

Plato, Foucault and the conceptualisation of *parrhēsia*

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It is difficult to find a consistent treatment of the concept of *parrhēsia*, problematically translated as frank or free speech, in Plato's dialogues. Plato's presentation of Socrates as a frank-speaking Athenian provocateur cannot easily be reconciled with the strictures that appear to govern the conduct of the Socratic elenchus, or the restrictive regulations of his imagined cities. Michel Foucault's detailed exploration of *parrhēsia* places Socrates and Plato at a critical juncture in the development of the concept; this account itself develops across several series of lectures, all published posthumously.¹ Foucault treats Socrates, or

¹ Foucault's 1983 Berkeley lectures were published in English as M. Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, ed. J. Pearson (Los Angeles, 2001) (=FS), also online as M. Foucault, 'Discourse and Truth: The Problematization of Parrhesia', (1983)

<<http://foucault.info/documents/parrhesia/>>), and more recently in French, including post-lecture discussions, as M. Foucault, *Discours Et Vérité. Précédé De La Parrésia*, edd. H.-P. Fruchaud and D. Lorenzini (Paris, 2016) (=DV). The two series of lectures given at the Collège de France, in 1982-3 and 1984, were published as M. Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1982-1983*, edd. F. Ewald and A. Fontana, trans. G. Burchell (Basingstoke, 2010) (=GSO), and M. Foucault, *The Courage of Truth (the Government of Self and Others II): Lectures at the Collège de France, 1983-1984*, trans. G. Burchell (Basingstoke, 2011) (=CT); original publication as M. Foucault, *Le Gouvernement de Soi et des Autres : Cours au Collège de France, (1982-1983)*, edd. F.

Plato's character Socrates, as the agent of a transformation of the concept of *parrhēsia*, moving it from what he identifies as "political" *parrhēsia* practised in the public arenas of Athenian democracy to a "moral" or philosophical *parrhēsia* applied to private speech and specifically to philosophical speech, and associated with non-democratic contexts such as the courts of Hellenistic kings.² But reading the key Socratic dialogues in which frank speech and *parrhēsia* are discussed in the context of educational and philosophical method, it becomes difficult to reconcile Socrates with the Foucauldian figure of the democratic parrhesiast, or to read Plato as engaged with democratic *parrhēsia*, as Sara Monoson argues.³ This paper will suggest that, while Plato's thought and characterisation of Socrates were useful for Foucault in constructing his model, applying that model back to classical Athens reveals ambiguities in Plato's depiction of Socrates, and in what it might mean to treat Socrates as a parrhesiast.⁴

Ewald, A. Fontana, and F. Gros (Paris, 2008) M. Foucault, *Le Courage de la Vérité: Le Gouvernement de Soi et des Autres II: Cours au Collège de France (1983-1984)*, ed. F. Gros (Paris, 2009).

² *GSO*, pp. 339-42, *CT*, pp. 23-33, *FS*, pp. 20-24.

³ S.S. Monoson, *Plato's Democratic Entanglements: Athenian Politics and the Practice of Philosophy* (Princeton, 2000), pp. 154-80.

⁴ V. Glansdorff, 'Michel Foucault: la "Parrésia" dans le Gouvernement de Soi et des Autres', *Revue de Philosophie Ancienne*, (2010) 28 (1), pp. 67-84, N. Luxon, *Crisis of Authority: politics, trust, and truth-telling in Freud and Foucault* (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 141-150. Cf. the application of Foucauldian *parrhēsia* to contemporary politics in T.B. Dyrberg, *Foucault on the Politics of Parrhesia* (Basingstoke, 2014)), and to the political culture of imperial Rome in P.A. Miller, 'Truth-Telling in Foucault's "Le Gouvernement De Soi Et Des Autres" and Persius 1: The Subject, Rhetoric, and Power', *Parrhesia*, 1 (2006), pp. 27-61.

Equally, the valorisation of frankness in the dialogues creates difficulty for Straussian interpreters looking for evidence of veiled speech, a paradox explored by Arlene Saxonhouse in her survey of Athenian free speech.⁵

Foucault's use of classical sources for the history of sexuality has received detailed criticism from classical scholars, but this critical process has been slower to emerge for his account of *parrhēsia*. David Konstan and Sophie Bourgault offer two different critiques, based on Foucault's reading of the concept in Euripides and Plato respectively.⁶ There are tensions between Foucault's analysis and Plato's use of the term, between *parrhēsia* and the power relationships of Socratic dialogue, and between *parrhēsia* as a mode of rhetorical performance that pertains to specific ancient Greek and Athenian speech contexts rather than as a concept in ancient political thought. Other scholarship on ancient freedom of speech treats *parrhēsia* as only one part of its conceptualisation (with *isēgoria*, equal access to the opportunity to address the *demos*, also playing an important role).⁷

⁵ A.W. Saxonhouse, *Free Speech and Democracy in Ancient Athens* (Cambridge, 2006).

⁶ S. Bourgault, 'The Unbridled Tongue: Plato, Parrhesia and Philosophy', *Interpretation*, 41(2) (2015), pp. 65-89, D. Konstan, 'The Two Faces of *Parrhēsia*: Free Speech and Self-Expression in Ancient Greece', *Antichthon*, 46 (2012), pp. 1-13; see also Luxon, *Crisis of Authority*, p. 142, n.22. On Foucault and the history of sexuality (M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge (Vol. 1)*, trans. R. Hurley (London, 1978), M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: The Use of Pleasure (Vol. 2)*, trans. R. Hurley (London, 1985)), see D.H.J. Larmour, P.A. Miller, and C. Platter (eds.), *Rethinking Sexuality: Foucault and Classical Antiquity* (Princeton, 1998), J. Davidson, 'Dover, Foucault and Greek Homosexuality: Penetration and the Truth of Sex', *Past & Present*, (170) (2001), pp. 3-51.

⁷ A. Momigliano, 'Freedom of Speech in Antiquity', in P.P. Wiener (ed.), *Dictionary of the*

While all Foucault's lectures on this topic have now been published (posthumously), the English-language short lecture series given in Berkeley in 1983, "Discourse and Truth", was the first to appear in print. This has led scholars to draw on the fraction of the project included in these papers, for many years the only accessible versions.⁸

An earlier lecture given at Grenoble in 1982, unpublished for 30 years, gives a distinctive account of the position of classical antiquity within the framework that Foucault originally envisaged.⁹ Most significantly, it is much more clear from this lecture that Athenian democracy and the thought of Plato and Socrates were not Foucault's initial focus in exploring *parrhēsia*, but the thought and speech of later times, particularly the emergence of Christian thought and practice; one can trace a pattern similar to that of his *History of Sexuality*.¹⁰ The classical Athenian authors and texts that will feature in the later lectures receive less discussion than later texts that explore the relationship between teacher and

History of Ideas: Studies of Selected Pivotal Ideas (New York, 1973-4), Vol. 2, pp. 252-63, K.A. Raaflaub, *The Discovery of Freedom in Ancient Greece* (Chicago, 2004), pp. 221-5, P.P. Liddel, *Civic Obligation and Individual Liberty in Ancient Athens* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 24-28. Foucault addresses the idea of 'bad *parrhēsia*' in his reading of Euripides' *Ion* (*GSO*, pp. 149-51).

⁸ Luxon, *Crisis of Authority*, p. 142; see S. Elden, *Foucault's Last Decade* (Cambridge, 2016), pp. 191-204 for a survey of the incomplete project.

⁹ M. Foucault, 'La Parrhēsia', *Anabases: Traditions et réceptions de l'Antiquité*, 16 (2012), pp. 157-88, published in English as M. Foucault, 'Parrhēsia', *Critical Inquiry*, 41(2) (2015), pp. 219-53; now also in *DV*, pp. 21-75.

¹⁰ Foucault, *History of Sexuality I*; see Elden, *Foucault's Last Decade* on the evolution of this project.

student in the later classical world.¹¹ Foucault concludes his Grenoble lecture with the following:

J'ai essayé de vous montrer cette espèce de figure assez curieuse de la parrhêsia qui me paraît extrêmement différente du jeu platonicien ou socratique des questions et des réponses et des rapports [entre] maître et disciple, et qui est également très différente de ce qu'on trouvera par la suite dans la spiritualité chrétienne et dans les institutions monastiques.¹²

However, this outline is not delivered in full in the later lecture series, with their more detailed exploration of Athens, Plato and Socrates. The positioning of Socrates within this account is problematic, complicating Foucault's account of the development of *parrhêsia*, its move from the political to the private sphere, from democracy to philosophy, and its role in practices of self-care.¹³ Foucault makes Socrates central to his account of a change from democratic to philosophical *parrhêsia*, in which the object of speaking fearlessly is self-examination and care for one's own life, rather than contributing to the collective well-being of the polis. This emblematic position is an uncomfortable one for the character, if it is read back into the Platonic texts, and over-burdens "Socrates" with multiple layers of meaning.¹⁴

¹¹ This later focus is usefully explored by Paul Allen Miller, using Foucault's Collège de France lectures to explore *parrhêsia* and the 'construction of the imperial subject' (Miller, *Truth-Telling*).

¹² *DV*, p. 56; the editors add an extract from Foucault's notes, which show that Foucault regarded *parrhêsia* as "à comparer avec... l'interrogation socratique: ironie".

¹³ See Nancy Luxon, 'Truthfulness, risk, and trust in the late lectures of Michel Foucault', *Inquiry* (2004), 47 (5), pp. 464-89.

¹⁴ A. Nehamas, *The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault* (Berkeley,

Foucault's developmental model was challenged during discussion after the Berkeley lectures; Foucault acknowledges that the forms of *parrhēsia* he represents as sequential developments may have been in place simultaneously, given the significant overlap in the lives of Euripides and Socrates, each identified with one of the conceptualisations.¹⁵

Foucault's insistent separation of *parrhēsia* from rhetoric, and refusal to treat it as a rhetorical strategy that might be adopted by a speaker in the assembly or an interlocutor in a dialogue, creates further difficulties. For him, *parrhēsia* is the absence of rhetorical tropes.¹⁶

Understanding this distinction may help to clarify Foucault's own focus on a specific subset of parrhesiastic speech acts.¹⁷

Foucault likens Socrates the character to a *parrhēsiastēs*, a free-speaking social critic, even though his own *parrhēsia* differs from the political kind.¹⁸ But this treatment of the character is difficult to reconcile with the complex treatment of *parrhēsia* itself across Plato's dialogues, including restrictions on speech promoted by Plato's "Socrates" himself, as well as

1998), p. 183.

¹⁵ *DV*, pp. 206-07.

¹⁶ *FS*, pp. 20-22, *GSO*, pp. 327-28, *CT*, pp. 13-14; see A. Ross, 'Why Is 'Speaking the Truth' Fearless? 'Danger' and 'Truth' in Foucault's Discussion of *Parrhesia*', *Parrhesia*, 4 (2008), pp. 62-75 at pp. 66-68.

¹⁷ A.E. Walzer, '*Parrēsia*, Foucault, and the Classical Rhetorical Tradition', *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 43 (1) (2013), pp. 1-21 presents *parrhēsia* as rhetorical strategy, cf. P.J. Gehrke et al., 'Forum on Arthur Walzer's "Parrēsia, Foucault, and the Classical Rhetorical Tradition"', *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 43 (4) (2013), pp. 355-81.

¹⁸ *FS*, pp. 101-02, 05-06.

other key speakers.¹⁹ Neither the restrictions on speech and the censorship of literature envisaged by Plato in his constructions of idealised polis societies in the *Republic* and the *Laws*, nor the complexities of Socratic irony within dialogues such as the *Gorgias*, sit easily with a commitment to the Athenian democratic value of frankness or frank speech.²⁰ Power relationships within the Socratic elenchus, a highly structured form of speech, likewise suggest that Socrates is not the weaker figure speaking “truth to power”, but a rather forbidding questioner with a narrow view of what constitutes an acceptable answer, and one who can rely on the powerful position of his superior epistemic status, confirmed by the oracle (*Apol.* 20d-21a). But Foucault’s readers have often overlooked his identification of the *parrhēsia* of the powerful, and treated Socrates as the weaker figure in his conversations. This results in a problematic conflation, identified by Nancy Luxon, and risks ignoring the roles of both players in the parrhesiastic game.²¹

Foucault and Socrates as parrhesiast

The pivotal position of Socrates within Foucault’s developmental model, standing between

¹⁹ T. Flynn, 'Foucault as Parrhesiast: His Last Course at the Collège De France', in J.W. Bernauer and D.M. Rasmussen (edd.), *The Final Foucault* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 102-18 at p. 102, and *CT*, pp. 343-56; S.C. Jarratt, 'Untimely Historiography? Foucault’s “Greco-Latin Trip”', *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 44 (3) (2014), pp. 220-33 on the role of the classical world in Foucault’s final works.

²⁰ Foucault explores “democratic *parrhēsia*” before Plato; see also G. Scarpat, *Parrhesia; Storia Del Termine E Delle Sue Traduzione in Latino* (Brescia, 1964) and Momigliano, *Freedom of Speech*. On Socratic irony, see G. Vlastos, *Socrates, Ironist and Moral Philosopher* (Ithaca, 1991).

²¹ Luxon, *Crisis of Authority*, pp. 151-2.

public and private, leads to this conflation. Foucault's interest in the future manifestation of *parrhēsia* in Christian confessional speech, if retrojected into the earlier context, could generate anachronistic analysis.²² From the perspective of the present day, the contrasting models of democratic and egalitarian *parrhēsia* in ancient cities and the hierarchical *parrhēsia* of priest and believer in the Christian tradition provide a useful framework, but this simplified structure is difficult to re-apply when considering the politics of democratic Athens.²³

Reconciling Socrates with Foucauldian *parrhēsia* has led some scholars to disregard the dialogic context of Socratic speech, the differing roles of Socrates and his interlocutors, and significant differences between the performance contexts of democratic debate and the Socratic elenchus.²⁴ The figure of Socrates the martyr for free speech and the practices of the working philosopher represented in Plato's dialogues are imperfectly aligned, and this

²² As in Foucault's reading of the *Gorgias*, *GSO*, p. 361, where he notes the risk of anachronism; see Bourgault, *Unbridled Tongue*, pp. 67-8.

²³ Dyrberg, *Politics of Parrhesia*, pp. 97-100.

²⁴ Accounts of Plato and *parrhēsia*; A.W. Saxonhouse, *Free Speech*, especially pp. 179-206; Monoson, *Plato's Democratic Entanglements*, E. Markovits, *The Politics of Sincerity: Plato, Frank Speech, and Democratic Judgment* (University Park, 2008), M. Van Raalte, 'Socratic Parrhesia and Its Afterlife in Plato's *Laws*', in I. Sluiter and R.M. Rosen (edd.), *Free Speech in Classical Antiquity* (Leiden, 2004), pp. 279-312; Bourgault, *Unbridled Tongue* offers a more critical perspective on both Plato and Foucault, drawing on all three lecture series, whereas Monoson and Saxonhouse, writing before the Collège de France lectures were published, rely largely on *FS*. On Socrates' *parrhēsia* in the *Apology* see Flynn, *Foucault as Parrhesiast*, at p. 107, Saxonhouse, *Free Speech*, pp. 100-26.

tension provides space for alternative readings of the relationship between Socrates, Plato, and *parrhēsia*.²⁵ Notably, Sara Monoson has used the figure of “the philosopher as parrhesiast” to reposition Plato as an engaged internal critic of Athenian deliberative democracy; this collapses Foucault’s distinction.²⁶ She writes that Plato “defends the specifically democratic conceptualization of parrhesia and appropriates it for philosophy”, citing Socrates’ description of the democratic city as “full of freedom and frank speech” (Pl. *Resp.* 8.557b4-5). In contrast Elizabeth Markovits has argued that political “straight talk” and Socratic *parrhēsia* are distinct phenomena; for Markovits, Socratic irony precludes the easy identification of Socrates with the parrhesiast.²⁷

For Arlene Saxonhouse, *parrhēsia* makes Plato’s work possible within its Athenian democratic context, but also generates a difficult paradox; *parrhēsia* becomes not the freedom to say all things, but an instrument of control.²⁸ Saxonhouse is more concerned with the effect of the loss of the Homeric value of shame as a cultural change that enables frankness and fearlessness in Athenian political speech, but like Foucault she finds Plato’s depiction of Socrates as a political actor in Athens a central case for freedom of speech. In turn, Christine Tarnopolsky finds difficulties within Saxonhouse’s and Monoson’s accounts of *parrhēsia* and shame, but rests her own analysis of *parrhēsia* on these earlier accounts, and

²⁵ Most clear in Foucault’s account of the *Apology*, a text central to his own self-presentation as a philosopher (*CT*, pp. 73-92).

²⁶ Luxon, *Crisis of Authority*, pp. 143-4.

²⁷ Markovits, *Politics of Sincerity*, pp. 84-91. Markovits’ analysis asserts a distinction between frank speech and free speech, seen in the changing usage of the word *parrhēsia*.

²⁸ *Grg.* 486e5-487b7; Saxonhouse, *Free Speech*, pp. 85-126, 212.

that of Foucault.²⁹ Disentangling the complexities of Foucault's developmental account of *parrhēsia* may help to resolve these paradoxes.

Nancy Luxon addresses the problems of these accounts through a reading of Foucault's account of Platonic *parrhēsia* in the *Seventh Letter*. For her, Plato speaking to the tyrant Dionysius II is a paradigmatic example of parrhesiastic speech. But this removes the discussion from democratic Athens, and also, as Luxon notes, sidesteps the question of the letters' authenticity and composition date.³⁰

Foucault identifies some speeches by Socrates as taking the same parrhesiastic form, where he addresses a powerful figure with words that require courage to deliver and incur risk, as Socrates' speech in the *Apology* did. He points to Socrates' conversation with Alcibiades, in *Alcibiades I*, as an example of an address to a powerful figure, albeit one on the cusp of becoming so, that matches Plato's encounter with the tyrant.³¹ But there are also questions of authenticity and date for this dialogue; Socrates' accounts of the Spartan and Persian kings already describe the dynamics of the Hellenistic court (*Alc.* 121a-124a).³² The *Charmides* offers a further possible instance of Socrates claiming a parrhesiastic relationship with a potentially superior interlocutor; that Charmides recalls a previous meeting permits Socrates

²⁹ C.H. Tarnopolsky, *Prudes, Perverts, and Tyrants: Plato's Gorgias and the Politics of Shame* (Princeton, 2010), pp. 89-103.

³⁰ *CT*, pp. 61-2; *GSO* pp. 214-19, 223-5; Luxon, *Crisis of Authority*, pp. 145-7. On the *Seventh* and *Eighth Letters* as later responses to Plato see L. Edelstein, *Plato's Seventh Letter* (Leiden, 1966), M.F. Burnyeat and M. Frede, *The Pseudo-Platonic Seventh Letter*, ed. D. Scott (Oxford, 2015).

³¹ See *GSO*, pp. 225-27 and *CT*, pp. 158-62.

³² J.-F. Pradeau, *Platon: Alcibiade*, (Paris, 1999), pp. 219-220 summarises this debate.

to speak freely to him, he claims (*Chrm.* 156a9-b1). Here the word is used informally, to establish friendship, and also ironically, given that Socrates intends to offer the handsome youth an educational experience rather than a cure for his headache.³³ The ambiguous relationship invoked by the claim to *parrhēsia* here does not suggest that Socrates regards himself as the weaker party in the encounter, whatever pretences he adopts. Foucault finds these texts with aristocratic and court settings more useful, rendering problematic the application of the model he derives from them to Athenian democratic politics.

Rather than Foucault's model of Socrates incurring risk in addressing the powerful, the power relationship within elenctic conversation in the core Socratic dialogues, and particularly those in which the nature of Socratic conversation is discussed, works the other way, with the risk falling to the weaker interlocutor. In line with Foucault's claim that *parrhēsia* always represents a political relationship of inequality, but contrary to his view of Socratic dialogue, interlocutors are always placed in a position of inferiority even when they might conventionally regard themselves as being of equal or higher socio-political standing than Socrates.³⁴ Outside the *Apology* and its imitation of a defence speech, the "parrhesiastic pact" between Socrates and his interlocutors is based on inequality, with Socrates almost always in the more powerful position compared to that of his interlocutors.³⁵ Furthermore, the

³³ Monoson categorises this instance, along with others involving Alcibiades, as informal use, and excludes it from her analysis (Monoson, *Plato's Democratic Entanglements*, p. 155, n.3).

³⁴ *CT*, pp. 133-35, on Creusa in Euripides' *Ion*; Creusa problematically uses *parrhēsia*, making a confession of truth, to seek justice in her private life (*FS*, pp. 52-57).

³⁵ Foucault identifies a "parrhesiastic game" (*CT*, pp. 12-13, *FS*, pp. 22-23), in which the tyrant agrees to hear what the parrhesiast has to tell him, which requires a "parrhesiastic pact" ("pacte parrésastique") or contract (*FS*, pp. 32-33, *DV*, p. 120). Socrates' requirement that

parrhēsia that interlocutors deploy is closer to the *parrhēsia* of truth about the self that Foucault identifies as an element of the later practice of philosophy.³⁶ In both courtroom and *elenchus*, *parrhēsia* is a strategy of radical self-disclosure, sometimes deployed for rhetorical effect (particularly in public contexts). Ancient sources distinguish it from *isēgoria*, the equal speech of citizens in the assembly. This distinction suggests the possibility of inequality in the invocation of *parrhēsia*, typified in later political contexts by the philosopher speaking out to the king or tyrant who holds power over him.³⁷

Foucault's model of the parrhesiast as the weaker party is challenged by a wider range of classical texts.³⁸ Foucault himself noted after his Grenoble lecture that one of these texts "causes him difficulty", but he does not treat this text as problematic in the later lectures.³⁹ In

interlocutors speak sincerely seems to perform the same function, if Socrates is understood to be in the position of the tyrant. There is an atypical portrayal of Socrates in Plato's

Parmenides, in which Socrates, his powerlessness marked by his youth (σφόδρα νέον, *Prm.* 127c5), is criticised by the mature philosopher Parmenides (σφόδρα πολίον, *Prm.* 127b2).

³⁶ *FS*, p. 143.

³⁷ Polybius 2.38.6; *GSO*, pp. 157-58, suggesting that there is a relationship with *dunasteia* too. Foucault points to other passages where the freedom of democracy is mentioned, but *parrhēsia* is not specifically invoked in texts such as ps-Xenophon's *Constitution of the Athenians*.

³⁸ Gary Scott ('Games of Truth: Foucault's Analysis of the Transformation from Political to Ethical Parrhēsia', *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 34 (1) (1996), pp. 97-114) suggests that Alcibiades' drunken self-revelation in the *Symposium* is also problematic for Foucault's model.

³⁹ *FS*, p. 87; cf. Foucault, *Parrēsia*, p. 249, *DV*, p. 57.

the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle identifies *parrhēsia* as a quality of the man with greatness of soul (*megalopsuchos*). He regards the parrhesiast as the figure in a position of superiority (*EN* 4.3.1124b29-30) who looks down upon others (*kataphronētikos*).⁴⁰ Such a person will speak openly with people of similar status, but use irony when speaking to those of lower status. In his Collège de France lectures, Foucault cites this passage without comment on the power relations, noting the link with courage but not the superior position of the Aristotelian parrhesiast.⁴¹ He evades the political status of the *megalopsuchos* by concentrating on his psychological qualities, but the position of the potential speaker with *parrhēsia* is made clear by the directionality of *kataphronētikos*.

Traces of this perspective can be seen in Foucault's reading of Euripides' *Ion*, in which the apparent outsider Ion's desire to belong to Athens with full citizen status and to be able to compete for status in politics is expressed in terms of the ability to speak freely (*Ion* 669-675). Foucault finesses the question of *parrhēsia* as a marker of power by suggesting that its force comes from outside the individual, "a discourse spoken from above". Rather than being an element of Ion's desired elite status, it is a quality that comes from outside and is "different from the pure and simple exercise of power".⁴²

⁴⁰ The qualities and virtues possessed by the *megalopsuchos*, and their significance, have been much debated; see R. Crisp, 'Aristotle on Greatness of Soul', in R. Kraut (ed.), *The Blackwell Guide to Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 158-78 and H.J. Curzer, *Aristotle and the Virtues* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 121-42.

⁴¹ *CT*, p. 12.

⁴² *GSO*, pp. 103-04; this passage from the *Ion* appears as an example of *parrhēsia* in the earlier lectures, at Foucault, *Parrhēsia*, pp. 223-24, where it is identified as a right, and at *FS*, pp. 50-51, where it shows the difference between monarchy and democracy.

In other texts, such as works by Aristotle and Xenophon, *parrhēsia* expresses mutual openness between those of the same status. Two of Xenophon's leading characters in the *Cyropaedia* are said to speak to each other with *parrhēsia*, Gobryas the defeated Assyrian, and Gadatas, previously defeated and castrated by the cruel king of Babylon. Gobryas is sure that Gadatas will support Cyrus (*Cyr.* 5.3.8):

εὖ μὲν οὖν, ἔφη, δοκῶ εἰδέναι· πολλὰ γὰρ δὴ ἔγωγε κάκεϊνος ἐπαρρησιασάμεθα πρὸς ἀλλήλους.

“I know it well,” he said, “for I myself and that man have had many frank conversations with each other”.

Here, the two men (non-Greek, and fictionalised) have already suffered a huge loss of status. Their mutual frank speech shows that with little left to lose they were able to speak to each other frankly, as the first person plural verb and middle voice indicates. In Aristotle's model, their former status gave them the capacity to speak with *parrhēsia*, while their current circumstances guarantee that they can use it to each other.

Aristotle, in his account of friendship, treats *parrhēsia* as a proper form of mutual conversation between friends, brothers, and all those connected by community (*EN* 9.2.1165a29-30).⁴³ It is not a feature of democracy but a feature of equal status within an association, whether within a family, an association or wider form of community. The ties of *philia* between friends mean that flattery is not required and openness is not a risk to status. Such openness is specifically contrasted with the honour one should give to superiors, such as those with a greater claim to honour through age (1165a27-29).

But this mutual *parrhēsia* is never echoed by Plato's characters, for whom *parrhēsia* is a

⁴³ *CT*, pp. 12, 22 n. 36.

strategy that characters deploy from a weak position, whether political or philosophical. For Plato, *parrhēsia* typically generates true speech acts in specific conditions that are not those of normal political discourse. A drunk reveals his inner thoughts (*Symposium*), a loser in political and career competition admits to his deficiencies in order to secure sympathy and advice (*Laches*), a man on trial, ultimately for his life, endeavours to present himself to a hostile audience (*Apology*). Unlike the speech desired by Euripides' Ion, it is the speech of the weaker towards the stronger, whether that is a fellow citizen asking Socrates for advice or a philosopher addressing his master the tyrant.

Plato's texts may participate in this critical political discourse while also, at least for Foucault, representing a new form of relationship between teacher or mentor and student, that would become the later form of *parrhēsia*. The identification of this ambiguous encounter between a democratic concept and an emerging philosophical practice is central to Foucault's analysis of *parrhēsia* through his reading of Plato's dialogues. But it also complicates the identification of Socrates as a democratic figure.

For Pierre Vidal-Naquet, Socratic dialogue is fundamentally and intrinsically opposed to the democratic life of the city. He argues that "Socratic dialogue is the antidote to democratic debate"; philosophical conversations in private and semi-private locations, symposia and gymnasia, replace rather than participate in the public speech of Athenian institutions.⁴⁴ This calls into question whether the *parrhēsia* which takes place within the private space of

⁴⁴ P. Vidal-Naquet, *Politics Ancient and Modern*, trans. J. Lloyd (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 25-26. (P. Vidal-Naquet, 'Platon, L'histoire Et Les Historiens', in J. Brunshwig, C. Imbert, and A. Roger (edd.), *Histoire Et Structure. A La Mémoire De Victor Goldschmidt* (Paris, 1985), pp. 147-60, at p.151; "il faut dire du dialogue qu'il est le contre-poison de la discussion en assemblée.")

Platonic dialogue, and which Foucault identifies as the philosophical or moral use of the concept, can be linked back to and identified with democratic practice, the rhetorical *parrhēsia* of Demosthenes and Aeschines.⁴⁵ The polyvalence and developmental trajectory of *parrhēsia* in Foucault's account suggest that he is treating Socrates anachronistically as a figure resembling the parrhesiast as developed in later sources, the philosopher speaking truth to a tyrant, as Dion does to Dionysius I (Plutarch *Life of Dion* 5.8-9), or invoking the motif of the *dēmos tyrannos* to treat the unified citizen body as a single entity with which the parrhesiastic game can be played.⁴⁶

For other interpreters, notably Arlene Saxonhouse, the desire to identify *parrhēsia* as a positive concept in Plato requires some deft handling of the evidence to square it with the Straussian picture of Plato the esotericist and wary communicator. Indeed, it is precisely Plato's lack of frankness – the irony, the elusiveness, and the esotericist withholding of direct speech – that is identified by the Straussian school as the key to reading and interpreting

⁴⁵ For example, Dem. *Olynthiacs* 3.3, 32; *Philippics* 1.51, 2.31, 3.3. As Demosthenes describes himself as speaking μετὰ παρρησίας, it seems perverse to deny that he treats *parrhēsia* as a rhetorical device or mode of speaking. Although Foucault rejects the idea of a rhetorical *parrhēsia* (*GSO*, p. 336, *CT*, pp. 10-11), the concept can equally be seen as a rhetorical device with a substantial history as such, as shown in Arthur Walzer's alternative account of its development (Walzer, *Parrēsia*).

⁴⁶ Substantial textual evidence survives for the elaboration of the concept of *parrhēsia* in later classical thought: it is the explicit topic of Philodemus' *On Parrhēsia* and plays a significant role in Plutarch's *Quomodo adulator ab amico internoscatur*, and Lucian *The Dead Come to Life*. Foucault discusses these texts as expressions of the later, philosophical form of *parrhēsia* (*GSO*, pp. 302, 06-08).

Plato.⁴⁷ In the Straussian model, philosophers must hide their controversial views when communicating beyond their own circles, disguising the true meaning of their writings to evade external threats. In this model, Socrates, executed by the Athenians, exemplifies the danger to the philosopher, while Plato exemplifies the philosophical response to the death of Socrates, writing guardedly and without full expression of dangerous truths, and cloaking Socrates' speech in irony. Not everyone can hear or read the unwritten doctrines, a state of affairs that is the opposite of Foucauldian *parrhēsia*, the frank and full expression, the speaking of truth to power.

While the second problem, the distinction between two forms of *parrhēsia* and their position on a timeline, is valuable in capturing the changing contexts of literary speech from the democratic assembly of the classical polis to the monarchical courts of the Hellenistic world, it generates two separate versions of Socrates.⁴⁸ Arguably Plato also provides these, one in the *Apology*, where Socrates defends himself, and one in the other dialogues, where Socrates conducts his usual enquiries through the process of the elenchus. But even within the *Apology*, Socrates' speech refers to the elenchus, even though the discussion with Meletus is a problematic example of the type.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ L. Strauss, 'Persecution and the Art of Writing', *Social Research*, 8 (1) (1941), pp. 488-504, Saxonhouse, *Free Speech*, pp. 179-206.

⁴⁸ The literary model, with its narrow focus on access to power, asserts a distinct break between the political contexts of the classical and Hellenistic world.

⁴⁹ L.R. Smith, 'The Interrogation of Meletus: *Apology* 24c4-28a1', *CQ*, 45 (2) (1995), pp. 372-88 suggests that this passage conforms to typical elenctic patterns, in which interlocutors may offer minimal contributions, but the *Gorgias* and the *Laches*, discussed below, make greater demands on the speech of interlocutors.

Parrhēsia* in the *Apology

The image of Socrates speaking in his own defence is a powerful one that has been used by many authors as an exemplar of the freedom of speech, but reflecting this mixture; for example, Cornel West writes “Socratic questioning is the enactment of *parrhēsia*”, citing *Apology* 29d-30a as an epigraph to his survey of the history of democracy.⁵⁰ Marlein van Raalte characterises the *Apology* as “one big exercise in Socratic *parrhēsia*”.⁵¹ But Stone and others have questioned the commitment of Plato’s Socrates to Athenian democratic values, just as the place of democracy in Plato’s political thought more broadly has been disputed.⁵² Plato’s depiction of Socrates’ defence speeches at his trial brings his character into his closest contact with the institutions and practices of Athenian democracy, and so brings Foucault’s two forms of *parrhēsia*, the democratic and the philosophical, into contact. It requires Socrates to engage with a different form of discourse, that of the democratic courtroom, rather than that of the elenctic philosophical discussion; although such discussion is embedded in Socrates’ speech, connecting them. Socrates responds to rather than initiates the questioning, defending himself against both what he styles the “old accusations” and the

⁵⁰ C. West, *Democracy Matters: Winning the Fight against Imperialism* (New York, 2004), pp. 208-11 at 209; West draws on Monoson, *Plato's Democratic Entanglements* here.

⁵¹ Van Raalte, *Socratic Parrhesia*, at p. 296.

⁵² I.F. Stone, *The Trial of Socrates* (London, 1988); Stone’s critical reading of Socrates has been set against that of Gregory Vlastos (Vlastos, *Socrates*), notably by Irwin (T. Irwin, 'Was Socrates against Democracy?', in R. Kamtekar (ed.), *Plato's Euthyphro, Apology, and Crito* (Lanham, 2005), pp. 127-49) and Schofield (M. Schofield, 'I.F. Stone and Gregory Vlastos on Socrates and Democracy', *Apeiron*, 33(4) (1991), pp. 281-301), cf. P. Cartledge, *Ancient Greek Political Thought in Practice* (Cambridge, 2009), pp. 76-90.

formal charges made by Meletus and Anytus (*Apol.* 19b1-c2, 24b8-c1).

Foucault identifies the Socrates described in Socrates' speech as a parrhesiast, although the noun itself post-dates Plato:

‘...the role of Socrates is typically a parrhesiastic one, for he constantly confronts Athenians in the street and, as noted in the *Apology* (29de), points out the truth to them, bidding them to care for wisdom, truth, and the perfection of their souls.’⁵³

Foucault's primary model identifies the parrhesiast as one who speaks the truth to a powerful figure from a weaker position, and incurs personal danger in doing so.⁵⁴ Socrates does indeed incur danger in the court, and speaks as a parrhesiast to those present, but his individual conversations reported within the speech resemble those of the spiritual counsellor or adviser that Foucault identifies in the speech of other, later philosophers, or perhaps even the outstanding citizen that Ion aims to be or that Pericles became. It seems difficult to treat Socrates purely as a democratic parrhesiast rather than a philosophical parrhesiast, on the basis of the conversations embedded within his courtroom speeches.

Socrates emphasises his frankness and the completeness of his account. He declares his intention to speak the whole truth (πᾶσαν τὴν ἀλήθειαν, 17b8), and insists that this is necessary (22a2), that others have not spoken the truth about him, and that he will reveal everything: “I speak, having hidden nothing from you, either great or small” (ὅμᾳς οὔτε μέγα οὔτε μικρὸν ἀποκρυψάμενος ἐγὼ λέγω, *Apol.* 24a5-6).⁵⁵ His self-explanation is drawn from

⁵³ *FS*, p. 23.

⁵⁴ *FS*, pp. 13-17, *CT*, pp. 11-14.

⁵⁵ Van Raalte notes that Socrates' truth is “especially comprehensive” because it encompasses the divine (*Socratic Parrhesia*, at p. 297).

him by the courtroom circumstances; this is not his usual form of speech, although he describes his more typical conversations in the process of revealing all in order to defend himself (*Apol.* 21b1-23c1). His commitment to self-revelation here resembles that of interlocutors elsewhere in the Platonic corpus, such as the fathers in the *Laches*, discussed below. He is identified as speaking with courage, as if he were remaining in place during battle rather than retreating (28d5-29a2).

The conversations with citizens that Socrates reports within his speech are elenctic, raising the question as to whether they can be treated as parrhesiastic. Socrates seeks confirmation of the oracle that Chaerephon reported from Delphi (*Apol.* 20c3-21a7), which serves as a vehicle for Plato to expound the epistemological claim that he attributes to Socrates, the paradox that he is the wisest because he alone is aware of his own ignorance (*Apol.* 21d5-6). Socrates speaks to small groups of Athenians, identified by their professions, and representing different classes, poets and craftsmen, to ascertain their self-knowledge and thus to compare their epistemic status with his own. Socrates reveals the epistemic limitation of individual citizens through these conversations, but in the *Apology* he addresses the collectivity of the *dēmos* in the form of his jurors. Again, there is the question of whether his parrhesiastic game is being played with individuals or the collective, or whether Plato is subtly collapsing the distinction between the two. In later works Plato treats parrhesia as symptomatic of democratic disturbance (e.g. *Resp.* 8.557b4-7).

Is Socrates “speaking truth to power” either in the court or in these earlier conversations, and can these reported elenctic conversations be interpreted as revealing Socratic *parrhēsia* in a strict sense? The relationship between the elenchus and *parrhēsia* is complicated, because of the structured nature of elenctic conversations, the formal requirements for participation within them, and the further barrier of Plato’s literary representation of these conversations; although the *Apology* is presented as a faithful account of what was said at Socrates’ trial,

neither it nor any other account of Athenian public speaking can be accepted as a verbatim record.⁵⁶

The dialogue with Meletus (*Apol.* 24b-27d) provides a problematic example of Socratic discussion, with Meletus' apparently reluctant answers limited to short phrases and single words (ἔγωγε, 24d1; οἱ νόμοι, 24d11). The brevity of Meletus' responses to Socrates' longer questions makes them more like punctuation to the Socratic speech than contributions to an argument based on full and willing participation.⁵⁷ It is not clear that this conversation represents Foucault's "parrhesiastic game", with Meletus standing in for the *dēmos* as a whole. The tables seem to have been turned, in that Socrates is assuming his usual role of the dominant partner in the "game" even in the circumstances of being a defendant, in which he is not in a dominant position.⁵⁸ Socrates perhaps fits another version of Foucault's model, the *parrhēsia* exhibited by a powerful politician such as Thucydides' Pericles, "the privilege of speaking to others in order to guide them".⁵⁹

⁵⁶ C.H. Kahn, *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue: The Philosophical Use of a Literary Form* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 88.

⁵⁷ Smith, *Interrogation of Meletus*, offers charitable reasons for Meletus' brevity of speech, cf. Saxonhouse, *Free Speech*, pp. 117-18.

⁵⁸ Beversluis examines Plato's treatment of Socrates' interlocutors, and argues that Plato unfairly restricts their speech and depicts them as assenting to Socrates' argumentative misdirection (J. Beversluis, *Cross-Examining Socrates: A Defense of the Interlocutors in Plato's Early Dialogues* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 6-9, cf. C. Gill, 'Speaking up for Socrates' Interlocutors', *OSAPh*, 20 (2000), pp. 297-321).

⁵⁹ *GSO*, p. 359, cf. p. 300. Foucault treats Thucydides' speeches as authentic records (*GSO*, pp. 174-80).

The *Apology*, therefore, remains a difficult document to fit within Foucault's account of *parrhēsia*, even though, as Peter Euben, observed, it is the one Platonic text where Socrates can be interpreted as being democratic.⁶⁰ Arlene Saxonhouse identified the relationship between Socrates and democratic Athens as one of the paradoxes of *parrhēsia* and argued that it could be resolved by separating the portrayal of Socrates the frank speaker, on trial in public in Athens and speaking to the jurors, from the representation of Socrates in the other dialogues. She writes: "Socrates cannot always play the role of the democratic parrhesiast standing naked before his interlocutors".⁶¹ Her solution is to argue that Socrates must use irony and deception to achieve his goals, when *parrhēsia* is not permitted to him. He must be a Straussian philosopher, and thus has more in common with her version of Protagoras than she allows.

A different way to resolve the paradox would be to examine the status of the participants in the trial and their interactions, and their mapping on to the model of the parrhesiastic game. The elenchus takes place between individuals, perhaps offering a forum for philosophical *parrhēsia* and identifying the epistemic status of its participants, but in the *Apology* Socrates uses it to establish the epistemic status of the citizenry as a whole, the citizenry before which he is on trial. The large jury listening to his self-defence and his conversation with Meletus stands for the citizenry as a whole. Socrates' critique of individual citizens within his account is transferred to the entirety of the *dēmos*. Plato evokes the familiar figure of the *dēmos tyrannos*, the demos as a single entity that acts as a tyrant, so that the conversations of

⁶⁰ J.P. Euben, 'Reading Democracy: "Socratic" Dialogues and the Political Education of Democratic Citizens', in J. Ober and C.W. Hedrick (edd.), *Demokratia: A Conversation on Democracies, Ancient and Modern* (Princeton, 1996), pp. 327-59 at p. 331.

⁶¹ Saxonhouse, *Free Speech*, pp. 211-12.

Socrates with the *dēmos*, as instantiated in his interlocutors and his accuser, become the one-on-one conversations of what Foucault describes as monarchical *parrhēsia*, where the philosopher speaks the truth courageously to the autocrat.⁶² However, Foucault has another version of the parrhesiast acting within his model, the powerful citizen such as Pericles, and the kind of citizen that Ion hopes to be. This integration of the powerful individual into the fabric of democratic political activity may offer a better fit with Plato's depiction of Socrates in the *Apology*, in respect of his performance within court. Without this alternative model, Socrates' speech in the *Apology* reveals the limitations of *parrhēsia* as a concept for handling complex power relations within the *polis*.

***Parrhēsia* and the elenchus**

While the *Apology* revealed the tension between two different forms of Socratic speech and the difficulties of fitting them into models of *parrhēsia*, further dialogues explore the problems of political speech using the Socratic elenchus, the question and answer format through which Socrates guided students to the realisation of their epistemic limitations.

Parrhēsia is explicitly identified as a form of interlocutors' speech in the *Gorgias* and the *Laches*, which explore problems of the effects of different modes of speech in establishing

⁶² W.R. Connor, 'Tyrannis Polis', in J.H. D'Arms and J.W. Eadie (edd.), *Ancient and Modern. Essays in Honor of Gerald F. Else* (Ann Arbor, 1977), pp. 95-109, K. Hoekstra, 'Athenian Democracy and Popular Tyranny', in R. Bourke and Q. Skinner (edd.), *Popular Sovereignty in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, 2016), pp. 15-51. Hoekstra argues that the idea of the *dēmos* as a unified figure may be an Athenian version of the modern political concept of sovereignty; while this fills Lefort's 'democratic void', it also disrupts the idea of egalitarian *parrhesia* in providing a potential parrhesiastic hierarchy (cf. Dyrberg, *Politics of Parrhesia*, pp. 107-13).

the truth, and of rhetoric within political speech, through the experience and requirements of debating with Socrates. The nature and quality of Socratic debate, and the terms on which one participates in it, are also discussed in the *Protagoras*. However, the relationship between the Socratic elenchus and frank speech in these dialogues is complex. While the Socratic elenchus resembles a parrhesiastic game, both its formal structure and the sophistic short cuts that appear in its practice make it difficult for interlocutors' speech to be interpreted as *parrhēsia*. Socrates' speech, while less restricted than that of the interlocutors, is difficult to identify as democratic *parrhēsia* unless the form represented by Pericles, that of the powerful figure educating the *demos*, is assumed.

What is at stake here is not the logical form of Socrates' arguments, but the type of speech that is permitted to participants in those arguments.⁶³ The Socratic elenchus itself is a structured form of discussion whose rules of engagement appear clear to Socrates and to experienced interlocutors such as the *Laches'* Nicias. Two such rules are strictures on the length of speeches, and the requirement that participants make "sincere assent" to what they say.⁶⁴ This second requirement, that interlocutors believe in their premises and statements and assent to them, has further implications when the elenchus leads them to assent to the negation of these initial premises; in Vlastos' analysis, Socrates will demonstrate that their

⁶³ There is a counter-view that the model of the elenchus is itself an artificial construct of modern critics: see T. Penner, 'The Death of the So-Called "Socratic Elenchus"', in M. Erler and L. Brisson (edd.), *Gorgias - Menon: Selected Papers from the Seventh Symposium Platonicum* (Sankt Augustin, 2007), pp. 3-19.

⁶⁴ As Hippias notes to Protagoras (*Prt.* 337e2-338b1); see also G. Vlastos, *Socratic Studies*, ed. M. Burnyeat (Cambridge, 1994), Vlastos, *Socrates*, pp. 112-13, Beversluis, *Cross-Examining Socrates*, pp. 37-58, Scott, *Games of Truth*, pp. 98-99.

beliefs are false. The contributions of Socrates' interlocutors to their discussions are limited, however; they may, indeed must, make allowable contributions to the exchange openly and without reserve, but their options for steering the course of the dialogue, as Plato writes it, are circumscribed.⁶⁵

As Socrates' questioning of Meletus in the *Apology* showed, the first requirement, the brevity required of Socratic interlocutors influences the quality of the conversation and the ability of interlocutors to shape it. Socrates' insistence on short speeches denies interlocutors the opportunity to express the subtleties of their views, and to qualify their statements, leaving them unable to make precise points that might resist his (often sophistic) refutation of the statements they have been permitted to make.⁶⁶ This goes against the broad inclusivity of speech suggested by the literal meaning of *parrhēsia* as "saying everything". Plato himself explores the consequences of this "eristic" mode of argumentation in his *Euthydemus*, where eristic debate generates fallacies that make it impossible to maintain any premise.⁶⁷ But while the *Gorgias* also explores the limits of sophistic speech for exploring the truth, it simultaneously illustrates some of the shortcomings of the elenchus.

The three main discussions of the *Gorgias* illustrate and explore the difficulties of the elenchus, with the quality of speech and argumentative method as an explicit topic of

⁶⁵ Vlastos, *Socratic Studies*, pp. 1-38; especially "Socratic elenchus is a search for moral truth by question-and-answer adversary argument in which a thesis is debated only if asserted as the answerer's own belief..." (p. 4).

⁶⁶ Beversluis, *Cross-Examining Socrates*, pp. 11-12, Van Raalte, *Socratic Parrhesia*, pp. 282-83.

⁶⁷ In the brothers' refutation of Clinias, Dionysodorus asserts that, whatever the boy says, he will be refuted (*Euth.* 275e3-6).

discussion. While interlocutors are required to conform to its rules, the agonistic presentation means that revisions and reformulations they attempt to offer may be presented as defeat. Socrates uses some dubious methods to trap them into contradiction, such as equivocation on the meaning of key terms in this dialogue.⁶⁸

A further difficulty in the identification of *parrhēsia* within Socratic dialogue arises from Plato's use of irony, notably in Socrates' assessment of the quality of speech of Callicles, the Athenian politician, the third interlocutor of the *Gorgias*.⁶⁹ This appears to be a paradigmatic instance of Socrates' own speech disobeying the "say what you mean" imperative of the elenchus. Although Socrates claims that *parrhēsia* is an important quality of Callicles' thought and speech, this is not a straightforward statement, although it is important for understanding Plato's concept of *parrhēsia*.⁷⁰ However, as Sophie Bourgault has shown, Foucault fails to do this in his own reading of these speeches, and seems oblivious to the possibility of irony within them.⁷¹ Bourgault has argued that the *Gorgias* enables Plato to

⁶⁸ J. Moss, 'Shame, Pleasure, and the Divided Soul', *OSAPh*, 29 (2005), pp. 137-70, D.B.

Futter, 'Shame as a Tool for Persuasion in Plato's *Gorgias*', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 47 (3) (2009), pp. 451-61.

⁶⁹ On Callicles' role in the *Gorgias*, see: E.R. Dodds, *Gorgias: A Revised Text* (Oxford, 1959), pp. 12-15, R.F. Stalley, 'The Politics of the *Gorgias*', in M. Erler and L. Brisson (edd.), *Gorgias – Menon*, pp. 116-21, Tarnopolsky, *Prudes, Perverts, and Tyrants*, pp. 25, 81-82, M. Schofield (ed.), *Plato: Gorgias, Menexenus, Protagoras*, trans. T. Griffith (Cambridge, 2010) at pp. xv-xvii.

⁷⁰ Tarnopolsky, *Prudes, Perverts, and Tyrants*, pp. 136-40.

⁷¹ Bourgault, *Unbridled Tongue*, pp. 84-88, *GSO*, pp. 357-74, Markovits, *Politics of Sincerity*, pp. 94-95.

demonstrate the limitations of *parrhēsia* rather than its importance, and that the concept provides a context for Socrates' engagement with Calicles, rather than being the focus of the dialogue or of Plato's interest. She suggests that the elenchus and the Socratic method accommodate a wider range of speech-acts than the "unpleasant activity" that she identifies as *parrhēsia*, including silence and reflection.⁷² Bourgault's wider aim is to criticise the democratic-leaning version of Plato that emerges from Monoson's analysis of Foucault on *parrhēsia*, but her critique of Foucault and his readers is helpful in untangling some of the difficulties with the synthetic account of *parrhēsia* that emerges from that reading.⁷³

The first two discussions of the dialogue, with the non-Athenians Gorgias and Polus (from Leontini and Acragas respectively), falter as Socrates leads his interlocutors to adopt positions contrary to their stated beliefs. After the Athenian Calicles has re-entered the dialogue after Socrates' discussion with Polus breaks down, Socrates claims that certain interlocutors with certain characteristics enable him to test his ideas, and that he has identified Calicles as such a person (*Grg.* 486e-488b). This encounter is a rare opportunity for Socrates' own capabilities to be tested, since most people are unable to test Socrates in this way (οἱ ἐμὲ οὐχ οἷοί τε εἶσιν βασανίζειν, 487a4); Foucault identifies this passage as a critical step in the conceptualisation of *parrhēsia*, perhaps its first fully fledged outing.⁷⁴

⁷² Bourgault, *Unbridled Tongue*, pp. 84-5.

⁷³ Bourgault, *Unbridled Tongue*, p. 89. Bourgault's point is to show that Foucauldian *parrhēsia* identifies only the relationship between speaker and speech-act, rather than guaranteeing the absolute truth of any proposition made by a speaker. As such it is a concept that might be of value only to a relativist, or at least have limited appeal to philosophers of a Straussian persuasion.

⁷⁴ *GSO*, p. 367.

Testing requires three supporting qualities of the interlocutor who is to act as the “touchstone”:

ἐννοῶ γὰρ ὅτι τὸν μέλλοντα βασανιεῖν ἰκανῶς ψυχῆς πέρι ὀρθῶς τε ζώσης καὶ μὴ τρία ἄρα δεῖ ἔχειν ἃ σὺ πάντα ἔχεις, ἐπιστήμην τε καὶ εὖνοιαν καὶ παρρησίαν.

It strikes me that the person who is going to be an adequate touchstone for the soul, to see whether or not it lives rightly, must in fact possess three things – understanding, goodwill and a willingness to speak his mind – all of which you do possess. (*Grg.* 486e6-487a3, translation Griffith)

But Socrates seems to be speaking ironically or “sarcastically”, as Christine Tarnopolsky suggests, rather than making a genuine attribution of these qualities to Callicles, and the conceptualisation of *parrhēsia* in this dialogue may not be as serious as Foucault’s model requires.⁷⁵ This becomes clear as Socrates’ expands his claims about Callicles’ capabilities. The claim about Callicles’ knowledge or wisdom is more clearly marked as ironic, given the list of his colleagues said to share such wisdom at 487c1-4 (and indeed, for Socrates to identify anyone as wise suggests irony).⁷⁶ That leaves the claims in respect of goodwill and frankness, but these too are ironic:

⁷⁵ Tarnopolsky, *Prudes, Perverts, and Tyrants*, p. pp. 95, J.P. Euben, 'Democracy and Political Theory: A Reading of Plato's *Gorgias*', in J.P. Euben, J.R. Wallach, and J. Ober (edd.), *Athenian Political Thought and the Reconstruction of American Democracy* (Ithaca, 1994), pp. 198-226 at pp. 211-13, cf. Schofield (ed.), *Gorgias, Menexenus, Protagoras*, at pp. 61, n.64.

⁷⁶ Commentators are divided on the perception of irony here: see Van Raalte, *Socratic Parrhesia*, at p. 286 n.25.

ἐπειδὴ οὖν σου ἀκούω ταῦτὰ ἐμοὶ συμβουλευόντος ἄπερ τοῖς σεαυτοῦ ἐταιροτάτοις,
ἱκανόν μοι τεκμήριόν ἐστιν ὅτι ὡς ἀληθῶς μοι εὖνους εἶ. καὶ μὴν ὅτι γε οἷος
παρρησιάζεσθαι καὶ μὴ αἰσχύνεσθαι, αὐτός τε φῆς καὶ ὁ λόγος ὄν ὀλίγον πρότερον
ἔλεγεσ ὁμολογεῖ σοι.

When I hear you giving me the same advice you give your own closest friends, that's evidence enough for me that you really are well-disposed towards me. As to your ability to speak your mind without embarrassment, I have your own statement, borne out by the speech you have just made. (487d2-7)

As Markovits notes, Callicles has already expressed disbelief in Socrates' statements, hardly an expression of goodwill, in claiming to be unable to discern whether he is serious or in jest (σπουδάξει... ἢ παίζει, 481b6-7). This is "incongruent" with Socrates' praise, unless Socrates is grasping at the idea that Callicles thinks that he might be speaking seriously.⁷⁷

Socrates' observation that Callicles has the ability "to speak frankly without embarrassment" (παρρησιάζεσθαι καὶ μὴ αἰσχύνεσθαι, 487d5) connects *parrhēsia* and shame, the emotion that had led to Gorgias' and Polus' withdrawal. Callicles' shamelessness, however, is quite distinct from the citizen's embarrassment at a reluctant personal revelation, and Socrates' irony lies in ignoring the differences between the two quite distinct character types and emotions, the citizen admitting to details that support his argument but weaken his social standing, and the controversialist who is effectively trolling the citizenry. What is shameful about Callicles is his willingness to consider unconscionable views on tyranny and justice, not his personal circumstances.⁷⁸ So again, there may be some irony in the identification of

⁷⁷ Markovits, *Politics of Sincerity*, p. 94.

⁷⁸ Tarnopolsky, *Prudes, Perverts, and Tyrants*, pp. 22-23, Markovits, *Politics of Sincerity*, pp. 102-03.

Callicles' emotion as shame rather than shamelessness, and Socrates' pursuit of a line of argument that even Callicles finds too shameful to accept.

What is shameful or shameless about Callicles' ideas is underscored in his further speech (491e5-492c8), marked as parrhesiastic, with the repetition in Callicles' introduction (παρρησιαζόμενος, 491e7-8) and Socrates' response (παρρησιαζόμενος, 492d2) demarcating its limits. In this speech, Callicles makes a strong claim that the right way to live is to pursue desires without restraint, and the best life, offering virtue and happiness, the one in which power and ability ease this process. Callicles is certainly speaking frankly, provocatively offering what he claims is his undisguised opinion, regardless of its acceptability. This is, by Foucault's definition, a paradigmatic case of *parrhēsia*. In the sense that Callicles thinks that he is speaking truth to power, telling the philosopher how things really are, it is; but the reader might consider that Callicles is speaking power to truth. But Callicles' rant hardly seems like the kind of speech that should be valorised, and it is not clear that he genuinely supports the content of his speech rather than its effect, and Foucault prefers us to see Socrates as the agent of *parrhēsia*, not its recipient.

Arlene Saxonhouse identifies Plato's extensive use of the language of openness and shame, particularly in the *Gorgias*, as a marker for the risk of political participation.⁷⁹ Callicles and

⁷⁹ Saxonhouse, *Free Speech*, pp. 203-05. Saxonhouse makes much of the non-Athenian status of the sophists and the restrictions this places on their activity in Athens, linking them to the Straussian figure of the philosopher veiling his speech (Strauss, *Persecution*, Saxonhouse, *Free Speech*, pp. 184-93). But the Protagoras of Plato's dialogue has much in common with Socrates, including embarrassment. And his disinclination to participate in the elenchus shows a sophisticated awareness of its operation, and challenges the usefulness of Socrates' philosophical practice (cf. Monson, *Plato's Democratic Entanglements*, p. 156).

Socrates as Athenian citizens can speak freely, while Gorgias and Protagoras, as visiting sophists, are embarrassed to speak openly (*Grg.* 487ab; *Prt.* 316c-317c). Their grounds are slightly different; Protagoras points to hostility towards visiting sophists, while Polus and Gorgias are said by Socrates to be restrained by the thought of embarrassment in being defeated in argument (*Grg.* 487a7-b5). But, as Tarnopolsky has shown, shame is a complex emotion; Plato's use of the language of shame exploits its polyvalence.⁸⁰ Saxonhouse too notes that for Plato's Protagoras, shame is the emotion that enables political life.⁸¹

The conclusion of Saxonhouse's reading of Socrates' argument about free speech here is that the elenchus can take place only between Athenian citizens, within a democratic context, and hence that Plato despite his apparent opposition to democracy acknowledges its importance as a context for knowledge. But this is to deny the transition between democratic and philosophic *parrhēsia* that Foucault asserts, and also to ignore Plato's explicit concerns about the impossibility of philosophical speech in a democratic context. This point is noted by both Callicles and Socrates (484d2-e3, 485d3-e2, cf. Socrates' claims about his lack of political skill, 473e6-7); Plato makes similar points through images such as the Ship of State (*Resp.* 6.488a7-489a2) and the Cave (*Resp.* 7.514a1-517e1), and the *Theaetetus* digression (*Tht.* 172c1-177b7).⁸² The philosopher's speech is incomprehensible to the crowd, and the

⁸⁰Tarnopolsky, *Prudes, Perverts, and Tyrants*, pp. 57-59, cf. D. Konstan, *The Emotions of the Ancient Greeks: Studies in Aristotle and Classical Literature* (Toronto, 2006), pp. 91-110. Socrates exploits the language of shame in the *Apology*, to frame both his own thoughts and his identification of Athenian responses to him: 17b1-5; 22b5; 28b3-5; 29d7-e3; Saxonhouse, *Free Speech*, pp. 57-82.

⁸¹ Saxonhouse, *Free Speech*, p. 179.

⁸² Schofield (ed.), *Gorgias, Menexenus, Protagoras*, at p. 59 n. 58.

philosopher is treated as mad or dangerous. Within the *Gorgias* itself the unique political skill of Socrates is likely to be misunderstood and rejected, as a doctor's bitter medicine might be by children who prefer sweets (*Grg.* 521d-522a). The contrast between *parrhēsia* in democratic and philosophical contexts is demonstrated by the failure of the latter to work within the context of democratic public debate.

The relationship between sincerity, shame and *parrhēsia* within public speech and the elenchus is made more clear in the discussions of the *Laches*. For Foucault, this dialogue also displays Socrates as “the person who possesses *parrhēsia* ”, although it also reveals that it is of a subtly different type than that used by other characters, as its identification as a personal quality rather than a mode of speech might suggest.⁸³ In this dialogue, *parrhēsia* first appears as a kind of speech that the other characters feel is appropriate in engaging with Socrates, and when admitting to failure and thereby losing face in front of other citizens, necessarily embarrassing within the agonistic context of polis public life.⁸⁴ Foucault insists that such revelations are “not a confessional autobiography” and not the same as later, Christian confessional speech.⁸⁵ The difference may lie in the audience hearing the revelation and the purpose of making it. Here, the embarrassment is played out in a smaller-scale setting, and in the examination of the individual life, a dramatic setting that leads Foucault to identify this dialogue as a significant moment in the development of philosophical *parrhēsia*, as well as in Plato's examination of the concept more broadly.⁸⁶ In his model, Socrates begins to take on a confessional role as parrhesiast.

⁸³ *FS*, p. 122.

⁸⁴ C.J. Emlyn-Jones, *Plato: Laches* (London, 1996), p. 52.

⁸⁵ *FS*, pp. 96-97.

⁸⁶ *FS*, p. 96, *CT*, pp. 121-24.

Throughout this dialogue, Plato emphasises the inequality of achievement between the conventional Athenian elite, represented by Lysimachus and Melesias, two undistinguished sons of distinguished fathers, and Nicias and Laches, the current generation of successful generals; the introduction of Socrates adds a further kind of achievement. Socrates is introduced as an expert, and a hero whose achievements are noted by Laches, despite his avoidance of political action and publicity. Again, *parrhēsia* is not a form of speech deployed between equals, but by parties to the conversation already identifying themselves as weaker. Foucault argues that Lysimachus can invoke *parrhēsia* only in an everyday sense; in dealing with his son, the father is “unable to assume a parrhesiastic role”, in the sense of providing frank tutelage, the role that Socrates will take within the dialogue.⁸⁷ This analysis illustrates the distinction that Foucault seeks to make between political *parrhēsia* and that practised by Socrates, but it also clearly suggests that Socrates’ *parrhēsia*, like that of the Aristotelian *megalopsuchos*, involves looking down on the other participant in the parrhesiastic game. Lysimachus, in his opening statement, makes this clear; the fathers must risk loss of face in disclosing their own failure to lead successful political lives. They also risk receiving flattery aimed at pleasing them rather than the truth that will solve their problems:

ἡγούμεθα γὰρ χρῆναι πρὸς γε ὑμᾶς παρρησιάζεσθαι. εἰσὶ γὰρ τινες οἱ τῶν τοιούτων καταγελῶσι, καὶ ἐάν τις αὐτοῖς συμβουλευέσθαι, οὐκ ἂν εἴποιεν ἃ νοοῦσιν, ἀλλὰ στοχαζόμενοι τοῦ συμβουλευομένου ἄλλα λέγουσι παρὰ τὴν αὐτῶν δόξαν·

For we think that we need to be frank with you. For there are some people who laugh at people like this, and if someone were to seek advice from them, would not say what they think, but guess at the view of the advice-seeker and say something different,

⁸⁷ *FS*, p. 105.

contrary to their own opinion. (*Laches* 178a4-b3)

Even in this opening speech, Lysimachus identifies *parrhēsia* as a rhetorical strategy appropriate to certain circumstances, where an honest response is desired; as Monoson notes, he must “dare to expose the truth about himself if he is to learn”.⁸⁸ It is a strategy that may or may not attract an equally frank response, but Lysimachus’ hope is that in offering openness about the parental neglect to which he attributes his underachievement, he will receive advice that is honest and useful, rather than aimed at gratifying or flattering him. Lysimachus believes that this is an especially appropriate strategy for discussion with expert advisers such as the generals (πρός γε ὑμᾶς, 178a4), and indeed it is congruent with Socrates’ views as expressed in the *Gorgias*. In risking their dignity by making use of *parrhēsia*, the fathers hope not for ridicule but for a detailed and considerate response. But Lysimachus’ adoption of parrhesiastic style, in his long opening speech, could not have been accommodated within the elenchus; this is noted ironically when he hands the discussion over to Socrates (189c3-d3), claiming that age makes him forget the questions he wants to ask, echoing Socrates’ own claim about his poor memory at *Protagoras* 334c8-9.⁸⁹

After Nicias has recommended that Socrates be consulted, the fathers need to understand how to interact with him, thus receiving Plato’s most explicit account of the process of the elenchus (although they do not in fact become principal interlocutors in conversation with Socrates, a role that is performed here by the generals). Two speeches by Nicias (*Laches*

⁸⁸ Monoson, *Plato's Democratic Entanglements*, p. 156.

⁸⁹ L.-A. Dorion, *Platon: Lachès, Euthyphron* (Paris, 1997), p. 153 n.06. A. Tessitore finds humour and irony in the appeal to *parrhēsia* and the fathers’ narrative of underachievement (A. Tessitore, 'Courage and Comedy in Plato's *Laches*', *Journal of Politics*, 56 (1) (1994), pp. 115-33).

187e6-188c3) and Laches (188c4-189b7) illuminate first the experience of the elenchus, and second the assessment of Socrates as one with whom it is appropriate and safe to deploy *parrhēsia*. This may provide the fathers with some reassurance about their rhetorical strategy, although the rivalry that Plato depicts between the two generals complicates this; Beversluis suggests that Nicias' explanation of the elenchus serves the dramatic function of demonstrating that he possesses a greater knowledge of Socrates than Laches can claim.⁹⁰

Nicias explains to the fathers what the experience of participating in Socratic conversation, the elenchus, is like. This lets them know that they will not be entering this conversation as equals, and can expect to be tested by the experience; Emlyn-Jones points to “images of trap and torture” in this speech, ἐμπέση (188a2) and βασανίση (188a3), although Nicias himself emphasizes that he has not found it to be an unpleasant experience (ἐμοὶ μὲν οὐδὲν ἄηθες οὐδ’ αὖ ἄηδές ὑπὸ Σωκράτους βασανίζεσθαι, 188b5), but one with which he is familiar, and which he enjoys.⁹¹ They must give an account of themselves (τὸ διδόναι περὶ αὐτοῦ λόγον, 187e10); Foucault elides this with *parrhēsia*, which he sometimes defines as giving an account of one's logos that matches one's life.⁹² The testing is being done by Socrates, although arguably it is still the interlocutor who acts as the touchstone.

Foucault describes this speech as outlining the parrhesiastic pact.⁹³ In *Fearless Speech*, he writes “this explanation of Nicias' is, I think, a portrayal of Socrates as a *parrhesiastes*”, going on to add that this is a distinctive form of parrhesiastic game, between individuals

⁹⁰ Beversluis, *Cross-Examining Socrates*, pp. 115-16.

⁹¹ Emlyn-Jones, *Laches*, p. 9, Dorion, *Laches*, p. 151 n.92.

⁹² *FS*, pp. 96-97.

⁹³ *CT*, p. 143.

rather than the *dēmos* and the orator.⁹⁴ This is reflected in the distinctive role of the interlocutor, in giving an account, although as Foucault notes of other dialogues, “what is involved is not a confessional autobiography”. The *logos* is not a narrative account, but a rational explanation, such as Laches’ account of his courage (190d-194b).

Laches responds to Nicias’ speech by giving a brief narrative and assessment of his own experience of Socrates; although he emphasizes experience over speech, his language implies a sophisticated understanding of philosophical debate that is in ironic tension with the character Plato gives him, as the man of action and few words.⁹⁵ Laches explains that his experience of Socrates’ (successful) deeds suggests that both the fine words of praise and the openness of *parrhēsia* are appropriate modes of speaking to or about Socrates:

Σωκράτους δ’ ἐγὼ τῶν μὲν λόγων οὐκ ἔμπειρός εἰμι, ἀλλὰ πρότερον, ὡς ἔοικε, τῶν ἔργων ἐπειράθην, καὶ ἐκεῖ αὐτὸν ἠῦρον ἄξιον ὄντα λόγων καλῶν καὶ πάσης παρρησίας.
(*Laches* 188e5-189a1)

I have no experience of the words of Socrates, but, I believe, I have had previous experience of his deeds, and there I found him deserving of fine words and total frankness.

Laches’ address to the fathers here is much less friendly than has been suggested by many commentators.⁹⁶ In drawing attention to the courageous deeds of Socrates, and offering his

⁹⁴ *FS*, pp. 95-96.

⁹⁵ The opposition he draws between *philologos* and *misologos* (188c5-6), for example.

⁹⁶ Monoson, *Plato's Democratic Entanglements*, 155-156; Dorion, *Laches*, 26-27; Dorion notes that they represent a common theme of the failure of inheritance of skill and success, but suggests that they have ‘Socratic traits’. See below for problems with Sprague’s

own high valuation of them, he reminds the fathers of their failure to succeed in the competitive world of Athenian politics. By using *parrhēsia* in their conversation with Socrates, they will be acknowledging their inferior status and making it central to the discussion. Laches himself might be said to be speaking frankly, but his blunt advice does not in itself constitute *parrhēsia*, beyond the openness of his admiration for Socrates' deeds. That Laches intensifies *parrhēsia*, itself a compound that includes the adjective *pas*, with the adjective *pasa*, suggests an ironic tone that underlines his critical attitude towards the fathers, and a reminder of the limits of Laches as a man of action.⁹⁷

Laches identifies Socrates as the holder of power (in this case, knowledge of how to educate the young) to whom the fathers must reveal their problems, confirming their weaker position (they do not know how to educate their sons). While Socrates himself disclaims knowledge, and so the position of power that the structure of the dialogue implicitly offers him, Plato uses the general and his experience to provide a critical assessment of the relative status of the interlocutors. Socrates is not the weaker figure here, but a powerful figure with whom it is safe to engage in *parrhēsia*, as a tragic messenger does to a king or Cyrus' subordinates do to him.

translation of this passage (in J.M. Cooper and D.S. Hutchinson (eds.), *Plato: Complete Works* (Indianapolis, 1997) at p. 674), used by Monoson.

⁹⁷ The same combination of adjective and noun appears in the *Eighth Letter*. Both Foucault and Monoson make much of Plato's use of the phrase in this letter, Monoson arguing that it identifies "his own voice" (*GSO*, pp. 275-80, Monoson, *Plato's Democratic Entanglements*, p. 151). But given the strong likelihood that the letter is a later homage, it is more likely that this repeated phrase emphasises the growing importance of *parrhēsia* as a concept in the period after Plato wrote.

Sara Monoson draws on (and paraphrases) Rosamond Sprague's translation of this passage, in which *parrhēsia* is attributed to Socrates rather than to the interlocutor:⁹⁸

Now I have no acquaintance with the words of Socrates, but before now, I believe, I have had experience of his deeds, and there I found him a person privileged to speak fair words and to indulge in every kind of frankness.⁹⁹

This formulation identifies Socrates as the parrhesiast within the elenchus of the *Laches*, rather than involving both parties in a parrhesiastic contract. As Monoson notes, the progression of argument within the *Laches* is from pseudo-democratic speeches, such as that of Lysimachus before Socrates joins the conversation, to private, expert-driven elenchus.¹⁰⁰ However, we do not see the fathers carry this through in the dialogue as Plato presents it; their opportunity for *parrhesia* occurred before Socrates arrived. But Laches perhaps offers reassurance that Socrates will speak directly and without flattery in the conversation that does take place. If Socrates is a political parrhesiast here, he is in the powerful position of the monarch or court rather than the courtier or defendant.

⁹⁸ Monoson, *Plato's Democratic Entanglements*, p. 157.

⁹⁹ Cooper and Hutchinson (eds.), *Plato*, p. 674.

¹⁰⁰ Monoson, *Plato's Democratic Entanglements*, pp. 160-61. In contrast, the 2001 edition of Foucault's Berkeley speeches cites Lamb's translation from the Loeb edition: "Now of Socrates' words I have no experience, but formerly, I fancy, I have made trial of his deeds; and there I found him living up to any fine words however freely spoken" (*FS*, p. 99).

Markovits notes the different translations but accepts both (Markovits, *Politics of Sincerity*, p. 78, n.98).

Conclusion

Parrhēsia is a word used by many Athenian authors, but to describe practices of speech act, a form of anti-rhetoric, rather than as a political concept. Frank speech incurs risk for speakers in many of these speech contexts, in discussing inherently shameful subjects or in making personal admissions that can lead to loss of face. In the democratic context, the risk involved is ridicule or loss of face rather than risk to one's life. In the tyrannical context, and the later monarchical context, *parrhēsia* risks actual physical danger to the speaker. Plato, in conflating tyranny with the democratic polis, can present Socrates as a speaker using *parrhēsia* to defend himself, while at the same time acknowledging its more usual use through characters such as Lysimachus, and even Alcibiades in the *Symposium*. Plato further complicates *parrhēsia* by presenting Callicles as speaking frankly, when his sincerity is questionable and his audacity can be misinterpreted as courage.

Foucault, reading these texts through the later development of the term by writers such as Plutarch and Lucian, creates an artificial construction that overstates the importance of the concept in his classical sources while misrepresenting the range of power relations that it can incorporate. While the quality of speech, and the allowable content of political speech, were important concerns of Athenian democracy, the Foucauldian model does not offer a straightforward intellectual history that can easily be applied to classical Greek rhetoric and Plato's responses to it.