

**BIOPOWER AND EDUCATION
SELF-CARE, SUBJECT AND TRUTH**

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ABSTRACT

Our thesis here is that the relation between bio-power and education is found in the care of oneself, the subject and truth. We consider bio-power to be one's self-government/discipline and that of others and that this discipline is possible in the subject-truth relation just as it is in one's self-care. The questions that guide our reflections are: *What is education in the sense of biopower? How does one constitute the subject in relation to oneself, in relation to others and truth?* According to Foucault, biopower is a form of the "exercise of power" that has as its objective the biological life of the human; it is the exercise of power over the bodies of the individuals. Such exercise might exist in the self-care practices (*epimeleia heautou*) just as in the practices of "truth-telling" (*parresia*).

KEY WORDS

Biopower; Self-care; Truth; Subject.



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Biopower and Education: Self-Care, Subject and Truth

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INTRODUCTION

Our thesis here is that the relation between biopower and education is found in self-care and truth-telling. We consider that biopower is a self-government/discipline along with others and that this discipline is possible in the subject-truth relation. If truth and it along with the subject are universal or particular, we would not be discovering the gist of the discussion, but rather establishing that the constitution of subjectivity nowadays stems from the governing of some over others toward a condition of the government of oneself as government of others. The reflection we attempt from the epoch of Foucault provides us with a creative glance at this modernity. The question which guides our reflections is: What is education in the sense of biopower? In other words, how is the subject constituted in relation to oneself, in relation to others and in relation to the truth?

To tackle the above question, it is important to consider that it is different to talk about the government of oneself and of others as *self-care* (*epimeleia heautou*) than it is to truth-telling (*parrhesia*). Foucault analyzes the first or former in the figure of Socrates and his relation to Alcibiades, while *parrhesia* is dealt with in Plato as Dionysius's master.

In accordance with Foucault, biopower consists of “ways to ‘exercise power’ with the aim of the biological life of humans; it is the exercise of power over

the bodies of individuals” (Castro, 2011, p. 55). Such exercise might exist in the practices of self-care as well as in the practices of truth-telling. Biopower appears as power over life and death even though in our case, we only care about the first, that control and dominion of the body as biological life, constituting self-care and truth-telling. Self-care and truth-telling consist of a type of power over the lives of oneself and of others; they are a way of affirming life mastering itself, governing and controlling itself; they are a way to ensure a life founded in care and truthfulness.

Today we know that the body is not only a component of the human in terms of sexuality, but we also know that bodies in themselves cannot occupy other bodies. Why does one establish the subject? Also, one now recognizes that it is not only established to atone for guilt or either for the contemplation of the highest truth or simply for one’s great pleasure and happiness.

Why does self-government and truth-telling become integrated to a practice of government of others? It is not because one denies the existence of discursive orders of genealogies or particular desires that in their condition of word, institutional regulations, corporal appetites, subjugate and attempt to dominate the human in such a way that we try to ignore these conditions that, in order to call them in a certain fashion, are functional or structural to human nature. In other words, life is not a discursive order; it does not end in its pure genealogy nor is it the result of some symbolical articulations.

SELF-CARE AS BIOPOWER

It should not seem strange to us that Foucault’s last reflections were centered on a relationship between body and soul; undoubtedly, his Christian-Catholic genealogy appeared in his courses dealing with hermeneutics of the subject. From there he fashions hermeneutics or then, rather, becomes interested in the way certain subjects interpret themselves (another thing), a matter that of course calls for reflection. It is somewhat paradoxical to take up the question of subjectivity and truth in relation to the topic of self-care and later try to refer it to the field of education. Effectively, it is odd considering that the questions of truth, subjectivity and, more than anything else, education are constantly remitted to knowledge, even of the world, of others or of oneself as an exclusive matter of the conscience.



“Know thyself” is the maximum by which, since Delphos, philosophy and other forms of knowledge of humans has been guided. It is the prescription that, par excellence, connects the relationship between subject and truth. *Gnothi seauton* in some way refers to a psychological introspection or a type of self-knowledge, in essence, or to our relationship of salvation to God and not at all to certain rational conditions as to what we are. In short, it is not about a moral precept that appears before us as good or bad or that permits us to know, with no doubts, our beings in the world.

To know, to be conscious of oneself in the Ancient World, has to do with a set of rules, of rituals related to the very act of consulting an oracle. Foucault, now, identifies in his text *Hermenéutica del sujeto* [The Hermeneutics of the Subject] three precepts regarding knowing how to question: the *meden agan*, which means nothing in excess, and absolutely refers to what we today understand as ethical behavior or moderation in the consumption of certain products. The second precept is *eggue*, which refers to being cautious; in other words, when one consults the gods one has to be cautious not to commit oneself to that which cannot be carried out. And in third place, the *gnothi seauton* is that which implies examining thoroughly the questions one wants to ask, how many and how to interrogate the gods. In short, it is about prudence in what one asks for, in what one expects from the gods, in being cautious in one’s commitments made with them, and remembering that she or he who interrogates the gods is mortal and, as such, should be aware of her/his strengths and limitations.

All of the above makes us think that the Delphic precept of knowing thyself is linked with the idea of self-care and not with some psychic or moral restlessness as it is nowadays interpreted to be and even less with the superiority of the conscience as regards experience. In other words, it is about a practice that perhaps can be reduced to the art of knowing how to question, very much in consonance with another experience—that of self-care.

Let us see, briefly and following Foucault, what this notion of *epimeleia heautou*, of self-care, means:

- It is about a general attitude, a way of considering things, of being in the world, taking action, dealing/socializing with other subjects. *Epimeleia heautou* is an attitude: in respect to oneself, in respect to others, and in respect to the world.



- It is a type of attention, of looking. Of attending to oneself, projecting the look to the exterior. It is about paying attention to what one thinks and to what happens as a result of thought. In that sense it is linked to the word *melete*, which means both exercise and meditation.
- *Epimeleia* does not only mean attention or general or global interest regarding oneself, but that one is preoccupied in particular with the techniques or actions behind one's taking charge of the subject, of how to purify, modify and transfigure it; in other words, of how one goes about establishing the subject. For example, the techniques of meditation, of memorization, of examining one's conscience, those of verifying representations as they appear in the mind (Foucault, 2002, p. 28).

It is now not an exclusive issue of a dietary measure, an economic stance or a rule of one's own, regarding sexuality, as to how we reveal ourselves in *The Use of Pleasures*, but one of a broader question that places subjectivity in a reflection that goes beyond that of hermeneutics and analyses; it is about, more than anything else, an experience of the spirituality of the subject or rather of a practice and pragmatic nature of the spirituality of the subject. Practice understood to be exercise and pragmatics as experience. Exercise understood as sets of activities that permit having the condition of existence, corporality, and mentality. And the experience is that which allows us to become transformed upon ending it; that places us in a location radically different from that we were in.

Foucault rightly insists on the conjunction existing between truth and spirituality, an irrefutable union in the eyes of the ancient Greek philosophers. Effectively, the first philosophers were the first educators as truth and human transformation walk arm in arm, and the former is impossible without transfiguration and this cannot happen without access to truth. The question regarding the subject-truth relationship should be posed from a pedagogical environment given that it involves "how" and "how should" the subject wants to be.

With the idea of "self-care" an interruption is produced. Perhaps all that that for the Greek world, up to the V century BC., is found connected to what Deleuze and Guattari (2005) denominate the relationship between the "plan of immanence" and nature; in other words, the opening of a gap between the social elements, such as they are given to us, and the natural world. The Homeric past will lose its mythical meaning, the gods will no longer be on

the side of mortals, the other beings of the Universe, but will be converted, coupled with philosophy and certain laws in mandates and precepts that will come to be known as ethical principles that go along becoming transformed into universal scenarios of human chores. The relationship between subject and truth, found in self-care, will be radically transformed and, with it, their disciplines.

Precisely, the trial of Socrates can be considered the water part, as the calling to care for oneself. Nonetheless, this separation of earlier thought also implicates one's own duplicity; on the one hand, the idea of self-care as related to truth, reason, and the divine mandate, and on the other, of oneself attending the body and soul, not beyond the good and evil, but linked with the good and evil in a way of production of subjectivity and truth centered on one's own experience with others, with "La Polis", with things made by humans.

If indeed in *Apology* that Plato himself wrote (concerning Socrates) it states the direction one has to take is one's self-care, what Foucault shows us is that this is a complicated question in that one must locate the constitution of the subjectivity. Below is what Socrates said about it:¹

My good friend, you are a citizen of Athens, a great city famous for wisdom and strength; are you not ashamed to spend so much trouble upon heaping up riches and honor and reputation, while you care nothing for wisdom and truth and the perfection of your soul? And if he protests that he does care for these things, I shall not at once release him and go my way; I shall question and cross-examine and test him, and if I think he does not possess the virtue

¹ In the FCE translation from the *Hermeneutics of the Subject* by Michel Foucault, it is translated as follows: "What! Dear friend, you are an Athenian, citizen of a city that is bigger, more famous than any other due to its science and power, and do not blush upon tending to [*epimeleisthai*] your fortune with the aim of increasing it as much as possible, just as in your reputation and honors; but as to your reason, truth and soul, which you have to improve tirelessly, do not worry about it and do not even take it into consideration" [*epimeleia, phrontizeis*].

Socrates, [Foucault says], remember, nonetheless, what you always said and still you are very decided to say to those you meet and plead to: You all worry about a lot of things, your fortune, your reputation, but not about your own selves. And to continue:

"And if one of you answers, affirm that you take care of them [your soul, truth and reason; M. F.], do not believe I am going to leave it alone and immediately go away; no, I will interrogate the person, examine, dispute in depth. Young or old, citizen or foreigner, I will act as such with whomever I meet; and especially with you all, my fellow citizens, because we are close by blood. Well, that is what God requires of me, listen well; and I believe there was nothing more beneficial for the city than my jealousy in carrying out such an order" (Foucault 2002, p.21).



he affects, I shall reproach him for holding the most precious things cheap and worthless things dear. This I shall do to everyone whom I meet, young or old, citizen or stranger, but especially to you, my fellow-citizens, inasmuch as you are my own people. For be assured that such is heaven's command; and I believe that no better piece of fortune has ever befallen you in Athens than my enlistment in the service of heaven... (Plato, 1997, pp. 29d-30a).

From there to Saint Paul, and up to our days, there exists a complete line of continuity very akin to Western thought in that the soul is favored over the body in order to be in consonance with God, or that all sense of experience be guided, by reason, toward truth. No one in the Homeric world, in *The Iliad* or *The Odyssey* could be imagined fulfilling the will of God and seeking truth via the *logos*. The “natural” and the “human” are separated by philosophical concepts. In a strict sense we could say one turns to the birth of philosophy just as we know it and with that to a knowledge-power with which one clarifies the myth and seeks to base it in reason. Nonetheless, let us return to the techniques themselves such as the discipline of body and soul in one’s self-care.

Let us try, rather, to find out what oneself is. It is not about knowing who you are or knowing your abilities, your passions, if you are mortal or immortal or why you come into the world; this, in a methodological or formal sense, as Foucault affirms, serves a purpose, but it is not the nature of the question. It is also not about the body since the body does not serve, per se, as a body, just as a human as a mixture of body and soul. Well then, as Foucault says, what thing the body is worth is the soul.

But as you can see, this soul, to which we approach via the curious reasoning of “making use of something” [...] has nothing to do with, for example, the body-imprisoned soul, which needs liberating, as in *Fedon*; it has nothing to do with the winged soul mate that one has to channel in a good direction, as in *Phedro*; neither is it the soul that possesses an architecture with a hierarchy of instances that we have to harmonize as in *The Republic*. It is the soul only in that it is subject to actions, the soul in that it is useful to the body, the organs, its instruments, etc. [...]

[As such making use of] means: honor the gods, worship them, do with them as you should. The expression *hippo kresthai* (making use of a horse) does not mean taking a horse in order to do what one wants with it. It means that

one has done as one should and that you used it in keeping with the rules of art implied by the team of horses or cavalry, etc. [In that sense Foucault says, it is not the same as making use of one's passions for something, abandoning oneself for them, and the same applies to ire, it is not the same as making use of ire, abandoning oneself to it, it is about the soul as a subject] (2002, p. 66-70).

The soul acts over the body, but not as it wishes but conforming to the conditions of the body that, in turn, would be nothing without the soul's presence. In some way the soul incarnates itself in the body and the one or the other by themselves are nothing. Where do the soul and body come from? What enables them to exist? In one sense, they spring from the existence of others, and in another sense, from biological energy—that which remits us to biopower. As Spinoza would say, “No one knows what a body can do”.

If the soul occupies the body, who, then, occupies the soul? Undoubtedly, the other souls, the other subjects. To occupy oneself, then, is impossible without occupying others. To occupy oneself is to take care in terms of self-discipline and control. We can say that the soul exercises a power over the body, “a power that is positively exercised over life, which procures to manage it, increase it, multiply it, exercise precise controls and general regulations over it”. (Foucault, 2012, p. 129) We know well that to arrive at the truth, it is not enough to be in good standing with God or to be right, but that these are directly related to certain technologies per se, along with some practices that have been present since Ancient Greece just as in other villages and civilizations up to our own days.

To educate is not only a passing of the knowledge of the old generation to the new, but about the whole exercise of certain practices, traditions, and experiences. To view education in some way as a biopower means conceiving it either positively or negatively. To educate is not a synonym of doing something good, which is an old conception of it. Underneath the perspective of biopower is the implication that self-care is a practice that can have many edges. For example, nowadays the exercise over oneself makes us recognize that one finds spirituality lacking, that we have tossed aside the particular, the own for a generality in which we do not recognize ourselves, call it society of knowledge or education for competences, that are imposed on us as inevitable.

To educate as self-care is a way of considering things, of being in the world, of acting with self-respect and respect for others; it is a way of life based on the *epimeleia heautou*, a way of introducing biopower because it is



an exercise of power over oneself and others and has as a finality life itself. Taking care of oneself, paying attention to what one thinks, does, says, and to what happens to our thought process, with our actions and words, is a form of biopower. It is about being able to meditate a little, about talking with ourselves and with others about daily life, of looking within our actions regarding others and within the things that surround us, of examining our conscience about things that, although simple or useless in appearance, comprise our ordinary lives. Self-care is being under a type of exercise that imposes upon us “another relationship” with life.

Nowadays we know that those rules and regulations, not only of Ancient Greece but of our more recent ancestors, seem to have become blurred, that any alternative for today’s education could seem either too idealistic or extremely utilitarian. Notwithstanding, the question of self-care keeps emerging as a reality, whether in its antithesis such as automatism and selfish alienation or as ways of joint coexistence, which seeks in the experience of daily life to make sense of this world.

Education, truth and subject get out of hand. What is the purpose of education except the search for truth? One can “do” in and for knowledge, but one can also try via experience and practice to recognize that conscience is not conscience of itself but rather of a thing, which is a great advantage. The search for truth does not negate the recognition of multiple truths. Nonetheless, if education resided in the particular truth of each person one would have an answer to many things, such as the actuation many times of science. But if there were no search for truth, everything would end up as individual truths. In that sense truth cannot be reduced to a simple symptom located in a lack of something or an absence. To compare truth with eternal laws, be they divine or structural, cancels all possibilities of the experience as creative and places the subject in the position of an instrument, always a slave in the service of a master. By the same token, if everything appears to be relative or circumstantial, we lose subjectivity in that anything we do could be or not be and in such a case to act or not to act becomes the same. An education directed toward the ability to act, toward the experience of the subject, toward its own transfiguration in the recognition that the aforesaid guarantees no benefit or recovery from something, causes one to recognize education as biopower or as a type of exercise over oneself.

SUBJECT AND TRUTH AS BIOPOWER

As Foucault says, on the one hand, we would have the philosophical preoccupation that one does not question what is true or false, but rather what one does to ensure that there exist truth and falseness and that one can or cannot differentiate between one and the other. Philosophy is an experience of thought that crosses all boundaries of life and science; it is not a discipline per se but a task that allows the subject access to truth, to its conditions and limitations. Truth-telling implies that the truth is not in writings, in laws, in standards, in rules, or in advice or illusions or the ideal. In other words, not only is it an empirical matter or something transcendental, but rather its immanence resides in the act of telling, in the experience it produces in the situation or circumstance of the exercise of power this entails.

The relationship between spirituality and truth that so interests Foucault provides three characteristics. The first consists of the fact that the truth is never fully given to the subject. The second indicates that the subject per se does not enjoy the right of having access to the truth. And lastly, that truth is not given through an act of knowledge; rather, one requires a practical modification of the subject that converts it in a certain sense and to a certain point into another subject, into the subject of truth.

The price of truth lies in the integrity of the same subject in which it is put into play. And we ask ourselves along with Foucault: How is the subject capable of truth nowadays? The concept of truth that currently reigns is that which we have been given due to knowledge and due only to knowledge, something that undoubtedly has not ceased to represent certain transformations, renunciations, and agreements of the subjects with themselves and with others. Of course, among other renunciations of our time we can mention the question concerning truth as it is completely identified with knowledge. Truth-telling, speaking the truth, does not exclude errors or wrong choices. Also, an error is a component of truth, even as far as scientific truth; this fact allows asking continuously: How many times does one say something untruthful and at the same time one is mistaken? Here, beliefs come into play. Someone, possibly a saint, a martyr or a hero, can die for truth and be completely mistaken. What is true today is false tomorrow, which does not subtract one iota of the veracity of truth-telling. The aforementioned information links truth-telling with the courage of the truth and not with knowledge.



In fact, the question for the different truths does not necessarily lead us to the question for the Truth. It is not about the sum of the parts responding to everything. Foucault himself affirms that his question was not about the different truths, but that he asks himself about the Truth. But what good is asking about the Truth? To try to confirm a previously-existing universe or to create a new one? Experience appears to indicate to us not one or the other. The question for the Truth brings us to recognize a process, a route toward wherever, although we never arrive. Therefore, what is important in this journey of “telling” the truth is to work the truth and it is this practice and experience where one finds the ineffable highway to truth. Seen from another perspective, it is about an exercise of the consumption of life, of a vital expense which becomes dynamic along the highway to truth. In that sense, there are two options: those who imagine a point of departure and point of arrival, fulfilled or not, and those who set out on a journey from an unknown location to an uncertain end. This latest concept of the Truth is more related to wisdom than to knowing things. The Western tradition imposes reference points; in other words via knowing. Other versions navigate, or drift to be specific, in search of wisdom. It is worth saying that drifting does not refer to going to pot at the depths of absolute chaos, but to the contrary; by drifting we understand it as the tension between the current imposed upon us and the singular forces that, at times, resist and at others sweep one away.

Therefore our doubts concerning that excess of “epistemologization” of the humanities (of history, anthropology, pedagogy and even the reduced epistemology of philosophy), which attempt to provide certainties and assurances to that which in itself is uncertain. To create a logical and analytical road toward the Truth has been the effort of all philosophy from the time of Socrates to our days. Also represented today as excess of information, founded in a post-modern time, are words devoid of sense and meaning. If it is true that this unequivocal truth has excited and provoked its alter ego, the equivocal, the relativistic as the other temple of knowledge, the other side of the same coin, it also applies that when one thinks about self-care, it does not mean producing a third alternative form of knowledge to the two that are revealed for that would imply continuing along the same route.

This is about a distinct ethic that in no way remits and reduces the subject to a private field or zone. Self-care, in the ethical-political category, does not exempt the individual from general sovereignty, but, on the contrary,

part of the individual; it takes the particular as a constitutive experience that creates the general, but at the same time rejecting it. In that sense, and as Foucault states, there is a double reference to the illustration or example: inasmuch as in the act of self-constitution of the subject and simultaneously as a critical interrogation task done by this subject.

But what is the truth concerning knowledge, how is it produced, what are its aims? The modern truth is due to two circumstances: on the one hand, are those we could call internal that imply a set of rules, standards and formal conditions, methods, study tools, verifications, interpretations, analyses and types of expositions. On the other hand are the externals that have to do with ways to practice, of understanding, to reason, socialize, accept and “instrumentalize” the postulates of said truth, of knowledge.

It is true that the Truth responds to a set of rules that discriminate between what is true and what is false; we could say it is a form of tautological truth as that of the sciences, especially mathematics, and not for this reason leave off being linked to power; on the contrary, it is this latter one that always gives life to the Truth. Yet, there is also a form of truth that, to give it a name, is daily, which comes from experience and practice and that on occasions responds to the truth of knowledge, but some others reveal themselves before it. It is another truth and, consequently, another power, a way different from subjecting oneself. What we find are regimens of truth production. As such, seeking the truth is not a metaphysical issue that takes us to the only infinite and authentic truth but to that truth that we must think and live. This latter one differs from that concept which considers, in one fashion or another, that there is a plan in the universe, a cosmos, a structure although neither does one take comfort in accepting that all is chaos; it is more like what Guattari (1996) would say: it is about “chaosmosis”² or of the irreducible tension among order, the recognizable and disorder, uncertainty.

2 As Guattari says: “My perspective consists of moving the human and social sciences from the scientific paradigms toward ethical-aesthetic paradigms. The problem is no longer knowing whether the Freudian Unconsciousness or Lacanian Unconsciousness offers a scientific answer to the problems of the psyche. These models will only be considered in the nature of institutional production which are promoted according to their impact on psychiatry, the teaching of subjectivity, among others, inseparable both from the technical devices and university or mass media... in a more general way, one must admit that each individual, each social group creates its own system of the modernization of subjectivity; in other words, a certain cartography made of cognitive points of reference but also myths, rituals, symptomatology, and from the standpoint that each one of them positions itself in relation to its affects, its anguish, and tries to administer its inhibitions and drives.” (1996, p. 22)



One can think that with this it is an effort to negate knowledge, but it is not; it is about not accepting that that has been and is the only path to the truth. That it entails a certain type of subjectivity which seems to attack the same idea of the subject in which, historically, we recognize ourselves. Also, it is certain that there is no return to the past and that this modernity is nothing but the infinite forging of subjects, although nowadays we are aware of the risks that question the same possibility of the world.

On the other hand, for Foucault the truth that is linked to the subject and that is present in self-discipline and the discipline of others is *parrhesia*. In keeping with what Foucault has stated (2010, p. 161-184), there exist four conditions of *parrhesia*.

- Formal condition: that found in a democracy; that is linked to tribal organization and that gives its inhabitants the right to voice their opinions concerning the problems that concern their city. However, as we will see, it is not about anyone voicing just any kind opinion, but what is of interest in this formal condition is the possibility of community organization.
- Condition of completeness: refers to the feeling of accomplishment due to the ascendancy and superiority of some. It refers to being in the “first row” in the “first rank” given that one forms part of a small group of persons who make up the outstanding citizens, about the line of “soldiers” at the helm or, in other words, the row of directors or rulers (*kubernetes*) who steer the boat. It is the condition of authority in that one belongs to the group one can, due to his/her position, and ruling.
- Condition of truth: the need for a rational *logos*. Strength, potential, power exercised, the exercise of the power of one who ascended and has the floor, exercising her/his right to speak. The ability to reason, ability to think or the energy to be critical which, as we will see, entail practice and effort.
- Moral condition: the courage and bravery in the struggle manifested in the rivalry of those who preoccupy themselves with the city, the conflict, let us say, fairness or competition among the words of those who ascended. It is an agnostic condition, in that one is in the *agon*, of the practice of truth-telling. Given that the *parrhesia* only appears in a conflict, the truth-telling is threatened by the confrontation.

We can say they are conditions of truth-telling: organization, authority, reasoning, and conflict. These four conditions are necessary in order to exercise power as the discipline of self and of others.

In these four conditions of truth-telling it is certain that there is a contest among different persons of the first rank, and they are the most influential and, as such, must and can assume the risk, the courage to impose their decision upon their followers. “It is a parrhesiastic agreement: I tell you all the truth; you all follow it if you wish, but if you do, consider yourselves part of the consequences, whatever they may be, and do not make me the only and exclusive person responsible.” (Foucault, 2010, p. 187) This parrhesiastic agreement is a form of biopower as even war is waged in name of the existence of everyone, there is an agreement in which one takes up the motto “kill in order to be able to live”. (Foucault, 2012, p. 129). *Parrhesia* is an exercise of power aimed at producing vital forces and to make them grow and orderly. In the life of the “parrhesiasta” the power of truth-telling establishes her/his strength.

This parrhesiastic agreement is exclusively supported by the same *parrhesia* and not by a false or bad *parrhesia*. There are three aspects that identify bad *parrhesia*: 1) anyone can speak; 2) what one says represents the opinion of the majority; and 3) the person who speaks guarantees her/his own security and her/his own success. It is a mistake to confuse democratic³ *parrhesia* with the possibility of anyone speaking or everyone and that they say whatever they wish. Just because everyone can speak, does not mean everyone can tell the truth. With democracy, the important thing is not that everyone or anyone says something, but the interest lies in the exercise of power as truth-telling. What requires *parrhesia* is the practice of power in the telling. Therefore, the *parrhesia* of democracy accepts that only some can tell the truth. Here is located the paradox extant in the democracy-*parrhesia* relation since “there is no true discourse sans democracy, but that discourse introduces differences in this one”. (Foucault, 2010, p. 195)

The exercise of power found in truth-telling is impossible if words lose their strength and meaning. Empty words are no good concerning *parrhesia*. Truth-telling does not overflow with meaningful words but that they

3 It is important not to confuse democracy, where what reigns is the power of the “demos”, of the villages that comprise “La Polis”, with the degeneration of democracy as the government of the poor. The “demos” are not poor and they have their “first ranks” and their “climbers”.



enable the exercise of power. We ask ourselves if nowadays truth-telling is possible considering the “erosion” of words: justice, love, freedom, pain, hatred, truth, beauty, otherness, differences, wisdom, fear, anguish, cynicism, will, nature, ire, violence, education, power, etc. It seems that nowadays anybody talks about just anything; everyone expresses her/his opinion, but few exercise *parrhesia*, not because they cannot, but because of the difficulty, almost impossibility, to expect meaningful words. “One must have thoughts, and not only points of view!” (Nietzsche, 2009, p. 40) Now, every attempt at truth-telling is considered unproductive, incorrect and absurd.

Parrhesia is the root of the process of governing, this term understood as government of oneself and of others. But, what does this self-government consist of in order to govern others? Where does the biopower that empowers biopolitics lie? What does it mean to teach a prince who exercises or will exercise power? Foucault analyzes these questions in Plato’s Letter VII, where he must act as a pedagogue of whomever inherits the power in Syracuse; rather, of Dionysius the Young. It is important to say that, in democracy, *parrhesia* is focused on the government of the people; in other words, on many, and the *parrhesia* of the monarchy is directed to the government of one, the monarch. The qualities of teaching the monarch truth-telling can be applied to those rising (politically) within democracy.

Foucault differentiates the political-educative relationship found between Socrates and Alcibiades from that relationship that is extant between Plato and Dionysius. Both masters must speak truthfully to their disciples to educate them, “persuade them concerning truth and with it to govern their souls, the souls of those who have to govern others”. (Foucault, 2010, p. 237). Alcibiades, as one who is rising as regards democracy, wants to place himself in the “first rank”, he wants to govern Athens by himself. The *parrhesia* between Socrates and Alcibiades is taken as *kayos* (opportunity or occasion). For his part, Plato has an internal “obligation” which links him to Dionysius, who now enjoys first status in such a way that his philosophy changes to *ergo* (work or task). And it is not the same to teach taking advantage of an opportunity as when it is done in fulfillment of a job. Opportunity is a chance to exercise *parrhesia*, the job entails effort and production. And this does not mean that in opportunity there are no effort and production; nonetheless, the exercise of truth-telling as work demands such effort and production. Let us say that energy and manufacturing are indispensable requisites of *parrhesia* as work. Philosophy, as a political-educative practice,

is not only logos but, fundamentally, work, understood as effort or energy, and as a productive effort. Plato's work is to exercise *parrhesia*, exercise logos and, with that, practice philosophy. It is not about giving good advice to the ruler, "but instead, with the exercise of *parrhesia*, one seeks to practice veridiction with reference to power. Truth-telling is an exercise of power or a practice of biopower as vigor in life.

Foucault identifies three processes or "circles", as he calls them, of the political mission of the pedagogue or of the teaching of *parrhesia* to the ruler. First, is the circle of listening. Plato must make himself heard, know how to speak and with that, govern; at the same time Dionysius must be willing to make one listen; in other words, obey. For example, Plato (1992, p. 330 c-d) says in Letter Seven:

The first thing the advisor of a sick person needs to do, if the patient follows a regime harmful to his health, is to suggest a change in lifestyle; if the patient is willing to accept, the advisor must give him new prescriptions, but if the patient refuses, I would still consider him a good man and a good doctor if he refuses to accept further consultations. [...]

Whenever I am asked for advice [truth-telling] regarding an important matter referring to one's own life, such as the acquisition of assets or the care of the body or the spirit, if I consider that his usual behavior conforms to certain demands, or if I think that he will follow my advice regarding the matters for which I am consulted, I will do so whole heartedly and not just as a way to get rid of him by downloading my conscience [...] Precisely with this same criterion with respect to his own city must the wise man live by; if he thinks that his city is not well governed, he must say it, so long as he does not talk in haste or put himself in danger of death.

Listening and keeping quiet imply paying attention; at first, oneself and, later, the other one. It is not possible to be silent in order to hear if one does not control one's impulses to speak. Here the student hushes up not out of ignorance, lack of knowledge, fear or indifference, but because one is obligated to listen, one must learn to restrain her/his voice. To obligate one to listen is to practice veridiction with reference to the power of ruling so that the other one (student) obeys. Let us consider a world full of information, mainly proportioned by the mass media, one so crowded with communication that in the social networks and *microblogging*, it is difficult to silence. She/he who is



not on Facebook or Twitter does not exist, some say; notwithstanding the fact that both communication platforms are fed largely by opinions of everybody in the world in which anything is said by anyone; hence, better not to exist. The problem lies in the accessibility of the whole world, in the flexibility of opinions, in the waste of words that profoundly damage one's capacity to listen and keep quiet. Probably one of the greatest evils of humankind is this self-exhibition. To be exposed to the waste of words profoundly weakens the exercise of *parrhesia* as the practice of making oneself heard because, faced with the lack of power to keep quiet, it is impossible to make oneself heard.

In *parrhesia* what is exercised is truth-telling on the teacher's part, as is keeping quiet on the students' part. Due to this Foucault relates three elements of the practice of medicine to the exercise of the teacher of *parrhesia*. The teacher makes her/himself heard only when things are going bad; she/he prescribes while persuading at the same time; in other words, she/he must say what has to be done but, also, explain why it has to be done and she/he must always consider the whole and not only a part of the problem; think completely about the regimen of the city as if it were a regimen of the body. It is necessary to feel that oneself, life, the world and certain things are not well; one must have the strength to trust that something can be done and that, although it may be only for an instant, it is possible to be well, not individually but universally.

The second circle is of the practice (*pragmata*). These are all the activities, the difficulties, the practices, the exercises, and ways to be applied, of which completion requires an effort. The method for this practice consists of putting the intelligence, memory and reflection to work. *Pragmata* here refers to everything we apply ourselves to, it means "let's do it", thus an alert intelligence, good memory and the ability to reflect must occur in everyday life; and this demands great energy, let's say it "demands a lot of work"; Foucault says (2010, p. 250) that the apprentice should not moderate his efforts and must work all the way until the end of the road.

Plato (1992, p. 340b-341a) in Letter Seven says:

First of all he should corroborate if Dionysius was really inflamed like fire by philosophy [by the exercise of *parrhesia*] [...] Well, there is a very discreet process to perform this test [...] the philosophical work needs to be explained in its entirety, as well as all the work and efforts required [...] [He must put forth] all his efforts with those of the guide who is directing him and not

slow down until he has fully reached all the objectives, or finds the necessary strength to be able to walk without his instructor. This is the mood that the man lives with, devoted to his ordinary activities, whatever they may be, but always mindful of philosophy and to a daily lifestyle which grants him along with sobriety an alert intelligence, memory and capacity for reflection.

Different from the knowledge of self in relation to one's personal well-being, this is not about a conversation, but rather following a path, to work and carry out strenuous exercises. Nor is it the devotion to external realities, but the practice, in everyday life, to learn, to remember and to reason. It is not about the change of view, but of the work, or even better, of the exercise on oneself, which is the practice of self on self. The method, as a practice of *parrhesia*, demands intelligence, memory and reflection. Intelligence is the astuteness to resolve conflicts, an example of that is Odysseus, the *polus pragmata* (he of many resources); memory is the ability to remember, the capacity to retain perceptions and facts; and reflection is an action of thought which allows you to change direction, to look into the folds of reality, and with that make decisions.

Intelligence, memory and reflection are the fundamental skills to: learn easily (*eumathes*), to remember or memorize what has been learned (*mnemon*) and to reason or use reasoning when making decisions (*logízzesthai dynatos*). "It is the practice in everyday life, that kind of day-to-day activity, within which an individual should [with great effort] display himself *eumathes* (capable of learning), *mnemon* (capable of remembering) and *logízzesthai* (capable of reasoning)."

To exercise power over oneself, as a practice, implies willingness to set the body toward every day work. Here, work is viewed as an effort to learn, to memorize and to reason, and work as in the production or manufacturing of something. What is produced by the practice of truth-telling? In the area of currency exchange or finance it seems to us very little, but a lot in the specific effects of decision-making or elections made as *parrhesia*, both individually as well as in public. In other words, as ascending in democracy or as first by status in monarchy, the product of the practice of truth-telling lies in whether or not to go to war, to write a law or not, to finance or not certain social or cultural projects, etc. The decisions made as a consequence of *parrhesia* produce concrete things that mark the life of a whole community. The aptitude to learn, to memorize and to reason by the parrhesiastic student, serve his exercise of power as they have been practiced in body and soul.



He does not practice these skills as ornaments of life, as vanity or stamps of pride, but rather as substantive aspects of his work. The parrhesiastic is the most practical and pragmatic of all mankind. He practices and acquires experience in his work, transforming work itself into his own practice and vital experience. It is, as we said, a pragmatic practice of spirituality.

Finally, there is the circle of knowledge, which refers to the learning of things themselves. For somebody to be able to say that they know something, five elements are required: 1) name, 2) definition, 3) image, 4) to have the right opinion on the matter, and 5) “to know the thing itself” which means to practice and confront the aforementioned. It is about knowing what it is, how it is and why a certain thing is the way it is, be it: politics, power, justice, body, work, education, etc.

To be heard, coupled with practice and knowledge, are political missions of the teaching of *parrhesia* to the ruler. The three processes are exercises in power, and in and of itself the teaching of *parrhesia* is biopower as much as government of itself as to the government of others. The teaching of *parrhesia* is immeasurable to the school and the curricula even though both are used as a first instance. The *parrhesia*, as a fundamental quality of biopower, is the practical exercises over oneself, in the form of listening, practice and knowledge. Life-changing, strenuous and difficult exercises for those who perform them.

FINAL THOUGHTS

We must change our view in order to modify the horizon of the known. The truth lies in our own transformation. It is about having a plurality of perspectives so as to prevent our remaining immobilized in a fixed point of view. And just as Foucault would say (1986, p. 12): It is important to think in a different way, and perceive in a different way, because there are times in life “in which the question of knowing whether it is possible to think differently from what you already think, and to perceive differently from what you already see is essential to continue contemplating and thinking”.

We have to question our own historical account with the criteria of truth that have been instilled into us as individuals, to reflect, such as Foucault has mentioned, on the basis of a new ethic that links all individual action in line with the collective interests. The care of oneself and truth-telling not to think of ourselves based on a new psychic structure, but precisely because



we have the need to occupy ourselves in a different way, with new questions that contradict the continent of truth inscribed in this modernity.

As Wilhelm Schmid says (2002, p. 27)

What currently comes to the fore is not the hermeneutics of self, but the practice of me which can become a praxis of freedom. That is, the essential point is no longer the question of whether or not we have conquered “freedom” or if we have given up on it; the decisive point is the development of praxis. The issue has to do with personal decisions that we must make at all times, every step of the way. This choice is decisive when closing or opening the horizon of possibilities. The total absence of practice in matters pertaining to personal election is when the *aporia* that immobilizes us presides.

It is, firstly, a strong sensitivity endowed with a capacity to observe and the openness to experience. In this sense, it is a form of knowledge, how to identify yourself in the world, the perception of oneself and of knowing how to behave. It is, as Foucault says, the “art of living”. Meanwhile, how should I transform myself to *be able* to access the truth? The care of oneself and truth-telling are abilities, skills, exercises that figure and disfigure life itself. The biopower is the art of living, it implies the capacity of personal election in the sense of being able to opt, to accept or reject how we live. The ability to establish a foundation of the individual, that isn’t in ontological terms, nor based upon relativist pragmatism. It means to assume the formation and transformation of oneself as a way of life.

It is precisely in the work upon oneself, on certain practices, of imposing on ourselves certain rules of behavior, but mostly in the possibility of transformation to oneself, as ethics is achieved and with that a way to live life. As has been said, life itself does not just happen. It must be gotten, practiced, exercised and rehearsed so it can live. Create your own lifestyle, an aesthetical existence.

It is clear that we have adopted a strategy of biopower, as creator and creative, in a positive and alternative sense to the alienating forms, coercive and submissive, of the alienation and suppression of desire prevailing in this globalized world. Biopower is also a form of negative control.

As a subject, truth, conscience and sensitivity are the limits within which we are constituted. To suggest biopower as a way of life means to recognize ourselves in the forms that we create from certain techniques of self as every day practices, which allow us to govern ourselves and to transform what we



are into something different, occasionally opposed to rules and institutional norms, and at times accepting them, but never as eternal and immutable, only as a strategy for the transformation of our subjectivities.

In this sense we can identify an important difference between the concept that establishes that the possibility of the transformation of the subject, of the care of oneself and the practice of self with a corrective and formative sense that does not depend on being young, as Socrates seemed to imply when addressing Alcibiades in the *Banquet*, and neither is the issue of truth-telling only possible in adulthood or old age. Doubtless, one is never too young to take care of oneself or for truth-telling, as it is never too late for the elder to take care of themselves or give truth-telling a try. All of the above makes us think of the possibility of going back to being what we never were, as Foucault says (2002, p. 105):

We must heal ourselves, even when we are young. A doctor, of course, has a better possibility of success when consulted at the onset of the illness and not at the end. Anyway, although one does not make it right when we are young, there is still time to do it. Even though we toughen up, there exists the means to right it, to correct ourselves, to be back to what we should have been but never were. To be what we never were: this, it seems to me, is one of the elements, one of the fundamental issues of the practice of self.

In the practices of self, as caring for oneself and truth-telling, lays the constitution of subjectivity and biopower. To be back to what we never were, demands the governing of self and of others who exercise power. Biopower, which is *epimeleia heautou*, consists of an attitude, closer look, purification, modification and transfiguration. *Parrhesia*, is the ability to express everything, to be heard, as a practice and as work.

With this it is clear that if we accept accessing the truth only as conscience, we would be limited by a reasonable subjectivity. We will be in effect making the illustrated postulate of being able to conduct ourselves following our own reason, and thus will be autonomous, no doubt, of our own sensitivity and affections, we will carry on through the world as perfect automatons, capable of functioning, but alien to our own bodies and to another form of subjectivity that can effectively be risky, especially considering the principles of immutability, indifference and insignificance that characterize our times.

To bet on the difference, to the day-to-day asymmetries, to the local, not as privilege of the private over the public, but as the only current venue for the production of truth, of creation and the ethical-political realization. This does not imply the need to abandon the universal, but to accept that in what is imposed on us as globalization we do not recognize ourselves as sensitive individuals, instead we are being treated as pieces of a market that in spite of everything is always relying on the concrete, in a defined space not only as a liquid abstraction or global speculation. For Peter Sloterdijk, for example, the inequalities and the differences are what allow us to face an ever-increasing indifferent world, a state of things where we hold on to one's own language, habits, what is different from what has been established by prevailing concepts.

The lack of capacity for the future has a name: *monoglosia*, that is, to hold on to our native language. According to the modernists, the world should be constructed in such a way that all admissible situations could be expressed in *basic English*: if at airports and in discussions of board of directors this has proven to be highly useful, why not also in all other circumstances. For a similar reason—due to the resistance to the spread of developed cultural praxis—positivist planners are outraged by the science of the spirit in general, and especially by the literary and musical training plans. It is clear to them: a reading of *Fausto* takes entire days, *War and Peace* entertains the reader for several weeks; however, those who want to familiarize themselves with Beethoven's piano sonatas and with Rihm string quartets have to spend several months. (Sloterdijk, 2007, p. 309)

We will be true individuals not only through our conscience, but also through our daily practices, the everyday training with others, at home, with our family, at school, in college and privately. Accepting that institutions no longer exist as we knew them as they have succumbed under the control of society⁴,

4 “All the enclosed institutions are undergoing a general crisis: jails, hospitals, factories, schools, families. The family is an “interior” crisis, just as are the other interiors (the student, the professional, etc.). Competent ministers constantly announce the supposedly necessary reforms. Reform schools, reform industry, reform the hospital, the army, the jail; but everyone knows that, in the long term, these institutions are done with. We pretend only to manage the agony and maintain people occupied while these new forces that are already calling at our doors are installed. It is about the *societies of control* that are teaching these disciplines.” (Deleuze, 1999, p. 278)



that there is an instituting process bigger than ourselves, but which is not foreign to us.

But also, and above all, in recognizing that what constitutes the world is the nonsense. To assume the nonsense as the impulse for a different world and chaos as constitutive of our own subjectivity, allows us to raise the need to create other institutions where, at least partially and temporarily, we can be recognized. Education as biopower is the nonsense that enables life.

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