

# DARING TO TELL THE TRUTH FROM THE GREEK'S GOOD CITIZEN, TO NIETZSCHE'S RELATIVISM AND FOUCAULT'S CARE OF THE SELF

## Atreverse a decir la verdad desde el buen ciudadano griego, al relativismo de Nietzsche y el cuidado de sí en Foucault

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### Abstract

Throughout humanity, telling the truth has always been seen or understood as a challenge, as a defiance of the status quo or what is established or known, and could very easily be torn down by an announced truth at any given moment. That is the main reason a speaker, in most cases, will avoid expressing his/her interpretation of what is real and true, and will prefer to intentionally alter it with convenient and accommodating lies that will not result in any type of discomfort for the people around. This text presents a general overview of three very important and crucial moments in history, in which daring to tell the truth came to be the very philosophical foundation and gave some specific characters in history the importance and relevance they have been given today. First, it covers a brief review of the ancient Greek term *Parrhesia*, its relation to other relevant philosophical terms and its importance within the different philosophy schools of the era. Later, the process of how truth is started to be manipulated from a Christian stance and later the proposal of relativity from Friedrich Nietzsche. Finally, there will be a reflection about Michael Foucault's proposal that relates *parrhesia* to the care of the self. As a conclusion, an open discussion focusing on the recent post-truth issues illustrating the mechanics involved since ancient times in regard to telling the truth.

### Keywords

Truth, *parrhesia*, relativism, subjectivity, care of the self, Foucault.

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### Abstract

Throughout humanity, telling the truth has always been seen or understood as a challenge, as a defiance of the status quo or what is established or known, and could very easily be torn down by an announced truth at any given moment. That is the main reason a speaker, in most cases, will avoid expressing his/her interpretation of what is real and true, and will prefer to intentionally alter it with convenient and accommodating lies that will not result in any type of discomfort for the people around. This text presents a general overview of three very important and crucial moments in history, in which daring to tell the truth came to be the very philosophical foundation and gave some specific characters in history the importance and relevance they have been given today. First, it covers a brief review of the ancient Greek term *Parrhesía*, its relation to other relevant philosophical terms and its importance within the different philosophy schools of the era. Later, the process of how truth is started to be manipulated from a Christian stance and later the proposal of relativity from Friedrich Nietzsche. Finally, there will be a reflection about Michael Foucault's proposal that relates *parrhesía* to the care of the self. As a conclusion, an open discussion focusing on the recent post-truth issues illustrating the mechanics involved since ancient times in regard to telling the truth.

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## Introduction

The aim of this text is to present truth as courage, through a path that begins with the exemplary Greek citizen -Athenian, to be precise-; then it will go through Christianity as an imposing form that unifies the value of truth in order to make it one. It will then point to the official objector of such truth, Nietzsche -who dares to claim lying as an equally vigorous way of achieving meaning-; and will finish with the return of the Greek tradition's own ability to tell the truth as the alternative to overcome the risk of relativism.

The problem to be addressed is the ability to tell the truth as the willingness to understand that it is a challenge that went beyond the merely epistemological and became a problem of action, i.e., of a lucid encounter between ethics and politics. This *aletheia* that occurs is what can be seen in Socrates, the man who was capable of truth. Foucault (2010) exposes in detail and property these athletes of ethical and political truth that was at the same time a truth of themselves.

The main ideas that strengthen the problem are aimed at abandoning the comfort in which *aletheia* had ceased to be an aspiration and became a certainty without discussion, without anticipation. Truth ceased to be, at some point in Christian tradition, that know-how that demanded challenge and fearlessness, and became a surprising imposition that demanded obedience to dogma. Then *aletheia* ceased to be that unsettling interrogation of self to become a motto to be followed, a cer-

tainty to be revealed, a treasure to be unearthed, a command to be obeyed or an image to be forced to accommodate. Truth became official and the ability to access to it was reduced to obedience.

Moreover, the topicality of the subject lies in raising the question of what is certain, coming out of the stupor, admitting that *aletheia* was no longer a certainty to be abandoned with confidence and became a challenge to be faced with courage and bravery.

This text does not attempt to present a mere historical itinerary of the development of the concept of *parrhesía*, but to show, through a careful investigative methodology, how this concept configures a reinvention of *aletheia* as a public matter, as will be found in the first section. In a second moment it will delve into truth in Christianity and Nietzsche's relativism, since *parrhesía* as the importance of knowing and telling a particular truth that obeys the concrete political situation, not only goes hand in hand with the physical aspect, but also strongly involves the spiritual aspect, which entails the formation of the being from within, and from Nietzsche the idea is to discover a subject capable of accessing the clearest and most authentic reality possible, in which he does not have to hide his way of thinking when it comes to making his interpretations. Thirdly, the focus will be on Foucault's approach to *parrhesía*, which is decisive, since it is part of an ambitious project that seeks to explain the relations between power, truth, and subjectivity.

Documentary research with qualitative-descriptive analysis will show that it is no coincidence that today's Western states insist on calling themselves democrats, as the Greeks did. For this reason, it is necessary to have the courage to tell the truth again -a concrete, specific, clear and punctual truth, not a transcendent truth- to a community that most likely will not want to hear it.

## *Parrhesía*<sup>1</sup> and good citizenship

It is common for those who study or have studied philosophy to first focus on the reconstruction, analysis and often the confrontation of the ideas proposed in the early periods of antiquity when the individual started thinking from a more subjective point of view (Hadot, 2006). At the beginning, only theories that seemed abstract and out of place for the feelings and thoughts of ordinary people were evident, since they left aside the main idea that proposes that philosophy should be understood basically as a way of living, in which appear a set of spiritual practices



and exercises that can lead the human being to have a better future, by highlighting the path that can lead him to reach maximum virtue (*ἀρετή*, *areté*) ideal of every man, not only in antiquity but also in the present time. However, it is necessary to understand that it is not up to philosophy to show a way to reach an end, nor does it represent that end in itself; on the contrary, it represents a way of constantly questioning oneself about the different questions that have surrounded the existence of the human being during the recurring of the material history and even beyond, in the mental and spiritual aspects.

Both in antiquity and in contemporary times, in Philosophy and in any other aspect of life, man has wandered in search of what represents the supreme good, which therefore has a teleological character, since it directs him to achieve a specific purpose that is always seen as improvement, either of happiness as in Epicurus, Aristotle and Bentham, or perfection as in Plato or Hegel, or duty as in Kant or Dworkin: all of them are variants of what the Greeks knew as virtue (*ἀρετή*, *areté*). However, to reach this state, it is necessary that as Michel Foucault says following Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics* 1140a et seq. the individual manages to be as prudent (*Φρόνησις*, *phronēsis*) as possible. Such prudence becomes with the time a call to understand, as Fornet et al. (1984) said that the limits of what should be said and what should be done depending on the context, even more so because for different circumstances, parts of the story have been cautiously silenced or eliminated.

Depending on the context, it is then a matter of recognizing one's own limits in order not to transgress those spaces that may eventually generate disagreements between individuals of the same community or with other communities. In fact, there are certain moments, especially in public life, and particularly in politics, in which truth acquires a preferential place within the space-time. What happens in the political space when avoiding a disagreement is equivalent to deceiving the interlocutor, who most of the time is an opponent? Or, on the contrary: what happens when disagreement is sought because it is a tactic of concealment of the truth, understood as *what should be publicly known*? And even more: what happens when the truth is absolutely necessary even though it is not prudent to tell it, both for the one who is harmed by the concealment and for the one who dares to pronounce it as if to lift a veil that covers something undoubtedly shameful, reproachable or criminal? It is then that practices as ancient as that of *parrhesía* (*παρρησία*) appear in the panorama to give society a better vision of what the action of speaking frankly means.



In the wide range of possible topics to address within the studies of ancient philosophy, *parrhesía* occupies a unique place because it is both a fundamental concept in ancient thought and a term not sufficiently explored today, at least in relation to other classic terms in this area, such as *phronesis* understood as “practical wisdom” in the Aristotelian framework and related to why one decides to act in some way rather than another and *areté* seen as virtue. Considering the latter, it is recommended to conduct some considerations about *parrhesía* and the importance that daring to speak the truth was acquiring through time, and how this was transformed in a way that ended up having a degradation and degeneration due to manipulations that put it at the service of the purely intentional and instrumental, until reaching what is known today as post-truth.

When sensitive matters are brought to light, they are almost automatically rejected by people who are not prepared to assimilate the consequences of such frankness. Socially, it has been learned that it is better to remain silent when one does not have the physical and moral guarantees to freely exercise the right to speak, to say what one has to say, what is necessary. It is necessary to understand the social and temporal context in order to decide to speak, without provoking any kind of rupture within the environment in which one is working. In this way, it is evident that when something cannot be discussed, it is because there are certain limits that must be respected, certain constraints that cannot be evaded or certain limitations that cannot be remedied, i.e., because they are truths that, although they are perceived by some, if they were to be exposed in any way to those who, either by calculation, naivety or stupidity, are blind to the evidence, could affect in various ways a wider group of people or the very one who is exposed with the speech. As José Martí says:

Thus, there are many things that are true, even if they are not seen. There are crazy people, of course, and they say that what you see with your eyes is only true, as if anyone could see the thought, or the affection, or what the father is talking about inside his gray head when he is working, and has enough money to buy horses like silk or velocipedes like light for his son! (Martí, 1997, pp. 112-113).

The word *parrhesía* (*παρρησία*) can be etymologically decomposed into *παν*, meaning “everything” and *ρησις* or *ρημα* which can be translated as “speech”. Thus is feasible to state that etymologically *parrhesía* means “speech about everything”, or simplified, “to say everything”. To find its first appearance in Greek literature, it is necessary to go back to



the middle of the 5th century B.C., specifically, to what is written in some texts by Euripides. In these, the ancient Greek mentioned *parrhesía* as the inherent right of every Greek citizen to speak about matters concerning the polis. It is in the tragedy *Hippolytus* that the word *parrhesía* appears, as Euripides (1960):

FEDRA: [...] This, indeed, is what is killing me, my friends, the fear that one day I may be caught dishonoring my husband and the children I bore; may they, free to speak frankly [*parrhesía*] and in the prime of life, dwell in the illustrious city of Athens, enjoying a good name for their mother's sake! Surely it enslaves a man, however resolute in spirit, to know the faults of his mother or father (p. 420).

From that frankness, as the term *parrhesía* is usually translated, the first interesting detail that can be derived is that *parrhesía*, being a right of the Greek citizen, implied at the same time a set of exclusions. Neither slaves, nor foreigners, nor women, for example, could exercise this freedom, since they were not considered citizens with full rights within the polis. Note that the term *parrhesía* was understood in a clearly political sense, according to Foucault (2010), since in that context it constituted the legitimate right of the Greek citizen to actively influence, through the greatest frankness, the ups and downs of the city.

But from the Greek context we can understand an even broader meaning of *parrhesía*. The meaning given to this term will be later presented and will not be limited to the exercise of a political right, but will become a consistent practice of telling the truth, the whole truth, without holding anything back, no matter how uncomfortable this situation may be for the other person. In this sense, the one who tells the truth, by saying everything without concealment, is not talking completely about everything that comes to his head, rather, telling everything is understood as the subject's aim to affect the other as much as himself, i.e., through the discourse the person seeks the transformation of the other and of the self. It can be understood that truth, in this sense, is not something that the individual possesses and the other does not. In the exercise of *parrhesía*, understood as an existential practice of full frankness, both the one who exercises *parrhesía* and the one who listens to it know the truth. The point lies in the effects produced by such practice, as expressed by Thoreau (2014) when he states:

But in such cases one must be very vigilant to avoid acting out of obstinacy or undue respect for the opinion of others. What must be understood is that by acting in this way one is doing what one ought to do and what corresponds to the moment (p. 51).

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*Parrhesía* is by antonomasia, a modality of life studied and adopted since ancient Greece, which etymologically refers to “the activity of saying everything: *pan rhema Parrhesiázestai* is to say everything” (Foucault, 2010, p. 28). The first to propose this art in antiquity and in turn were considered as founders were Antisthenes (445-360 BC) and Diogenes of Sinope (400-325 BC), who thought it was essential that the truth had no barriers to access determined by social status, economic or political power. Both thinkers belonged to the school of the Cynics, in which they tried to encourage the need for and importance of speaking the truth regardless of the consequences that this would have on their lives or on the lives of others. All this, as expressed by Asuaje (2014) with the ultimate goal of freeing from social ties and being able to reach the point of sincerity in their existence.

The Cynics promoted this practice in Greece, putting on the table the importance of investigating what is true and saying it openly in front of those who were affected by it, without taking into consideration that it could be labeled as rude or even worse transgressor of the divine, human and/or citizen laws (Soto, 2014), which determined -and still do- the order of a community. The person who engaged in this practice centuries later was called *Parrhesiastés*, the subject who fearlessly told the truth, as expressed by Foucault (2010), in any space, even risking his own integrity, his own life. The Cynic school, founded by Antisthenes in the 4th century B.C., represented in the best way the spirit of *parrhesía* understood as a way of being, as an existential exercise. Frankness is no longer conveyed through words, but life itself, in its random daily life, becomes a constant and risky daring to speak the truth, in the context in which it must appear.

The cynic, equated with a dog, lay on every corner of the polis, lying in the street; he was barefoot and ragged, subverting social conventions without any modesty whatsoever. The personification of the Cynic school, and, by extension, of the fiercest *parrhesía*, was the aforementioned Diogenes of Sinope. *Parrhesía* was, is and will be freedom, in the words of Foucault (2010) and above all freedom of speech, for the only law that matters is that which is in harmony with nature; all other laws are futile.

Famous is his anecdote with Alexander the Great, collected by Diogenes Laertius: “When he was sunbathing on the Skull, Alexander stood before him and said: “Ask me whatever you want”. And he answered: “Do not overshadow me” (Laercio, 2007, p. 38).

*Parrhesía* is in this moment a provocation, but also a manifestation of a continuity between an inner truth and its external display. Dio-



genes of Sinope, like the rest of the Cynics, by embodying the exercise of *parrhesía* with such fidelity, ended up being existentially consistent with what he said. Among those considered great philosophers and also a great *parrhesiastés* is the figure of Socrates, who was constantly confronting the Athenians in the street, pointed out by Foucault, (2004) saying what he saw as truth and inviting them to take care of themselves through the cultivation of wisdom, truth and the perfection of their souls, since, in the words of the same author (2010) it was essential for a correct care of oneself (*Epiméleia heautou*).

It was essential to begin by having a free soul, which for the Greeks, especially the Cynics, was achieved through the correct use of *parrhesía*, and it was in an attempt to encourage this practice that Socrates in his dialogue with Alcibiades -a personage of the Athenian elite who sought in the philosopher the teacher who would guide him to be a good ruler- tried to make him see how before being a worthy leader, he had to dedicate a space to take care of himself, and for this purpose it was necessary to be transparent, a situation that was achieved through the exercise of *parrhesía*, which as a result made man a better person (Plato, 1871), not only for the development of his own being, but also as a fundamental gear within a given social group.

For Socrates, referred to by Plato (1871) "every man who takes care of his body, takes care of what belongs to him, but not of himself" (p.186), that is why he who is not capable of taking care of himself, will hardly be able to lead others on the path of righteousness or truth. However, the exercise of *parrhesía* can lead to dire consequences, as it happened to Socrates, who met his death for speaking sincerely and critically in front of the sophists, "by inciting citizens to take care of themselves, in their reason, truth and soul, through *zétesis* (inquiry), *exétasis* (examination of the soul) and *epiméleia* (care of oneself), to practice virtue" (Soto, 2014, p.16).

In accordance with the above, a new group of philosophers known as the Epicureans emerged, for whom *parrhesía* is deeply connected to self-care, to such an extent that it was considered by Foucault (2004) as "a technique of spiritual guidance for the education of the soul" (p. 52). This was a modality that gradually evolved within the same philosophical schools, but with the same purpose: to turn man into a better citizen, by making himself a better person, so that he could be a real contributor to the society to which he belonged.

*Parrhesía* should then be understood as a dialogue or a debate aimed at finding a common truth. As already mentioned, the one who



practices *parrhesía* already possesses, deep within himself, the truth and the only thing he does is to state it boldly and regardless the possible consequences that such an act may have, not only for the subject but also for his environment. A paradigmatic example of *parrhesía* is provided by Plato, who in his letter VII narrates his encounter with Dionysius, tyrant of Syracuse. Together with Dion, a young politician related to Dionysius, he undertakes the mission of implanting in Syracuse his ideas about the State, virtue and justice.

However, Plato did not seek to reach agreements with Dionysius or to engage in a fruitful dialogue. Plato exercised *parrhesía*, i.e., he spoke his truth, a truth whose content sprang from his own being, to be exposed regardless of the context, for he spoke that truth, even in the knowledge of the uncontrollable consequences it might entail. In fact, the political and social environment surrounding Dionysius ended up influencing him in such a way that what Plato said to him was assumed in the worst way, resulting in a total failure. Plato sought to influence the tyrant of Syracuse so that the truth would unfold, starting from the implementation of certain principles considered necessary for a good, just and virtuous government. In the end, Plato was risking his own life. By stating without holding anything back, what he considered to be true about what was considered to be the best government, suffering terrible reprisals from a tyrant with great power. There is an asymmetry between the one who exercises *parrhesía* and the one who listens to him, and for this reason the element of risk is inherent to the mode of being of *parrhesía*, which allows the subject to be neither unfinished in his acting nor in his saying.

Thus, *parrhesía* has a double dimension. On the one hand, there is an external space, in which there is freedom of speech of the one who exercises *parrhesía*. On the other hand, there is an internal dimension that consists of the truthfulness of the attitude, which can also be understood as recognizability and authenticity in his way of being in the world, where what is being expressed is in accordance with the way it is done. Thus, whoever practices *parrhesía* uses freedom to speak frankly and tell the truth, the truth that goes hand in hand with his transformation and the possible transformation of those who listen to him. It can be affirmed that *parrhesía* contains a courageous commitment to truth, aimed at the general improvement of a given community. However, it is not easy to lead others on the path of righteousness and truth, and even more so from the exercise of *parrhesía*, since it can easily lead to dire consequences, such as the death of the parrhesiasta. It is very important to keep in mind that he is a critic of politics because he has an interest in his



community and not because he aspires to power. This is a very important aspect if we bear in mind that post-truth is a thing of the powerful or of those aspiring to power, as will be seen later in this paper.

As Montaigne said in his Essays:

It is to the truth the lie a cursed vice. We are not men, nor are we bound to one another except by words. If we knew all its horror and transcendence, we would persecute it with blood and fire, with much greater motive than other sins. I believe that boys are ordinarily punished without just cause, for innocent mistakes, and that they are tormented for thoughtless actions lacking importance and consequence. Lying alone, and somewhat less stubbornness, seem to me to be the faults that should be combated at all costs: both things grow with them, and since the tongue has taken that false direction, it is a pilgrimage the work it costs and how impossible it is to bring it to the right path; whereby it happens that we commonly see people lie who in other respects are excellent, who have no inconvenience in incurring in this vice (Chap. IX).

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## Truth in Christianity and Nietzsche's Relativism

It is understood from the above that *parrhesía* as the importance of knowing and telling a particular truth that obeys the concrete political situation, not only goes hand in hand with the physical aspect, but also it involves the spiritual aspect which relates to the formation of the being from within. Therefore, and giving even more sense to the theme of truth within history and which transcended to a spiritual plane, the idea of a superior God who dwells in that spiritual space and who sends his prophets to earth to promulgate the truth related to a life after the material one will emerge centuries later. As Nietzsche (2003) states, such doctrines came with ideas of “sacrifice of all independence, of all freedom of spirit, of all fierceness and at the same time a servility” (p.78), in favor of the neighbor, much more praiseworthy if it is at the cost of the own tranquility of the one who acts as a servant. Good and evil also appeared as the foundation on which the ideology of Christianity was founded, hand in hand with the punishment or retribution that for the actions of man in his daily life -in reality- will be obtained in the afterlife, related to the philosophical idea related to truth brought from ancient Greece.

Truth ceased to be a “tangible” concept in reality, and became an element that manifested itself in another dimension different from the one that can be seen and touched, which can only be accessed after the

passage of death. It will therefore be thanks to what will later be known specifically as Christianity, by which man ceases to worry about himself and focuses his existence on the complacency of a god, who is in the beyond, which will allow not to separate the idea of transcendence from the human being.

In the face of the finitude of the body, the promise of a glorious eternity becomes the highest value, but, paradoxically, in order to fulfill this objective, the individual must satisfy as little as possible his own aspirations or desires. Truth would therefore no longer be understood in the Greek sense of unveiling, but rather in the biblical sense of devotion and loyalty. Such devotion will be reflected in the figure of its prophets, as transmitters of the divine message, in the case of the Old Testament; and in the New Testament it will be condensed in the figure of the person of Jesus. The apostle John mentions it in the prologue of his Gospel: “[...] grace and truth have come to us through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17), and it will be through him that grace and truth will be given to the subject as a gift and revelation of God’s love.

The discipline by which this type of thinking is established in the subject will be known as “Christian morality”. If ethics is the discipline by which the use of reason is regulated, morality will be considered, from Christianity, as a theological discipline, which guides the subject in his good actions from faith. This guide is based on norms or values, as an expression of an agreement of the subject with the society to which he belongs, since it must be emphasized that group welfare will always be more important than personal welfare. Then, when the benefit of others is sought over one’s own, the renouncing subject acquires a value that will be compensated in a life full of glory in the hereafter, where there is a superior being who sees all and judges all.

By showing that there is a being superior to the human being, all weakness is justified in the latter through guilt, sickness, poverty, everything that has to do with suffering. Even so, the human being will have to seek the mercy of that superior Being, through a servile action and absent of all vanity. It will be the teachings of Jesus that will determine the guide of this morality, since he said “I am the way, and the truth and the life”, and the behavior of the Christians is directed from it.

Christian morality can only be understood from faith, since this is the one that sustains the belief in a being and a life of which there can be no proof in the reality of the subject. The one that gives conscience of what is good or bad, but at the same time pretends to be too benevolent, promoting the forgiveness of the enemy, satisfying the one who misbe-



haves, basically, the one that incites to turn the other cheek, instead of looking for one's own complacency.

Contrary to these ideas, Friedrich Nietzsche presented a critique of Christian morality and what is to be understood as truth or true:

[...] we believe that morality, in the sense it has had until now, i.e., the morality of intentions, has been a prejudice, a precipitation, a provisionality perhaps, a thing of a rank similar to astrology and alchemy, but in any case something that has to be overcome (Nietzsche, 2003, p. 62)

Christian morality was the decadence of the subject and of belief, all thanks to the fact that it is concerned with preserving a well-being that, according to its assumptions, can only be acquired after death, taking for granted that this will be the reality of the subject and not the one he is living at the moment, in the words of Nietzsche (1967):

[...] the master of morality sets himself up as the master of the end of life; he invents a second life for it, and by virtue of this artifice he takes our old and ordinary life out of its old and ordinary corner (p.18).

Hand in hand with these ideas will be a religion that dominates from fear and the needs created in its followers, founding "truths" at their convenience. It will be now, more than ever, when it is evident that the power of possessing the truth will be for the one who is able to impose his way of thinking, not for the one who worries about obtaining and disseminating it, as proposed by *parrhesía*. For Nietzsche (1967), Christian morality was the way to the creation of a false morality, since it forces the subject to deny his reality and his own integrity, in order to assume that which others impose on him as real and true.

Therefore, Nietzsche (1967) proposed that the human being returned to take care of himself, leaving behind all the ideas implanted from the ecclesiastical power, within which stands out the idea of a world in decadence, where everyone as a flock must be happy with their lot and help the weakest, leaving aside any idea of improvement and complacency of their being, in their reality.

For the German philosopher, "Man must be concerned about his life; what he knows must allow him to continue living and growing, otherwise it would be meaningless" (Giraldo, 2008, p.134). In addition to living in the dichotomy between good and evil, the human being has disrupted these values and therefore is alien to the truth. He criticizes that what is evil in Christianity becomes enjoyment, the symbol of redemption to be well in the hereafter, almost disappearing the essence of the individual.



According to Giraldo (2008), it is necessary, to relate this action to the morality of the slave, who is weak and incapable of changing his situation, either because it pleases him or because he does not want to see beyond. Man must return to the idea of the ancient philosophers, of the cultivation of being from his own existence with strong and dominant morals, which stand out among others, without feeling that he is acting badly.

Morality was related to the domination of a culture, i.e., whoever is not within the norm is treated as seditious and to the same extent repressed and rejected by the community he belongs to (Giraldo, 2008). This leads the individual to take extreme positions, either he is inside or he is outside, there is no intermediate position. And although there are no middle positions, there are no certain truths either; because what for one is true and defends it to death, for the other there may be another completely different version. For example, for Nietzsche, God should represent the best of that culture, and with all the variables, he should not only symbolize goodness, because that would show a lack of interest in the future (Giraldo, 2008). He thinks that religion makes the individual feel inferior and that should not be the ideal of the human being, who should strive to be superior, embracing everything that is within the possibilities of the intellect, while maintaining the responsibility he learned from having to appear before a superior being, as expressed by Giraldo (2008). He must overcome everything that seems to be deceitful, in the manner of Nietzsche (1984):

Abstracting from all theology and the war that is waged against it, it follows that the world is neither good nor bad, neither the best nor the worst, and that these ideas of good and bad have no meaning except in relation to men and even then are not justified: we must renounce the conception of the injurious and panegyrist world (p.41).

The intention of Nietzsche (1984) is that the subject can access the clearest and most authentic reality possible, in which he does not have to hide his way of thinking when making his interpretations, because the truth will be equally subject to the perspective from which it is described. Therefore, this remains being problematic because the differences in the ways of thinking and seeing things permeated by a previously acquired culture that can lead the subject to different paths to the reality that can perceive.

This same philosopher refers to ideas proposed by Kant (2007), who began with the concern for the knowledge of the *thing itself*, showing the limitations to access knowledge and how it is difficult for the subject to appropriate the concept of truth, because every notion com-



ing from the scientism of this era was becoming a manipulative reason, which leads, in the words of Giraldo (2009) to "(...) the impossibility of knowing with our reason the object itself, and the possibility of error in the interpretation of what reality is" (p.55), i.e., despite possessing the reason that allows him to understand what he sees, man must also use his subjectivism and empiricism -this is what Kant says- to interpret what he perceives through the senses.

One can only have knowledge of that which one can see, feel, experience, or in Kant's (2007) way, of that which enters into the categories of time and space; the objectivity of the real will therefore be obtained by means of sensibility and understanding. Therefore, the knowledge of the subject, according to Kant (2007), does not have access to reality, because it will always be limited by its subjectivity.

Likewise, Nietzsche (1984) also wants to highlight the change that occurred in the nineteenth century in the way the environment that surrounds the subject is considered, being more objective and certain. It is known that questioning each thing that surrounds the subject has been present since man began to think and question his existence, however, there have been few who have been concerned with understanding how some things that seem to be something, in reality are not. This scarcity of subjects who question what is given to them as reality is due to the inheritance of the western metaphysical tradition, strongly criticized by Nietzsche.

Western culture dedicated in previous centuries to create false values that seek the negation of life itself, identified by Nietzsche as nihilism (Segura, 1986). To be more accurate in his affirmation, he proposes to demolish these values, which make the subject think of a reality that transcends the human -both to explain its origin and its demise- in a purely spiritual field, alien to what he can perceive; and to build a new perspective, where the individual is master and lord of his reality.

In spite of the fact that in the 19th century, scientific trends such as positivism arose, through which it was sought to know the world as it is, validating the methods with which truth is sought to be obtained, all this effort to favor rationality did not provide the tools to acquire the truth, but rather to improve the method by which it is manipulated, since things are not known as they are, but simply remain in determining how the subject relates to them. For Nietzsche, in the words of Martínez (1999) what science does is to transform the world so that it appears to be authentic, maintaining the duality proposed by metaphysics, of good-bad, true-false.



The schools and their intellectuals were the only ones considered to know the truth, of which they will only present “[...] to the public the use, and keep for themselves the key” (Kant, 2007, p. 34) and just as in the critique of Christian morality, it was evident that whoever held the power, was the one who was able to dominate the truth and print with his trace the way of thinking that best suits him.

As a critique of the dominant rationalism, these philosophers were concerned with the importance of reflecting and being aware of the real scope of their processes, which are increasingly alien to the individual as such. The fact that a premise comes as a decree from a certain discipline, does not oblige the subject to take it as real or true, just because it has been determined from reason and much less if it has been established with the intention of dogmatizing, to make believe that there is an absolute truth to which the common subject is not worthy of accessing.

A proposal of Nietzsche (1984) to compensate all this criticism to morality and rationality is to see that the subject does not have an ultimate goal and for this reason will be willing to see what really happens around him, for the pleasure of knowing the new, will not be wary of anything (Nietzsche, 1984), he will only have his arms open to what the day after day wants to offer him. The common subject must also understand the reality that is evident to him, therefore, there will always be ideas, disciplines, trends, that will try to help him on this path; the important thing here is that the subject is willing to investigate in depth.

Hence, the subject will have to overcome the ideas of good and evil that are in his conscience when acting, since, according to Nietzsche (1984), good and evil depend on a particular situation, and, therefore, are not absolute categories. This means that, according to the experiences, knowledge, in short, the perspective of each one, will determine whether something is positive or negative, all to the extent that the subject is affected. This is known as Nietzsche’s relative morality. There are no general laws that can be applied to all people indistinctly, everyone will perceive the world at his convenience; this means, that there are no absolute truths either, these are also relative. Discourse is accepted or rejected according to the individual.

However, this posture will imply that the subject will not have an objective access to reality, since he only takes what is important to him and values it according to a personal scale. This subject begins to question the relationship between thinking and being, looking at reality from his own perspective, not as an established fact but, expressed by Martínez (1999) “as a creation demanded by the being through which he expresses



himself as being-interpreted" (p. 40). This will be understood as perspectivism and was articulated by the German philosopher at different levels.

The first refers to the biological and basic basis of all human beings, their relationship with nature, i.e., the interests, needs and survival conditions. This would be known as the intuitive man, the one who goes with the evolution of the world, without being subject to social guidelines. It is shown that man, as stated by Nehamas (1985) is not separated from nature and is rather totally immersed in it; therefore, the subject must be open to the fact that the flow of life is constant, blind and irrational.

The second level is related to rational man (Nietzsche, 1996), who is governed by concepts and is constantly systematizing what he has around him, logically from the individual perspective; for him every metaphor will be a concept, because that will be what puts him on a higher level than the animals. According to Nietzsche, in the words of Nehamas (1985): "Facts are precisely what do not exist, only interpretations" (p. 42); therefore, although the inclination to want to know things as they are is still in force, these will be taken as true to the extent that they serve the subject for his survival.

With the latter, it is evident that there are moments in which both levels of perspectivism will agree along the way. Nietzsche tried to explain this in his essay *On Truth and Lies in a Non-moral Sense*

[...] the one anguished before intuition, the other mocking abstraction; the latter is as irrational as the former is unartistic. Both crave to dominate life: the latter knowing how to face the most imperious needs through foresight, prudence and regularity; the former without seeing, as a "hero overflowing with joy", those needs and taking as real life disguised as appearance and beauty (Nietzsche, 1996, p. 36).

Even if one level dominates the other, there will be times when they need each other to understand and cope with the world ahead.

Thus, it is not only a matter of how reality is seen, but also on the way it is lived. For this reason, Nietzsche (1984) also established the existence of two types of human morality, a lower group of those who will always resent life (slave morality); and another group of superiors, who will determine their being from within and not from what they receive from the environment (master morality). The next level of perspectivism would be linked to the particularity of each individual as a member of one or another group. There, each instinct, impulse and force that defines him as a subject and puts him in conflict with others is highlighted



(Romero Cuevas, 2015). The truth will not then be determined by each subject, but will be influenced by his environment and culture.

We are passing from an era in which an absolute, eternal and universal truth is proclaimed, where the subject transcends from the physical to the spiritual, and therefore never ceases to exist; to a new vision of life, in which man is considered as such, for being a plurality of instincts and impulses which will determine the truth that inspires him according to the impulse that dominates him at each moment. Truth will cease to be absolute, dominant and permanent, and will become plural and changing. From this philosophy, it will be proposed that the truth is not only dictated from the will of power that only pretends to impose it as dogma; rather it is expected that the truth is constructed by the individual from his characteristics and the relationship with his social group.

It will be important that when a precept is to be taken as true, it is analyzed from the context in which it arises. Only in this way can it be taken as such or rejected at its root, thus giving meaning and significance to existence. However, that which is taken as not true should not be considered an error either, but rather as the possibility of: “[...] an appropriation relevant to our action of certain aspects of the structure of the real” (Romero Cuevas, 2004, p. 137). Each truth will be possible to the extent that it serves certain needs, it will make sense according to the conditions of life within which it is represented, so that there will hardly be a single truth.

For Nietzsche (1996), truth was subject to a determined perspective, “a multitude of metaphors, metonymies and anthropomorphisms in movement, in short, a set of poetically and rhetorically enhanced, transferred and embellished relations, which after prolonged use seem fixed, canonical and obligatory to people” (p.23), i.e., to the extent that this truth is useful for those who promulgate it, it will be taken into account by those whom it also affects, either positively or negatively, converted into a set of collectively validated concepts, thanks to the reiterative use of language.

In contrast to this approval, there is the figure of the lie. When the subject abuses the conventions granted to an element or concept, changing them in an interested and provocative way, when discovered, he will be excluded by society and tainted by distrust.

However, one should not think that in the environment of the subject everything revolves around truth or lie in an exclusive way, since according to Nietzsche (1996), the designations of language are arbitrary and it will never be possible to arrive at an adequate and pure truth. Since, as mentioned above, things are designated to the extent that the subject has a relation with them:



We say that a man is honest. Why has he acted so honestly today, we ask. Our answer usually is: because of his honesty. Honesty! Certainly we know nothing at all of an essential quality called honesty, but we do know numerous individual actions, therefore, dissimilar, which we equalize forgetting the dissimilarities, and, then, we call them honest actions; in the end we formulate from them a *qualitas occulta* with the name of "honesty" (p. 24).

It will therefore be to the extent that a convention affects a subject and his community, that it will be taken by him as true. Truth is transformed into a concept that is managed around the convenience, the pleasure and the vision of the one who transmits it and of the one who perceives it. Although it may seem that Nietzsche promotes a prefiguration of post-truth, it is necessary to clarify that, far from this, what he seeks is to abandon the certainties of Christian dogmatism in both epistemology and morality.

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## Truth as an element of self-care in Foucault

In contemporary times, it will be seen that there are not many studies by philosophers on the problem of *parrhesía*. Perhaps the lack of systematization of this term in the works of the great classical thinkers such as Socrates or Plato, as well as its subversive and uncomfortable character, have relegated it to a secondary place in the Western philosophical tradition. Although the term has not been widely studied, there have been interesting approaches to it, some of which are extremely enriching because of the dialogue they establish between antiquity and the present. In the following, we will briefly discuss three authors who, each in his own way, take up the concept of *parrhesía*.

Carlos García Gual, in his book *La secta del perro. Vidas de los filósofos cínicos*, states the figure of the cynic: "These are good times for cynicism, unbeatable times for sarcasm as a critical form" (2005, p.1). García Gual tries to find in those cynical characters, marginalized by the Western philosophical tradition, a revulsive that could serve as an alternative to the current civilization, so frenetic and decadent at the same time.

Certainly, in trying to rescue the cynics, *parrhesía* appears ineluctably. García Gual emphasizes *parrhesía* as the unabashed way of saying everything that characterizes cynical philosophers, where institutionalized norms are questioned, since perhaps the *establishment* needs a jolt to straighten its crooked paths of corruption and lies.

Rather than blind obedience to externally imposed norms or allowing oneself to be influenced by the opinions of others, *parrhesía* should allow self-government through the internalization and externalization of truth. García Gual (2005) says:

The conquest of freedom is the goal of this practical wisdom. That true wisdom gives the power to govern oneself, freeing oneself from the alienation of *dóxa* and *nomos* to use frankness of speech, *parrhesía*, and unconcern with conventional values, *adiaphoría*, is the fundamental affirmation of Diogenes (p. 40).

Michel Foucault in contemporary times is who studies *parrhesía* in depth. In the last years of his life, he turned his intellectual work towards the topic of self-care. *Parrhesía* would be a practice privileged to achieve certain visible effects within the framework of self-care. The *Foucauldian* analysis of *parrhesía* is considerably vast. In fact, the last course at the *Collège de France* taught between 1983 and 1984, was entitled *The Courage of Truth* and was devoted almost entirely to the problem of *parrhesía*.

To summarize, Foucault (2010) defines *parrhesía* as:

[...] the courage of the truth in the speaker who assumes the risk of saying, in spite of everything, all the truth he conceives, but it is also the courage of the interlocutor who accepts to receive as true the offensive truth he hears [...] *Parrhesía* establishes, then, a strong, necessary, constitutive bond between the speaker and what he says, but it opens the bond under the form of risk between the speaker and his interlocutor. After all, in fact, the person to whom one addresses always has the possibility of not listening to what is said (pp.32-33).

The latter has some important elements to highlight. In the first place, risk appears again as an inseparable characteristic of *parrhesía*. Daring to speak the truth, without hiding anything, implies a risk for the one who exercises this practice, which can range from the interlocutor not listening to the truth, to death itself. Secondly, there is an interesting relationship between subject and truth, because the one who exercises *parrhesía* is linked experientially to what he is saying. Truth produces a series of transformations in the subject, who, at the same time, through certain practices of the self, manages to endow his enunciation of truth with veridiction.

In his various studies in which, like Socrates and the Epicureans, he also discusses the importance of prudence and self-care, Foucault refers to aspects of *parrhesía* that show it as a practice related to the fact of “saying everything, but adjusted to the truth: saying everything truth-



fully, not hiding anything of the truth, telling the truth without masking it with anything” (2010, p. 29). Hence, it is no longer just a matter of talking for the sake of talking in order to harm the opponent and benefit oneself, but rather to be able to rectify behaviors that improve the quality of life of society in general, even if interpersonal relations or even one's own existence are put at risk.

In this aspect, Foucault focuses on the relationship of *parrhesía* and democracy, thanks to which citizens can speak, give their opinion and participate in decisions -currently everyone can exercise such rights, in Ancient Greece it was only exclusive to those who belonged to the elite- the “saying-truth” (*Parrhesía παρρησία*) and the value of the struggle to carry out the ideals, although he also considers the problem of the manipulation of discourse to persuade. By this he means that within the practice of truth-telling, in the words of Giraldo (2016) there are several aspects that converge, the political one, the one of truth and courage.

Foucault's approach to *parrhesía* is decisive, because it is part of an ambitious project that seeks to explain the relationship between power, truth and subjectivity. The influence that those who exercise *parrhesía* can have in the political and social spheres is overwhelming. The structures that administer institutionalized power reject the contumacious truth of *parrhesía*. Foucault seeks to generate small spaces of resistance to the machinery of institutionalized power, taking the constitution of a free and courageous subjectivity as a starting point. This means that, in order to transform society, the individual must first transform himself. And according to Foucault, it is there where *parrhesía* comes into play.

It is not a matter of not saying things, but rather of being sensible when doing so, keeping in mind what effects this action can produce both in the one who tells the truth and in the one who listens to it. This *parrhesía* or truth-telling, as defined by Edgar Garavito (1986), should not be confused either with an act of teaching, i.e. “it is not telling the truth to someone who does not know the truth, nor does its direction seek to inform a student who is ignorant of the truth” (p. 43), since, within this practice, both the truth-teller and the listener are aware of it and its effects. Nor should this modality be considered as a way of persuading the other through rhetoric or by means of some intentionality. For Garavito (1986), *parrhesía* is, above all, “an edge in which telling the truth implies above all a risk, a death, the danger of losing one's life” (p. 43).

In a world guided by consumerism, bureaucracy and the media, *parrhesía* stands as a sincere commitment to the truth and as an opportunity for self-transformation in order to contribute to the construction



of a better world. Nowadays, there is a direct relationship between truth and subjectivity, in other words, people say what is convenient and how it is convenient, considering both the speaker and the listener, which inevitably affects the correct exercise of *parrhesía*. On many occasions it is impossible to execute this exercise in the way that philosophers like Diogenes practiced it in Ancient Greece; on the contrary, we must understand that, although the information comes from part of the *parrhesiastés* of the context or the receiver, one is not completely prepared to this truth and if one does so, the consequences instead of supporting self-care are detrimental to it, even to the point of deconstructing the subject's own identity.

## Conclusions

### *The non-paradoxical return to parrhesía as epimeleia heautou or self-care*

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What can be concluded from this conceptual itinerary that became an apparently questionable historical return due to the time elapsed? How to legitimize this journey of more than two thousand four hundred years without having to turn it into a chronology?

This is a double question that challenges the applied method, since the exploration began with a contemporary author, but the subject was, from the very beginning, Greek, or rather, Athenian. Then it crossed Christianity in a paradoxical dialogue with the polemical but unavoidable objections of Nietzsche, and it closed with a return to the Greek theme, making explicit the fundamental differentiating element: the concern for self-care. However, the question remains open as to whether this is a historical return without conceptual relevance. The return is historical, but its conceptual relevance is unquestionable because an archeology, a genealogy, a reconstructive deconstruction, a perspectival redescription, which enriches the current problem, have been carried out.

First, it was pointed out that the *parrhesía* of the good citizen is that of the one who dares to say what is necessary when it must be said, and regardless of the risk or the consequences for his own person: he puts the good of the community before his own, not in the manner of the martyr or the prophet, but in that of the member of the community who openly says what others fail to recognize, or do recognize, but prefer to remain silent for political correctness, convenience or cowardice.

Later, truth became an epistemological problem to which Christian dogma responded: truth is nothing other than the correspondence of the idea impressed in the soul with the reality of the world created by God.

Not the reality of the senses, because their changing and random forms lead to error, but the reality that reason, being divine, was able to contemplate by way of transcendence. The possibility of raising objections was eclipsed because it was tantamount to doubting, and doubting is sinful when it is God who has solved the problem. All that remained to be done was to give all possible limpidity to the soul and to the means of contemplation of truth. The changeable appearances of the world were due to the imperfection of the senses and certainty was attained through intellectual exercise. Transcending was necessary to find truth, and it was something that could only be achieved through an exercise of detachment, of asceticism.

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On this matter, Nietzsche will only be in charge of giving voice to the tensions and impulses generated since the sixteenth century and that warned the confusion and contradiction of the planning of the problem of knowledge when it was reduced to the simple contemplation of the divine creation as divine, i.e., devoid of all the concerns provoked by the mutable, the perishable and the finite. The objection is in the problem of knowledge, but it took very little time to influence ethics, which is what interests Nietzsche, and politics, which is what allows the return to the paradoxical and necessary figure of the *parrhesiasta*.

The third moment is *parrhesía* rediviva, i.e., the return to the Greek approach in which daring to speak the truth is nothing other than possessing the courage to be concerned about oneself. The alternative to the recalcitrant individualism in which post-enlightenment practices fell into is this *epimeleia heautou*, which is, at the same time, a question for the truth of oneself that is not answered from the epistemological but from the ethical-aesthetic. It is an effort to coin a truth that is meaningful for the person who knows and admits himself as belonging to an extended community with which he shares the same fears and the same aspirations. This is the only way in which one can speak of restlessness and self-care: necessarily passing through the *parrhesiasta* veridiction.

Now, the question that can be posed here is a provocative one, insofar as it questions the whole approach, the genealogical reconstructive method employed, and the conclusion proposed. Hence, how reasonable is it to find that the best alternative with respect to the being capable of truth is none other than the return to *parrhesía* as restlessness and care of the self? The method seems to have generated a conceptual approach that

may fall into derision, inoperativeness or mere repetition with the displaced context, so that this proposal would be qualified as irrelevant for daring to speak the truth again as a commitment of an ethical character.

However, the simplicity of the answer is as clear as it is forceful: it is reasonable and necessary because the problem of Athenian democracy is the same as that of today's state democracies. It is the same crisis, the same manipulations, the same ethical and political bankruptcies. The *parrhesiasta* also needs the aesthetic display associated with the *epimeleia heautou*. It is necessary to be capable again of daring to speak the truth insofar as the punctual, concrete, specific problems in which democracy begins to lose itself are pointed out again. Because it is well known how the drift towards tyrannies and totalitarianisms undermines it from within. That is why it is a non-paradoxical return, and one could even call it a recurrent return. The topicality of the Greek theme only warns that the ethical-political of the 21st century shares the same problem with the Athens of the 5th century B.C., and that it has the same solution at hand. The disturbing question that remains is whether it will end up falling into the same cynical practices that ruined it. Cynicism and post-truth seem to force us to answer affirmatively.



## Notes

- 1 This term will be understood from the meaning of the action of speaking.
- 2 Later Michel Foucault will argue that the exercise of speaking the truth without limitations required, among other things, an attitude in relation to the environment, in addition to a care based on the look that others have on one, i.e., one must be concerned about oneself by being vigilant of what one thinks and taking charge of one's own actions (1987, p. 35).

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