



Self-Care and Truth-Telling: Rethinking Care with Foucault

GERALD POSSELT 

RESEARCH


Open Library of Humanities


Part of the Ubiquity
Partner Network

ABSTRACT

Although the *care of the self* looms large in Michel Foucault's later works, his analyses are largely neglected in current debates on care. This may be due to the fact that Foucault's work has so far been read primarily as an ethics and aesthetics of the self, concerned less with common care activities than with individualistic practices of self-cultivation. Against this background, I argue that in Foucault the care of the self is pervaded by the presence of the Other. This becomes clear as soon as one links the care of the self with the concept of *parrhesia*, which signifies a form of truth-telling in which the individual confronting the Other with the truth constitutes herself as the subject of a discourse of truth. It is precisely by associating the care of the self with *parrhesia* that the genuinely critical and emancipatory potential of each becomes effective in the first place. This makes it possible not only to detach the concept of care from its close entanglement with the private sphere and to reframe it in political terms but also to envisage a critical attitude that is based both on the care of the self and others and on the concern for truth.

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Gerald Posselt

University of Vienna, AT

gerald.posselt@univie.ac.at

KEYWORDS:

alterity; care; critique; ethics;
parrhesia; politics; Michel
Foucault

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Gerald, Posselt. "Self-Care and Truth-Telling: Rethinking Care with Foucault." *Le foucaldien* 7, no. 1 (2021): 10, pp. 1–15. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16995/lefou.107>

I am more willing to risk imprisonment, or any other negative outcome personally, than I am willing to risk the curtailment of my intellectual freedom and that of those around me whom I care for equally as I do for myself.

Edward Snowden, *Citizenfour*, 2014

We need movements that encourage care of self, self-care. [...] We have to incorporate rituals and processes of self-care within the very processes of activism.

Angela Davis, *Beyond the Bars*, 2016

1. THE ETHICS OF CARE AND FOUCAULT'S CARE OF THE SELF

The concept of *care* has been at the center of lively philosophical and sociopolitical debates for many years, and these debates have intensified with the COVID-19 pandemic and its far-reaching societal implications. According to Carol Gilligan's seminal work *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (1982), theories of care propose a radical change of perspective in ethics and moral philosophy. While utilitarian as well as deontological ethics—based on the concept of *justice*—favor criteria such as universality, neutrality, and impartiality, theories of care emphasize the importance of social and affective bonds for ethical questions. The various approaches differ, however, in the way they define *care* (as caring, carefulness, nurturing, fostering, attentiveness, etc.) and in how they frame it theoretically: as *care work*, with a focus on issues of social equality and distributive justice, or as an explicit counter-concept to traditional conceptions of justice in the context of an *ethics of care* that seeks to reinforce values such as responsibility, participation, and intersubjective action against a one-sided focus on liberal norms of equality and freedom.¹ In this context, both the relationship between *gender* and *care* and the question whether the concept of care tends to mask capitalist relations of exploitation or rather opens the way to a *caring democracy* beyond profit maximization are matters of discussion.² A further issue is the problematic linkage of self-care, individualism, and freedom in the context of neoliberal policies that lead to the increasing commercialization of care activities and to the emergence of new 'care industries.' Employing slogans such as "We care for you!" or "Your worries are our concern!"³ these industries market *care* as a product, commodity, and service.⁴ Here, the more general question is whether the concept of care can still fulfill its original critical and emancipatory function or whether it must itself be critically questioned.

In a different context, the ambivalence of the concept of care and its German counterpart *Sorge* (which as a verb can mean "to care for sb./sth.," "to be concerned about sb./sth.," or "to

1 Cf. Elisabeth Conradi, "Verteilungsgerechtigkeit oder achtsame Zuwendung? Ethico-politische Dimensionen der Sorge in deutschsprachigen Care-Diskursen," *Das Argument* 58, no. 6 (2016).

2 Cf. Sabine Plonz, "Zeitschriftenschwerpunkt: Ethik im Kapitalismus als Arbeit an der Utopie," *Das Argument* 58, no. 6 (2016); Joan C. Tronto, *Caring Democracy: Markets, Equality, and Justice* (New York: New York UP, 2013); Joan C. Tronto, "Kann 'Sorgende Demokratie' eine politische Theorie der Transformation sein?," *Das Argument* 58, no. 6 (2016); Michael Stiegler and Tatjana Schönwälder-Kuntze, "Wie subsidiär ist (der) Care(-Diskurs)?," *Femina Politica* 26, no. 2 (2017). For a comprehensive account of the care discussion, see Christa Schnabl, *Gerecht sorgen: Grundlagen einer sozialetischen Theorie der Fürsorge* (Freiburg: Herder, 2005).

3 This is the slogan of an Austrian insurance company ("Ihre Sorgen möchten wir haben").

4 Cf. Cornelia Klinger, "Krise war immer ...: Lebenssorge und geschlechtliche Arbeitsteilungen in sozialphilosophischer und kapitalismuskritischer Perspektive," in *Gesellschaft: Feministische Krisendiagnosen*, ed. Erna Appelt, Brigitte Aulenbacher, and Angelika Wetterer (Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 2013). That neoliberalism tends to colonize and capitalize even the private realm is stressed by Cornelia Klinger, "Selbstsorge oder Selbsttechnologie? Das Subjekt zwischen liberaler Tradition und Neoliberalismus," in *Für sich und andere sorgen: Krise und Zukunft von Care in der modernen Gesellschaft*, ed. Brigitte Aulenbacher and Maria Dammayr (Weinheim: Beltz Juventa, 2014), 35. See also Wendy Brown, "Neo-Liberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy," in *Edgework: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 2005), 42. Similarly, Müller refers to the neoliberal 'inversion' of the ancient care of the self into an obligatory *individualism for all* "without regard to the unequal material and cultural endowment of resources" (Hans-Peter Müller, "Lebensführung und Lebenskunst im Zeitalter der Unsicherheit," in *Für sich und andere sorgen: Krise und Zukunft von Care in der modernen Gesellschaft*, ed. Brigitte Aulenbacher and Maria Dammayr (Weinheim: Beltz Juventa, 2014), 20 (my translation). On the both *individualizing* and *totalizing* principle of pastoral power that is characteristic of the modern state, see Michel Foucault, "Omnes et Singulatim: Towards a Criticism of 'Political Reason'," *Tanner Lectures on Human Values* Oct. 10 & 16 (2001). On the biopolitical implications of the "care of life," see Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998), 147; Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive* (New York: Zone Books, 2000), 155; Byung-Chul Han, *Psychopolitics: Neoliberalism and New Technologies of Power* (London: Verso, 2017); Ulrich Bröckling, "Menschenökonomie, Humankapital: Zur Kritik der biopolitischen Ökonomie," in *Gute Hirten führen sanft: Über Menschenregierungskünste* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2017).

worry about sb./sth.")⁵ is reflected in the ideologically charged figure of the *concerned citizen* (*besorgte Bürger*in*). As Carolin Emcke points out, in suggesting that unfiltered feelings are per se justified, *care* or *concern* are elevated, as it were, to political categories of peculiar authority, presumably not requiring any further justification.⁶ This is not to deny the legitimacy of forms of care that relate to prudence, attentiveness, and caring for others. But the current tendency to absolutize one's own concerns shows that the care of the self is all but immune from turning into an egocentric care for *oneself* that negates the Other or paternalistically subjugates her.⁷

In view of this complex situation, it is surprising that the vibrant debates on care ethics and care work scarcely mention Michel Foucault's analyses of the ancient principle of the *care of the self* (*epimeleia heautou*), which, according to Foucault, means "care of oneself, attending to oneself, being concerned about oneself."⁸ One reason for this may be that Foucault, focusing on the care of the self, is concerned not primarily with typical care activities located in the domestic and private sphere but with the philosophical care of the soul and the concern for truth, which in antiquity were reserved solely for those (usually adult male citizens) who were relieved of the necessities of self and life maintenance. Another reason is that Foucault scholarship has situated the care of the self primarily in the context of technologies and practices of the self by which the individual constitutes herself as an autonomous subject,⁹ whereas one still looks in vain for an alterity-oriented conception of the care of the self, understood as a communal and dialogic practice that is pervaded by the presence of the Other.¹⁰

In fact, the relation between the self and the Other is far from unequivocal in Foucault.¹¹ On the one hand, Foucault seems to encourage individualist readings when he asserts, with regard to antiquity, that the "[c]are for others should not be put before the care of oneself," that the "care of the self is ethically prior in that the relationship with oneself is ontologically prior."¹² On the other hand, he repeatedly suggests that the relation to the Other is constitutive of any self-relation. Thus, as Axel Honneth points out, two alternative interpretations of Foucault's analyses of the care of the self emerge: Foucault has in mind either a "'monologic' act of self-empowerment" centered on a sovereign subject or a "'dialogic' process of recalling valuable social ties and ethically substantial life tasks," based on the insight "that we owe our freedom not only to our own efforts but to many ties to concrete or generalized others," which is concealed by "the orientation toward the goal of individual utility maximization."¹³

5 I cannot expand here on the rich semantics of the German term 'Sorge,' which is not reducible to the English term *care*. For a historical-conceptual overview, cf. Margarita Kranz, "Sorge," in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, Bd. 9, ed. Joachim Ritter and Karlfried Gründer (Basel: Schwabe, 1995).

6 Cf. Carolin Emcke, *Against Hate* (Medford: Polity Press, 2019), 11.

7 On the problematic linkage of the concept of care with that of "vulnerable groups" and the consequent reproduction of "paternalistic forms of power," see Judith Butler, *The Force of Nonviolence: An Ethico-Political Bind* (London: Verso, 2020), 70–71, 185–187.

8 Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981–1982* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 2; hereafter cited in text as HS.

9 Cf. Wilhelm Schmid, "Selbstsorge," in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, Bd. 9, ed. Joachim Ritter and Karlfried Gründer (Basel: Schwabe, 1995), 534.

10 The individualistic and depoliticizing implications of Foucault's *care of the self* have been criticized by a number of feminist theorists (see Amy Allen, "Foucault, Feminism, and the Self: The Politics of Personal Transformation," in *Feminism and the Final Foucault*, ed. Dianna Taylor and Karen Vintges (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 2004); Ella Myers, "Resisting Foucauldian Ethics: Associative Politics and the Limits of the Care of the Self," *Contemporary Political Theory* 7 (2008)). In defense of Foucault, see Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg, "Michel Foucault: An Ethical Politics of Care of Self and Others," in *Political Philosophy in the Twentieth Century: Authors and Arguments*, ed. Catherine H. Zuckert (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011); James Wong, "Self and Others: The Work of 'Care' in Foucault's Care of the Self," *Philosophy Today* 57, no. 1 (2013). On the accusation sometimes leveled against Foucault that he endorses a neoliberal conception of the subject—for example, in the context of his lectures on the history of governmentality (1977/78; 1978/79)—see the discussion in Andrew Dilts, "From 'Entrepreneur of the Self' to 'Care of the Self': Neo-liberal Governmentality and Foucault's Ethics," *Foucault Studies* 12 (2011). Foucault himself firmly rejects the equation of the ancient care of the self with contemporary forms of "our present culture of the self," such as the "Californian cult of the self," emphasizing instead their diametrically opposed character (Michel Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress," in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth. Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954–1984. Vol. I* (New York: The New Press, 1997), 271).

11 Cf. e.g. Bernhard Waldenfels, "Wahrsprechen und Antworten," in *Parrhesia: Foucault und der Mut zur Wahrheit*, ed. Petra Gehring and Andreas Gelhard (Zürich: Diaphanes, 2012); Sergej Seitz, "Truth beyond Consensus: Parrhesia, Dissent, and Subjectivation," *Epékeina: International Journal of Ontology, History and Critics* 7, no. 1–2 (2016).

12 Michel Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom," in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth. Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954–1984. Vol. I* (New York: The New Press, 1997), 287.

13 Axel Honneth, "Freiheit und Individualisierung: Axel Honneth im Gespräch mit Vladislav Suvák und L'ubomir Dunaj," *Allgemeine Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 42, no. 2 (2017), 237 (my translation).

This raises the question whether the care of the self can be reduced to mere self-care and self-cultivation or must be conceived of as an ethical and political practice constitutively permeated by the presence of the Other. In what follows, I argue that the Other as well as the genuinely ethical-political dimension of care come into view as soon as Foucault's concept of care is linked to his analyses of *parrhesia*. Foucault himself suggests such a connection when he argues that *parrhesia*, as a form of telling the truth and a way of telling the truth about oneself, is intrinsically connected with the problem of the care of the self (cf. DTP, 61). Following Friedrich Balke, I oppose the common interpretation that Foucault's "preoccupation with self-care and technologies of the self" ought to be understood "as the result of his late 'ethical turn'" and his return to the problem of the subject.¹⁴ Against this reading, it can be shown that ethics and the problem of the subject are already manifest in Foucault's early works on madness, discipline, and sexuality.¹⁵ Moreover, as Frédéric Gros emphasizes, Foucault does not abandon the question of power and "politics to dedicate himself to ethics, but *complicates* the study of governmentalities through the exploration of the care of the self. In any case, ethics, or the subject, is not thought of as the other of politics or power."¹⁶

Building on these considerations, I propose to conceive of self-care and truth-telling as complementary practices that fully unfold their critical and emancipatory potential only in their mutual conditional relationship. This makes it possible, on the one hand, to detach the care of the self from its close entanglement with the private sphere and to reframe it in political terms and, on the other hand, to envisage a *critical attitude* that is based both on the care of the self and on the concern for truth. To this end, I first discuss Foucault's analyses of the ancient principle of the care of the self (*epimeleia heautou*), which he contrasts with the Delphic precept of self-knowledge, the famous "know yourself" (*gnthi seauton*) that in modernity becomes the all-dominant principle of Western thought. With Foucault, it can be shown that the precept of self-knowledge is but one element of the more fundamental principle of the care of the self, insofar as both are modes of learning the truth about oneself. Crucially, while the care of the self is mediated through others, this aspect is largely eliminated in the modern rule of self-knowledge. As I show in a second step, this constitutive dimension of the Other can be brought back into focus by linking the care of the self to *parrhesia* as a form of truth-telling in which the individual speaks the truth openly to the other's face. Third, and following from this, I concentrate on two modalities of the connection of the care of the self with *parrhesia* that have established two prominent philosophical traditions: the *analytic tradition* of Platonism and the *critical tradition* of Cynicism. Drawing on Sophocles' *Antigone*, I then go on to examine the critical potential that arises from the connection of the care of the self with *parrhesia*. This brings into view a *parrhesiastic care of the self* that is not only an ethico-political care of the self and others but also a *concern for truth*.

2. SELF-CARE AND SELF-KNOWLEDGE

Foucault develops his analyses of the ancient care of the self primarily in his lectures of the 1980s. He is interested in those self-practices and technologies through which individuals are led to care about themselves and to learn the truth about themselves. This care of the self is not, however, an epistemic principle.¹⁷ Contrary to the modern reading that traces the care

¹⁴ Cf. Friedrich Balke, "Selbstsorge/Selbsttechnologie," in *Foucault-Handbuch: Leben – Werk – Wirkung*, ed. Clemens Kammler (Stuttgart/Weimar: Metzler, 2008), 286, and Gerald Posselt and Sergej Seitz, "Sprachen des Widerstands: Zur Normativität politischer Artikulation bei Foucault und Rancière," in *Foucault und das Politische: Transdisziplinäre Impulse für die politische Theorie der Gegenwart*, ed. Oliver Marchart and Renate Martensen (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2019), 200. Philipp Sarasin, "Foucaults Wende," *Le foucauldien* 3, no. 1 (2017), for example, speaks of a *turn* in Foucault. By contrast, Balke—such as Foucault himself—rejects the notion of a turn or 'break' in Foucault's work, emphasizing the continuity of his thought. Cf. Balke, "Selbstsorge/Selbsttechnologie," 286f.; and Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern for Self," 281–82.

¹⁵ Balke, "Selbstsorge/Selbsttechnologie," 287.

¹⁶ Frédéric Gros, "Course Context," in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981–1982* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 512. Sarasin, too, seems to support such an interpretation in an earlier article when he defines the question of how to think "the subject beyond and outside the law" as Foucault's "fundamental question," which the latter supposedly addresses in his late work by introducing the idea of the care of the self, through which the subject "becomes capable of placing itself to some extent against power and outside power relations" (Philipp Sarasin, "Unternehmer seiner selbst," *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 55, no. 3 (2007), 55 (my translation).

¹⁷ Cf. Stephanie Jenkins, "Care," in *The Cambridge Foucault Lexicon*, ed. Leonard Lawlor and John Nale (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2014), 59.

of the self to the Delphic precept "know yourself," traditionally associated with the figure of Socrates, Foucault insists that this precept of *self-knowledge*, so significant for Western cultural and intellectual history, is only one elaboration of the fundamental principle of the care of the self (*epimeleia heautou*).¹⁸ This is not to say that self-knowledge does not play an important role in the care of the self; instead, Foucault's point is that it is not prior to the care of the self but rather "one of the components of this basic concern" (HS, 492).¹⁹

With the emergence of the Cartesian concept of the subject, the general principle of the care of the self is replaced by the more specific precept of self-knowledge. Foucault also speaks here of the "Cartesian moment," which "came into play in two ways: by philosophically requalifying the *gnōthi seaouton* (know yourself), and by discrediting the *epimeleia heautou* (care of the self)" (HS, 14).²⁰ This development is accompanied by the establishment of an autonomous subject whose methodological access to truth is mediated solely by itself, without "the philosopher (or the scientist, or simply someone who seeks the truth) [...] having to change or alter his being as subject" (HS, 33). In other words, whereas in ancient philosophy "a subject could not have access to the truth if he did not first operate upon himself a certain work that would make him susceptible to knowing the truth," since Descartes "[t]o accede to the truth, it suffices that I be *any* subject that can see what is evident."²¹ This implies a fundamental change in the subject's relation to itself, to others, to the world, and to the truth. Whereas in ancient philosophy—from Plato through Stoicism and Epicureanism to Cynicism—this relation is established by a lifetime of *practice, exercise, and asceticism*,²² in Descartes it takes the form of *evidence*, of clear and distinct (*clare et distincte*) insight, through which the subject doubles itself, as it were, and constitutes itself as an object of introspection: "The relationship to the self no longer needs to be ascetic to get into relation to the truth. It suffices that the relationship to the self reveals to me the obvious truth of what I see for me to apprehend the truth definitively."²³

Historically, the care of the self in its philosophical form can be traced back to Socrates recommending in the *Apology* to his fellow citizens "not to care for [their] persons or [their] property more than for the perfection of [their] souls."²⁴ Here, self-care forms a central prerequisite for guiding others, based on the conviction that only those who take care of themselves can take care of others. Socrates assumes this role in relation to his fellow citizens; for Socrates takes care and looks after himself "by visibly and manifestly refusing the injustices that may be done to him, but also by encouraging others [...] that, knowing nothing, they really

18 Cf. Michel Foucault, *The Courage of the Truth: The Government of Self and Others II* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 4; hereafter cited in text as *GSO II*. According to Foucault, the term *epimeleia* refers to a whole bundle of occupations, including the activities of the householder and the duties of the regent, which require a certain knowledge of oneself, as well as "the care that must be given to a sick or wounded patient, or the honors that must be paid to the gods or to the dead." (Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self: The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 3 (New York: Pantheon, 1986), 50)

19 See also Michel Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 44; hereafter cited in text as *GSO I*. This seems to resonate with Honneth's thesis, which he develops following authors as diverse as Heidegger, Dewey, Cavell, Tomasello, and Winnicott, that *cognition* is not the original mode in which we relate to the world. Rather, all objectivity and cognition is preceded by a participating, caring, interested, and engaged being-in-the-world and being-with-others: "a layer of existential engagement indeed provides the basis for our entire objectifying relation to the world" (Axel Honneth, *Reification: A New Look at an Old Idea* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008), 40).

20 "Cartesian moment" "within a lot of inverted commas," as Foucault adds, since this moment is by no means associated exclusively with the name of Descartes. Already ten years earlier, in his debate with Jacques Derrida, Foucault points to the highly ambivalent character of Descartes' *Meditations*, for they combine elements of both *exercise (askēsis)* and *evidence*, each representing different modes of the relation between subjectivity and truth (cf. Michel Foucault, "My body, this paper, this fire: Appendix II of 1972 edition," in *History of Madness* (New York: Routledge, 2006)). See also Christoph Menke, "Zweierlei Übung: Zum Verhältnis von sozialer Disziplinierung und ästhetischer Existenz," in *Michel Foucault: Zwischenbilanz einer Rezeption*, ed. Axel Honneth and Martin Saar (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 2003), 286; Theres Lehn, *Asketische Praxis: Die Bedeutung der Askese für das ethische Handeln und das menschliche Sein bei Aristoteles und Michel Foucault* (München, 2012); and Gerald Posselt, "Rhetorizing Philosophy: Toward a 'Double Reading' of Philosophical Texts," *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 52, no. 1 (2019).

21 Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics," 278–79.

22 Foucault understands *asceticism* "not in the sense of a morality of renunciation but as an exercise of the self on the self by which one attempts to develop and transform oneself, and to attain to a certain mode of being" (Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern for Self," 282).

23 Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics," 279.

24 Plato, "Apology," in *Euthyphro – Apology – Crito – Phaedo – Phaedrus* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2005), 30a–b; see Foucault, *The Care of the Self*, 44.

should take care of themselves" (GSO I, 351).²⁵ From this it follows that the care of the self is not an isolated occupation, "not an exercise in solitude, but a true social practice" that is accompanied by "an entire activity of speaking and writing in which the work of oneself on oneself and communication with others were linked together."²⁶

Consequently, the care of the self is a practice and activity that requires another person, "a guide, an advisor, a friend" who—regardless of all the consequences—does not shy away from openly telling the truth to the individual or a group. According to Foucault, this is not a temporally limited relationship, reducible, for example, to the teacher-student relationship, but a social practice that encompasses the entire life and each individual: "The practice of the self links up with social practice or, if you like, the formation of a relationship of the self to the self quite clearly connects up with the relationships of the self to the Other" (HS, 155). The consequence is that "the problem of relationships with others is present throughout the development of the care of the self."²⁷ The care of the self is, as it were, permeated by the presence of the Other. It is not only that "the care of the self consequently requires [...] the other's presence, insertion, and intervention" (HS, 134); the "other [*autrui, l'autre*] is indispensable for the practice of the self to arrive at the self at which it aims" (HS, 127).

3. PARRHESIA AND THE ROLE OF THE OTHER

The first conclusion to be drawn from this is the following. If the Other is indispensable for the constitution of the subject and the care of the self is a lifelong practice that cannot be reduced to a pedagogical relationship, then the care of the self is not a monologic but a dialogic endeavor. Consequently, the reading that sees the care of the self as a 'monologic act of self-empowerment' is difficult to sustain.²⁸ Nor does the care for others seem to be simply subordinate or secondary to the care of the self. Rather, it turns out that every self-relation is constitutively permeated by the presence of the Other, so that the care of the self always implies the care for others. This interpretation can be further substantiated once we reconstruct the care of the self as an activity and epistemic practice that is closely linked to *parrhesia* as a form of truth-telling in the face of the Other. Foucault even suggests that the connection of the care of the self with *parrhesia* is the essential achievement of Greco-Roman philosophy: "Ancient philosophy linked the principle of the care of self (duty to take care of oneself) and the requirement of the courage to tell the truth, to manifest the truth" (GSO II, 339).

In order to make this connection plausible, it is necessary first to recall the central features and the ambivalent character of *parrhesia*:²⁹ In its positive sense, *parrhesia* means to say everything, the whole truth, frankly, directly, immediately, and without regard to oneself or others. However, to say everything can also mean—and this is the negative sense of *parrhesia*—to say "anything one has in mind, without any distinction, without taking care of what he says," so that *parrhesia* would be nothing more than empty talk or mere chatter.³⁰ Moreover, the speaker can make use of *parrhesia* as a rhetorical strategy to fashion himself as a courageous truth-teller in order to flatter or impress his audience.³¹ In rhetoric, therefore, *parrhesia* (Latin *licentia*) denotes both

25 This is also the reason why Socrates himself in the face of death sets a good example, not tiring of exhorting his fellow citizens to be concerned less about their fame and fortunes and—like himself—more about their souls. However, this is not to be understood in terms of altruistic or selfless behavior. For it is precisely by taking care of his fellow citizens and the *polis* that Socrates takes care of himself; indeed, it is from taking care of oneself that "all other good things to man, both to the individual and to the state," follow (Plato, "Apology," 30b).

26 Foucault, *The Care of the Self*, 51.

27 Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern for Self," 287. See also Gros, "Course Context," 536–37.

28 See above, Honneth, "Freiheit und Individualisierung," 237.

29 For an in-depth analysis of *parrhesia*, see Gerald Posselt, "Wahrsprechen, Wortergreifung und 'Collateral Murder': Zur Aktualität von Michel Foucaults Begriff der *parrhesia*," *Rhetorik: Ein internationales Jahrbuch* 32, no. 1 (2013); Posselt and Seitz, "Sprachen des Widerstands," 198–202.

30 Cf. Michel Foucault, *Discourse & Truth, and Parrēsia* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2019), 41; hereafter cited in text as *DTP*.

31 Foucault points out that in Greek society women were generally excluded from "the use of *parrhesia* (along with aliens, slaves, and children)" (Michel Foucault, *Fearless Speech* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2001), 12); this changes to some extent with Cynicism.

the open and frank speech that directly confronts the audience with an inconvenient truth and the disguised frankness that appears as flattery and aims at the mere approval of the listeners.³²

The only criteria that can guarantee that the *parrhesiastes*, the one who engages in *parrhesia*, is actually telling the truth are the *courage* that telling the truth requires and the *risk* that comes with it. These are, as it were, the guarantees that the truth-teller is *sincere* both to himself and to others. Indeed, the price the truth-teller has to pay for his courage can be considerable. In extreme cases, the one who addresses the powerful with an unpleasant truth—the people's assembly in a democracy (think of Socrates addressing his fellow citizens) or the autocrat in a monarchy (think of Plato addressing the tyrant Dionysius of Syracuse)—must be prepared to pay for his frankness with his own life.³³ Ideally, this results in a kind of pact or contract between the one who knows the truth but does not have power and the one who has power but is not in possession of the truth (cf. DTP, 74). If the powerful accept the parrhesiastic game, they can benefit substantially from it; if, on the other hand, they reject it, they lose the opportunity to know the truth, while the *parrhesiastes* risks losing his life (GSO I, 56).

For democracy, however, *parrhesia* poses a fundamental problem, as Foucault makes clear in his historical reconstruction of the term. As a form of government in which everyone is equal before the law and everybody can express their opinion more or less safely, courage and risk are insufficient criteria to ensure the sincerity and conscientiousness of the speaker. The problem is that democracy by itself does not provide criteria to differentiate those forms of *parrhesia* that are useful to the community from those that are harmful to it.³⁴ As an egalitarian form of government that grants everyone the same right to speak (at least those who are part of the *demos*), democracy is itself unable to determine who is intellectually, socially, and morally qualified to speak the truth (DTP, 113–114)—a problematic that takes on new relevance in our 'post-truth' era of fake news, 'alternative facts,' and 'felt truths.'³⁵ For while there are political and institutional norms that define who is entitled to speak in what situation (in an assembly, in court, in parliament, etc.), as well as logical laws and argumentative rules that define how we can distinguish true from false statements, there are no reliable rules that allow us to determine who is qualified to tell the truth and to do so in a way that benefits individuals and the political community alike (cf. DTP, 113).³⁶

One consequence of this dilemma is that, seen from a historical perspective, *parrhesia* gradually shifts from the political field to the realm of personal relations. "The problem of freedom in the use of *logos* becomes more and more the problem of freedom in the choice of the way you live, and freedom in the choice of the *bios*" (DTP, 131). In other words, *parrhesia*, understood as an societal practice and institution, becomes more and more "a personal attitude" (DTP, 59). For if there are no rules to determine who is competent to speak the truth, and if the relationship between the speaking subject and the truth spoken can no longer be established by "pure frankness or pure courage" (DTP, 113), then the only option is to get individuals to care about themselves and the truth through constant practice, exercise, and reminding. According to Foucault, this development leads to the emergence of an ethical form of *parrhesia* located in "the field of personal relations to oneself and to others, *parrēsia* in the care of the self" (DTP, 123). From now

³² Cf. Michael P. Schmude, "Licentia," in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik*, Bd. 5, ed. Gert Ueding (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2001).

³³ At first glance, this description is reminiscent of Rawls's definition of *civil disobedience*, according to which the subject can demonstrate the *sincerity* of its actions—to itself and to others—only by the price it may have to pay: "To be completely open and nonviolent is to give bond of one's sincerity, for it is not easy to convince another that one's acts are conscientious, or even to be sure of this before oneself. [...] We must pay a certain price to convince others that our actions have, in our carefully considered view, a sufficient moral basis in the political convictions of the community." (John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Revised ed. (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1999), 322) There is, however, a decisive difference between *civil disobedience* and *parrhesia*—namely, the violent and hurtful character of the latter (cf. Posselt, "Wahrsprechen, Wortergreifung und 'Collateral Murder'," 84).

³⁴ See also Jacques Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2005), 21: "It has always been very difficult, and for essential reasons, to distinguish rigorously between the goods and the evils of democracy [...]. It has always been *hard* to distinguish, with regard to free will, between the good of democratic freedom or liberty and the evil of democratic license."

³⁵ Cf. Vincent F. Hendricks and Mads Vestergaard, *Reality Lost: Markets of Attention, Misinformation and Manipulation* (Cham: Springer, 2019); Silke van Dyk, "Krise der Faktizität? Über Wahrheit und Lüge in der Politik und die Aufgabe der Kritik," *PROKLA* 188 (Jg. 47), no. 3 (2017); Frieder Vogelmann, "The Problem of Post-truth: Rethinking the Relationship between Truth and Politics," *Behemoth* 11, no. 2 (2018).

³⁶ For a discussion of normative criteria for evaluating parrhesiastic speech acts, especially in light of their increasing appropriation by right-wing populist actors, see Posselt and Seitz, "Sprachen des Widerstands."

on, *parrhesia*, it seems, has its primary place not in politics and political practice but in the realm of education, personal guidance, and "the formation of the moral subject" (GSO II, 8).

However, this is not to say that *parrhesia*, with its location in the ethical realm, has completely lost its political meaning. Rather, the concept of *parrhesia* transforms itself, "without losing this meaning, [...] by joining up with the principle of the care of self" (GSO II, 339). The transition from a political to an ethical *parrhesia* diagnosed by Foucault does not, therefore, imply an 'ethical turn' of any kind. Rather, it indicates the close intertwining of ethics and politics and the genuine ethico-political dimension of *parrhesia*. This becomes particularly clear when *parrhesia* is reconstructed as a form of political subjectivation that is constitutively entangled with the presence of the Other. This relation to the Other also makes apparent the close connection between *parrhesia* and the care of the self: For as a practice that is essentially about "telling the truth about oneself," *parrhesia* necessarily requires "the presence of the other person who listens and enjoins one to speak, and who speaks himself" (GSO II, 5). Similarly, "one cannot attend to oneself, take care of oneself, without a relationship to another person," to an Other whose task "is precisely to tell the truth, to tell the whole truth, or at any rate to tell all the truth that is necessary" (GSO I, 43).

In *The Hermeneutics of the Self*, Foucault also speaks of *parrhesia* as a *new ethic*, "which is not so much a new ethic of language or discourse in general, but of the verbal relationship with the Other" (HS, 164).³⁷ One of the ways in which this new ethic is made possible is that the care of the self is expanded from a self-practice, which in antiquity was often limited to the relationship between teacher and student, to a social relationship, thus becoming, as it were, politicized, without, however, being reducible to politics.³⁸ After all, the goal of *parrhesia*, understood as a general "philosophical activity," is not simply to persuade or win over another or the political assembly for a particular cause, but "to convince someone that he must care for himself and change his life" (DTP, 156). The conversion that the *parrhesiastes* or truth-teller seeks is thus of a more fundamental kind, "since it is not only a question of changing one's opinion, but of changing completely one's life, one's style of life, one's *relations to others*, and one's *relations to oneself*" (DTP, 156; my italics). Nor is it enough for someone to be "courageous enough to tell the truth to other people"; one must also be "courageous enough to disclose the truth about oneself" (DTP, 193).

4. ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE

Against this background, Foucault distinguishes two modalities of the connection between self-care and *parrhesia*, both of which can be traced back to the figure of Socrates and give rise to two influential philosophical traditions: Platonism and Cynicism. The Platonic modality emphasizes the importance of knowledge, teaching, and instruction (*mathēmata*) and "gives to self-knowledge the form of introspection," which leads to the division "between soul and body," "between the true world and the world of appearances." By contrast, the Cynic modality "reduces as strictly as possible the domain of the *mathēmata*" and "gives knowledge of self the privileged form of exercise, test, and practices of endurance" (GSO II, 339). In other words, while self-knowledge in Platonism takes place as contemplation, with the aim of fathoming the *psyche* as an ontologically distinct reality from the body, in Cynicism it constitutes an ongoing practice and exercise, with the purpose of constantly examining and putting to the test one's own way of life (cf. GSO II, 159–162). In each case, this is accompanied by a different relation

³⁷ On the difference between discourse ethics in the sense of Karl Otto Apel and Jürgen Habermas (to which Foucault implicitly seems to allude here) and Foucault's *dramatics of discourse*, which he introduces in *The Government of Self and Others*, cf. Posselt, "Wahrsprechen, Wortergreifung und 'Collateral Murder'," 82–84.

³⁸ *Parrhesia* is first addressed explicitly by Foucault in *The Hermeneutics of the Self* (1981/1982), in the context of the ancient practice of conscience guidance and the pedagogical relationship between teacher and student. In this relationship, *parrhesia* belongs to the teacher alone, while "[w]hat was imposed on the disciple as duty and conduct [...] was silence, a particular organized silence" (Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 372). The task of the disciple is "to constitute himself as a subject of sovereignty over himself" (Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 372) and "to form an autonomous, independent, full and satisfying relationship to himself" (Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 379; cf. on this reading, for instance, Leonard Lawlor, *From Violence to Speaking Out: Apocalypse and Expression in Foucault, Derrida and Deleuze* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2016)). Only a year later, Foucault rejects the 'pedagogical' conception of *parrhesia*, emphasizing instead its violent, injurious character (Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others* I, 54) as well as the aspects of critique and risk: "*Parrēsia* comes from 'below' and is oriented towards those 'above.' [...] That is the reason why the Greeks wouldn't say that a teacher or that a father, when he criticizes a child, uses *parrēsia*." (Foucault, *Discourse & Truth*, and *Parrēsia*, 44)

to the truth, to the world, and to life. In Platonism, which seeks to recognize the soul in its own being, the true world can only be an *other* world, a world distinct from the world of mere appearances. In Cynicism, which centers on *bios*, on "putting oneself to the test," on the "battle in this world against the world" (GSO II, 340), true life is possible only as an *other* life (GSO II, 314), a life that differs from the ordinary life of human beings. Consequently, as Foucault points out, referring to Platonism and Cynicism as the two liminal figures of the connection of the care of the self with *parrhesia*, "there is no establishment of the truth without an essential position of otherness; the truth is never the same; there can be truth only in the form of the other world and the other life (*l'autre monde et de la vie autre*)" (GSO II, 340).³⁹

This double-sidedness and the emphasis on both the other world and the other life are crucial; for they underline that the two modalities of the connection between the care of the self and *parrhesia* are neither detachable from each other nor reducible to each other. This also applies to the two different ways of problematizing the truth that can be traced back to these modalities: The more influential of these two ways in the history of philosophy "is concerned with the question of how to make sure that a statement is true, that its reasoning is correct, and that we are able to get access to truth" (DTP, 224). The focus here is on the analysis of truth: the propositional truth content of statements, the criteria "through which anyone [...] [can] recognize if a statement [is] true or not" (DTP, 222), and the consistency of the line of reasoning. The other, less prominent tradition deals with truth from the point of view of truth-telling as an activity and asks about the meaning of truth for the individual and the community. Here, the question is, "what is the importance of telling the truth, who is able to tell the truth, and why should we tell the truth, know the truth, and recognize who is able to tell the truth?" (DTP, 224). Thus, according to Foucault, there are two ways of problematizing the truth, both of which have their roots in the figure of Socrates and to this day remain characteristic of philosophy. The *analytic* tradition pursues an "analytics of truth" aimed at establishing criteria for what is true and what is false, as well as guaranteeing the correctness of judgments. The *critical* tradition, on the other hand, asks who can and should speak the truth, about what, with what consequences, and in what relation to power; who is competent to speak the truth at all; what issues and events require that one speaks the truth; and "[w]hat are the relations between this activity of telling the truth and exercising power" (DTP, 223–24), thus addressing the role of power "in the interplay between the subject and truth" (GSO II, 8).

Although Foucault himself locates his own enterprise in the critical tradition, the crucial point is that any one-sided focus—either on truth as analysis or on truth as critique—falls short. The connection between *parrhesia* and self-care is limited neither to a purely epistemic approach in terms of demonstration and (self-)knowledge nor to a purely ascetic attitude in terms of exercise and practice; rather, these two modalities mutually condition and require each other. According to Foucault, however, with the emergence of Cartesianism, this conditional relationship gets suppressed: through the devaluation of the care of the self and *parrhesia* vis-à-vis the precept of self-knowledge and truth as evidence, the analytic perspective is unilaterally valorized and privileged vis-à-vis the critical tradition.

5. SELF-CARE AND PARRHESIA AS CRITICAL PRACTICES

Foucault's preoccupation with the care of the self and *parrhesia* can, in fact, be understood as part of his larger project to elaborate a "genealogy of the critical attitude in philosophy" (DTP, 224).⁴⁰ In "What is Critique?" (1978), Foucault already argues that to adopt a critical attitude

³⁹ Foucault also speaks of the "metaphysical experience of the world" and the "historico-critical experience of life" as the "two fundamental cores in the genesis of European or Western philosophical experience" (Foucault, *The Courage of the Truth*, 315). On Cynic *parrhesia* as a critical attitude, practice of resistance, and life form, see Ruth Sonderegger, "Foucaults Kyniker_innen: Auf dem Weg zu einer kreativen und affirmativen Kritik," in *Foucaults Gegenwart: Sexualität – Sorge – Revolution* (Wien: transversal texts, 2016); and Anna Wieder, "Kritik, Widerstand und die Erben des Kynismus: Wahrsprechen und politische Praxis beim späten Foucault," in *Foucault und das Politische: Transdisziplinäre Impulse für die politische Theorie der Gegenwart*, ed. Oliver Marchart and Renate Martensen (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2019).

⁴⁰ Note that the genealogy of the critical attitude is closely related to Foucault's *history of thought* (as distinct from the history ideas), understood as "the analysis of the way a field of experience and a set of practices—which were accepted without any problem, which were familiar and silent, or at least beyond discussion—become an issue and raise discussions, debates, and incite new reactions, and so induce a crisis in habits, in practices, and in institutions." As such a history of *problematizations*, the history of thought is "the history of the way people take care of something, the way they worry about this or that, maybe madness, crime, sex, or about themselves, or about truth" (Foucault, *Discourse & Truth, and Parrhesia*, 115).

means to assume a certain relation to oneself and to others: "a certain way of thinking, speaking and acting, a certain relationship to what exists, to what one knows, to what one does, a relationship to society, to culture and also a relationship to others."⁴¹ As such a relationship to oneself and to others, the critical attitude, as Foucault puts it following Kant's "What is Enlightenment?," is an appeal to courage—an appeal, however, that is not limited to the courage to make use of one's *own* understanding⁴² but also points to the courage "to question truth on its effects of power and question power on its discourses of truth."⁴³ While in "What is Critique?" Foucault seeks to develop the genealogy of the critical attitude starting from the Christian pastorate, in his 1983 Berkeley lectures *Discourse & Truth* he explicitly traces it back to *parrhesia* and the care of the self (cf. DTP, 68).⁴⁴ It should not be overlooked, however, that the care of the self—like *parrhesia*—in ancient culture was a privilege reserved solely for those who were relieved of the need to care for their own subsistence.⁴⁵ In this context, Foucault also speaks of a "male ethics," "an ethics for men: an ethics thought, written, and taught by men, and addressed to men—to free men, obviously [...], in which women figured only as objects or, at most, as partners that one had best train, educate, and watch over."⁴⁶ Understood in this way, the principle of self-care seems difficult to reconcile with a contemporary perspective on care that explicitly criticizes the invisibilization of care activities that results from their being performed primarily by women in the private sphere of domestic care work.

Consequently, Foucault's analyses of the care of the self and *parrhesia* can be read in two ways: First, it could be argued that Foucault's genealogical reconstruction of the principle of self-care represents yet another example of the appropriation of the concept of care to the conceptual system of Western metaphysics, an incorporation of self-care into a patrilineal genealogy that extends from ancient Greece to modernity. What speaks against such a reading, however, is the fact that Foucault is not at all interested in simply rehabilitating the ancient principle of self-care. As a matter of fact, he explicitly opposes the idea "that, at a certain moment, philosophy went astray and forgot something," in other words, "that somewhere in its history there is a principle, a foundation that must be rediscovered."⁴⁷ Foucault's critical genealogy is, in fact, concerned not with reviving forgotten principles or concepts but with developing concepts and tools suitable for the present situation—that is, "for analyzing what's going on now—and to change it."⁴⁸ Against this background, the second reading—the one that I propose—emphasizes the close connection between self-care and *parrhesia*. The reformulation of self-care via *parrhesia* as a form of truth-telling rooted in the political sphere not only reveals the care of the self as a care for others; it also offers the chance to detach the notion of care from its close entanglement with care work performed in the private sphere and to re-politicize the classical demarcation between the private and the public.

This second reading—and thus the mobilizing power of the connection between self-care and *parrhesia*—can be exemplified by means of Sophocles' *Antigone*. For Antigone takes care of herself and others (her brother Polynices, her sister Ismene, Creon, the polis, etc.) not only by symbolically burying her brother's corpse—following the unwritten, divine law and

41 Michel Foucault, "What is Critique?," in *The Politics of Truth* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1997), 42.

42 Cf. Immanuel Kant, "An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?," in *Practical Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), 17.

43 Foucault, "What is Critique?," 47; see also Sarasin, "Foucaults Wende," 6f. Foucault does not yet use the term *parrhesia* in "What is Critique?"; he first introduces it in his lectures on *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* (1981/82). The continuity between the ancient problematization of *parrhesia* and Kant's account of *Enlightenment* is emphasized by Foucault in *The Government of Self and Others*: "Kant's text on the *Aufklärung* is a certain way for philosophy, through the critique of the *Aufklärung*, to become aware of problems which were traditionally problems of *parrhesia* in antiquity" (Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others I*, 350). On Foucault's 'genealogy of critique' from ancient *parrhesia* to the (neo)liberal critique of the state, see Andreas Folkers, "Daring the Truth: Foucault, Parrhesia and the Genealogy of Critique," *Theory, Culture & Society* 33, no. 1 (2016).

44 These passages are missing in the first English edition of Foucault's lectures, published under the title *Fearless Speech*, ed. by Joseph Pearson, Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2001.

45 Cf. Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 31: "'taking care of oneself' is not at all philosophical but doubtless a fairly common principle linked, however, and we will find this again and again in the history of the *epimeleia heautou*, to a privilege, which in this case is political, economic, and social."

46 Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality, Vol. 2* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 22.

47 Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern for Self," 294–95.

48 Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics," 261.

transgressing Creon's human law—but also by fearlessly telling Creon the truth to his face and binding herself to the truth she tells: "I admit it—I do not deny anything."⁴⁹ The care of the self and others is therefore not confined to the private sphere; rather, it requires open and free speech to gain political significance. Thus, Antigone not only reminds her sister Ismene that she should worry less about her, Antigone, than about herself; she also harshly rejects Ismene's assurance that she will not reveal Antigone's plans, saying, "No—tell everyone. I insist. You will be more hated for silence than if you shout it from the city walls."⁵⁰

What becomes clear here is that *parrhesia* is a form of truth-telling "that is equivalent to commitment, to a bond, and which establishes a certain pact between the subject of enunciation and the subject of conduct" (HS, 406). Through this pact, the speaking subject commits itself to be "the subject of conduct who conforms in every respect to the truth [it] expresses," thereby implying "that there can be no teaching of the truth without an *exemplum*. There can be no teaching of the truth without the person who speaks the truth being the example of this truth" (HS, 406), as when Socrates courageously addresses his judges in the *Apology*, or when Antigone openly confesses her deed to Creon.⁵¹

However, this should not obscure the fact that Antigone, as a woman, is denied *parrhesia* as well as the care of the self. When Antigone nevertheless speaks, when she frankly opposes Creon with her speech, she succeeds only through the catachrestic appropriation of precisely those concepts and norms that exclude her. Such a catachrestic speech act occurs, Judith Butler argues in her reading of Antigone, "when the less than human speaks as human, when gender is displaced, and kinship founders on its own founding laws."⁵² Thus, Antigone's alliance with herself paradoxically implies a kind of rupture at the same time. For, according to Butler, "as she begins to act in language, she also departs from herself. Her act is never fully her act, and though she uses language to claim her deed, to assert a 'manly' and defiant autonomy, she can perform that act only through embodying the norms of the power she opposes."⁵³ Indeed, Antigone's speech and actions not only violate Creon's rule but simultaneously challenge the prevailing political order, including the order of the sexes and the dividing line between the public and the private spheres. Therefore, for Creon, the fact that Antigone boasts about her deed and mocks him weighs at least as heavily as the transgression of his commandment. For it is not by her transgressive act alone but by virtue of her parrhesiastic speech act that Antigone constitutes herself as a truth-speaking subject and subverts the prevailing gender relations: "She will be the man, not I, if she can go victorious and unpunished!"⁵⁴

Crucially, Antigone's speech act unfolds its critical-emancipatory power precisely by combining *parrhesia* with the care of the self in a constitutive way: For it is only because Antigone cares for herself and the truth that her speech act toward Creon is more than mere folly or foolish arrogance; and it is only because Antigone publicly binds herself to the truth she speaks that her concern for herself and others (for Polynices and Ismene as well as for Creon and the polis) is not limited to the private and personal sphere but unfolds its politically subversive power and effectiveness. What comes into view here is what we might call a *parrhesiastic care of the self and others*: just as *parrhesia* becomes *empty* chatter, speech dangerous for democracy and the community if it is not sustained by the care of the self and others, so the care of the self and others remains *mute* and trapped in the private sphere if it is not accompanied by the courage of the truth and the risk of speaking out. Creon's tyrannical exercise of power and ultimate failure, on the other hand, stem from his inability to take care of himself and others. This, in turn, results in his incapacity to engage in the parrhesiastic game, in which those who know the truth but do not have power turn to those who have power but are not in possession

⁴⁹ Sophocles, "Antigone," in *The Theban Plays: Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus, Antigone* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2009), line 443.

⁵⁰ Sophocles, "Antigone," lines 83–87.

⁵¹ Cf. also Hannah Arendt, "Truth and Politics," in *Truth: Engagements Across Philosophical Traditions*, ed. David Wood and José Medina (Malden: Blackwell, 2005), 306, with reference to Socrates: "this teaching by example is, indeed, the only form of 'persuasion' that philosophical truth is capable of without perversion or distortion."

⁵² Judith Butler, *Antigone's Claim: Kinship between Life and Death* (New York: Columbia UP, 2000), 82. On catachresis as a political act of speaking up and as a subversive act of resignification of hegemonic concepts and norms, cf. Gerald Posselt, *Katachrese: Rhetorik des Performativen* (München: Fink, 2005), 219ff.

⁵³ Butler, *Antigone's Claim*, 10.

⁵⁴ Sophocles, "Antigone," lines 484–85.

of the truth.⁵⁵ This constellation is by no means limited to the ancient figure of Antigone but still figures prominently in political forms of speaking up and resistance. For a present example of the constitutive connection between *parrhesia* and the care of the self, think of the whistleblower Edward Snowden's statement, made in the first interview after his escape from the United States, that the care for himself and others was the main motivation for going public with his revelations—despite the risks involved.⁵⁶

6. CONCLUSION: THE CARE OF THE SELF AND THE CONCERN FOR TRUTH

Two important conclusions can be drawn from all this: On the one hand, the care of the self and others and *parrhesia* are closely interwoven with the role of power in the relationship between the subject and truth; on the other hand, both develop their genuine critical and emancipatory potential only in their constitutive relatedness to each other—that is, as a *parrhesiastic care of the self and others*. For just as *parrhesia* must be rooted in the care of the self and others as well as in the *concern for truth*⁵⁷ if it is not to become empty talk and chatter endangering and threatening the democratic community and social solidarity, the care of the self and others threatens to turn into a mere cult of the self, xenophobic isolation, or paternalistic welfare if it is not tied back to the ethical-political practice of *parrhesia*. Such one-sidedness is at play in the figure of the *concerned citizen*, who negates the claims and needs of others while rendering her own concerns absolute and immunizing them against any questioning. Further, it is manifest in the political model of the 'welfare state' (German *Fürsorgestaat*), in which, according to Foucault, the "political power at work within the state as a legal framework of unity" is interwoven with "a power we can call 'pastoral', whose role is to constantly ensure, sustain, and improve the lives of each and every one."⁵⁸ And it can also be seen in the neoliberal appropriation of the care of the self in terms of an obligatory individualism that declares freedom the norm and transforms people into entrepreneurs of themselves.⁵⁹

Based on the reconstruction of Foucault's concept of care proposed here, we can now reformulate the problem that still seemed unsolvable to Foucault in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*: Namely, "that we find it impossible today to constitute an ethic of the self, even though it may be an urgent, fundamental, and politically indispensable task, if it is true after all that there is no first or final point of resistance to political power other than in the relationship one has to oneself" (HS, 252). Such an ethics appears impossible, however, only if one fails to recognize that every self-relation implies alterity. If, on the other hand, we combine *parrhesia* with the care of the self, and if we recognize that every self-relation is constitutively a relation with others, then perhaps what becomes possible is not only an ethics of "the verbal relationship with the Other" (HS, 164) but also a politics of the care of self and others that is also a concern for truth.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research leading to this article has been financed by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) Research Project P 26579-G22 "Language and Violence." My special thanks go to Florian Pistor, Tatjana Schönwälder-Kuntze, Sergej Seitz, and Ľubomír Dunaj, Michael Stiegler as well as to the anonymous reviewers for their helpful remarks and suggestions.

AUTHOR AFFILIATION

Gerald Posselt  orcid.org/0000-0002-7175-8623
University of Vienna, AT

55 Cf. Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern for Self," 288.

56 Cf. Snowden in: Laura Poitras, *Citizenfour* (USA: RADiUS-TWC 2014), app. 00:27:00.

57 Cf. On the concern for truth (*le souci de la vérité*), see also Michel Foucault, "The Concern for Truth," in *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings. 1977–1984* (New York: Routledge, 1988).

58 Foucault, "Omnes et Singulatim," 235.

59 Cf. Müller, "Lebensführung und Lebenskunst," 20. On the neoliberal redefinition of *homo oeconomicus* as an entrepreneur of himself, see Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–79* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 226.

- Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998.
- Agamben, Giorgio. *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*. Trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen. New York: Zone Books, 2000.
- Allen, Amy. "Foucault, Feminism, and the Self: The Politics of Personal Transformation." In *Feminism and the Final Foucault*, edited by Dianna Taylor and Karen Vintges, 235–57. Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 2004.
- Arendt, Hannah. "Truth and Politics." In *Truth: Engagements Across Philosophical Traditions*, edited by David Wood and José Medina, 295–314. Malden: Blackwell, 2005. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470776407.ch19>
- Balke, Friedrich. "Selbstsorge/Selbsttechnologie." In *Foucault-Handbuch: Leben – Werk – Wirkung*, edited by Clemens Kammler, 286–91. Stuttgart/Weimar: Metzler, 2008. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-476-01378-1_42
- Bröckling, Ulrich. "Menschenökonomie, Humankapital: Zur Kritik der biopolitischen Ökonomie." In *Gute Hirten führen sanft. Über Menschenregierungskünste*, 305–33. Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2017.
- Butler, Judith. *Antigone's Claim: Kinship between Life and Death*. New York: Columbia UP, 2000.
- Butler, Judith. *The Force of Nonviolence: An Ethico-Political Bind*. London: Verso, 2020.
- Brown, Wendy. "Neo-Liberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy." In: *Edgework: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics*. Princeton: Princeton UP 2005, 37–59.
- Conradi, Elisabeth. "Verteilungsgerechtigkeit oder achtsame Zuwendung? Ethico-politische Dimensionen der Sorge in deutschsprachigen Care-Diskursen." *Das Argument* 58, no. 6 (2016): 818–32.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*. Trans. by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2005.
- Dilts, Andrew. "From 'Entrepreneur of the Self' to 'Care of the Self': Neo-liberal Governmentality and Foucault's Ethics." *Foucault Studies* 12 (2011): 130–46. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22439/fs.v0i12.3338>
- Emcke, Carolin. *Against Hate*. Trans. by Tony Crawford. Medford: Polity Press, 2019.
- Folkers, Andreas. "Daring the Truth: Foucault, Parrhesia and the Genealogy of Critique." *Theory, Culture & Society* 33, no. 1 (2016): 3–28. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276414558885>
- Foucault, Michel. *The Care of the Self: The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 3. Trans. by Robert Hurley. New York: Pantheon, 1986.
- Foucault, Michel. "The Concern for Truth." In *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings. 1977–1984*. Ed. with an introduction by Lawrence D. Kritzman. Trans. by Alan Sheridan and others, 255–70. New York: Routledge, 1988.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 2. Trans. by Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage Books, 1990.
- Foucault, Michel. "The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom." In *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth. Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954–1984. Vol. I*. Ed. by Paul Rabinow. Trans. by Robert Hurley and others, 281–302. New York: The New Press, 1997.
- Foucault, Michel. "What is Critique?." In *The Politics of Truth*. Ed. by Sylvère Lotringer and Lysa Hochroth. Trans. by Lysa Hochroth and Catherine Porter, 41–81. New York: Semiotext(e), 1997.
- Foucault, Michel. "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress." In *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth. Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954–1984. Vol. I*. Ed. by Paul Rabinow. Trans. by Robert Hurley and others, 253–80. New York: The New Press, 1997.
- Foucault, Michel. *Fearless Speech*. Ed. by Joseph Pearson. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2001.
- Foucault, Michel. "Omnes et Singulatim: Towards a Criticism of 'Political Reason'." *Tanner Lectures on Human Values* Oct. 10 & 16 (2001). https://tannerlectures.utah.edu/_documents/a-to-z/ff/foucault81.pdf.
- Foucault, Michel (HS). *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981–1982*. Ed. by Frédéric Gros, general ed. François Ewald and Alessandro Fontana, trans. by Graham Burchell. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-09483-4>
- Foucault, Michel. "My body, this paper, this fire: Appendix II of 1972 edition." In *History of Madness*. Ed. Jean Khalifa, trans. by Jonathan Murphy and Jean Khalifa, 550–74. New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–79*. Ed. by Michel Senellart; trans. by Graham Burchell. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.
- Foucault, Michel (GSO I). *The Government of Self and Others*. Lectures at the Collège de France 1982–1983. Ed. Frédéric Gros. Trans. by Graham Burchell. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230274730>
- Foucault, Michel (GSO II). *The Courage of the Truth: The Government of Self and Others II*. Lectures at the Collège de France 1983–1984. Ed. by Frédéric Gros. Trans. by Graham Burchell. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.
- Foucault, Michel (DTP). *Discourse & Truth, and Parrhesia*. Ed. by Henri-Paul Fruchaud and Daniele Lorenzini. Introduction by Frédéric Gros. English edition established by Nancy Luxon. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2019.

- Gilligan, Carol. *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*. With new introduction. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1993 [original edition 1982].
- Gros, Frédéric. "Course Context." In *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981–1982*. Ed. by Frédéric Gros. Trans. by Graham Burchell, 507–50. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- Han, Byung-Chul. *Psychopolitics: Neoliberalism and New Technologies of Power*. Trans. by Erik Butler. London: Verso, 2017.
- Hendricks, Vincent F., and Mads Vestergaard. *Reality Lost: Markets of Attention, Misinformation and Manipulation*. Cham: Springer, 2019. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-00813-0>
- Honneth, Axel. *Reification: A New Look at an Old Idea*. With commentaries by Judith Butler, Raymond Geuss, Jonathan Lear. Ed. and introd. by Martin Jay. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195320466.001.0001>
- Honneth, Axel. "Freiheit und Individualisierung: Axel Honneth im Gespräch mit Vladislav Suvák und L'ubomír Dunaj." *Allgemeine Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 42, no. 2 (2017): 235–42.
- Jenkins, Stephanie. "Care." In *The Cambridge Foucault Lexicon*, edited by Leonard Lawlor and John Nale, 57–60. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2014.
- Kant, Immanuel. "An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?." In *Practical Philosophy*. Trans. and ed. by Mary J. Gregor; general introd. by Allen Wood, 11–22. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511813306.005>
- Klinger, Cornelia. "Krise war immer ...: Lebenssorge und geschlechtliche Arbeitsteilungen in sozialphilosophischer und kapitalismuskritischer Perspektive." In *Gesellschaft. Feministische Krisendiagnosen*, edited by Erna Appelt, Brigitte Aulenbacher and Angelika Wetterer, 82–104. Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 2013.
- Klinger, Cornelia. "Selbstsorge oder Selbsttechnologie? Das Subjekt zwischen liberaler Tradition und Neoliberalismus." In *Für sich und andere sorgen: Krise und Zukunft von Care in der modernen Gesellschaft*, edited by Brigitte Aulenbacher and Maria Dammayr, 31–39. Weinheim: Beltz Juventa, 2014.
- Kranz, Margarita. "Sorge." In *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, Bd. 9, edited by Joachim Ritter and Karlfried Gründer, 1086–89. Basel: Schwabe, 1995.
- Lawlor, Leonard. *From Violence to Speaking Out: Apocalypse and Expression in Foucault, Derrida and Deleuze*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2016.
- Lehn, Theres. *Asketische Praxis: Die Bedeutung der Askese für das ethische Handeln und das menschliche Sein bei Aristoteles und Michel Foucault*. Dissertation zur Erlangung des Doktorgrades der Philosophie an der Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität. München, 2012. https://edoc.ub.uni-muenchen.de/17887/1/Lehn_Theres.pdf.
- Menke, Christoph. "Zweierlei Übung: Zum Verhältnis von sozialer Disziplinierung und ästhetischer Existenz." In *Michel Foucault: Zwischenbilanz einer Rezeption*, edited by Axel Honneth and Martin Saar, 283–99. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 2003.
- Milchman, Alan, and Alan Rosenberg. "Michel Foucault: An Ethical Politics of Care of Self and Others." In *Political Philosophy in the Twentieth Century: Authors and Arguments*, edited by Catherine H. Zuckert, 228–37. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139028530.016>
- Müller, Hans-Peter. "Lebensführung und Lebenskunst im Zeitalter der Unsicherheit." In *Für sich und andere sorgen: Krise und Zukunft von Care in der modernen Gesellschaft*, edited by Brigitte Aulenbacher and Maria Dammayr, 18–30. Weinheim: Beltz Juventa, 2014.
- Myers, Ella. "Resisting Foucauldian Ethics: Associative Politics and the Limits of the Care of the Self." *Contemporary Political Theory* 7 (2008): 125–46. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.cpt.2007.25>
- Plato. "Apology." In *Euthyphro – Apology – Crito – Phaedo – Phaedrus*. Trans. by Harold North Fowler. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2005.
- Plonz, Sabine. "Zeitschriftenschwerpunkt: Ethik im Kapitalismus als Arbeit an der Utopie." *Das Argument* 58, no. 6 (2016): 799–860.
- Poitras, Laura. *Citizenfour*. Documentary film. USA: RADIUS-TWC 2014.
- Posselt, Gerald. *Katachrese: Rhetorik des Performativen*. München: Fink, 2005.
- Posselt, Gerald. "Wahrsprechen, Wortergreifung und 'Collateral Murder': Zur Aktualität von Michel Foucaults Begriff der *parrhesia*." *Rhetorik: Ein internationales Jahrbuch* 32, no. 1 (2013): 71–92. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1515/rhet.2013.008>
- Posselt, Gerald. "Rhetorizing Philosophy: Toward a 'Double Reading' of Philosophical Texts." *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 52, no. 1 (2019): 24–46. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5325/philrhet.52.1.0024>
- Posselt, Gerald, and Sergej Seitz. "Sprachen des Widerstands: Zur Normativität politischer Artikulation bei Foucault und Rancière." In *Foucault und das Politische: Transdisziplinäre Impulse für die politische Theorie der Gegenwart*, edited by Oliver Marchart and Renate Martensen, 185–209. Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2019. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-22789-0_10
- Rawls, John. *A Theory of Justice*. Revised ed. Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1999.
- Sarasin, Philipp. "Unternehmer seiner selbst." *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 55, no. 3 (2007): 473–79. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1524/dzph.2007.55.3.473>

- Sarasin, Philipp. "Foucaults Wende." *Le foucaldien* 3, no. 1 (2017): 1–12. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16995/lefou.27>
- Schmid, Wilhelm. "Selbstsorge." In *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, Bd. 9, edited by Joachim Ritter and Karlfried Gründer, 528–35. Basel: Schwabe, 1995.
- Schmude, Michael P. "Licentia." In *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik*, Bd. 5, edited by Gert Ueding, 253–58. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2001.
- Schnabl, Christa. *Gerecht sorgen: Grundlagen einer sozioethischen Theorie der Fürsorge*. Freiburg: Herder, 2005.
- Seitz, Sergej. "Truth beyond Consensus: Parrhesia, Dissent, and Subjectivation." *Epékeina: International Journal of Ontology, History and Critics* 7, no. 1–2 (2016): 1–13. <http://www.ricercafilosofica.it/epekeina/index.php/epekeina/article/view/152>
- Sonderegger, Ruth. "Foucaults Kyniker_innen: Auf dem Weg zu einer kreativen und affirmativen Kritik." In *Foucaults Gegenwart: Sexualität – Sorge – Revolution*, 47–76. Wien: transversal texts, 2016.
- Sophocles. "Antigone." In *The Theban Plays: Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus, Antigone*. Trans., with notes and an introduction by Ruth Fainlight and Robert J. Littman. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2009.
- Stiegler, Michael, and Tatjana Schönwälder-Kuntze. "Wie subsidiär ist (der) Care(-Diskurs)?" *Femina Politica* 26, no. 2 (2017): 19–33. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3224/feminapolitica.v26i2.02>
- Tronto, Joan C. *Caring Democracy: Markets, Equality, and Justice*. New York: New York UP, 2013.
- Tronto, Joan C. "Kann 'Sorgende Demokratie' eine politische Theorie der Transformation sein?" *Das Argument* 58, no. 6 (2016): 839–48.
- van Dyk, Silke. "Krise der Faktizität? Über Wahrheit und Lüge in der Politik und die Aufgabe der Kritik." *PROKLA* 188 (Jg. 47), no. 3 (2017): 347–67. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32387/prokla.v47i188.65>
- Vogelmann, Frieder. "The Problem of Post-truth: Rethinking the Relationship between Truth and Politics." *Behemoth* 11, no. 2 (2018): 18–37. <https://doi.org/10.6094/behemoth.2018.11.2.986>.
- Waldenfels, Bernhard. "Wahrsprechen und Antworten." In *Parrhesia. Foucault und der Mut zur Wahrheit*, edited by Petra Gehring and Andreas Gelhard, 63–81. Zürich: Diaphanes, 2012.
- Wieder, Anna. "Kritik, Widerstand und die Erben des Kynismus: Wahrsprechen und politische Praxis beim späten Foucault." In *Foucault und das Politische: Transdisziplinäre Impulse für die politische Theorie der Gegenwart*, edited by Oliver Marchart and Renate Martensen, 65–86. Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2019. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-22789-0_5
- Wong, James. "Self and Others: The Work of 'Care' in Foucault's Care of the Self." *Philosophy Today* 57, no. 1 (2013): 99–113. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5840/philtoday20135717>

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Gerald, Posselt. "Self-Care and Truth-Telling: Rethinking Care with Foucault." *Le foucaldien* 7, no. 1 (2021): 10, pp. 1–15. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16995/lefou.107>

Submitted: 24 June 2021

Accepted: 18 August 2021

Published: 04 October 2021

COPYRIGHT:

© 2021 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

Le foucaldien is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by Open Library of Humanities.

