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TIZIANA FAITINI – FRANCESCO GHIA

A HISTORICO-CONCEPTUAL OUTLINE OF POLITICAL *PARRHESIA*

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ABSTRACT:

This essay is intended to provide a wide-ranging reconstruction of the history of the concept of *parrhesia* in relation to its political implications. Moving from Michel Foucault's reading of the concept, the paper gives a succinct overview of its use in classical Greece and in biblical texts, in order to emphasize the internal dialectic which has always riven the relationship between *parrhesia* and democracy and is at its most intense in the modern era, with its separation of external and internal fora.

In 1928 – the year in which the *History of Italy between 1871 and 1915*, not officially banned by the fascist regime, but undoubtedly firmly boycotted, came out – Benedetto Croce submitted a treatise, «*Della dissimulazione onesta*» (On honest dissimulation), previously believed lost, for publication. The pamphlet, written by Torquato Accetto¹, had first come out in Naples in 1641, during the Spanish reign. In it Accetto, using the typical Renaissance format of the treatise on behavior, invites the reader to dissimulate, when dealing with «powerful people who devour the very essence of those whom they subjugate», and thus masked, protect themselves.

Croce was obviously himself “dissimulating”, disguising the real reasons for his republication of the treatise. These are, however, immediately clear and can be found in the quotation from Tacitus’ *Agricola*, in which Accetto, in accordance with the *topos* of the anti-tyrannical literature, had concentrated the meaning of his elegy to dissembling:

«*Praecipua sub Domitiano miseriarum pars erat videre et aspici, cum suspiria nostra subscriberentur, cum denotandis tot hominum palloribus sufficeret saevus ille vultus et rubor, a quo se contra pudorem muniebat*»².

What greater suffering can be imagined than being constantly under the terrible vigilance of a tyrant whose subjects cannot even breathe without being noticed? In such circumstances, asked Accetto, how can anyone «breathe when the tyrant does not allow breathing?» and is it not permissible to pale with fear «when the sword is staining the earth red with innocent blood»? No, before an unjust and evil power, a subject has a right, even a duty, to hide and dissemble his feelings in order to be able to protect them³.

And so: to speak the truth or to pretend to do so? Is speaking the truth, when faced with political questions regarding the relationship between an individual and the established power, and possibly risking life and death, always an absolute, unconditional duty⁴? Is there a truth the protection of whose inviolability necessitates an actual defensive strategy of reticence⁵? Is truth the very foundation of the political order, as the counter-revolutionaries (particularly Bonald) insisted, demanding that the political system be rebuilt on the basis of religious truth, guaranteed by ecclesiastic authority⁶, and as, on the opposite side, the positivists (particularly Taine) claimed, supporting a political system based on a scientific truth guaranteed by positivist science⁷? Or, on the contrary, does the dialectic nature of the relationship between truth and politics always have to be emphasized, as other XIXth Century thinkers maintained? In other words, is the traditional

¹ T. Accetto, *Della dissimulazione onesta*, con una Prefazione di B. Croce, Laterza, Bari 1928.

² «Our greatest misfortune under Domitian was that of seeing and being watched, our every sigh being noted and the terrible ruddy face with which Domitian protected himself from all shame being enough to make a great number of people blanch».

³ For a description of Accetto’s position within the more general context of theories of dissimulation, see R. Villari, *Elogio della dissimulazione. La lotta politica nel Seicento*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 1987. See also Salvatore Nigro’s introduction to the new Einaudi edition (1997) of Accetto’s text *Della dissimulazione onesta*.

⁴ This is recognised to be Kant’s position, discussed by Lorena Cebolla’s essay.

⁵ See Massimo Giuliani’s essay.

⁶ See S. Chignola, *Società e costituzione. Teologia e politica nel sistema di Bonald*, FrancoAngeli, Milano 1993, and R. Spaemann, *L’origine della sociologia dallo spirito della Restaurazione. Studi su L.G.A. de Bonald*, a cura di C. Galli e L. Allodi, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2002.

⁷ See E. Cassirer, *Erkenntnisprobleme in der Philosophie und Wissenschaft der neueren Zeit*, Bd. IV: *Von Hegels Tod bis zur Gegenwart* (1832-1932), Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt 1973, pp. 250-261 («Der Positivismus und sein historisches Erkenntnisideal – Hyppolite Taine»), and C. Mongardini, *Storia e sociologia nell’opera di H. Taine*, Giuffrè, Milano 1965, pp. 143-190 («Taine politico»).

historicist answer (given by Hegel and Marx⁸) valid in its view of politics as an objective realization of truth understood as an historical process which implies the actual “transfiguration” of humankind? And was Kierkegaard right when he asserted the huge gulf between politics and religion and conceives of individual witness to the truth as a correction of the self-divination of the established order⁹?

These – roughly sketched – are the dilemmas around which the dialectic between always being open with the truth (*parrhesia*) and the art of camouflaging it (dissimulation) plays, and from which it can be deduced that the questioning of dissimulation is indeed, on close observation, «much older than the Baroque theorists who made it famous»¹⁰.

1. Parrhesia. A “spider-notion”

The concept of *parrhesia* again became a subject of the philosophical and theological debate on the relationship between politics and truth thanks to Michel Foucault. He drew attention to it in his last courses at the Collège de France¹¹ and then in the seminars he held in Berkeley in 1983 - which were published two years later in English and therefore available considerably earlier than the texts of the courses at the Collège¹².

During his lectures Foucault plumbs the semantic depths of that which he terms a *notion-araignée* because of its extraordinary complexity¹³ and with the art of Nietzsche «goldsmith» philologist he binds forever the political and ethical valences of the courage to “speak the truth”. When he turns to history it is his intention neither to seek refuge in nostalgia nor, moved by contemporary apprehensions, to offer us a dusty old model from Graeco-Roman antiquity. His methodological purpose – political in both its reason to be and in its point of arrival – is clear: to construct a genealogy which, making a comparison with the exteriority offered by historical distance, can open up present spaces for possibilities¹⁴.

A *notion-araignée*: going back to its etymological roots, the term *parrhesia* indicates the action of openly saying everything (παν – ρησις); it falls within the semantic field of freedom of speech,¹⁵ having originated in the political language of the Greek *polis*, where it appeared at the end

⁸ See G. Prauss, *Moral und Recht im Staat nach Kant und Hegel*, Alber, Freiburg i.B. 2008.

⁹ See M. Nicoletti, *Politics and Religion in Kierkegaard's Thought: Secularization and the Martyr* in G. Connell – C.S. Evans (eds.), *Foundations of Kierkegaard's vision of community*, Humanities press international, Atlantic Highlands N.J 1992, pp. 183-195, and A. Ndreca, *Mediazione o paradosso? Kierkegaard contra Hegel*, Bonomi, Pavia 2000.

¹⁰ V. Frajese, *La dissimulazione di scrittura. Metodi di aggiramento della censura in materia religiosa nell'Italia moderna*, in «Rivista di Storia del Cristianesimo» 9(2/2012), pp. 295-316.

¹¹ These were the courses that began in January 1982, now published as: M. Foucault, *L'herméneutique du sujet. Cours au Collège de France (1981-1982)*, éd. par F. Ewald, A. Fontana et F. Gros, Gallimard - Seuil, Paris 2001; Id., *Le gouvernement de soi et des autres*, Cours au Collège de France 1982-1983, édition établie sous la direction de F. Ewald et A. Fontana par F. Gros, Paris, Gallimard - Seuil, 2008; Id., *Le courage de la vérité. Cours au Collège de France (1983-1984)*, éd. par F. Ewald, A. Fontana et F. Gros, Gallimard - Seuil, Paris 2009.

¹² J. Pearson's unofficial transcription appeared as M. Foucault, *Discourse and Truth. The problematization of Parrhesia*, Northwestern Univ., Evanston 1985.

¹³ See M. Foucault, *Le gouvernement de soi et des autres*, cit., *Lecture 12.01.1983*.

¹⁴ See Sandro Chignola's essay for a reconstruction and detailed interpretation of Foucault's thought on *parrhesia*. Foucault reconsiders the structure and meaning of his own analyses on a number of occasions, particularly in the pieces collected in *Dits et écrits. 1954-1988*, 4 vol., éd. par D. Defert et F. Ewald, Gallimard, Paris 1994 : regarding the incursions into Graeco-Roman antiquity of his later years, see in particular *Le retour de la morale* and *L'éthique du souci de soi comme pratique de la liberté* (*ivi*, vol. IV, the former is no. 354, see particularly p. 702 and the latter is no. 356, pp. 722-24); A. Fontana's study, *Leggere Foucault, oggi*, in *Foucault, oggi*, ed. M. Galzigna, Feltrinelli, Milano 2008, pp. 29-44, provides readers with a clearly marked path through Foucault's work.

¹⁵ For a more detailed reconstruction of the history of the term and its implications, see G. Scarpat, *Parrhesia. Storia del termine e delle sue traduzioni in latino*, Paideia, Brescia 1964, a second edition of which has been published, newly titled *Parrhesia greca, parrhesia cristiana*, Paideia, Brescia 2001. Compare also the entry *Parrhesia* edited by H. Schlier in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, hrsg. von G. Kittel, Kohlhammer, Köln 1933-1979, Bd. V,

of the 5th century B.C. As early as the end of the 6th century Athenian citizens were chosen randomly every year to join the council, within which discussion was free and open; nevertheless, freedom of speech was only really conceptualized in the period after the Persian Wars – which had revealed so clearly the limitations of despotism – and under growing pressure from the oligarchs in the last stages of the Peloponnesian War: it then emerges as one of the most important elements of *eleutheria*, is conceptualized as a political value and becomes one of the defining characteristics of Athenian democracy¹⁶.

There are essentially two terms in the ancient Greek political lexicon which specifically refer to freedom of speech, *isegoria* and *parrhesia*; these became so significant that Polybius actually (*Histories*, II, 38, 6) identified them with “real democracy” (δημοκρατίας αληθινής). However, *isegoria* emphasizes freedom of speech in public assemblies and means therefore a formal claim to equal access to free speech and to power, in connection with that which Herodotus defines *isokratia* (*Histories*, V, 92, I). The term *parrhesia*, on the other hand, also involves content, emphasizing the opportunity to say *all* that it is considered appropriate to say, without any hesitation. In this sense, it is important to point out that *parrhesia*, at least in the beginning, was seen more as an essential attribute of free democratic citizenship than as a speaking of the truth¹⁷.

The primacy of the term’s political valence is evident right from its earliest recorded usage, in Euripides’ *Hippolytus* and *Ion*. In his tale of Phaedra and Ion the tragedian makes it clear that the privilege of *parrhesia* derives from the *status* of Athenian citizenship, belongs to citizens only and cannot be extended to foreigners or slaves: this is why Ion prays to be born of an Athenian mother, in order that he may «have freedom to speak (παρρησία)» on his mother’s side, since a foreigner

«even if he is called a citizen, must keep a slavish mouth closed, and does not feel free to speak»¹⁸.

Euripides also uses the concept of *parrhesia* when dealing with private relationships¹⁹, but the political valence appears to be the most important, as is confirmed by the only instance of the

869-885, M. Casevitz’s summary, *Parrhesia, histoire du mot et de la notion*, in «Révues d’études grecques», 105(1992), pp. XIX-XX, and, particularly on the use of the term in monasticism and the texts of the desert fathers, the entry on *Parrhesia* edited by P. Miquel in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité ascétique et mystique: doctrine et histoire*, publié sous la direction de M. Viller, Beauchesne, Paris 1937-1995, t. XII, 260-67. For a broader contextualization of freedom of speech within the thought and the institutions of the ancient world, from the Hittite empire and the early Jews to classical Greece and then Rome, see A. Momigliano, *La libertà di parola nel mondo antico*, in «Rivista Storica Italiana» 83 (1971), pp. 499-524, and Id., *Freedom of speech and religious tolerance in the ancient world*, in «Annali della scuola normale superiore di Pisa», serie III, IV.2 (1974), pp. 331-49, both collected within Id., *Sesto contributo alla storia degli studi classici e del mondo antico*, 2 voll., Ediz. di Storia e Letteratura, Roma 1980, vol. 2, the first on pp. 403-36 and the second on pp. 461-76. The contributions that make up *Free Speech in Classical Antiquity*, ed. I. Sluiter and R.M. Rosen, Brill, Leiden - Boston 2004 are also detailed and wide-ranging.

¹⁶ On this see A. Momigliano, *La libertà di parola nel mondo antico*, cit., p. 426, and K.A. Raaflaub, *Aristocracy and Freedom of Speech in the Greco-Roman World*, in *Free Speech in Classical Antiquity*, cit., pp. 41-61, p. 41. The absence of the concept of free speech and *parrhesia* in Sparta is referred to *ibi*, pp. 53-54.

¹⁷ On the contrast between *parrhesia* and *isegoria*, see G. Scarpat, *Parrhesia*, cit., p. 22-38, and K.A. Raaflaub’s summary, *Aristocracy and Freedom of Speech in the Greco-Roman World*, loc. cit., pp. 46-49, with good bibliographical references, together with the comments of D.M. Carter, *Citizen attribute, negative right*, in *Free Speech in Classical Antiquity*, cit., pp. 197-220, which demonstrate the inappropriateness of the modern concept of “negative rights and freedoms” in connection with the *parrhesia* of antiquity.

¹⁸ Euripides, *Ion*, vv. 670-75 (engl. tr. in Id., *The Complete Greek Drama*, ed. by W.J. Oates and E. O’Neill, vol. I, tr. by R. Potter, Random House, New York 1938, available at <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>). Phaedra’s words are found in *Hippolytus*, vv. 421-24; see also the dialogue between Jocasta and Polynices in *Phoenissae*, vv. 390-92. Other instances of *parrhesia* in Euripides are found in *The Bacchae*, vv. 668ss, and in *Orestes*, vv. 866ss. It is not surprising that Foucault analyzed these passages, particularly those from *Ion*, in great detail in his lectures on 19 and 26 January and 2 February 1983 (in *Le gouvernement de soi et des autres*, cit.); see also, *Le courage de la vérité*, cit., *Lecture 08.02.1984* and *Discourse and Truth*, cit., pp. 15-49.

term in the work of Aristophanes²⁰; the connection between *parrhesia* and *eleutheria* is also explicit in this fragment from Democritus:

«Freedom of speech (παρρησία) is part of personal freedom (ελευθερία), but the danger lies in knowing when to choose the right moment (καιρός) to speak»²¹.

But *parrhesia* is not only an attribute of citizenship: it is also a means to influence others and thus ensure the wellbeing, or the salvation, of the whole city. The *polis* itself needs people who will speak openly and assume responsibility – in all kinds of situations – for encouraging decisions in the common interest²². But it is above all, however, in a democracy that free speech can really be given space: as Plato makes clear in his Republic, a tyrant has to get rid of anyone who really speaks their mind – friend or enemy – and, thus eliminating the best of men, leaves the *polis* in the hands of the worst.²³

2. Parrhesia and its connection with democracy

The connection between democracy and *parrhesia* is undoubtedly structural, although in many ways ambiguous and problematic. On the one hand, the *parrhesiasta* of which Plato is thinking is, in fact, the unflattering and disinterested speech which places an entire assembly face to face with an uncomfortable and unpleasant, but useful, truth²⁴: here the emphasis is on *parrhesia* as *truth telling* – which presupposes the presence of someone both capable of telling the truth and brave enough to run the risks involved in doing so – and the trial of Socrates is a stark example of the persistence of such risks, even under a democratic government²⁵.

On the other hand, however, the discourse on *parrhesia* always walks a fine line on the borders of both licentiousness and political indifference. After all, criticism of insolence and audacious speech long predates the valuing of free speech. This becomes immediately apparent if we consider some episodes from Homer where speaking frankly (*parrhesia ante litteram*: ελεύθερος λέγειν) is only possible to an equal and the lame Thersites, who challenges Agamemnon, is derided and punished for it²⁶, to the extent that the adjective “thersitical” became synonymous

¹⁹ Euripides, *Electra*, vv. 1049 e 1055, during a conversation between a mother and daughter – Clytemnestra and Electra – although the former is clearly in a position of power over the latter. In this asymmetrical relation between the speakers, and the search for truth in an unjust situation, we can identify – as Foucault’s analysis of *Ion* (M. Foucault, *Le gouvernement de soi et des autres*, cit., *Lecture 02.02.1983*) clearly reveals – one of the distinguishing characteristics of *parrhesia*: a willingness to take the risk of speaking out in order to achieve a greater end.

²⁰ Aristophanes, *Thesmophoriazusae*, vv 540-42, where one of the characters, a relation of Euripides, asserts his own freedom of speech: «εἰ γὰρ οὐσης / παρρησίας καζόν λέγειν ὅσαι πάρεσμεν ἀσπαί, / εἶτ’ εἶπον ἀγίγνωσκον ὑπερ Εὐριπίδου δίκαια» (engl. tr. in *The Complete Greek Drama*, vol. 2, ed. by E. O’Neill, Jr., Random House, New York 1938, available at <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>: «Have we not the right to speak frankly at this gathering? And because I have uttered what I thought right in favour of Euripides, do you want to depilate me for my trouble?»).

²¹ H. Diels-W. Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, 3 voll., Weidemann, Berlin 1951-1952, fr. 226.

²² See, for example, Plato, *Laws* 835c and, although Ciro and a non-democratic context are referred to, 694b.

²³ Cfr. Id., *Republic*, 567b.

²⁴ For a description of Plato’s position in this regard, see G. Rohrmoser, *Platons politische Philosophie*, in «Studium Generale» 22 (1969), pp. 1090-1134.

²⁵ That *parrhesia* should be understood as political discourse on the unflattering truth is clear in two passages from Demosthenes. The first comes from the *Funeral Oration* (Επιτάφιος, *Speech LX*, 26), the second is the final passage of the last *Philippic* (*Speech X*, 76)

²⁶ Drances’ intervention in the *concilium regis* that followed the Latin king’s intervention in Virgil’s *Aeneid* (XI, vv. 343-75) is modelled on Thersites intervention (Homer, *The Iliad*, II, vv. 225-42): the episode centers on the *libertas fandi* which contains a «clear and lively representation of that “quality” of discourse which the Greeks call *parrhesia*». (L. Spina, *Parrhesia e retorica: un rapporto difficile*, in «Paideia» LX(2005), pp. 317-46, here p. 319). For Thersites’ *parrhesia* see, Id., *L’oratore scriteriato. Per una storia letteraria e politica di Tersite*, Loffredo, Napoli 2001, pp. 45-46.

with an “awkward and slanderous” attitude²⁷. And it is Plato once again who points out how conceding the right to *parrhesia* to all the inhabitants of the *polis* is to distort the concept and a cause of decadence, in that *parrhesia* can become uncontrolled speech, when everyone talks about everything and the *polis* becomes «chock-full of liberty»: there is «freedom of speech (παρρησία) » and every man has «the licence to do as he likes (εξουσία εν αυτη ποιειν οτι τις βούλεται)»²⁸. A few years later, Demosthenes observes in the *Third Philippic* that in Athens *parrhesia* is now conceded to everyone, including slaves and foreigners, but expressing an opinion with regard to the good of the *polis* is not permitted: he thus denounces the decadence of the concept in comparison with the – undoubtedly somewhat idealized – image offered by Euripides²⁹.

We can therefore affirm that an awareness of the aporetic, insuperable dialectic between egalitarianism and ethical differentiation – which, as will be seen, is a constant in the history of political *parrhesia* – has existed right from the beginning³⁰.

With the decline of democratic institutions, the semantic field of the concept of *parrhesia* shifts away from the political, and into the purely ethical, sphere, coming to be seen as a private virtue³¹. The concept thus survives, which it might well not have done otherwise – as the death of the strictly political concept of *isegoria* in the Hellenistic and Roman worlds (in which the political power gradually created the secret space of the *arcana imperii*, frequently evoked by Tacitus) demonstrates³². *Parrhesia* is now invoked as one of the virtues of a counselor, or of a philosophy

²⁷ See for instance G.E. Lessing, *Una controreplica*, in Id., *Religione e libertà*, ed G. Ghia, Morcelliana, Brescia 2000, p. 69.

²⁸ Plato, *Republic*, VIII, 557b (tr. *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, Vols. 5 & 6, translated by P. Shorey, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA 1969, available at <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>). There are a number of other examples of *parrhesia* being negatively connoted by Plato, especially when interpersonal relationships are involved (e.g. *Phaedrus*, 240e).

²⁹ Demosthenes, *Speech IX*, 3-4: «αξιω δε, ω ανδρες Αθηναιοι, αν τι των αληθων μετα παρρησίας λέγω, μηδεμίαν μοι δια τουτο παρ’υμων οργην γενέσθαι. σκοπειτε γαρ ωδί. υμεις την παρρησιαν επι μεν των αλλων ουτω κοινην οισθε δειν ειναι πασι τοις εν τη πόλει, ωστε και τοις ξένοις και τοις δούλοις αυτης μεταδεδώκατε, και πολλους αν τις οικέτας ιδοι παρ’ημιν μετα πλείονος εξουσίας ο τι βούλονται λέγοντας η πολίτας εν ενίαις των αλλων πόλεων, εκ δε του συμβουλευειν παντάπασιν εξεληλάκατε. ειθ’υμιν συμβέβηκεν εκ τούτου εν μεν ταις εκκλησίαις τρυφαν και κολακεύεσθαι πάντα προς ηδονην ακούουσιν» (engl. tr. in Id., *Demosthenes with an English translation*, ed. by J. H. Vince, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA 1930, available at <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>: «I claim for myself, Athenians, that if I utter some home-truths with freedom, I shall not thereby incur your displeasure. For look at it this way. In other matters you think it is so necessary to grant general freedom of speech to everyone in Athens that you even allow aliens and slaves to share in the privilege, and many more menials may be observed among you speaking their minds with more liberty than citizens enjoy in other states; but from your deliberations you have banished it utterly. Hence the result is that in the Assembly your self-complacency is flattered by hearing none but pleasant speeches»).

³⁰ Foucault devotes a great deal of space to the paradoxical dialectic between democratic egalitarianism and ethical differentiation – the only possible guarantee of a truth the possession of which the Ancients held to be linked to particular ethical qualities rather than to a method of obtaining clear, distinct facts (*Le gouvernement de soi et des autres*, cit., *Lecture 02.02.1983*, and *Le courage de la vérité*, cit., *Lecture 08.02.1984*). See also D.M. Carter, *Citizen attribute, negative right*, cit., p. 201, and the reflections of Debora Spini on this aporetic dialectic, which is at the very heart of discourse on “truth and politics”.

³¹ The theme again becomes highly topical in the 17th century, and particularly in connection with libertinism – consider the so called “Gassendi case” and the famous phrase (of uncertain origin) «Audi, vide, et tace, si vis vivere in pace». See Silvano Zucal’s essay on the “impossible political *parrhesia*” of Blaise Pascal.

³² See A. Momigliano, *Freedom of speech and religious tolerance in the ancient world*, cit., p. 467; on the lack of a political idea equivalent to *parrhesia* in Rome, G. Scarpat, *Parrhesia*, cit., pp. 114-15, and K.A. Raaflaub, *Aristocracy and freedom of speech*, cit., pp. 54-57, which describes the aristocratic connotation of Roman *libertas* – a much broader term which also includes freedom of speech – and its link to *dignitas*. For an historico-conceptual outline of the notion of “*arcana imperii*” – whose roots lie here – and its theoretical connections with political *parrhesia*, see M. Stolleis, *Arcana imperii und Ratio status. Bemerkungen zur politischen Theorie des frühen 17. Jahrhunderts*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1980, and above all Roman Schnur’s classic study, *Individualism und Absolutism*, Berlin, Duncker & Humblot, 1963. Schnur’s reasoning very effectively illustrates the political significance of the transformation of *parrhesia* into an ethical virtue and the distinction, connected with this, between the outward obedience demanded by a

teacher in his dealings with his students³³; its link with *truth*-speaking becomes stronger with the acquisition of this ethical coloratura, it emerges as a way of speaking that contrasts with demagogic adulation and, in terms of technique, anti-rhetorical³⁴. We can find traces of this same use in the Roman world in Seneca: the theme of *libertas* of speech, devoid of any rhetorical ornament, which must characterize his friendship with Lucilius, appears frequently³⁵, although it is not possible to identify a precise translation of the term *parrhesia*³⁶. In this case, *parrhesia* as a private virtue may still have a public profile, but it is mainly seen as a provocative or heroic act: some of the characters in the *Dialogues* of Lucian offer good example of this phenomenon³⁷ as does, above all, the cynic philosopher³⁸, protagonist of a transparent and radically rebellious provocation which pushed the relationship with the other to the limits of comprehension, and even to breaking point. Later on, this connotation of *parrhesia* – the worst implications of which came to predominate, until the term became synonymous with excessive, uncontrolled licence – is recovered from the tradition of the desert fathers and Eastern monasticism: it now indicates the licentious and excessive familiarity of the relationships between the monks, which degenerate into insolence and obscenity and contradict the ascetic practices of hesychasm³⁹.

3. Parrhesia in the Bible

sovereign and inner conviction (the story of the “Licence of Naaman the Syrian”, examined in detail in the entries on *dissimulation*, is an important example).

³³ Plato uses the term *parrhesia* to refer to Socrates’ attitude to his interlocutors (e.g. *Gorgias*, 487a-e and *Laches*, 188e) and, in a relatively similar manner, Aristotle refers to it when talking about the characteristics of friendship (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 9,2). *Parrhesia* as a conjectural *techne* used by Epicurean teachers with their students (and also with those in positions of political or social power) is at the heart of an enigmatic text by Philodemus of Gadara, *Peri parrhesias* (ed. A. Olivieri, Teubner, Leipzig 1914), fragments of which survive: on this see M. Gigante, *Filodemo sulla libertà di parola*, in *Ricerche filodemee*, Macchiaroli editore, Napoli 1969. Moreover, Galen, in the third chapter of his treatise on the passions of the soul, introduces *parrhesia* as one of the moral qualities of a spiritual advisor (Claudi Galeni Pergameni, *Peri Psyches Pathon Kal Amartematon*, ed. G. Magnaldi, Istituto poligrafico dello Stato, Roma 1999, pp. 41-61). The texts of Philodemus, Galen and some passages from Seneca quoted *infra* are analyzed in M. Foucault, *L’herméneutique du sujet*, cit., *Lecture 10.03.1982*.

³⁴ Foucault often returns to the problem of the relationship between *parrhesia* and rhetoric, first in *L’herméneutique du sujet*, cit., *Lecture 10.03.1982*, in *Gouvernement de soi et des autres*, cit., *Lecture 02.03.1983*, as well as, more briefly, at the beginning of his North American lectures collected in *Discourse and Truth*. On *parrhesia* as a *figure of speech* in relation to rhetoric, see also L. Spina, *Parrhesia e retorica*, cit.

³⁵ See for example Seneca, *Epistulae morales ad Lucilium*, I, 6,5, and IX, 75, 1-7. This letter in particular seemed to Foucault to fully illustrate that which *libertas*, the Greeks’ *parrhesia*, stands for (M. Foucault, *L’herméneutique du sujet*, cit., *Lecture 10.03.1982*).

³⁶ The only passage from Seneca in which it seems possible to identify the Greek term is in the *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium* (III, 29,1), where the Roman philosopher, speaking of Diogenes, attributes to him a *libertas promiscua* in his exhortation: it is the reference to cynicism – of which *parrhesia* was a necessary characteristic – that allows us to identify Greek *parrhesia* here (see G. Scarpat, *Parrhesia*, cit., pp. 115-116 and, for a description of *parrhesia* in relation to cynicism, *ivi*, pp. 62ss.).

³⁷ See Visa-Ondarçuhu, *La notion de parrhèsia chez Lucien*, in «Pallas», 72(2006) [*Le monde et les mots - Mélanges G. Aujac*], pp. 261-278. For more on Luciano, including a perceptive analysis of Leon Battista Alberti’s retake on Lucian’s character Momus – *parrhesia* incarnate and brazenly insolent – see the contribution by Dante Fedele; Roberto Gatti’s rereading of Rousseau gives us valuable food for thought on the unresolved dialectic between truth speaking and provocation, reformulated in terms of a *parola ribelle* (*rebellious word*).

³⁸ On the cynic philosopher, who incarnates *parrhesia* in his very *bios*, to the extent that the latter actually becomes the place where truth is manifest, along with radical, mocking criticism of society, see Foucault again, and the lectures he gave in March 1984, during his last course at the Collège de France (M. Foucault, *Le courage de la vérité*, cit.).

³⁹ In, for example Evagrius Ponticus, John Climacus, Dorotheus of Gaza: see L. Mortari (ed.), *Vita e detti dei padri del deserto*, Città Nuova, Roma 2012. For a general overview, see P. Miquel, a.v. *Parrhesia*, loc. cit., col. 264-267. There are also echoes of this tradition in the *Regula* of Benedict, in the notion of *praesumptio*, for example.

Starting from the Greek tradition of *parrhesia*, according to Heinrich Schlier's reconstruction⁴⁰, it is possible to identify three different meanings of the term in the Bible, all of which remain constants, notwithstanding the subsequent evolution of the concept:

a) *parrhesia* as the right to say everything: since this right confers a specific authority on the person who enjoys it, it usually coincides with the notion of *exousia* and distinguishes free men from slaves;

b) *parrhesia* meaning to speak the truth without any reserve: outspokenness and frankness here have an ontological significance, since they are determined by reality and by the relationship of the speaker to that reality. It resists both the tendency of things to hide, and also the human tendency to conceal things and to dissemble;

c) *parrhesia* as the courage of frankness and the ability to defy those who hinder the dissemination of truth: the virtue of resistance to tyranny, a virtue that generates freedom of spirit (it is not by chance that the Epicureans, particularly Philodemus of Gadara, emphasize the paideutic function of *parrhesia*, which thus becomes the technique to be learned in order to gain an inner discipline) which then reappears in the Christian era within the martyrological literature⁴¹.

Without delving in any depth into the discussion of the issues connected to the presence and meaning of the word in the *Septuaginta*⁴², we can nevertheless note⁴³ how the acceptance of *parrhesia* as *exousia* recurs, in Lev 26,13, for example («I have broken the bars of your yoke and made you walk erect [μετὰ παρρησίας]»), here designating the particular authority, conferred directly by God, which distinguishes the free man from the slave.

In Syr 6,11 and 25,25 *parrhesia* is understood as the «boldness of speech»; in Prov 1,20 («Wisdom cries out in the street; in the squares she raises her voice») and 10,10 («Whoever winks the eye causes trouble, but the one who rebukes *boldly* makes peace») *parrhesia* can be seen to mean the pronouncing of truth *sine glossa*.

Parrhesia as courage and honesty before man and God, with an inner freedom which can produce a sense of confidence and solace, occurs in the fifth chapter of Wisdom (Wis. 5,1); in Job 22,26 («you will [...] lift up your face to God») and 27,10 («Will they call upon God at all times?»), on the other hand, the importance of “veracity” in *parrhesia* is emphasized, as that which allows the righteous Job to make his *confessio cordis* and to turn to God in complete freedom⁴⁴.

A further meaning for *parrhesia* emerges in Psalm 94: here, the inner freedom with which the faithful yield to God is the corollary of the freedom and the radiance with which God (called «the avenger») reveals himself in all his glory.

⁴⁰ H. Schlier, *Parrhesia*, cit.

⁴¹ In fact the connection between *parrhesia* and *maryria* is a topos of the martyrological (the *Vita Antonii* of Atanasius, for example) and Patristic literature; in Origen and Eusebius *parrhesia* is both a typically apostolic charisma and a spiritual attitude of inner freedom in relation to God Himself. In the works of Gregory of Nyssa and John Chrysostom *parrhesia* is used to describe the freedom of the children of God, that is, the conscious acquisition of that particular filial intimacy which allows someone to address God directly as Father and which is typical of prayerful and mystical relationships.

⁴² On this, see Gian Luigi Prato's contribution.

⁴³ We quote the Bible using the *New Revised Standard Version*, National Council of the Churches, 1989. Where it aids understanding, the phrase corresponding to the Greek *parrhesia* (or to its derivatives) will be italicised.

⁴⁴ See G. Moretto, *Etica e interrogazione jobica*, in Id., *Giustificazione e interrogazione. Giobbe nella filosofia*, Guida, Napoli 1991, pp. 55–92, especially p. 63. Remember that, as we will also see further on, the term *Redlichkeit*, used by Kant, in reference to Job, in his essay on the failure of all philosophical attempts at theodicy, is one of the ways in which German Idealism translates the concept of *parrhesia*. See also X. Tilliette, *Les philosophes lisent la Bible*, Cerf, Paris 2001.

The motif of *parrhesia* as an unveiling, which is actualized in speech *apertis verbis*, is undoubtedly a *topos* of the New Testament *Wortgeschichte*, particularly that of John and Paul⁴⁵. A good example of this is found in John 16,25: «I have said these things to you in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures, but will tell you plainly of the Father»: here the concept of the *nyn* (the «Hour») is added to that of *parrhesia*; *nyn* is a typically eschatological term for the day of salvation in the Old Testament⁴⁶ and, in the synoptic gospels, for the Passion of Christ⁴⁷. In John, as well as the eschatological sense, *to nyn* retains the specific meaning of the Hour and comprehends the passion, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ, thus emphasizing a clear progress towards the specification of the Hour as the manifestation of Christ's glory⁴⁸.

From this perspective *parrhesia* therefore comes to designate the public, rather than esoteric or secret, nature of the preaching of Jesus: the adverbial form *parrhesia(i)* is contrasted with *en kryptō(i)* in Jesus' self defence before the high priest in John 18,20 («I have spoken *openly* to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret»); a *Öffentlichkeit* which is nevertheless only evident from an eschatological perspective, that is, at the actual coming of the *nyn* and the *kairos*⁴⁹.

The public, open meaning of *parrhesia* is also found in Mark (Mark 8,32: [Jesus] said all this quite *openly* [παρρησίᾳ]); in Acts the use of the term to designate the public nature of Jesus' preaching is extended to the preaching of the apostles and, since the audience is often described as being hostile, speaking openly takes on the meaning of open, frank speech, loyal to the truth and sustained by faith (e.g. Acts 18,26), thus establishing, as the case of Paul shows, the presence of genuine charisma (e.g. Acts 18,28).

In the writings of Paul and the Deutero-Pauline letters the term *parrhesia* usually designates a dimension characteristic of Christian apostolicism, the «all boldness» (Phil. 1,20), which gives believers the courage to «make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel» (Eph. 6,19), to be «bold enough in Christ to command you to do your duty» (Fm 8) and therefore, in the final instance, the freedom of the genuine profession of faith guided by the action of the Holy Spirit (1Cor 12,2-3)⁵⁰: this meaning clearly recalls the aspect of open witness, and that of the authority (*exousia*) conferred by the Gospel (according to the summing up in 1Thess. 2,2: «though we had already suffered and been shamefully mistreated at Philippi, as you know, we had courage in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in spite of great opposition»).

4. Parrhesia between the public and the secret

It seems clear that the association of *parrhesia* with an inner state of freedom has favoured, from a theological point of view, the direct juxtaposition (and sometimes the actual overlapping) with faith and the theological virtue of hope (Heb. 3,6): this allowed Luther to translate the term as *Freudigkeit*, understood in the sense of a «faithful joy» and of a «trusting surrender» while waiting

⁴⁵ See the list of the *Principal occurrences of the term parrhesia in the New Testament*. See also *Friendship, Flattery, and Frankness of Speech: Studies on Friendship in the New Testament World*, ed. by J.T. Fitzgerald, Brill, Leiden 1996, Part Three of which (pp. 163ss) contains contributions on *parrhesia* in the New Testament.

⁴⁶ See for instance Dan. 8,17-19; 11,35.40-45; Ezek. 3,6; 7,2; 21,25.29; 35,5; Hab. 2,3.

⁴⁷ See for instance Mark 14,41 and Luke 22,43.

⁴⁸ See on this G. Moretto, *Giov. 19,28: la sete di Cristo in croce*, in «Rivista biblica italiana» 15 (1967), pp. 249–274.

⁴⁹ Typical of this is John 7,26: «And here he is, speaking openly [παρρησίᾳ], but they say nothing to him! Can it be that the authorities really know that this is the Messiah?». Here the *parrhesia* of Jesus is understood as an inextricable part of this Messianic nature. See the essay by Andrea Colli on this point, and particularly on the extension of the idea of *parrhesia* beyond a mere public declaration of a truth which is uncomfortable for the establishment.

⁵⁰ On the strategic importance of this passage from Paul with regard to the theological aspects of political *parrhesia* see Milena Mariani's essay on Hans-Urs von Balthasar and Karl Rahner,

for the day of the *Weltgericht*, the final judgement⁵¹. On the other hand, this association also highlighted a theme which is clearly evoked by Johann Gottlieb Fichte in his *Plädoyer* of 1793 on freedom of thought: if the exercise of freedom of thought, like the exercise of freedom of will, is an intrinsic part of the *Persönlichkeit* (or rather, is a necessary condition for the ability to say “I am”), it follows that it is only this exercise of freedom which can guarantee him his relationship with the spiritual world («seines Zusammenhangs mit der Geisterwelt»). However, *parrhesia*, able to encapsulate freedom of thought, of will and of speech, can only be fully realized in the transcendent, that which Fichte calls «ein unsichtbares Reich Gottes», the «invisible kingdom of God»⁵².

In this way, *parrhesia*, which is the principal tool through which political freedom is organized and takes shape, becomes the instrument of “opening” (an *Offenheit* which for Fichte is also an *Öffentlichkeit*) to a meta-political freedom which is then posited as the actual foundation of political freedom. The public space in which political freedom exists is thus limited by an irreducible space which gradually came to be called intelligence, conscience, inner being, or a mystery. On the one hand this space suggests a qualitative equality, based on principle, between all men; on the other, since it is not recognized and lived by everyone in the same way, a *hiatus irrationalis* is revealed⁵³, an aristocratic separation between the enlightened, the inspired, the talented or (teleologically) redeemed, on one side, the unenlightened, uninspired, unredeemed, ignorant and damned on the other.

Here the great importance of the dialectic between the outer and the inner, that is, between the visible and invisible in politics: between its empiric and intelligible, its phenomenological and transcendental and/or transcendent, aspects. For Carl Schmitt, this dialectic is what distinguishes the development of the modern state from the Greek *polis*⁵⁴. And from it, according to Reinhart Koselleck, the bourgeois consciousness emerged, as a claim to an intimate and secret private space offering a defensive bulwark against the pervasiveness of public space⁵⁵. The political scientist Görlitz classifies the different periods of the *Weltgeschichte* according to whether or not the concept of inner and outer exists within them, starting from the first groups of nomadic hunters and ending with the manifold organisational structure of today’s complex societies. This classification, in fact, as we read in Koselleck’s *laudatio* for Gadamer given on the 16th of February 1985,

«structures the conditions of all possible stories, whether we’re talking about the initiation rites of cults, or about professional associations or economic interest groups, or political electoral procedures (and even of their payment methods) or of the decision making bodies in domestic or

⁵¹ This is a translation which has important effects from a philosophical point of view (especially during the idealist period - Fichte, Schelling, Hegel are perfect examples: see X. Tilliette, *La Christologie idéaliste*, Desclée de Brouwer, Paris 1986) and from the politico-theological point of view: in particular, in the language of North American Calvinist sects, that of some Baptist churches, for example, the term has often come to mean a trusting surrender to the grace of God which can reach the point of an extremely radical *fuga mundi* (an eloquent document of this is the Mennonite pastor from Ottawa, David Ewert’s, article, *Die freudige Zuversicht des Glaubens* in «The Voice of the Mennonite Bethren Bible College», January-February 1958, vol. VII, No. 1, pp. 1-3).

⁵² See J. G. Fichte, *Zurückforderung der Denkfreiheit von den Fürsten Europas die sie bisher unterdrückten. Eine Rede*, in *Sämmtliche Werke*, hrsg. von I. H. Fichte, Band 1-8, Veit & Comp., Berlin 1845/1846, Bd. 6, p. 13 (available at <http://www.zeno.org/nid/20009167137>).

⁵³ See on this B. Jacobsen, *Hiatus Irrationalis. Der Bruch zwischen Sein und Sollen* in H.G. Kippenberg – M. Riesebrodt (eds.), *Max Webers 'Religionssystematik'*, Mohr, Tübingen 2001, pp. 31-50.

⁵⁴ C. Schmitt, *Glossarium. Aufzeichnungen der Jahre 1947-1951*, Duncker & Humblot, Berlin 1991, p. 19. See Michele Nicoletti’s essay on the dialectic between the outer and the inner, which is at the heart of Schmitt’s interpretation of “the licence of Naaman the Syrian”.

⁵⁵ See R. Koselleck, *Kritik und Krise. Ein Beitrag zur Pathogenese der bürgerlichen Welt*, Karl Alber Verlag, Freiburg-München 1959.

foreign affairs. All secrets, by definition, delimit a peripheral public space: all public spaces, once institutionalised, reproduce new secret spaces in order that politics can continue»⁵⁶.

We are thus at the point where the aporetic dialectic appears in its fullest meaning - challenging every form of political *parrhesia*, right from its origins. Free, sincere discourse is perfectly at home within a democracy, and that democracy needs such discourse in order to be and remain democratic; at the same time, however, the latter introduces something into the democracy which contradicts its egalitarian structure, threatening its very foundations: if absolutely everyone is allowed to say whatever they wish, the self-evident nature of truth is threatened; but if only the best are allowed a voice, those capable of speaking coherent and well-founded truths which are handed to them «in secret» because the masses are not able to «bear them» (John 16,12), then democracy is, possibly irretrievably, endangered.

⁵⁶ Id., *Historik und Hermeneutik*, in R. Koselleck, H.-G. Gadamer, *Historik, Sprache und Hermeneutik: eine Rede und eine Antwort*, Manutius Verlag, Heidelberg 1987, p. 19.