desire to believe the speaker rather than be skeptical towards his speech. A speaker using *deinotes* was often successful because the device flatters the audience, trusting it to correctly interpret the message of the speaker.

In rhetoric, a similar form of *deinotes* is utilized, along with several other oratorical devices which are meant to direct an audience towards a specific belief or action. A form of figured speech was referred to as *schema* or *eschematismenos* by rhetoricians. Neither of these

practices seems to have the same techniques or intentions as that of *parrhêsia*. Though these devices were acceptable in many aspect of Athenian life, they were not considered the best practice in the Assembly.

Limitations on Actual Practices

It is important to recognize that there were several limitations on the practice of *parrhêsia*. Contradictions in social values were not limited to the hiding of shame and the respect for frank speech, but extended to many other areas of Greek life. The values which Athens was built upon heavily influenced domestic and imperial policy and presented many stark contradictions which were either justified by the Greek elite citizenry or outright ignored as contradictions. Though *parrhêsia* was extremely valued in this society, limitations always existed and were displayed rather prominently in examples of Old Comedy. The private lives of citizens were still heavily guarded and individuals attempted to hide many happenings from the judgments of the public Assembly. It was still expected that the many aspects of private lives and interests were left at the door when citizens entered to discuss matters of public importance.

Though the values of the Athenian democratic system implied equality between citizens and political freedom, the Athenians amassed an empire which subjected outsiders to a limited political freedom and inequality before the law (Galpin 1984, 100). Many inconsistencies between the practice of domestic and imperial policy may be noted. Though subjects of Athenian rule may have been offered free speech as a right, the very subjugation of those areas implied a subordination of their opinion in public debate. Furthermore, on several occasions, these city-states were denied *isonomia* in the court and in the process of policy creation. The Athenians denied them sovereignty or symbols of political autonomy such as their own currency, domestic commerce, or right to *koinonia*. Though many of these practices made it possible for Athens to

exist, particularly in the case of the defeat of the Persian army, rights were not granted to those outside of Athens which led to contradiction between domestic and imperial policy. There are three possible reasons for a justification of such a contradiction. Perhaps they did not recognize the transition from the Delian league to *arche*, or they failed to realize this contradiction in policy; or they justified this vast empire through their democratic values (Galpin 1984, 106). There was apparently no objection to practices such as slavery as an institution at the time, nor any questioning of Athens' moral right to rule such a vast empire. The only questions asked were how to administer the empire and pursue the best interests of the Athenian citizenry.

Parrhêsia was presented as if all citizens could speak without suffering dire consequences. But in reality, speakers risked humiliation within the Assembly, monetary fines, ostracism, exile, and even in some cases death (Gabardi 2001, 566). This situation was not only consistent with imperial policy but with the Greek understanding of what it meant to be a citizen.

First and foremost, the right of *parrhêsia* was granted only to Greek citizens. The only individuals who were considered Athenian citizens were Athenian-born males with enough wealth to own land in the polis. This excluded women, children, slaves, immigrants, and foreign visitors. Women in the classical era occupied an unenviable position in Greek society. It is suggested by some authors that prior to this time, when emphasis on the household more than the polis was in full effect, women had slightly better access to a few personal freedoms (Rahe 1984, 269). In the work of Plato, it is suggested that men feared slavery more than death, as the gap between Athenian citizens and everyone else was so huge that men would rather die than have their freedom taken away.

As the Athenian democracy was so new, old ways of considering equality, remained from the age of oligarchic rule. This system, based on existing social and, more importantly, economic

relations, distributed political rights unevenly (Raaflaub 1983, 519). Definitions of democracy at the time still harboured this prejudice against the lower classes, thus allowing for the separation of citizens and non-citizens in the granting of democratic rights. Their definition of citizen, which was formulated in the context of a hierarchical class society, would strike many of us today as essentially the definition of a nobleman. These citizens were born into their class, and this Assembly was united by the common interest of the class so it is important to keep in mind that the common good refers solely to the common good of the citizens (Holland 2008, 132). The main limitation in the practice of *parrhêsia* existed for the non-citizens; the slaves, women, and conquered city-states. However, *parrhêsia* was not necessarily “freely practiced” by all citizens either. Evidence exists which suggested several legal restrictions existed in an attempt to provide all citizens protection against speech which might be extremist or slanderous and these laws did have an impact on free speech in Classical Athens.

Athenian Old Comedy was an extremely popular medium, and as a medium marked by the use of risqué political commentary, it provides important insight into what was publicly acceptable and which topics were off-limits. Since it was legislated by the same laws which outlined *parrhêsia*, it enables us to understand more about the function of *parrhêsia* and how it was legislated in everyday life. This medium was known for an “exceptional degree of indulgence in ridicule and vilification of named and recognizable individuals (Halliwell 1991, 48), making it an excellent study of ancient literature as it was able to push boundaries which other media could not. As seen very clearly in the work of Saxonhouse, issues of honour and shame were extremely important to Athenian citizens and the allowance of freedom of speech in this arena left many open to public ridicule. However, the harmful nature of extremist or slanderous speech was understood early on and legislation reflected this from the early fourth

century or perhaps earlier (Halliwell 1991, 48). Several topics seem to be off-limits in this medium. These include, but are not limited to: the dead, magistrates, working in the Agora, the labels “murderer” or “mother/father beater”, shield discarding, and Harmodius and Aristogeiton (Halliwell 1991, 51-53). There are very specific instances where Old Comedy was restricted in relation to some of these topics, particularly as some of these labels could be devastating to an individual’s honour within a society so heavily based on the politics of shame.

Old Comedy’s growing popularity within the democratic regime could likely have caused uneasiness within the citizen body. The satire which is characteristic of this medium became significantly more popular in the late fifth century. It is interesting to note the existence of a law against slander at the same time as the rise in Old Comedy, which in some cases seemingly had an immunity to the law. Many primary sources suggest that the *parrhêsia* did not exist in an unlegislated form, but many restrictions were set in place to protect Athenian citizens from extremist or slanderous speech. Though frank speech allows for speech with a critical bite, there were certainly limits to what one could say as the more obscene forms of ridicule were not considered frank speech because they were not truth. The practice of *parrhêsia* was in place to uncover the truth.

It was not necessarily socially, though it was politically acceptable, for all citizens to exercise their right of *parrhêsia*. As shame was considered a powerful incentive, harsh criticism was often used by a mentor to a student. Even with the existence of *parrhêsia* “frank criticism was thought justifiable only as a means of persuading a friend, protégé, or student to better behaviour. One delivering frank criticism, in other words, required the standing to do so... whoever exercises *parrhêsia* must be a serious person of good moral character” (Holland 2008, 132). This statement sheds light on the fact that we must look at much more than the laws

which were in place at the time to discern the actual practice. Though it was legally acceptable for all citizens to practice frank speech, the social environment dictated otherwise. Though the existence of democracy suggests the purging of hierarchies, these hierarchies and practices had been entrenched in Greek society for hundreds of years and heavily influenced the definition of the Greek citizen in Athens. New hierarchies were created, and even within the citizenry not all members were created equal. It was socially understood which individuals were morally virtuous enough to offer frank criticism, and often this depended on authoritative relationships.

Relationships based on power, or which depended on the existence of a dominant figure, were the ones which more openly allowed the practice of frank criticism, but from the teachers to the student.

The meaning of the term continued to shift as shifting political life and eventually the conquests of Philip and Alexander of Macedon rendered the practice irrelevant. The democracy was swept away and replaced with other forms of governance, largely dependent on a small ruling class which gave little regard for public opinion (Holland 2008, 127). However, even in these new forms of government, the importance of frank speech still existed to a certain extent. A “yes man” or flatterer could not be trusted to offer true advice or counsel to any ruler. These individuals pretended to speak frankly, but instead, stating what is safest as a form of self-preservation. It was considered a sign of wisdom to have the ability to distinguish an honest counselor from a yes man, though these individuals were no longer persuading an Assembly towards a specific end but a sole ruler.

Traditional Debates about the Trial of Socrates

The trial of Socrates is a profound moment in history which, for the most part, puzzles historians and academics and serves as a symbol of the violation of free speech. It is often

portrayed as an example of what happens when one is oppressed for their beliefs and thoughts. We have no official record of the event, simply the later writings of ancient authors. Socrates achieved immortality in this event through martyrdom. His legacy has lived on in writing and in art, renewed over the generations as a reminder of the importance of freedom of expression. Though this case is much more complicated than a question of speaking one's mind in public, as will be outlined here, it still serves as an extremely important historical event when considering the parrhesiast as a social actor.

A debate exists in which authors attempt to prove the innocence or guilt of Socrates. Those who insist on his innocence claim that the Athenians made a huge mistake in condemning Socrates to die and that it was likely that the novel nature of Athenian democracy led to his sentencing. Those who insist on his guilt claim that Socrates was arrogant, had questionable religious practices, and harboured oligarchic sympathies which made him a target of the democracy.

In 399 B.C.E. Socrates was accused by fellow Athenian citizens, Meletus, Anytus, and Lycos, who brought a public indictment against Socrates (Saxonhouse 2006, 100). Socrates was accused of being “a doer of evil, who corrupts the youth; and who does not believe in the gods of the state, but has other new divinities of his own” (Plato *Apology*, 28b-c). He was found guilty of this charge and sentenced to death.

It is impractical to try to determine the actual innocence or guilt of Socrates. This question cannot be answered for several reasons. First, the original source material comes from two authors who are not Socrates. This public figure, entirely against the practice of writing, presented an opportunity for these authors to have their words spoken through the character of Socrates. Plato's *Apology*, which is often relied on for most of our information on Socrates, far

exceeds the *Apology* of Xenophon in terms of length and therefore content. However, Xenophon's account provides a fresh perspective on a character that may not have been as divine as the writings of Plato would suggest. This discrepancy has led to two entirely separate traditions which are inconclusive on the guilt or innocence of the figure. Secondly, and most importantly, though the trial has become an example of the stifling of free speech, speaking without restraint was not what Socrates was put on trial for. In a very religious and politically unstable society, issues of piety are taken extremely seriously. Of course, it can be argued that Socrates may have also been innocent of these charges and that he was the victim of his very powerful political enemies. However, this claim can also not be proven. Socrates' enemies may have been primarily interested in putting an end to his meddling, but placing him on trial for this was not an option. What they could do was appeal to citizen's fear of the gods for their mythology made them fearful of entire cities being punished for the impiety of one. Introducing new gods (which could be anticipated to anger the old ones) was what they in fact found him guilty of along with the corruption of Athenian youth. While we can see why he may have been found guilty, it is still unproductive to debate his actual guilt or innocence.

According to Paul Millet (2005): "Early in 345 BC, the Athenian politician Aeschines prosecuted his fellow-citizen Timarchos on the grounds that, in his youth, he had been a homosexual prostitute and subsequently squandered his inheritance. In reality, the prosecution was motivated not by concern for public morality but by political rivalry" (22). This anecdote raises several questions concerning the accusations and eventual sentencing of Socrates as it forces us to question the legitimacy of the legal system which was in place. It is in this political climate that the right to *parrhêsia* can be attacked through the labeling of certain actions as immoral or irreligious. "When for some other reason it was desired to suppress somebody, a

charge of unorthodoxy was a facile means to excite the prejudices of the average citizens who served in the courts” (Lofberg 1928, 602). It would be significantly more difficult to justify a charge which criminalized his right to *parrhêsia*.

I.F. Stone (1988), a leading author on the trial of Socrates, suggests that Socrates was found guilty because he was much too dismissive of democracy as a political regime to properly practice *parrhêsia*. According to Stone’s theory, Socrates was much too proud and unsympathetic towards the democracy to enjoy the benefits that came along with it. Another theory which is proposed in his work is the potential existence of a witch hunt in Athens. In a period which was considered the Age of the Greek Enlightenment, there also began a period of resentment towards so-called freethinkers. It is not that Socrates was alone in his trial, but happened to become the most famous case. Referencing the work of E.R. Dodds (1951), Stone tells the story of the laws which were passed in roughly 432 B.C.E. which made disbelief in the supernatural and the teaching of astronomy indictable offences. The 30 years after the passing of these laws witnesses a series of heresy trials. Those placed on trial were leaders in the progressive thought movement which included but was not limited to Anaxagoras, Diagoras, Protagoras, and possibly even Euripides (Stone, 1989, 231). In most cases, the accused were not acquitted and many scholars were required to pay fines and were banished from the city. However likely it would seem that Socrates was yet another victim of this movement, in fact the witch hunt fable originated from fragments of an ancient play.

One scholar who vehemently opposes the idea that Socrates was a crypto-oligarch is Gregory Vlastos. In his article which revisits the trial, Vlastos argues that Socrates was in fact a loyal democrat. He truly believed that the charges were motivated by politics rather than any wrong-doing by Socrates. He states that “Socrates could only have been formally indicted on

charges which either were not political at all-not believing in the gods of the state and introducing new divinities-or only indirectly political: corrupting the youth” (497). By criminalizing his behaviour under a different label, his accusers were able to justify their claims. However, these accusations gained legitimacy through several attacks on the reputation of Socrates. His main argument which supports the idea that Socrates was a democrat comes from a statement made in the *Crito* where the personified laws of Athens say to Socrates that he prefers the laws over “every other city, Greek or barbarian”. This includes Greek superpowers such as Sparta, Crete, Megara, and Thebes. However, there are many similarities between the laws of these city-states. It is argued that the most salient difference between them lies in the constitution (Vlastos 1983, 499). In the *Apology* as well as the *Gorgias*, Socrates is cited as attacking democratic leadership; however, Vlastos argues that Socrates blames the men within this political regime and not the regime itself (Vlastos 1983, 502). These examples could be considered Socratic *parrhêsia*, rather than an attack on democracy. Socrates accepts his sentence as enforced by men, rather than the laws of Athens. Though several dissenting voices exist against the notion that Socrates was anti-democratic, an overwhelming amount of literature exists to suggest that he was. As no consensus can be met on this issue, it simply overcomplicates a debate on the innocence or guilt of Socrates in this trial under a democratic political regime.

A fundamental flaw of this debate, however, is that a comparison between a modern understanding of freedom of speech and the ancient practice of *parrhêsia* cannot be made. It is for this reason that we move away from the literature on the trial itself and focus on Socrates as the parrhesiast.

Parrhêsia as the Key to Understanding Socrates' Conviction

Arlene Saxonhouse's book entitled *Free Speech and Democracy in Ancient Athens* (2006) illuminates the distinctive character of our current understanding of free speech by contrasting it with a very different form practiced by the ancient Athenians. She emphasizes a concern in comparing the modern practice of free speech with *parrhêsia*, attempting to remove this element from the debate on Socrates. Citing the trial as one of her primary examples of a situation affected by the belief in *parrhêsia*, Saxonhouse outlines the paradoxical connection between *parrhêsia*, shame, and democratic values. For Saxonhouse, understanding that *parrhêsia* cannot be perfectly understood by our current understanding of free speech was the way to move away from the traditional debate about the trial. Saxonhouse traces the root of the word to a meaning of "saying everything." The term "free speech" does not do the notion of *parrhêsia* justice as it suggests a passive right rather than active expression of one's beliefs no matter the consequence.

Saxonhouse suggests that the fate of Socrates also had to do with the novel nature of Athenian democracy and contemporary political tensions between Athens and Sparta. "To exacerbate the situation Socrates' exhortations to ascetism – not caring about money or good food – could even be attributed by some to a desire to emulate the Spartan way of life, just at a time when anti-Spartan feeling would have been at its height" (Saxonhouse 2006, 102). Regardless of the fact that Socrates spoke outside the Assembly or law courts his speeches were a part of the public life of the city (Saxonhouse 2006, 28). During his trial, even his discussions in the homes of youth were considered to be a part of the public life because they had an impact on the political regime. His practice of *parrhêsia* extended to all aspects of life. "*Parrhêsia* goes from the democratic practice that threatened the regime, to the philosophic practice of the world Socrates inhabits" (Saxonhouse 2006, 122). Several authors suggest his own conduct during the

trial sealed his fate. His aggressiveness towards democracy itself and the pride he presented himself with in front of the court also had a great impact in his final sentencing. It is suggested that had he been more modest and cautious in his speech, it could have spared his life. However, if Socrates lived the life of a man who practiced *parrhêsia*, caution is of no concern; truth is.

An essential feature of Saxonhouse's work is Greek *aidôs*. "Shame so dependent on the gaze of the other becomes a fulcrum that divides the individual as independent and isolated from the individual understood as enmeshed in a context of others" (Saxonhouse 2006, 77). The practice of frank speech requires openness and transparency. It requires one to say what is necessary regardless of whether it would bring shame or humiliation. Does democracy, and therefore the existence of the democratic right of *parrhêsia*, depend on the existence of shame? Protagoras considered shame to be a gift from Zeus which allowed men to live with one another. The casting aside of shame, which *parrhêsia* required in order to be practiced truthfully, is at least a partial rejection of Zeus' gift. The result was a potentially awkward situation as "Zeus had said that those who did not share in *aidôs* were to be cast out of the city as diseased" (Saxonhouse 2006, 81). Both of these views in Athenian society existed in tension with one another. If the fear of shame causes one to hide the truth, how can it be considered the one characteristic that allows men to live together?

Saxonhouse suggests that the opportunity to criticize political leaders is absolutely necessary for any regime's political stability. Conflicts between citizens can be extremely constructive, but only when there is opportunity to criticize dominant authorities. *Parrhêsia* was necessary to facilitate a search for truth, teaching citizens the virtue of tolerance. This should not be misconstrued as an argument for extremist speech, as the rationale for freedom of speech as a means to discover truth does not justify extremist and hate speech. *Parrhêsia* is meant to

promote the common good (Saxonhouse 2006, 96). It should also not be misconstrued as a necessity against an oppressive government. This practice did not exist to work against a political power, as there is no reference to a power in which the demos needed to protect themselves as the demos is the government. In recognition of this context in which *parrhêsia* existed, a later conversation must be had on public versus private discourse and the trial of Socrates. As a direct democracy, Athenian citizens in large groups made all governing decisions. This stands in stark contrast to the current Canadian representative democracy in which a single representative attempts to ensure that a multitude of cultural voices are heard during the decision making process. This participatory system made it necessary for all citizens to partake in the discussion, ensuring that political matters were a part of everyday life in Athens. It is estimated that there could be anywhere from two hundred to three hundred speakers in any one meeting (Werhan 2009, 15).

Foucault's Treatment of *Parrhêsia* and his Three Requirements for a Parrhesiast

Saxonhouse was not the first scholar to use the concept of *parrhêsia* to help understand the trial of Socrates. Nor did she make the most extended and potentially productive use of the concept. She spoke of *parrhêsia* but not the parrhesiast or of Socrates as a parrhesiast. For this intellectual move, we need to revisit the French thinker Michel Foucault.

In his six lectures on *parrhêsia* given at the University of California in 1983, less than a year before his death, Michel Foucault focused his work on Greek *parrhêsia* as a social practice. The lectures provided a fresh perspective on *parrhêsia* and helped to place it in a more modern context by emphasizing the role of the speaker in its practice. The term *parrhêsia*, as a reference to a speaker as such, cannot be found in Classical texts and in fact is not found frequently in current literature. It is true that Foucault was not the first to coin the term, as it was

found in texts from the Greco-Roman period, but his work in these lectures was crucial in identifying the *parrhêsia* (henceforth simply parrhesiast) as a social type and providing the beginnings of an analytical framework for identifying the traits of this communicator. He was careful in his choice of words, identifying *parrhêsia* as a speech activity taken as a whole rather than a “speech act” or “performative utterance” as the term was used by analytical philosophers such as John Austin (Foucault 1983, Ch.1, Par.7)¹. According to Foucault, *parrhêsia* involves not only the status between the speaker and his audience but the level of risk involved in the interaction, factors which Austin ignored. In this chapter, we will consider Foucault’s framework for identifying a parrhesiast. We will provide an overview of Foucault’s lectures and utilize the work of a more recent scholar, Nancy Luxon, to help understand his framework which consists of three important characteristics.

The Test of Sincerity

For Foucault, the first requirement for being a parrhesiast is that one sincerely believes one’s “frank speech.” It is important that this sincerity be tested. It is in this discussion that the importance of trust and the ability to distinguish a flatterer from a friend who is willing to provide frank truths comes to the fore. This aspect of the parrhesiast is particularly important to the work of Foucault and sincerity is tested through the interaction between the parrhesiast and the interlocutor. The parrhesiast is meant to break the illusions we have about ourselves; the parrhesiast breaks an on-going cycle of self-love. To be surrounded by flatterers is to be eternally stuck in this cycle. As Foucault explained:

But it is still not enough to know that the truth-teller is old enough, rich enough, and has a good reputation. He must also be tested. And Galen gives a program for testing the potential parrhesiastes. For example, you must ask him questions about himself and see

¹ References are to chapter and paragraph number as page numbers are not included in the original online lecture notes as available.

how he responds to determine whether he will be severe enough for the role. You have to be suspicious when the would-be parrhesiastes congratulates you, when he is not severe enough, and so on (Foucault 1983, Ch.4, Par.75).

In order to accept the word of the parrhesiast as truth, the interlocutor must test the independence of the parrhesiast or their ability to accept the relations of power within the conversation, yet continue on the path of their argument. Passing this test intensifies the bond between the parrhesiast and interlocutor, transforming it into a relationship built on truth. As Luxon states, “Foucault develops the first component of this test – audience engagement – by placing the power of interrogation into the hands of the audience” (Luxon 2004, 472). The parrhesiast’s commitment to frank speech comes from a sense of duty rather than professional obligation or through external force. This practice is entirely different from a technique or profession, even if there are technical aspects to the practicing of *parrhêsia*. It is more of an attitude or manner of being that develops out of virtue. These figures do not embody any modern notion of “expertise” as they “must remain distant from both the politicization of truth claims and the moralization of political claims” (Luxon 2004, 466). Though the parrhesiast must avoid these methods, he or she must at the same time have adequate resources to guide individuals in an ethical work on the self.

Modern expertise finds these resources within a political office or profession, and it is for this reason in particular we must not compare a parrhesiast to an expert. The authority of the parrhesiast is considered to be much more fluidly or variously structured; he or she is determined by context rather than institution. This fact forces us to consider the parrhesiast in a social context rather than political or legal jurisdictions. Not only is it important to distinguish the parrhesiast from the expert, but also the flatterer. By attempting to define the parrhesiast by what he or she is not, we run the risk of considering them as a philosophic entity separate from society. However, these individuals are more than philosophers in solitude searching for truth as

a concept separate from politics. They are integral members of society attempting to find truth in the many spheres of the social and cultural fields.

Courage in the Face of Danger

For Foucault, however, being sincere in one's beliefs and even having one's sincerity tested is not sufficient to be labeled as a parrhesiast. Rather, the testing involved must contain a clear element of risk and one must respond to this with courage in the face of danger. "For, as we shall see, the commitment involved in *parrhêsia* 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" (Foucault 1983, Ch.1, Par.8). If the testing of the parrhesiast requires courage on the part of the interlocutor to continue the line of questioning and accept the difficult truths which they must hear, then the parrhesiast must be courageous enough to speak these truths. Risk places additional pressure on the speaker, which adds conviction to his or her claims. In the final analysis, this is the characteristic Foucault would consider to be the most important. The speaker works within a dangerous territory. However, risk is not something which is to be overcome or managed in this situation; it is to be embraced. The asymmetry of power in the relationship between the parrhesiast and audience is such that the speaker must be trusted to speak truthfully rather than out of fear, personal interest, or the desire to flatter. To be a true parrhesiast, an individual must display courage. This individual is always less powerful than the one with whom he speaks. As Luxon says, the truth comes from "below" and is directed "above" (Luxon 2004, 469).

The Care of the Soul

Apart from being sincere in one's belief and courageous in the face of danger, Foucault argued that the parrhesiast must also be concerned with the care of his/her own soul and that of

the interlocutor. This requirement binds the participants in the parrhesiastic method to a commitment to improve the self. This characteristic is tested with the identification of two traits. First, there must be a certain level of conformity between one's words and behaviour. Secondly, there must be continuity or stability of such behaviour. As Foucault stated,

Philosophical parrhesia is thus associated with the theme of the care of oneself... By the time of the Epicureans, parrhesia's affinity with the care of oneself developed to the point where parrhesia itself was primarily regarded as a *techne* of spiritual guidance for the "education of the soul" (Foucault 1983, Ch.2, Par.10).

Unlike other truth-tellers, the parrhesiast speaks under his or her own name. This relationship to speech is evidence of the speaker's own virtue and nature of his soul. An expert is indirectly virtuous insofar as society validates their status or professional persona. What defines the parrhesiast is their individual characteristics and virtues rather than their relation to social norms or practices. These figures can exist within any political system; however, they cannot be willed into existence. *Parrhêsia* must be a practice chosen and lived by the speaker; it cannot be compelled. The individual considers this practice to be a duty, maintaining a specific relationship to him or herself and to a truth which constitutes one's very identity.

The speaker must also set an example for the audience in living that which he or she claims. These individuals provide an example to their interlocutor displaying a step towards freedom from self-delusion. This theme becomes increasingly prevalent in the culture of the Hellenistic period. The theme of steadiness of mind becomes increasingly important in the Stoic philosophical tradition. Though growth is desirable, there must be some understanding of the self so that you are not constantly dependent upon some external force to discern what you are. The sophist is clearly not a parrhesiast because the use of rhetoric or *deinotes* (figured speech) was not considered to be part of practicing *parrhêsia*. It is therefore important to distinguish this practice from other rather dominant forms of oratory practice of this time. Though these devices

were acceptable in many aspects of Athenian life, they were not considered the best practice in the Assembly.

Parrhêsia allows the audience and speaker to develop a different relationship to authority. The risk involved initially attests to the sincerity of the speaker. It then serves to sustain the engagement and it is only at this point that the participants can begin self-development. The engagement establishes the vulnerability of both parties, creating trust between the participants. This trust allows the words of the parrhesiast to influence and ultimately transform the interlocutor. The emphasis here is not on ritual; these types of encounters become a familiar and regular procedure in confessional speech where *parrhêsia* builds relationships in an opposite manner. These engagements do not consistently move to a predictable end, but begin with no fixed end decided upon in advance. Though in the end the parrhesiast must have a justification for the harsh truths which may have been revealed, in many cases these truths would not have been foreseen before the conversation.

It is understandable that the history of *parrhêsia* became an area of interest in the work of Foucault, as it addresses many of his concerns about normalization and his extensive work on truth and power. The moral experience in ancient Greece serves as an example that is very different from any current experience as it constitutes a morality that seeks out personal ethics rather than obedience to a system of rules. In the end, this practice is fundamental in assisting individuals to reach the Greek ideal of knowing thyself. The philosophical focus on the problematization of truth takes two streams. The first focuses on the importance of determining whether a statement is true or not and the second asks what is the importance of truth telling for the individual and common society? This leads to the fundamental question of how to identify

these truth tellers or parrhesiasts. Foucault suggests that we look to Socrates and Plato for these answers.

Closing Discussion

The development of these characteristics was probably a result of Foucault's reading of Socrates in the Platonic dialogues. "These four questions about truth-telling as an activity — who is able to tell the truth, about what, with what consequences, and with what relation to power — seem to have emerged as philosophical problems towards the end of the Fifth Century around Socrates, especially through his confrontations with the Sophists about politics, rhetorics, and ethics" (Foucault 1983, Ch.6, Par.3). The parrhesiast speaks truths which he knows to be true because they are either really true or have been well developed and thought out. He or she is tested for their sincerity by the power relations which he finds himself in; his courage in the face of danger supports the claim of sincerity. As discussed thus far in this chapter, what sets the Foucauldian notion of *parrhêsia* apart from that of other authors is his emphasis on danger and courage as being a key characteristic of the parrhesiast. We have also learned that a sense of duty is an essential driver for the parrhesiast. This practice is a verbal activity in which the speaker expressed his personal relationship to truth and risks his life in defense of that truth. Though Foucault correctly points out that a grammar teacher, though his teachings are truthful, is not necessarily given the label of parrhesiast in ancient Greece, this is not based solely on that fact that the situation is not dangerous.

An analysis of *parrhêsia* through a focus on its practices is also provided in these lectures. It is in this discussion that Foucault really begins to develop a framework for this understanding of freedom of speech as a practice by emphasizing the specific types of human relationships which are developed as well as the procedures and techniques employed in such

relationships. These relationships are placed in the settings of community life, public life, and individual or personal relations. It is acknowledged in the beginning that these settings are much more interrelated than these examples suggest and though they cannot be analyzed as entirely separate areas, they can be used as guiding examples. Foucault also identifies an important distinction between democratic *parrhêsia* and monarchic *parrhêsia* in his discussion on the critical nature of the practice. As discussed earlier on the limits of *parrhêsia*, individuals risk their freedom to speak freely if they disclose truths which threaten the majority. “For it was a well-known juridical situation when Athenian leaders were exiled only because they proposed something which was opposed by the majority, or even because the assembly thought that the strong influence of certain leaders limited its own freedom. And so the assembly was, in this manner, “protected” against the truth” (Foucault 1983, Ch.1, Par.20). This situation created a very different dynamic than one in which an advisor would give advice to a sovereign.

The ancients compared *parrhêsia* to several qualities we have already discussed, such as a personal characteristic of an individual or a virtue, it was also considered a *technê* discussed in the same way as the art of medicine or piloting a boat (Foucault 1983, Ch.4, Par.36). These two *technes* require skill and practical training. The individual practicing such an art must be able to apply this knowledge to the context; he or she must understand *kairos*, or, the critical moment. They also both require an individual to take full responsibility for the decision. Holding the practice of freedom of speech in such a high regard places a large amount of responsibility on those claiming their right to *parrhêsia*. This responsibility made these figures very important to the life of the community through their role as spiritual guidance leaders. This developed into a very different tradition over time, leading to a discussion of *parrhêsia* and public life.

This body of work also adds to a larger literature on the critique of authority. Scholars argue that claims to truth are veiled invocations of power, and several argue that Foucault's work emphasized this problem through this idea of testing the authority or 'friendliness' of the truth speaker. This process has provided a contemporary model for truth-telling which does not require an audience to have specialized knowledge or a status which allows them to have more or better access to the truth. This concept is extremely powerful. It encourages a relationships built on trust rather than on expertise, encouraging the education and self-development of both parties involved rather than a dependence on the authority of one. Furthermore, it provides an interesting commentary on the place of risk in these modern relations.

In several examples of ancient literature, it is true that risk is a factor in the relationship between the speaker and his or her audience. However, it is not always a necessity that risk be involved for *parrhêsia* to exist in ancient sources. If we revisit our earlier discussion on *parrhêsia* in ancient Athens, it was considered a right for all citizens. In the Assembly, speakers were not consistently in dangerous or risky situations while speaking, but were still considered to be practicing *parrhêsia*. However, the emphasis on danger provides a more coherent perspective on the parrhesiast as a character within the social world, and a fresh look on identifying these individuals within a more current historical context.

In a short article on the intersections between the work of Heidegger and Foucault, Paul Rabinow includes a small section on *parrhêsia* and the four typologies of truth speakers. He ends this section claiming that "Foucault is clearly the parrhesiast with connections to the technician-teacher" (Rabinow 1994, 206). The teacher-technician possesses *techne*, skill learned through apprenticeship, which he is expected to transmit to another in an environment which is by no means dangerous. The parrhesiast, on the other hand, exists within dangerous circumstances.

Danger provides a link between truth, power, and ethics in this case (Rabinow 1994, 206). The main question which emerges from this reading is, how did Rabinow come to these conclusions? What framework was applied which allows him to confidently categorize Foucault as a parrhesiast? It could not have been the application posited by Foucault himself, as this highly idealistic framework sets the bar too high for this figure.

Would we be able to identify specific interlocutors which Foucault interacted with in order to unveil specific truths? Perhaps in specific public debates which took place, hints towards this method could be seen. Unfortunately, with the nature of his work and its publication through the academic institution, an individual interlocutor cannot be distinguished. Back tracking and looking once again at the element of risk in this case, it also cannot be argued that Foucault worked within a situation which promised a great amount of risk. It could be argued that perhaps his academic reputation be at risk given the taboo subjects he chose to study, but even his reputation was at a minimal risk given his success. The Foucauldian framework provides a very strong foundation, however, if these three categories which Foucault hinted at and Luxon outlined are too specific and much too idealistic to apply to a figure like Foucault, would they even apply to Socrates?

CHAPTER TWO

WHY SOCRATES WAS NOT A FOUCAULDIAN PARRHESIAST

Was Socrates a parrhesiast? Foucault clearly thought so; indeed, for him Socrates was the supreme parrhesiast. As Socrates holds the truth in front of the Athenians, even when faced with the death penalty, Foucault characterizes his very existence as parrhesiastic.

Foucault's Vision of Socrates as the Parrhesiast

With *parrhêsia* so closely related to the care of the self, it becomes essential to study the parrhesiast as an individual; as the embodiment of the truths he speaks. Socrates gains credibility in this position through his courage in the battle under Delium under the command of Laches. This embodiment of a virtue which was of great importance in the ancient world provides Socrates with respect from those in a position of higher power than he, according to Foucault. "In a Foucauldian parrhesiastic project, criticism would be the 'head of passion'. A 'free activity' implies to 'find the new world' through 'criticism of the old', to accomplish 'a ruthless criticism of everything existing'. This 'criticism' must not be 'afraid of its own conclusions nor of conflict with the powers that be'" (Schwartz 2000, 129).

Socrates is trusted among friends to be a teacher because he is extremely concerned with the care of the soul and the encouragement of others towards self-improvement. The listener in these situations is led by the discourse of Socrates. In a sense, this can be considered passive behaviour, but certainly not the same kind of passivity of a listener in the Assembly, creating a very different dynamic for the parrhesiastic method. In return, the audience has the opportunity to test or question the parrhesiast's *ability* to provide the truth. In his analysis of Plato's *Laches*, Foucault provides an important insight into how one determines that a speaker is a parrhesiast:

As you can see, this speech in part answers the question of how to determine the visible criteria, the personal qualities, which entitle Socrates to assume the role of the *basanos* [touchstone] of other people's lives. From information given at the beginning of the *Laches* we have learned that by the dramatic date of the dialogue, Socrates is not very well-known, that he is not regarded as an eminent citizen, that he is younger than Nicias and Laches, and that he has no special competence in the field of military training (Foucault 1983, Ch.4, Par.18).

If several of these rather common criteria are not met, how is the trust relationship established between Socrates and his interlocutor? First, several of these criteria suggest a certain level of expertise, which is not the goal of the *parrhesiast*. Several other criteria are more valued in the development of this trust relationship, and these criteria are challenged in the exchange between the speaker and interlocutor. Socrates' use of *parrhêsia* emphasizes the exchange between two human beings face to face rather than between the *parrhesiast* and the *demos* or a king.

Additionally, in the practice of political *parrhêsia*, relationships are found between courage, virtue and truth, but this new practice emphasized the role of self-improvement in the practice. This quickly becomes the focal point of Socratic *parrhêsia*. Part of the role of the *parrhesiast* is to listen to an interlocutor's account of their life and determine whether harmony exists between his words and actions, disclosing how the interlocutor can improve moving forward; all the while, the *parrhesiast* learns more about him or herself through these interactions with others. This practice is in opposition to self-ignorance (Foucault 1983, Ch.4, Par.18).

This particular practice of *parrhêsia* spurred a tradition carried on by philosophers for centuries, including those of the cynic tradition, but emphasized the *parrhesiastic* method rather than the aspects of *parrhêsia* which relate to the initial political purpose. This practice did not exist to persuade an Assembly, but to convince individuals to take care of themselves and others, requiring them to change their lives for the better. This implies a very complex relationship between the self and the truth, endowing the individual with self-knowledge which is meant to grant greater access to the truth (Foucault 1983, Ch.4, Par.31). However, the conclusion that

Socrates was an example of the supreme parrhesiast was based primarily on Plato's account of Socrates and his trial. What if we are to take the Socrates of Xenophon? Was his Socrates a parrhesiast?

Xenophon's Account of the Trial of Socrates

A contemporary of Plato and early student of Socrates, Xenophon wrote an *Apology* which is the only work to capture a more arrogant or boastful version of Socrates. There were several differences between this *Apology* and the *Apology* of Plato, including the description of the Oracle at Delphi, the *daimon* of Socrates, and the penalty suggested after his verdict had been announced. A fundamental difference between this characterization of Socrates and Plato's is his reasoning for his willingness to face the death penalty. Xenophon's characterization affects our ability to define him as the quintessential parrhesiast because he falls short of several of the necessary criteria for defining him as such.

An example of the testing of sincerity cannot be found in Xenophon's *Apology*. In one excerpt of his interaction with an accuser, a boastful Socrates can again be found. He does not rationally cross-examine his opposition, but instead throws accusations back. "Socrates remarked: 'How proudly the great man steps; he thinks, no doubt, he has performed some great and noble deed in putting me to death ...he appears not to know that of us two whichever has achieved what is best and noblest for all future time is the real victor in this suit'" (Xenophon *Apology*, 55-56). There is no opportunity for dialogue and this cannot be considered an element found in the parrhesiastic method. In this passage, Socrates suggests that it is he who is best and noblest, and in searching for the third characteristic of a parrhesiast in this work, it becomes clear that in the eyes of Socrates, being acquitted at the end of the trial is not necessarily his definition of winning. The victor will be the one who becomes immortalized.

Though Xenophon's Socrates should exist within the power relations required by a parrhesiast, his attitude absolutely changes the relationship to power. First, his arrogant behaviour would suggest that he does not acknowledge an authority in the court room higher than himself. Secondly, his willingness to endure the death penalty does not suggest a recognition of the inherent risk because he welcomes an end to his life. For Socrates, the stakes are not high and therefore his relationship to authority has been drastically altered. Xenophon begins his apology by making reference to his lofty style of speaking and suggesting that his use of rhetorical devices did in fact mirror that of his accusers.

Others have written on this theme, and all without exception have touched upon the lofty style of the philosopher, which may be taken as a proof that the language used by Socrates was really of that type. But none of these writers has brought out clearly the fact that Socrates had come to regard death as for himself preferable to life; and consequently there is just a suspicion of foolhardiness in the arrogance of his address (Xenophon *Apology*, 2-4).

Socrates continues in this style of speech, and though his statement could have been used as an argument in his favour, it turns into yet another display of brashness and arrogance. When questioned by his friend Hermogenes on why Socrates speaks of everything but his impending trial in a time when he should debate his defence, Socrates responds by stating: "What! do I not seem to you to have spent my whole life in meditating my defence?" Hermogenes questions him as to how and he responds: "By a lifelong persistence in doing nothing wrong, and that I take to be the finest practice for his defence which a man could devise" (Xenophon *Apology*, 7).

Hearing of his lifelong commitment to his work should be awe inspiring, and yet the way it is communicated leads you to doubt Socrates' virtue. His displays of arrogance do not end in these statements. In his address, Socrates announces to the jury: "And what do you make of this— while no one dreams of dunning me for benefits conferred, hosts of people acknowledge debts of gratitude to myself?" (Xenophon *Apology*, 34).

The final characteristic which is lacking is the commitment to the care of the self. Though it is true that the Socrates presented in Xenophon displays some commitment to his mission, his arrogance does not provide us with the flawless parrhesiast we have been searching for. This Socrates is entirely concerned with reputation and immortality; he even seems to be concerned with ideas of songs written in his honour. “For me, I find a certain consolation in the case of Palamedes, whose end was not unlike my own; who still even to-day furnishes a far nobler theme of song than Odysseus who unjustly slew him; and I know that testimony will be borne to me also by time future and time past...” (Xenophon *Apology*, 47-48). He considered an unjust end the best way to ensure that his legacy lives on.

In truth, this version of Socrates, already in his seventies, looks forward to missing the rest of the aging process. “And now if my age is still to be prolonged, I know that I cannot escape paying the penalty of old age, in increasing dimness of sight and dullness of hearing. I shall find myself slower to learn new lessons, and apter to forget the lessons I have learnt. And if to these be added the consciousness of failing powers, the sting of self-reproach, what prospect have I of any further joy in living?” (Xenophon *Apology*, 11-13). This theme continues throughout Xenophon’s story of Socrates up until the end. Socrates considered death in a troubled circumstance to be good fortune. He does not attempt to defend himself in hopes of this unfortunate outcome. “If so be I perish prematurely while the tide of life’s blessings flows free and fast, certainly I and my well-wishers should feel pained; but if it be that I am bringing my life to a close on the eve of troubles, for my part I think you ought all of you to take heart of grace and rejoice in my good fortune” (Xenophon *Apology*, 51). If he does not fear death, then he cannot be considered to be courageous in the face of danger. He considers death to be good fortune rather than danger, complicating his relationship to power. If his work was done in the

name of immortality, then it was not done in the name of truth and virtue. These motives severely complicate the definition of Socrates as a parrhesiast. The Socrates in Xenophon does not speak of the honour in dying for his cause but instead the songs and gossip which will likely be the result of it.

Xenophon brings the story back to the court room where Socrates does not take responsibility for or ownership of his words and actions. Instead, he shifts all of the blame onto the god which instructs him. This is not a characteristic of a parrhesiast.

And as to novel divinities, how, pray, am I supposed to introduce them by stating that I have a voice from God which clearly signifies to me what I ought do do? Why, what else do those who make use of the cries of birds or utterances of men draw their conclusions from if not from voices? Who will deny that the thunder has a voice and is a very mighty omen; and the priestess on her tripod at Pytho, does not she also proclaim by voice the messages from the god? The god, at any rate, has foreknowledge, and premonishes those whom he will of what is about to be (Xenophon *Apology*, 20-23).

This statement is quite astonishing, making clear that this version of Socrates cannot be considered a parrhesiast. A parrhesiast must take credit for his or her statements and actions. As mentioned earlier, Foucault relies heavily on Plato's account of Socrates in his work. In Foucault's defense, however, there are reasons for using Plato's account rather than Xenophon's for considering whether Socrates was a parrhesiast. For example, his argument about Socrates wanting to avoid the discomfort of old age ignores the fact that Socrates likely had a few good years left before the dreaded infirmities would have struck him. Perhaps Socrates would be considered a parrhesiast according to Plato's account of the events of the trial.

Plato's Account of the Trial of Socrates

Plato's version of Socrates is tested for his sincerity but also spends a great deal of time testing his interlocutors during his interactions with his them. Several examples of this can be extracted from Plato's *Apology*. Many of Socrates' enemies were created because of his

parrhesiastic method. Socrates begins the interaction with his interlocutor by testing him. “Then I went to one man after another, being not unconscious of the enmity which I provoked, and I lamented and feared this: but necessity was laid upon me,—the word of God, I thought, ought to be considered first. And I said to myself, Go I must to all who appear to know, and find out the meaning of the oracle” (Plato *Apology*, 21-22). Though this method created many powerful enemies, it created an equal number of admirers. His commitment to honesty in the face of the powerful adversaries generated a great amount of respect for Socrates. This reputation meant that a certain level of trust had already been established between the parrhesiast and his interlocutor even before they had come into contact with one another. In this sense, Socrates was able to establish trust with his interlocutor as his reputation preceded him. He addresses his popularity with Athenian citizenry to emphasize his good deeds. He looks at his work as important, good, and virtuous and wishes to be recognized for this. It was simply his duty to cross-examine others. “But I shall be asked, why do people delight in continually conversing with you? I have told you already, Athenians, the whole truth about this matter: they like to hear the cross-examination of the pretenders to wisdom; there is amusement in it. Now this duty of cross-examining other men has been imposed upon me by God” (Plato *Apology*, 33). During his trial, he questions Meletus using his method of inquiry and concluding that based on his responses, he must be providing the court with false information. He reprimands Meletus for this act: “Such nonsense, Meletus, could only have been intended by you to make trial of me. You have put this into the indictment because you had nothing real of which to accuse me...the same men can believe in divine and superhuman things, and yet not believe that there are gods and demigods and heroes” (Plato *Apology*, 27-28).

Can examples be found concerning the care of the soul in Plato's account of Socrates? What defines the parrhesiast is his or her individual characteristics and virtues rather than their relation to social norms or practices. It is this characteristic which is the most essential, as one can speak a truth in the face of danger and follow a parrhesiast's method, but it means nothing if one does not live the truths which they speak. It is abundantly clear from several passages in this work that Socrates lives a life which takes into careful consideration the lessons which he wishes to instill in others.

The first example of this comes from the introduction of his defense and the distinction made earlier in this study between *parrhêsia* and rhetoric. Socrates felt it necessary to also make this distinction in his speech, as his intention is not to persuade the jury in a sneaky fashion, using rhetorical devices to confuse or convolute the message. He also expresses his concern in not using these techniques as it may make him come across as less eloquent than his accusers. "...unless by the force of eloquence they mean the force of truth; for if such is their meaning, I admit that I am eloquent. But in how different a way from theirs...If I defend myself in my accustomed manner, and you hear me using the words which I have been in the habit of using in the agora... I would ask you not to be surprised, and not to interrupt me on this account (Plato *Apology*, 17). Socrates emphasizes his avoidance of the use of rhetoric in his defense, and additionally reveals his avoidance of rhetorical devices in everyday speaking. He uses the words which people may hear him speak in the agora, the marketplace of Athens, in all settings. This fact suggests a continuous flow in the presentation of his persona. He acts in the same manner publically and privately, representing himself as the same man in every social situation, feeling the need to apologize to his peers for this fact, but standing by it none the less.

Not only does Socrates stand by his words and actions during his trial, he makes a point of reminding his audience that he speaks his mind openly and accepts the consequences. He does not make accusations and disappear when it comes time for cross-examination. He speaks his words, and all know that they are the words of Socrates. This point is significant, as it speaks to the character of the speaker and the importance that having a reputable character adds to their message. In this speech, he raises the issues with his reputation with he has dealt with for decades and the problems which have arisen with the charges made against him. Several of his enemies had taken an opportunity to tarnish his reputation through writing, gossip, and theatre and he had no opportunity to defend himself. His accusers had successfully hidden themselves from any opportunity for an argument.

And they are many, and their charges against me are of ancient date, and they were made by them in the days when you were more impressible than you are now—in childhood, or it may have been in youth—and the cause when heard went by default, for there was none to answer. And hardest of all, I do not know and cannot tell the names of my accusers; unless in the chance case of a Comic poet. All who from envy and malice have persuaded you—some of them having first convinced themselves—all this class of men are most difficult to deal with; for I cannot have them up here, and cross-examine them, and therefore I must simply fight with shadows in my own defence, and argue when there is no one who answers (Plato *Apology*, 18).

Turning his attention to his newest enemies and focusing on Meletus, Socrates brings him for questioning. In his style, he cross-examines his accuser and turns several of his arguments on their head. Again, he brings up the significance of the character of the speaker and the impact this has on their message. The main charge against Socrates suggested that he was a corrupter of the youth, and Socrates asks what stake Meletus has in this issue and why it was important for him to bring it to the courts attention. He says that Meletus knows little about the matter of education for the youth in Athens, accusing him of ulterior motivation. Had Meletus wanted to seem sincere in his accusations, he needed to have experience and opinions in this area to

support them. He needed to live a life with a commitment to the education of the youth in Athens in order to provide an opinion, let alone legal accusation, in such matters. “He says that I am a doer of evil, and corrupt the youth; but I say, O men of Athens, that Meletus is a doer of evil, in that he pretends to be in earnest when he is only in jest, and is so eager to bring men to trial from a pretended zeal and interest about matters in which he really never had the smallest interest” (Plato *Apology*, 24).

Socrates was known for many things, and as discovered in a quick overview of literature, his legacy is contentious. In spite of the many arguments on both sides concerning his guilt, innocence, or character, one thing remains true in both versions of the tale: he lives as a poor citizen, almost Spartan-like in his regard for material wealth. He uses this fact in an argument on his commitment to truth and virtue, suggesting that an individual who holds material wealth and status so dear to their hearts cannot be truly wise or virtuous. During his trial, he holds all men in the court accountable for this, suggesting that shame be associated with the pursuit of these goods and insisting that he will continue his work and interrogate each man who makes a claim to wisdom yet does not live a simple life.

Men of Athens, I honour and love you; but I shall obey God rather than you, and while I have life and strength I shall never cease from the practice and teaching of philosophy, exhorting any one whom I meet and saying to him after my manner: You, my friend,—a citizen of the great and mighty and wise city of Athens,—are you not ashamed of heaping up the greatest amount of money and honour and reputation, and caring so little about wisdom and truth and the greatest improvement of the soul, which you never regard or heed at all? And if the person with whom I am arguing, says: Yes, but I do care; then I do not leave him or let him go at once; but I proceed to interrogate and examine and cross-examine him, and if I think that he has no virtue in him, but only says that he has, I reproach him with undervaluing the greater, and overvaluing the less (Plato *Apology*, 29-30).

In the end of his defence, Socrates again emphasizes that no matter the result, he will continue his work. He anticipates the suggestion that exile is better than death and denies this argument,

suggesting that it would again be only a matter of time before the men in his new city rise against him. His commitment is to truth and virtue, and living an unexamined life is not the life he had chosen and lived. Letting go of his commitment would mean he would no longer be truthful to himself. “Some one will say: Yes, Socrates, but cannot you hold your tongue, and then you may go into a foreign city, and no one will interfere with you?...if I tell you that to do as you say would be a disobedience to the God, and therefore that I cannot hold my tongue, you will not believe that I am serious” (Plato *Apology*, 37-38).

It is necessary that the parrhesiast be courageous in the face of danger and it is in this analysis of the text that we discover a limitation on our ability to define Socrates as a Foucauldian parrhesiast. Though some elements of this characteristic are present in the *Apology*, Socrates himself admits that he evaluated the paths of risk and chose to avoid a path of higher risk. In the beginning of his defense, Socrates discusses the nature of his situation, addressing gossip, his reputation, and his methods. He states that “[t]his inquisition has led to my having many enemies of the worst and most dangerous kind, and has given occasion also to many calumnies” (Plato *Apology*, 22-23). In this section, he explains in detail his mission, methods, and the enemies who have been created over decades of practicing *parrhêsia*: “...this is the reason why my three accusers, Meletus and Anytus and Lycon, have set upon me; Meletus, who has a quarrel with me on behalf of the poets; Anytus, on behalf of the craftsmen and politicians; Lycon, on behalf of the rhetoricians (Plato *Apology*, 23-24). Three accusers represent three demographics; demographics considered to be extremely powerful at the time. Poets, craftsman, and politicians were all considered citizens, and wealthy citizens at that. In this economic system, the ability to be defined as a citizen depended on one’s ability to own land. The wealthier the individual, the higher status they had within society. Upsetting individuals in these

positions is extremely dangerous, and given Socrates' financial position, he would have been considered of a lower status.

In his defence, Socrates states that he recognized that his mission was a dangerous one, insisting that the possibility of death is irrelevant in deciding his actions. This excerpt is in direct contradiction with the claims of Xenophon which suggested that Socrates sought an untimely end for the purpose of fame and the avoidance of old age.

Some one will say: And are you not ashamed, Socrates, of a course of life which is likely to bring you to an untimely end? To him I may fairly answer: There you are mistaken: a man who is good for anything ought not to calculate the chance of living or dying; he ought only to consider whether in doing anything he is doing right or wrong—acting the part of a good man or of a bad... Had Achilles any thought of death and danger? For wherever a man's place is, whether the place which he has chosen or that in which he has been placed by a commander, there he ought to remain in the hour of danger; he should not think of death or of anything but of disgrace. And this, O men of Athens, is a true saying (Plato *Apology*, 28).

The importance of mythology in relation to the social values in ancient Athens is also seen in this statement. Referencing Achilles from Homer's *Iliad* to illustrate his point, Socrates provides a connection which all in the court would understand, and reinforces the belief that dishonour is worse than death. Socrates then provides two other examples in his lifetime where he has disregarded the danger involved in speaking the truth. He first references the battles he fought in at Potidea, Amphipolis, and Delium. He states that it is true he was commanded to remain at his post, not only by his commanders but also by the gods themselves. This order meant he would look into the face of death, and yet he did not desert his post. "...[if] I were to desert my post through fear of death, or any other fear; that would indeed be strange, and I might justly be arraigned in court for denying the existence of the gods, if I disobeyed the oracle because I was afraid of death, fancying that I was wise when I was not wise" (Plato *Apology*, 28-29). He had to accept the risk to avoid dishonour in the eyes of his commanders, fellow citizens, and the deities

he recognized. The second example he recalls is his role in the trial of the generals after the battle of Arginusae.

The only office of state which I ever held, O men of Athens, was that of senator: the tribe Antiochis, which is my tribe, had the presidency at the trial of the generals who had not taken up the bodies of the slain after the battle of Arginusae; and you proposed to try them in a body, contrary to law, as you all thought afterwards; but at the time I was the only one of the Prytanes who was opposed to the illegality, and I gave my vote against you; and when the orators threatened to impeach and arrest me, and you called and shouted, I made up my mind that I would run the risk, having law and justice with me, rather than take part in your injustice because I feared imprisonment and death. This happened in the days of the democracy (Plato *Apology*, 32).

Both examples speak to the legacy of Socrates and his relationship to power, risk, and danger. In the end of his defense, in spite of the risk involved and threat of death, he emphasized his will to continue his work. He conveys to the court his commitment to truth and virtue above popular opinion or the court's will stating: "Wherefore, O men of Athens, I say to you, do as Anytus bids or not as Anytus bids, and either acquit me or not; but whichever you do, understand that I shall never alter my ways, not even if I have to die many times" (Plato *Apology*, 30). It is evident that the second characteristic necessary in a parrhesiast can be found in Socrates, as several excerpts can be used as examples of this argument.

Though several examples can be found in the text of Plato's *Apology* which shed a much more positive light on the character of Socrates, one fact stands in the way of defining him as a Foucauldian parrhesiast.

Problems with the Foucauldian Framework

An important question to ask is why Socrates did not stand up in the Assembly and lead a political life to make the large changes he wished to see in his polis. If every citizen had a right to speak publicly, then why would the quintessential parrhesiast shy away from such an opportunity? Socrates offered this statement in his defense, suggesting that his life would have

been significantly shorter had his mission been a public one. He came to an untimely death though his mission had been in private with individual citizens, so there is truth in his assumption that bringing these matters to the public Assembly would have meant less time to complete his life's work. "Reflecting that I was really too honest a man to be a politician and live, I did not go where I could do no good to you or to myself; but where I could do the greatest good privately to every one of you, thither I went, and sought to persuade every man among you that he must look to himself, and seek virtue and wisdom..." (Plato *Apology*, 36). Though there are reasons why Socrates shied away from such an opportunity, it could also be argued that this is an example of the individual avoiding the situation because of the risk involved. It would then mean that Socrates does not perfectly adhere to this characteristic.

What is needed in this case is a more practical conception of this framework, as one can see that these categories are unrealistic because they provide a highly idealized picture of any individual. If Socrates is thought of as the ultimate parrhesiast, it should be possible to apply these categories without issue. However, several problems arise in this attempt. The existence of two literary traditions which contradict one another concerning the character of Socrates problematizes the application of the framework. Already the character of parrhesiast is under question. However, if we determine, like Foucault has in his lectures, that the Platonic Socrates is the true Socrates, we are slightly closer to a positive application of the theory. Even in this instance, a fundamental problem exists.

This flaw exists in the assumption that Socrates existed and worked in an environment of risk. Though we may discover several examples of acceptance of risk on behalf of Socrates in Plato's *Apology*, one statement is able to turn this assumption on its head. Socrates acknowledges

a criticism in that he did not bring his concerns to the public assembly when he says; he chose to avoid a life of politics.

Some one may wonder why I go about in private giving advice and busying myself with the concerns of others, but do not venture to come forward in public and advise the state. I will tell you why. You have heard me speak at sundry times and in divers places of an oracle or sign which comes to me, and is the divinity which Meletus ridicules in the indictment. This sign, which is a kind of voice, first began to come to me when I was a child; it always forbids but never commands me to do anything which I am going to do. This is what deters me from being a politician. And rightly, as I think. For I am certain, O men of Athens, that if I had engaged in politics, I should have perished long ago, and done no good either to you or to myself (Plato *Apology*, 31).

His reasoning for this was that he would have lived a much shorter life, making enemies at a much more rapid pace in the public assembly. In other words, a public life would have been much too risky. In this regard, Socrates would not have met the first requirement of being a parrhesiast. Though his mission was still one that involved risk, he endeavoured to mitigate that risk by avoiding a more public philosophical mission. If Socrates does not necessarily adhere to these very specific characteristics found in a parrhesiast, though he is the primary example in all of these case studies, then it is clear that a re-evaluation of these criteria must occur.

CHAPTER THREE

THE SOCRATIC PARRHESIAST

If Foucault's requirements for a true parrhesiast are too demanding, how else might the concept be understood? More specifically, how might the term be defined so as to have practical applications and still be closely related to, and consistent with, ancient and modern conceptions of *parrhêsia*?

If Socrates was not a parrhesiast, it is hard to imagine who would be. But, as chapter two argues, Socrates was not, even when using Plato's version of him, a fully-fledged parrhesiast by Foucault's criteria. So what substituted criteria might we use so as to see Plato's Socrates, if not Xenophon's, as a parrhesiast? And where might we obtain these criteria? The answer, I will argue, lies in Socrates himself or rather in Plato's Socrates as depicted in the *Apology*.

The Parrhesiast as Gadfly

In this account, which we need to consider in some detail, Plato begins, as we have seen, with a discussion on his reputation in Athens and how he came to have such "fame". "I will endeavour to explain to you the reason why I am called wise and have such an evil fame. Please to attend then. And although some of you may think that I am joking, I declare that I will tell you the entire truth." He continues, addressing the particular kind of wisdom which he possesses: "Men of Athens, this reputation of mine has come of a certain sort of wisdom which I possess. If you ask me what kind of wisdom, I reply, wisdom such as may perhaps be attained by man, for to that extent I am inclined to believe that I am wise" (Plato *Apology*, 20). However, he does not believe that he is wise due to some possession of knowledge, stating that "whereas the persons of whom I was speaking have a superhuman wisdom which I may fail to describe, because I have it

not myself; and he who says that I have, speaks falsely, and is taking away my character” (Plato *Apology*, 21).

The specific kind of wisdom which Socrates possesses is acknowledged by the oracle of Delphi and his experience with the oracle of Delphi. Calling forth a witness in his trial, he announces that “that witness shall be the God of Delphi—he will tell you about my wisdom, if I have any, and of what sort it is” (Plato *Apology*, 20). Chaerophon, an Athenian citizen and friend of Socrates travelled to Delphi to question the oracle. . . .” he asked the oracle to tell him whether anyone was wiser than I was, and the Pythian prophetess answered, that there was no man wiser” (Plato *Apology*, 21). Socrates was concerned by this answer, questioning the god Apollo who speaks through the priestess of Delphi: “What can the god mean? and what is the interpretation of his riddle? for I know that I have no wisdom, small or great” (Plato *Apology*, 21). These questions continued to fuel Socrates’ quest in leading an examined life.

He began to use his Socratic method to question the citizens who claimed some sort of wisdom in Athens. “Accordingly I went to one who had the reputation of wisdom, and observed him—his name I need not mention; he was a politician whom I selected for examination.” Socrates began to question this politician with the following result: “When I began to talk with him, I could not help thinking that he was not really wise, although he was thought wise by many, and still wiser by himself; and thereupon I tried to explain to him that he thought himself wise, but was not really wise.” The interlocutor did not respond well to this turn in the conversation and Socrates explains the initial consequences of his actions. “The consequence was that he hated me, and his enmity was shared by several who were present and heard me” (Plato *Apology*, 21). Socrates continued in this fashion, regardless of these consequences. He began with the politicians, but also questioned the poets and artisans. Possessing a highly valued

practical knowledge, these individuals were well respected in Classical Athens and Socrates intended to find wisdom superior to his in these conversations.

He compares this task to the Herculean labours. “I will tell you the tale of my wanderings and of the ‘Herculean’ labours, as I may call them, which I endured only to find at last the oracle irrefutable” (Plato *Apology*, 22). Having hoped to find the wisdom which he did not possess in the politicians who had some claim to wisdom, Socrates had high hopes for the poets and artisans whose works heavily influenced the cultural landscape of Athens. However, these individuals also fell short, turning his quest into a labourious undertaking. He came to the realization that many decisions were made and so many works of art were created by inspiration rather than the wisdom that these individuals claimed to possess. “Then I knew that not by wisdom do poets write poetry, but by a sort of genius and inspiration; they are like diviners or soothsayers who also say many fine things, but do not understand the meaning of them” (Plato *Apology*, 22). After having this realization, Socrates stepped away from this mission to find the man wiser than he. “So I departed, conceiving myself to be superior to them for the same reason that I was superior to the politicians” (Plato *Apology*, 22).

Even in his acceptance of his superiority, Socrates claims that this superiority comes from his modesty. “And I am called wise, for my hearers always imagine that I myself possess the wisdom which I find wanting in others: but the truth is, O men of Athens, that God only is wise; and by his answer he intends to show that the wisdom of men is worth little or nothing”. This particular kind of wisdom which Socrates possesses lies in the fact that he is cognisant of the fact that he knows nothing. “He is not speaking of Socrates, he is only using my name by way of illustration, as if he said, He, O men, is the wisest, who, like Socrates, knows that his wisdom is in truth worth nothing” (Plato *Apology*, 23).

Recognizing the limitations in his knowledge, Socrates hopes to find other individuals who recognize the limitations in their knowledge. During this Herculean labour, he attracts the attention of Athenian citizens, particularly the youth: “they like to hear the pretenders examined, and they often imitate me, and proceed to examine others; there are plenty of persons, as they quickly discover, who think that they know something, but really know little or nothing; and then those who are examined by them instead of being angry with themselves are angry with me” (Plato *Apology*, 23). This Socratic method becomes a social practice among the youth of the city, which Socrates had hoped for but which also led to his eventual trial and sentencing.

Knowing what we know of the nature of Socrates’ wisdom, we can use Plato’s writing to uncover the heart of the parrhesiast. The translation of the Greek word *μύωψ* *myōps* into “gadfly” points towards the core goal of the parrhesiast. As part of his argument against his condemnation, Socrates uses this word to describe himself, claiming that he has been sent by the Gods to perform his work as the gadfly of this city. “For if you kill me you will not easily find a successor to me, who, if I may use such a ludicrous figure of speech, am a sort of gadfly, given to the state by God” (Plato *Apology*, 30). He continues this metaphor, claiming that Athens is the steed which he must stir into life: “the state is a great and noble steed who is tardy in his motions owing to his very size, and requires to be stirred into life. I am that gadfly which God has attached to the state, and all day long and in all places am always fastening upon you, arousing and persuading and reproaching you” (Plato *Apology*, 30-31).

Socrates states that his wisdom lies in the fact that he neither knows nor thinks that he knows. His life work is to uncover the falsehoods; the false wisdom men have convinced themselves that they have. There is a recognition that he is better off than countless others in knowing that he has much to learn. This understanding leads to an openness to new information

and lifelong learning. This process of learning is reflected in his parrhesiastic method. On his mission from god, Socrates sets out to test all of the known wise men in the polis and abroad, observing them and questioning their wisdom. He discovers rather quickly that the men who claimed to possess knowledge within his city actually possessed very little wisdom. Their confidence in their knowledge meant that they had closed themselves off from further self-development. Claiming that he himself has no wisdom, it is interesting that Socrates confidently poked holes in the supposed wisdom of his interlocutors.

So I left him, saying to myself, as I went away: Well, although I do not suppose that either of us knows anything really beautiful and good, I am better off than he is,—for he knows nothing, and thinks that he knows; I neither know nor think that I know. In this latter particular, then, I seem to have slightly the advantage of him. Then I went to another who had still higher pretensions to wisdom, and my conclusion was exactly the same (Plato *Apology*, 21).

A focus on the parrhesiast as a sort of gadfly does not remove the importance of the three characteristics of a Foucauldian parrhesiast. However, requiring one individual to adhere to these three specific characteristics at all times sets the bar much too high for many individuals who should be considered parrhesiasts. People are constantly evolving, so at any point they could have been tested for their sincerity, courageous in the face of danger, or concerned with the care of the soul. Perhaps this was not in any one single work or act, but their commitment to their role as a gadfly is always evident.

The Parrhesiast vs. the Ideologue, the Moralist and the Opinion Leader

We may also understand the parrhesiast by the considering what he or she is not. The parrhesiast is not a moralist, ideologue, or opinion leader. The parrhesiast as gadfly stimulates, or in some cases annoys, particularly through persistent criticism. This quality is found in Plato's portrayal of Socrates in the *Apology* and may also be found in a modern context.

In discussions, debates, and arguments many speakers attempt to persuade the listener by finding assumptions which they believe cannot be questioned. Referred to by some as “god terms,” these assumptions are difficult to challenge or reduce to ideas rather than seeming facts (Jasper 1992, 315). Cultural constructions have a large impact in political and social spheres serving as a powerful influence on beliefs and actions. A vast majority of the arguments based on these constructions are moralist or instrumental in nature. Here we come across rhetoric once again which is used to make these seemingly abstract cultural ideas into a more tangible form. This helps to place a large amount of abstract information into focus, allowing individuals to make sense of the world around them. Unfortunately, in many cases this rhetoric narrows the focus too much, leaving little room for proposed alternate ways of understanding a similar situation. However, this method of persuasion is extremely effective which is why it is used by ideologues and moralists to this day.

The tactics of such ideologues and moralists are very different than those employed by a parrhesiast who has at least a small commitment to the care of the soul. Jasper has argued the goal of rhetoricians is simple “to persuade without necessarily educating, to compel assent without increasing understanding. Moralist rhetoric is not the same as direct discussion of morality, since the former attempts to foreclose the latter” (Jasper 1992, 319). The term moralist does not necessarily refer to an individual with a religious agenda, though the term is often found in reference to religious ideologies. In a study on the person as scientist and moralist, Joshua Knobe (2010) suggests that humans are naturally inclined to make moral judgments (315). As a cognitive framework, morality helps individuals to understand the world around them. However, though individuals lean towards a moral framework for understanding, it can close them off from new ideas and truths. Moralist or instrumental styles of rhetoric proceed as if reality is governed

by fixed laws. Instrumentalists are persuasive precisely because they provide a framework which promises control and predictability. It suggests the existence of an objective truth which is highly desirable to individuals attempting to make sense of the world around them. The parrhesiast as gadfly pokes holes in this objective truth. Rather than presenting a clear framework to apply to the social world, they insist on continuous lines of questioning and eternal transformation.

Whereas the moralist bases arguments on some moral ground, the ideologue bases their arguments on ideologies which are often rooted in the past. In the early nineteenth century, ideologues earned Napoleon's wrath for their opposition to his dictatorship. Under his rule, the term was used to describe an individual who was irrationally dedicated to the democratic principle (Knight 2006, 619). The core definition of ideology as "a coherent and relatively stable set of beliefs or values" has remained intact in the study of political science and communications (Knight 2006, 625). However, the connotation associated with the term and the label of "ideologue" has changed since the early nineteenth century. At that time, the term ideology connoted an attachment to the values of liberal democracy and ideologues were individuals who supported the "rights of man" against an absolutist state. Over time, the term ideology became applicable to any belief system (Knight 2006, 625). This has somewhat removed the negative and positive associations with the term, initially used to juxtapose democracy with totalitarianism or good against evil. By using the term in a more neutral sense, it has become more popular in academic discourse.

The ideologue is not concerned with the performance of an in-depth analysis of the present to ensure a better future. His or her arguments are emotional and rooted in the idea of tradition focusing on the belief in a shared collective past and the values developed in this history (Bedell-Avers et al. 2009, 300). The ideologue is also rigidly committed to his or her belief like

the moralist maintaining tight boundaries concerning beliefs and relationships. They are extremely dependent on associations with individuals who reinforce their belief rather than challenge it. These values and actions are in stark contrast to that of the parrhesiast.

While the ideologue and moralist provide interesting examples of what the parrhesiast is not, these social actors did not dominate the study of mass communication at any point. The opinion leader, on the other hand, was a social actor of great importance in the decade following World War II. In the study of personal influence, the opinion leader emerged as part of the two-step flow of communication. Earlier in this study, we discussed the parrhesiast as separate from any formal title or job description which gives him or her some form of authority. The most visible leaders are those of formally organized groups; governments, corporations, schools, labour unions, clubs, etc. Opinion leaders, like the parrhesiast, do not fall under this category. However, for several reasons, they also cannot be labelled parrhesiasts.

Opinion leaders emerge when individuals turn to someone at their same social level they know and trust. These individuals can provide an example, advice, interpretations, or even new interests. Often, this advice is given and received without either party consciously recognizing it. This type of informal personal influence became of great interest to communications scholars, and the first pioneering study became known as the Decatur Study after the community in which it was done. Released by Elihu Katz and Paul L. Lazarsfeld in 1955, the study focused on the role of opinion leaders as influencers in four areas of day-to-day decision making: marketing, fashion, public affairs, and movies (Lowery & De Fleur 1983, 185).

Out of 800 subjects, 693 self-identified as opinion leaders. Position in the life cycle, socio-economic status, and social contacts played a large part in identifying as an opinion leader and more specifically placing themselves as an authority figure within the four areas of day-to-

day decision making. In the area of marketing, a strong horizontal flow of influence was found, rather than a trickle-down effect. When discussing products, it was very important that the two individuals had a similar socio-economic status. In the area of fashion, similar positions in the life cycle were important. In the area of public affairs, another strong correlation was found between socio-economic status and leadership. Wealthier individuals were more likely to take on the leadership role in this area. However, a different relationship was found here than in the area of marketing, as the emphasis on horizontal influence was decreased. Finally, under the movie category, the importance of youth culture was very apparent as they were the dominant demographic for the medium (Lowery & De Fleur 1983, 193-199).

In hindsight, knowing what we know of research procedures today, the study could be faulted on many grounds. Based on the earlier idea of the two-step flow of communication, the study did not actually trace the flow of information, but instead focused on the self-identified opinion leaders. In spite of the criticisms, this study was an important milestone for communications research. In a time when the influence of communication was viewed as all powerful and the negative communicator as propagandist trope dominated the discussion of the communicator as a social actor, the findings on the opinion leader provided a more positive category for the study of the speaker. It is very interesting to note that the consideration of the opinion leader as a key concept in the study of communication has fallen by the wayside. Though this is the case, a new concept to replace it has not been developed. It would seem that the communicator as a social actor has lost its importance in the discipline since its development in the post-war period.

As a gadfly, the parrhesiast does not claim the authority of knowledge in any particular area. As self-identified opinion leaders, these individuals are not parrhesiasts. The gadfly must

also poke holes in the logic of those with whom they interact. Opinion leaders share their preferences and advice with the individuals they interact with, but their intention in their interaction is not to uncover truths together. They also do not wish to poke holes in the logic of the system in which they are most knowledgeable such as marketing or fashion. Though they are also not identified through a professional title, opinion leaders cannot always be labelled parrhesiasts. The parrhesiast is concerned with the care of the soul which leads him or her down the path of the gadfly, and this is certainly not the main priority of the opinion leader. Outside of this study, many of these leaders remain uncategorized by themselves or others, so they do not recognize their duty as personal influencers.

A potential communicator which has not been considered in this discussion is the whistleblower. Working within organizations, identifying the flaws, and exposing the truth is the role of the whistleblower. We can certainly see similarities between this figure and the parrhesiast. A main distinction between the whistleblower and parrhesiast, however, is the anonymity of the role. For safety purposes, whistleblowers often remain anonymous in order to continue their work within an organization. The parrhesiast performs a much more public role, though these similarities and differences can be elaborated. There is certainly room for the exploration of this topic in further research.

Unlike the ideologue, the moralist, or the opinion leader, the parrhesiast pokes holes in supposed truths but does not suggest or attempt to persuade others towards their believed truths. Each interaction begins with an openness on the part of the parrhesiast towards undiscovered truths rather than an attempt to fit new information into a pre-conceived framework. Socrates acknowledges this method and realizes his fortune.

I was conscious that I knew nothing at all, as I may say, and I was sure that they knew many fine things; and here I was not mistaken, for they did know many things of which I

was ignorant, and in this they certainly were wiser than I was. But I observed that even the good artisans fell into the same error as the poets;—because they were good workmen they thought that they also knew all sorts of high matters, and this defect in them overshadowed their wisdom; and therefore I asked myself on behalf of the oracle, whether I would like to be as I was, neither having their knowledge nor their ignorance, or like them in both; and I made answer to myself and to the oracle that I was better off as I was (Plato *Apology*, 22).

Though Socrates was an advocate for *parrhêsia*, he also practiced a distinct form of Socratic *deinotes* which can be distinguished from the type of *deinotes* discussed earlier in this thesis. It is also important to distinguish this style from ancient and modern forms of rhetoric. Metaphor and simile may also be included in the understanding of this stylistic device. The device involves asking questions of the listener without divulging too much information or influencing the listener on the issue, often “driving them to perplexity by what amounts to cross-examination” (Ahl 1984, 177). This style is distinguished from the other less desirable form of *deinotes* because there is no hidden message or pre-conceived notion of the truth that Socrates wishes to communicate. Instead, a clear message is not stated because both parties have yet to discover the truth; the role of the parrhesiast is to instead uncover falsehoods and work towards the discovery of truth.

The Greeks had a very different conception of wisdom and it was an individual who had acquired much practical wisdom who was the wisest. In the case of Socrates, his questioning of the knowledge of others was particularly antagonizing as he himself claimed to have no practical wisdom. However, he believed that wisdom existed within every individual, and the wisest of men were the ones who understood they knew nothing of final value (Holland 2008, 129-130). The Greeks considered the contest (*agon*) an essential and healthy practice to improve the self, the field of philosophy, and the nature of politics. *Parrhêsia* was an essential part of this culture, and a key strategy of resistance to any sort of dominant authority. With its confrontational

nature, it directly challenged popular opinion on the basis of honesty and personal integrity (Gabardi 2001, 566). In several examples of ancient literature, it is true that risk is a factor in the relationship between the speaker and his or her audience. However, it is not always a necessity that risk be involved for *parrhêsia* to exist in ancient sources. If we revisit our earlier discussion on *parrhêsia* in ancient Athens, it was considered a right for all citizens. In the Assembly, speakers were not consistently in dangerous or risky situations while speaking, but were still considered to be practicing *parrhêsia*. If this factor was not a necessity for the ancients, it should not be considered a necessity in a modern context.

Would Socrates have been considered a parrhesiast within the Assembly, had he decided to partake in the politics of the city? According to Keith Werhan (2009), anywhere from two hundred to three hundred speakers were heard at any one meeting within the Athenian Assembly (15). The organization of these meetings requires honesty and frank speech in order to come to proper governing decisions for the city. The sheer number of speakers and amount of contentious topics covered meant that individuals had to leave their personal interests outside of the Assembly and come to quick decisions based on honesty with themselves and fellow citizens. Had Socrates been one of these speakers bringing his Socratic method to a new setting, he would most certainly have been considered a parrhesiast. Werhan states that “*Parrhesia* required that the *demos* open themselves to critical oratory for the good of the community, overcoming their personal displeasure at being chastised or at listening to what they did not wish to hear” (Werhan 2009, 16). The parrhesiast as gadfly would surely fit this role so it is odd that Socrates chose not to partake in the politics of Athens. Recognizing the inherent risk in doing so, he opted for a more private role in the city as the gadfly, but perhaps he could have made a more significant impact by publically questioning the policies and practices of the democracy and encouraging his

fellow citizens to do so as well. Fortunately, even in his private endeavours, Socrates managed to have such an impact on Athens that his legacy has influenced philosophical thinking for centuries. By encouraging the people that he met during his labours and the young members of the society to lead an examined life, Socrates very clearly meets the expectations of the parrhesiast as gadfly.

Moving forward in time, it is clear that the role of the parrhesiast as gadfly is important in modern society. In fifth century Athens, the parrhesiast was responsible for identifying problems in policies and practices. With every citizen in the Assembly expected to take on the role of the parrhesiast while discussing matters of the state, there were so many more opportunities for identifying the parrhesiast. We may still identify these individuals in a more modern context, utilizing the framework of the parrhesiast as gadfly rather than the Foucauldian criteria.

CHAPTER FOUR

SOME POSSIBLE MODERN PARRHESIASTS

A fundamental problem in attempting to re-appropriate ancient practices in a modern context is the fact that these societies are vastly different. Both the size and available technologies in any society have a great impact on communicative practices, and we need to allow for this in considering possible cases of a parrhesiast in the modern world. For example, the practice of *parrhêsia* may need to be considered on a larger scale, than simply between two individuals. This reduces the possibility of a relationship of trust between the individual and the powerful entity he or she interacts with. An element of risk may still exist, but it will likely be less drastic than being put on trial. Nonetheless, these individuals can still live a life in which they practice the truths they seek to unveil. An activist fighting against companies with questionable environmental business practices can live an environmentally sustainable life. An advocate for scientific literacy can work as an inventor, educator, and author in the hopes of achieving this goal. This does not mean that their entire existence is parrhesiastic. Perhaps they only fill this role in one work or situation, and perform the role of other communicators in other situations.

Rachel Carson as a Possible Parrhesiast

If Socrates was a parrhesiast in the revised sense of term, are there any modern figures who might qualify as well? One person who comes to mind is Rachel Carson, the American environmentalist who sought to document the lethal effects of pesticides in *Silent Spring* (1962). Upon further consideration, however, it might be more accurate to say that Carson began as a parrhesiast and ended as a moralist. As William Souder relates in his authoritative biography *On*

a Farther Shore (2012), when Carson began working as an information officer for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, pesticides were considered a modern miracle in the fight against insect pests and disease and were being widely used in both America and abroad. In 1945, however, a branch of the FWS began studying their effects in a series of experiments in Patuxent, Maryland, and Carson, who read and actually edited some of the studies, became concerned at what they were finding. In July 1945, she proposed a story to *Reader's Digest* which would have put the rosy view of pesticides in a very different light. In *The Affluent Society* (1958), John Kenneth Galbraith introduced the phrase "the conventional wisdom" and Carson was, in effect, proposing to challenge that wisdom in the case of pesticides -- in other words, to play the role of the parrhesiast in the sense of poking holes in the received view of pesticides. Though *Reader's Digest* passed on this initial offer, Carson did not give up on her quest to show that government and corporate accounts of the impact of pesticides did not match the scientific evidence. By the time she began work specifically on *Silent Spring* in 1958, however, she had developed a fairly sophisticated ecological perspective from which to assess the widespread and unquestioning use of pesticides. In so doing, she moved beyond being a parrhesiast and became a full-fledged polemicist -- part seer, part ideologue, part moralist, roles which carried even more risk than that of parrhesiast as evidenced by threats of lawsuits and the charge by one major pesticide manufacturer that she was a front for "sinister influences" in the Soviet Union aimed at undermining America (Souder 2012, 7-13). It is a story worth considering in more detail.

Carson led a quiet life before the release of her book in 1962. By the age of fifty-five, she had spent most of her adult life in the company of her mother. Most of her time during these years had been used to write, bird-watch, and visit the sea shore near her home in Silver Spring, Maryland. She had earned a Masters' degree in zoology from Johns Hopkins University, though

her authority as an environmentalist did not come from this formal education. She had never worked as a scientist, but instead as a public servant with the United States Bureau of Fisheries (Souder 2012, 5). A petite, soft-spoken, and seemingly apolitical woman, it is fascinating that she left behind a revolutionary legacy.

At the outset of World War II, there was a call for new pesticides and dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethane, or DDT, was developed. Though it had been initially developed in 1874, no practical application for the chemical had been determined. However, in 1939, a chemist named Paul Muller working in Switzerland discovered that the chemical killed insects. The chemical was immediately applied to the potato crop in Switzerland and proved extremely effective. In the early trials the chemical seemed to be safe for warm-blooded animals, so DDT became the overnight weapon against insects which transmitted human diseases. Production of the chemical expanded rapidly during the war and reached its peak when the U.S. Army sprayed more than one million civilians with the chemical and successfully halted a typhus epidemic in 1943. In 1948, Paul Muller won the Nobel Prize in Physiology and Medicine and DDT was declared a major discovery in the wondrous ways of science. But Carson and other skeptics continued to search for data that suggested otherwise.

In 1945, the constant promotion of DDT through media channels made the uses for DDT seem endless. It was being developed and sold in powders and dusts, liquid sprays and emulsions, and in aerosol bombs (Souder 2012, 9). Housewives were purchasing the chemical in grocery department stores and trades workers at hardware stores. It was being applied in the workplace, residential neighborhoods, schools, and hospitals. With such a small amount of research done on the short term effects of DDT use, and little to no research done on the long term effects, Carson began to be very concerned for the health of the human population. The use

of DDT had quickly become wildly out of control and it appeared as though it had been adopted without dissent. Through her research, Carson discovered several negative long term effects concerning pesticide use and eventually wrote *Silent Spring* in response. Unlike any of her previous books, it challenged the work of agricultural scientists and the words of government officials, as well as the business of the chemical industry.

Carson had already made a name for herself with her previous work. In 1951, her book *The Sea Around Us* made her literary reputation, sitting at the top of the *New York Times* bestseller list for thirty-nine weeks (Souder 2012, 5). In preparation for the release of *Silent Spring*, Carson released excerpts of the book in the *New Yorker*. The hype about the book began at once. Stories of shock and outrage appeared in newspapers across the United States. In some cases, the shock and outrage was directed at the message of the book because it caused citizens to question the use of chemicals in their daily lives; in other cases, the outrage was directed towards Carson herself. Despite the backlash, Carson and her supporters stood their ground and the book led to significant changes in laws affecting air, land, and water. Together with other opponents of the indiscriminant use of pesticides, Carson helped bring about the eventual banning of DDT. She was often given credit for launching the environmental movement, though this assessment is now seen by some as exaggerated.

Silent Spring opens with the story of a hypothetical small town in America. All of the misfortune to come upon this town as a result of environmental devastation seems shocking when described at once. Though the town is hypothetical, all of the misfortunes described had been happening to towns across the country during Carson's lifetime. She expresses her concern with the heedless pace of society: "The rapidity of change and the speed with which new situations are created follow the impetuous and heedless pace of man rather than the deliberate

pace of nature” (Carson 1962, 7). She continues to poke holes in the logic of the rapid acceptance of these chemicals by stating that: “We have done it, moreover, for reasons that collapse the moment we examine them. We are told that the enormous and expanding use of pesticides is necessary to maintain farm production. Yet is our real problem not one of overproduction?” (Carson 1962, 9).

Her reputation was attacked by the chemical industry and therein lay the risk of her practice of *parrhêsia*. When her publishing company became concerned that the frightening nature of *Silent Spring* could discourage readership, Carson responded less as a parrhesiast and more as a moralist by emphasizing “the futility and basic wrongness of the present chemical program – even better than ranting against it, though doubtless I shall rant a little, too” (Souder 2012, 345, emphasis added). As a gadfly, Carson quietly poked holes in the logic of the corporate chemical industry. But using her skill as a polemicist, her works provoked a moral reaction against the quick uptake of new technologies. American citizens began to question a chemical which was so pervasive and such a large part of everyday life in America, which was not an easy task. For this, the chemical industry fought back. Chemical companies like DuPont made several threats to request injunctions that would prevent publication of the book, also threatening to take other paths which they communicated would be “ruinous” (Souder 2012, 346). Carson was accused of being a communist and Souder suggests that she may have received death threats. However, her early practice of *parrhêsia* cannot be considered as an act that in itself placed her life on the line. Her interlocutor could be considered to be the pesticide industry as a whole, as she unveiled the falsehoods in their claim that pesticide use is safe. We cannot argue that a relationship based on trust between the two was developed, which was also clearly not the intent of Carson. The desire to improve the situation is clear, however, the desire to

improve the soul of the interlocutor is not. Carson saw her work as a public duty, and had been diagnosed with cancer before she finished *Silent Spring* (Lear, 1998). In the spring of 1964, just days before her death, it was determined that a nationwide pesticide monitoring program was needed to deal with widespread pesticide contamination. For a decade and more, pesticide use and the dangers associated with it were the focal point of the environmental movement. Though Carson's work is certainly not solely responsible for this development, she played an important role in the environmental movement.

Though some elements of this work could showcase certain parrhesiastic qualities, the general tone of *Silent Spring* suggests a more moralist viewpoint. Taking a strong ecological standpoint, Carson moved past her role as the gadfly to present an argument of right and wrong in terms of our relationship to the environment.

In the epilogue of *On a Farther Shore*, Souder takes creative license to hypothesize what living in present day North America may have been like for Carson.

It's hard to imagine her in this world now. She would like writing on a computer – there's nothing like Microsoft Word for an obsessive reviser – and she would find the ability to retrieve almost any kind of information from the Internet a joy... Other changes would be less comfortable. It's likely she would be dismayed by e-books and smartphones and social networking and that she'd be mortified by the steady demise of the great newspapers and magazines that were so large a part of the culture of her times (Souder 2012, 391).

These assumptions suggest that Carson would find it difficult to understand the modern world given the rapid advancement in technologies. This would also probably change how she would perform her role as a parrhesiast. The changes in these technologies do, however, provide new ways of performing this role rather than hindering one's ability to be a parrhesiast. This could lead to an interesting discussion on the potential for digital *parrhêsia*. Moving forward in

time once more, we can focus on a parrhesiast who has utilized the television medium to achieve his goals before turning our focus to *parrhêsia* online.

Bill Nye as an Imperfect Parrhesiast

Bill Nye is an American scientist, comedian, inventor, and educator and is affectionately known by generation Y as “The Science Guy.” Combining his talent with science and comedy, Nye took to the television medium to emphasize the importance of science literacy (Nye, 2013). Nye was awarded 18 Emmy awards for the show over a five year period. During this time, he also wrote five children’s books about science. He continues his work on television today, hosting three current television series, including: *The 100 Greatest Discoveries*, *The Eyes of Nye*, and *Stuff Happens*. Outside of his writing and television work, Nye works as the Executive Director of The Planetary Society, the world’s largest space interest organization. Recently completing a tour of North America, speaking at several prestigious universities, he spoke strongly about education and against the presence of religion in the science classroom. His mission is to help foster a scientifically literate society which appreciates the science that makes our world work. Using various media he has been successful in making science entertaining and accessible for everyone.

Born in Washington D.C. in 1955, Nye had to receive scholarships as young student to get into private school and improve his education. His mother was brilliant in mathematics and science and was recruited during World War II as a code breaker. At this time, his father was being held in a Japanese prisoner of war camp for a four year period. Without electricity, he became fascinated with sundials and passed down his interest in science to his son. With the support of his parents, Nye enrolled in Cornell University where he studied mechanical

engineering. Growing up in a family which was passionate about science, he decided to devote his life's work to the advancement of science literacy (Nye, 2013).

Nye's advocacy work began online and quickly went viral. Releasing a series of video blogs through the website BigThink.com, Nye quickly acquired new labels such as "The Science Warrior" and "Firebrand for Science." One of the more popular and controversial videos in this series, titled "Evolution is Like a Self Organizing Flash Mob," has received over five million views. In this video, Nye begins by addressing the plight of science teachers in the American school system today. He has come across parents who do not wish to have their child learn the theory of evolution in science class, and wishes to address this as a big issue in the teaching of biology. In the light of several lawsuits by parents against teachers teaching the theory of evolution, Nye decided to use video to address the issue. Rather than creating a video outlining the theory of evolution, he instead created a video questioning the logic of the creationist theory. He begins with a discussion on dinosaurs, stating that "it is a hard thing to find a kid who doesn't like dinosaurs...I would start there. The ancient dinosaurs are much like modern birds, and there are reasons for that" (BigThink, 2012). "The other, just really hard, thing is the amount of people who haven't taken time, and this will be a pun, to understand the amount of time involved. We live less than a century, the human does, but this process that brought us to be is billions of years old. And it is just really hard to get your mind around what that means" (BigThink, 2012). He suggests that he understands why it is difficult to understand. So much of our way of understanding the world is constructed through organizing schemas and top down theories and evolution does not work like that. In this video, Nye basically plays the role of parrhesiast. He begins as the gadfly, poking holes in the logic of the creationist theory. However, he allows for some understanding of why this competing theory may have been so dominant for so long as part

of an entrenched system of understanding. Though he plays a more subdued role in this video, his disdain for the teaching of the creationist theory in the classroom comes through more frankly in other sound bites. He is quoted as publically stating that: “if you want to deny evolution and live in your world — in your world that’s completely inconsistent with everything we observe in the universe — that’s fine. But don’t make your kids do it, because we need them. We need scientifically literate voters and taxpayers for the future” (Mehta 2013). This initiative led to strong media backlash and the backlash of church authorities, who labelled Nye as “anti-Christian.”

Nye recently went to Washington on an advocacy mission for the planetary society. Releasing an online video blog to spread the message about funding cuts to exploratory space programs, Nye emphasized the need for research funding. Encouraging viewers to develop opinions on the issue, and participate publically in support of scientific research, Nye has effectively mobilized citizens in advocating for research funding. With an entire generation raised on “Bill Nye the Science Guy” television episodes, Nye focuses on University campus visits to continue his rapport with this generation.

Like Carson, Nye’s work does not place him in an extremely dangerous situation, though some of his opponents are prominent religious officials. He has spent his life identifying problems within the scientific education system, and in an attempt to overcome these issues must take on the arduous task of condemning law makers and curriculum creators for allowing Biblical tales to replace scientific evidence, citing states such as Tennessee who have passed laws to make this possible. He has also committed his life to his mission, riding a bike to work every day and committing himself to the education of children, teenagers, and young adults through his television programs, books, and lecture series.

In some of his statements, Nye would appear to be an ideologue rather than strictly a parrhesiast. For example, in an interview given on NBC Today, Nye made the statement that: “the world is getting warmer. It's continually getting warmer....That's science, those are facts. You can't close your eyes and make them not true. We still have this culture or this tradition where people don't accept science. And that is not in anybody's best interest.” This statement does not leave room for argument or debate. Rather than working with an interlocutor to uncover an unknown truth, Nye presents this information as fact. However, in other circumstances, Nye has been quoted as stating: “I’m looking to stimulate curiosity so most people can go out there and learn on their own” (Schwartz 2013). Statements such as these echo Socrates in his work as the gadfly.

Though Nye does not perfectly fit into the category of parrhesiast, there are many elements of his work which can be labeled as parrhesiastic. As the gadfly, Nye pokes holes in the religious framework of creationism, publically debating the issue with individuals who deny the existence of evolution. In his other work, supporting scientific research and advocating that others do the same, Nye fits the expectations of the parrhesiast. By emphasizing the need for more research, Nye acknowledges the fact that he does not know everything and that society in general must work together to continue uncovering truths. By poking holes in the logic of those who do not support the research, and uncovering the problems caused by policy makers and corporations blocking this funding, Nye successfully works as the gadfly for the scientific community.

Julian Assange as a Digital Parrhesiast

Another possible example of a modern parrhesiast can be found in the life and work of Julian Assange. Though in many respects Assange fills the role of the parrhesiast, there are many

aspects of his character which have been called into question that remain unresolved. Born in Australia, Assange used his genius IQ to hack into the databases of some of the most high profile organizations in the world. With this access, he collected and shared on a worldwide scale some of the most confidential information available on these servers (The Biography Channel, 2013). However, Assange was not born into a technologically advanced milieu. When he was born, his mother Christine moved to Magnetic Island which, at the time, was the cradle for the Australian hippie culture. When her son was two, Christine met Brett Assange and his touring theatre, joining him in his Bohemian lifestyle. Surrounded by adults for most of his childhood, Assange would occasionally go to the local school but was, for the most part, home schooled. His mother was a politically committed activist, and issues in art and politics were instilled in her son from a young age. The issue of freedom of expression was of particular importance to his mother. Assange expressed an interest in computers at a young age, and joined the battle for freedom of expression in this new medium.

In 1971, Henry Kissinger, the National Security Advisor of the Nixon administration called Daniel Ellsberg the most dangerous man in America because of his role as a whistleblower in the Pentagon Papers affair (Guichaoua & Radermecker 2011, 101). Ellsberg had been working for the RAND Corporation defining the military strategy of the US armed forces at the time and felt as though it was his duty to make these secret documents public. This moment in history was of great importance to Assange, who considered Ellsberg a kind of mentor. Ellsberg operated in a situation of great risk, and was charged under the Espionage Act for his actions. Though the charges were dropped against Ellsberg after a long legal battle, he still lived with illegal wiretapping and theft efforts on behalf of the government. Knowing that Ellsberg was attacked and discredited for his actions did not deter Assange from his work, which

was heavily inspired by this case. Bradley Manning, a whistleblower who worked closely with Assange and WikiLeaks, is quoted as saying “I was actively involved in something that I was completely against. I want people to see the truth...because without information you cannot make informed decisions as a public” (Guichaoua & Radermecker 2011, 106). These words echo the statements made by Ellsberg back in the seventies.

Building on his life lessons, Assange continued a philosophical journey. “Julian Assange has come to believe that humans are not a left-wing idea against a right-wing one, or faith against reason, but rather individuals against institutions” (Guichaoua & Radermecker 2011, 111). It was with this philosophy in mind and hacker ethics that he began his work developing WikiLeaks. What made WikiLeaks so special was its format. Whistleblowers could post documents anonymously and untraceably. Users had the opportunity to discuss these documents publically and critically analyze their credibility and veracity. It had no home base and was not a legal entity in any country. It existed everywhere and nowhere (Beckett & Ball 2012, 23).

Hacker ethics acknowledged the power of sharing information, and Assange believed that it was his duty to share his expertise in software development through open access software and IT resources. “WikiLeaks’ main goal is to provide raw, quality information following the founding principles of Wikipedia: online encyclopedia (knowledge for all), a neutral point of view (information remains pure), free content (content can be re-used), interacting in a respectful and civil manner (ethics ensured by members), and not having firm rules (errors are self-regulated by the community)” (Guichaoua & Radermecker 2011, 114). Several of these goals correlate perfectly with the goals of the parrhesiast. By providing a neutral point of view with raw data, any pre-conceived ideologies are not dominating the communication of the material. The information available does not in itself support any particular viewpoint, but it does make it

easier to question the claims of others. That is what makes its “publication” parrhesiastic. Of course, the way the data is uploaded and presented can compromise the neutrality of the presentation, but the goal remains the same. Interacting in a respectful and civil manner is a key element in the interaction between the parrhesiast and interlocutor in order for the interaction to be a success. Additionally, by avoiding firm rules, this format allows for the unexpected and for growth in the interactions between the information and users.

Dubbed the biggest battle for free speech in our lifetime, the controversy over WikiLeaks and its practices has brought issues of secrecy and accountability to the fore. Upon the first large dump of classified files on the site, the United States government considered prosecuting Assange. Leaders of other countries and external organizations rallied to support him. More radical online activists like members of Anonymous showered their support through the launching of cyber attacks on companies which chose to boycott WikiLeaks, including PayPal, Visa, and Mastercard (Gjelten, 2010). Unfortunately, in some cases this show of support led to the alienation of those who sympathized with the WikiLeaks movement. However, these additional actions were not always done with the approval of Assange or his colleagues.

Of these case studies, Assange has worked in the most extreme circumstances of risk, receiving a plethora of death threats and seeking asylum in other countries to avoid extradition to others. His many interlocutors are not individuals, but the high profile organizations he has exposed. Improving the soul of these interlocutors does not seem to be his mission, as very little interaction between Assange and those organizations occurs. He accomplishes his task through the connection with anonymous insiders, leaking information electronically through the WikiLeaks website. His mission is to expose the lies, corruption, and secrecy within these organizations. It is difficult to analyze his character at the present time, given that he is wanted

for different reasons in different countries. Until these controversies are clarified, it is difficult to determine whether he has his own secrets that he is hiding; but harboring secrets of his own would not be in line with his life's work. Regardless of this issue, the noble mission of WikiLeaks could be considered another form of practicing *parrhêsia* insofar as Assange plays the role of the gadfly.

WikiLeaks plays an important role in challenging a culture of secrecy which has been developed over decades. Making these secrets, or classified information, available to everyone allows for discussion and debate among the general population rather than a select few. Though controversial, this method exposes systemic failures which not only include the over-classification of documents but also injustices which can occur as a result of this system.

Assange and WikiLeaks defend their tactics with the claim that as a democracy, this information is owned by the people. It should be considered their democratic right as citizens to have access, with very few exceptions for purposes of national security, to the information their government has access to. Secrecy combined with power provides an opportunity to abuse that power and this must be avoided at all costs. The original sentiments of the ancient foundation of democracy remain: the government is the people.

This case speaks to another discussion on the importance of whistleblowers and their potential role as parrhesiasts within a modern context. The actions of WikiLeaks have challenged traditional media, encouraging investigative journalism and courage in reporting. They have also revolutionized this medium, working in new ways to combine online and traditional efforts. Finally, they have promoted the spread of data journalism and new media. However, Assange's initiative would not be successful without the cooperation of whistleblowers within all of these organizations. The innovative design of the WikiLeaks website allows more safety for the

whistleblowers the organization works with. With an easy to replicate design, there are hopes that WikiLeaks begins as an act of publishing but eventually transforms into an entire social movement (Dreyfus et al. 2011, 4). These whistleblowers identify problems within the organizations they work in, and work to expose these issues in the hope that a solution may be found.

As a digital parrhesiast, one who provides counter information without any particular context for its use, Assange uncovered the intensity of the culture of secrecy which is ingrained in the governments and corporations of Western society. The intention of WikiLeaks is not to spread a specific ideology or persuade its audience one way or another. By simply releasing documents which they consider property of the people in a democratic system, they show the flaws in the system itself. With Assange working as the public face and motivation of the project, WikiLeaks has inspired debates on freedom of expression, freedom of information, and the positive and negative aspects of secrecy. As a parrhesiast, Assange has been successful in inspiring others to question the systems in which they work and live within. The flow of information is now increasingly occurring outside of traditional mainstream news media. It is then important to include an example of *parrhêsia* in a digital form, and Assange has proved a good case study in this endeavour.

These three parrhesiasts do not necessarily fit perfectly into the definition of a parrhesiast, though certain efforts, practices, and moments of their lives can be considered parrhesiastic. The Foucauldian framework proves difficult to apply in these situations, as was the case with Socrates. However, the new framework which combines the gadfly with certain other varying characteristics proves much more fruitful. When considering modern parrhesiasts, it is much simpler to look at specific instances which could be considered parrhesiastic rather than an

entire life. These individuals are still human and have a unique opportunity to grow through their encounters and experiences. Their openness to new truths allows for the opportunity to learn through new knowledge and we must allow for contradiction and growth in their character. Though Rachel Carson did not build her literary reputation through controversial writing, *Silent Spring* proved to be the work which showcased her previous efforts as a parrhesiast. Though Bill Nye may seem like an ideologue in certain interview statements, his work outside of his media advocacy has been in the name of improving the world and encouraging the questioning of the system in which we live through the study of science. And though the character of Julian Assange may be under scrutiny, it does not mean that the WikiLeaks initiative is not based on the principle of the parrhesiast as gadfly.

CONCLUSION

As mentioned in the introduction, recent works on key concepts in the general area of media, culture, and communication do not include a single concept referring to an actual communicator as an analytical category. Why is this the case? Is it because there is no perfect parrhesiast – or propagandist or opinion leader, etcetera – in the world? That may indeed be true. However, the same applies to all of the other concepts in these works. There is no perfect example of the public sphere, personal influence, or false consciousness either. That being the case, there is a clear value in having a lexicon of these concepts at our disposal for understanding the communicative world around us.

When considering the social world, it is essential to consider the communicator as a social actor. What better opportunity to do so than to consider the parrhesiast. Stemming from Plato's version of Socrates, the parrhesiast has the intention of changing the world. Socrates hoped to do so through his Socratic method, living an examined life and vehemently encouraging others around him to do so as well. Studying our three modern examples of the parrhesiast, we begin to see a pattern in their intentions. As the gadfly, these individuals hope to change the world. By questioning the entrenched ideologies and embedded systems, the parrhesiast can identify flaws and uncover truths. By encouraging others to also play the role of parrhesiast, these individuals display a great concern for the care of the soul and the environments in which they live.

As a singular communicative category, the analytical category of the parrhesiast does not represent the only communicative actor which is identifiable. Further research is necessary to expand upon this idea and create a lexicon which focuses on the communicator as a social actor who is separate from professional titles. With the rapid advancement of technology, it becomes

more difficult to identify reliable sources as the internet allows for much more anonymity than traditional media. Tools for identifying communicators as social actors must be developed to fill this need.

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