# The Ethics of Degrowth as an Actual *Parrhesia*

## Hints from Michel Foucault's reflections for a revolutionary singular/plural *ethos* against the consumption society.


## Abstract

During the Seventies **Michel Foucault** was considered one of the most influential intellectuals of political movements; today he is no more so famous among the activists, although he is the most cited author in the humanities. In this paper the focus will be on the concept of ***parrhesia***, developed in his last contribution (he died in 1984), particularly in the lectures at the *Collège de France* (*The government of Self and Others*; *The Courage of the Truth*) and at the University of California, Berkeley (*Fearless Speech*, aka *Discourse and Truth*). There it was analysed by the philosopher in all his evolution inside ancient Greek culture, from tragedy and historiography to Cynicism, Scepticism, and Stoicism through Socrates and Plato.

I think, this concept is extremely relevant for the ***degrowth*** theories and *praxis*, since the same explanation was given by Foucault: «The one who uses *parrhesia*, the *parrhesiastes*, is someone who says everything he has in mind: he does not hide anything, but opens his heart and mind completely to other people through his discourse». Not of minor importance: «In *parrhesia* the speaker emphasizes the fact that he is both the subject of the enunciation and the subject of the *enunciandum*», which means that the activist's lifestyle is a practical, direct example and concretization of the political opinion and philosophical vision.

In Foucault's mind this may constitute relevant timeless countervailing strategies, as a consequence to his conception of the "pastoral" character assumed by modern power (an idea clearly coming from **Friedrich Nietzsche** and resumed by **Judith Butler**).

These ideas are compared in the paper by **Hannah Arendt**, whose opposition between *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa* is a significant precedent of the Foucauldian one between *parrhesia* and *apatheia* (quiet obedience); and with the "reversibility" of power in **Simone Weil**. They are considered by the Italian philosopher **Simona Forti** the most persuasive remedy against the contemporary gap between ethics and politics: she retains, following Foucault, that revolution will be ethical or will never be.


## Introduction

Inside the *degrowth* movement there is an increasing interest about historical, cultural, and philosophical origins of *degrowth*. Latouche (2016) himself gives great attention to this aspect, which is also called into question in the present paper. Through innovative, acute, precise Foucault's interpretation, Hellenistic and post-Hellenistic thought till Christianity is queried, around the faceted, evocative concept of *parrhesia*, meaning 'free speech' and 'truth telling' together.

A brief history of this notion can offer fruitful suggestions for the *degrowth* experience, which tries to harmonize theorization and political action, individual and social dimension, ethos and *praxis*.

## A - Michel Foucault, a thinker in movement

### A.1 – Biography and thought

Paul-Michel Foucault [1926 – 1984] during his life was considered the leading candidate to succeed Sartre as the French 'master-thinker'. By the time he died, in 1984, he had already been the subject of dozens of books, and his posthumous fame has only increased.

The son of a prominent provincial family, Foucault was a brilliant student at the prestigious École Normale Supérieure. He travelled in Sweden, Poland, and Germany, while preparing his dissertation, which was sponsored by one of the most powerful professors at the Sorbonne and, once published, gained favourable reviews from leading intellectuals. Then he moved easily through a series of professorships.

He spent some years in Uppsala, Sweden, where he got to know Dumezil, but 'the main lesson he drew from his experience was that a certain degree of freedom could have as many repressive effects as a directly repressive society' (Macey 2004, 50).

A few years later, in 1970, he won election to the super-elite Collège de France (following Bergson and Merleau-Ponty), which put him at the pinnacle of the French academic world and relieved him of ordinary teaching obligations. From then on, he travelled the world (to Japan, Brazil, California, among other countries) lecturing to very crowded halls. At the same time he was engaged in high-profile political actions, and wrote famous books on crime and sex that have made him a major figure in every humanistic and social scientific discipline (see Gutting 2005, 1-2). Despite spectacular intellectual success, he spent his life seeking extreme sensations ('limit-experiences', as he called them) from drugs and sadomasochistic homosexuality, and died before he was 60 from the most notorious and terrible sexual disease, probably contracted at San Francisco bathhouses.

As Gutting (2005, 18) well outlines, 'Foucault traces this experience from Sade and Hölderlin through Nietzsche and Mallarmé to Artaud, Bataille, and Klossowski, to a culmination in Blanchot', who for his part dedicated a whole book to Foucault (Blanchot 1987). In particular, 'the fact that Foucault's thought follows in the long wake of the "Nietzsche-Renaissance" is widely known' (Forti [2012] 2015, 243).

About his own political opinion, he declared: 'I think I have in fact been situated in most of the squares of the political checkerboard, one after another and sometimes simultaneously: as an anarchist, leftist, ostentatious or disguised Marxist, technocrat in the service of Gaullism, new liberal, and so forth' (Rabinow 1997-2000, vol. 3, 115). All his writings are deeply characterised by reflections on power, so that probably the first definition, anarchist, is the most proper; although at the beginning he was a member of the French Communist Party, 'he was very soon disillusioned with both the theory and the practice of Marxism' (Gutting 2005, 24). This does not mean that then he forgot Marx, whose idea play a relevant role throughout his works. In an interview just before his death, he clarified: 'I am neither an adversary nor a partisan of Marxism; I question it about what it has to say about experiences that ask questions of it' (Rabinow 1997-2000, vol. 1, 115). He actively participated in the student revolt of May

1968, but, differently from some friends of him, did not show any enthusiasm for the excesses of Maoism that were typical of those fights (Macey 2004, 85-86). As far as popular violence is involved, 'Foucault himself was suspicious of the idea of "people's justice", which he discussed at some length in an interview with Levy (Macey 2004, 105). In a discussion with Rorty, Foucault pointed out his precise opinion about the relationship between the individual and the social aggregations, which will be relevant while considering his indications, possibly useful for *degrowth*: 'it seems to me that the ''we'' must not be previous to the question, it can only be the result – and the necessarily temporary result – of the question as it is posed in the new terms in which one formulates it' (Rabinow 1997-2000, vol. 1, 114-115).

What about the eternal doubts on the correct attitude of a revolutionist towards *reformism*, which is also evidently present in the *degrowth* movement? He rejected 'the dilemma of being either for or against' and went on to argue that even reformist projects (within a system) require 'criticism (and radical criticism)', since any reform worthy of the name requires questioning modes of thought, which imply a broader horizon. Accordingly, we cannot choose between 'an inaccessible radicality' and 'the necessary concessions to reality'. Rather, 'the work of deep transformation [reform] can be done in the open and always turbulent atmosphere of a continuous [revolutionary] criticism' (Rabinow 1997-2000, vol. 3, 457). There is a motto of his that may even better clarify his position: 'My point is not that everything is bad but that everything is dangerous' (Rabinow 1997-2000, vol. 1, 256).

'Foucault wanted to write books in order to escape from any fixed identity, to continually become someone else, thereby never really being anyone' (Gutting 2005, 10), that's why describing his work needs a periodization, which obviously implies a little bit of simplification.

### A.2 – Archaeology

After an essay about madness (Foucault [1961] 1967), an argument that would have such a deep attention by the author afterwards, and another one dedicated to a French surrealist poet (Foucault [1962] 1986b), the philosopher gave birth to a series of books (Foucault [1963] 1973a; [1966] 1973b; [1969] 1972) that are usually grouped under the definition of archaeology, a term frequently used with emphasis by the same author.

In these works Foucault is concerned with the *pre-history* of historical concepts and institutions, in the sense of the academic discourses which preceded their very existence. In dealing with these, he employs a method which is the procedure of looking for what in the philosophy of science are called 'epistemic breaks'. For him *episteme* refers to the stable ensemble of unspoken rules that governs knowledge, which is itself susceptible to historical breaks. Foucault does not concern himself here with why these shifts happen, only with what has happened. 'The *episteme* of Foucault's classical age is organized around a system of *mathesis*, or a general mathematical science of order, a *taxinomia*, or a more empirical system of classification, and genetic analysis. Its modes of thought are analysed in chapters dealing, respectively, with "representing", "thinking", "speaking" and "exchanging"' (Macey 2004, 74).

The key word 'archaeology', as Foucault himself declares, means approaching language in a way that does not refer to a *subject* who transcends it. That is not to say that Foucault is making a strong metaphysical claim about *subjectivity*, but rather only that he is proposing a mode of analysis that subordinates the role of the subject. It would be an improper deviation here to compare in detail Foucault with the *post-modern* thinkers, who went much further in criticising subjectivity, till its total destruction: we can just say that he somehow opened the path for a debate on this crucial concept, but did not follow those philosophers up to the extreme consequences.

### A.3 – Genealogy

Foucault's writings ([1973] 1978a; [1975] 1977) show a change after May 1968: influenced by the political ferment, they are more 'politicized', reflecting the author's new engagement. They belong to an up-to-date project that the same Foucault designates 'genealogy'. It implies what Foucault calls the 'history of the present': an explanation of where we have come from; its purpose is to tell us how our current situation originated, and is motivated by contemporary concerns. The word is drawn directly from Nietzsche ([1887] 1996): genealogy is the typical Nietzschean form of history, though rather more meticulously historical than anything the German thinker ever attempted.

The first volume (seven were planned but only three composed) dedicated to the history of sexuality (Foucault [1976] 1978), we can say, concludes this phase and opens to the following ones.

### A.4 – Governmentality and biopolitics

The notion of *biopolitics*, as the regulation of populations, brought Foucault's thinking to the question of the state. Foucault's work on power had generally been a matter of minimizing the importance of the state in the network of power relations, but now he started to ask about it specifically, via a genealogy of government (Foucault 2009), and then in the genealogy of neoliberalism (Foucault 2010). Foucault here coins the term *governmentality*. The function of this notion is to throw the focus of thinking about contemporary societies onto government as such, as a technique, rather than to focus on the state or the economy.

Even though it is true that 'Foucault saw it as a characteristic (and troubling) property of the development of government in Western societies to tend towards a form of political sovereignty which would be a government of all of each and whose concerns would be at once to "totalise" and to "individualise"' (Burchell, Gordon, and Miller 1991, 3), we must not forget that 'if power is relational rather than emanating from a particular site such as the government or the police; if it is diffused throughout all social relations rather than being imposed from above; if it is unstable and in need of constant repetition to maintain; if it is productive as well as being repressive, then it is difficult to see power relations as simply negative and as constraining' (Mills 2003, 47).

As a synthesis of these two matters, biopolitics and governmentality, Foucault's concept of 'bio-power refers to all the strategies born of the realization that governments have to deal with a population of living beings whose needs have to be met by social technologies that create as well as meet their needs in the domains of health care, housing, town planning, social work, education and so on. Foucault often refers to it as the government of the living' (Macey 2004, 108).

### A.5 – Ethics and aesthetics of existence

More than the result of a radical turn, the last period in Foucault's life and philosophical activity, which comprehends the works about which it is here discussed, is a recapitulation of his whole elaborations, with a strongest accent on ethics. Nevertheless, we should not neglect the possible inputs coming from the changing social, political, cultural, and also academic atmosphere, with the political militancy of the seventies in abeyance, and an increasing attention to individual behaviour.

The main output of this period is the second (Foucault [1984] 1985) and third (Foucault [1984] 1986a) volumes dedicated to the history of sexuality, together with the lectures at the College de France.

What Foucault got from the analyses carried on in these final years, is the notion of an ethics concerned with one's relation to one's self. The 'care for the self', observed by Foucault in ancient societies, manifestly attracts him, and he expresses some wish to recover such an ethics today, though he demurs on the question of whether such a resumption is really possible. Thus, the point for Foucault is not to expound an ethics; it is rather the new analytical possibilities of focusing on subjectivity itself. Foucault becomes now interested increasingly in the way subjectivity is constituted precisely by the way in which subjects produce themselves via a relation to truth. That is why Foucault in this very moment proclaims that his work was always about subjectivity.

'It is in this context that Foucault begins to outline what he would eventually call an aesthetics of existence. *La Volanté de savoir* argues against the emphasis of "sex-desire" and begins to make the case for a new economy of "bodies and pleasures". In an interview published to promote the book, its author declared himself in favour of "the decentralisation, the regionalisation of all pleasures". He spoke to another interviewer of the emergence of a movement that was not demanding more sex or more truth about sex, but manufacturing other forms of pleasures, relations, bonds and loves' (Macey 2004, 120).

It is important to notice, that 'Foucault analyses the operation of power largely outside the realm of institutions; for this reason, the body is one of the sites of struggle and discursive conflict upon which he focuses' (Mills 2003, 82). But, for the purposes of this paper, is even more urgent to underline that 'the notion of bodies as the target of power is part of Foucault's attempt to avoid the liberal conception of individuals as unconstrained creative essences' (Gane 1986, 155).

## B - The challenge of *parrhesia*

### B.1 – The conception of power and subject, borrowed from Nietzsche

The filiation of Foucauldian ideas from Nietzsche has already been indicated above, and after all he defined himself 'simply Nietzschean'. Therefore, if we want to understand better what the French philosopher means by power and truth, two essential concepts for the comprehension of *parrhesia*, we should hint at Nietzsche's opinion about. The latter retains 'that the *highest* man […] would be the man that represented the antithetical character of existence most strongly' (Nietzsche 1967, 470), id est who is able to sustain his or her inner duality of what we use to call good and evil. For the German thinker, the authentic aristocrat is the bearer of true responsibility. 'Going beyond good and evil, then, means conceding a "tragic yes to life", without getting trapped and blackmailed by the promise of a revaluation of suffering, and without deluding oneself by the hope of giving a meaning to the senselessness of pain. *It means knowing how to remain a field of opposing forces*' (Forti [2012] 2015, 240). Life, in an active tension, is expressed by the need to go beyond ourselves, which constitutes the real 'power'. That's the reason for not putting forward a *doctrine*, and for avoiding the simplification of just accepting or rejecting a whole ideology. The proposal is not to reverse good and evil, as mindless interpreters (Nazis for instance) may argue, but to conceive the premises for stopping the circularity between evil and power, through an 'ethical revolution' of the subject, which Foucault develops in his idea of the 'care of the self'.

'It was primarily under Nietzsche's guidance that Foucault performed his dual task: on the one hand, demolishing the pretense of the self-sufficiency of subjectivity, on the other, redefining the concept of power' (Forti [2012] 2015, 243). Foucault was taught by Nietzsche that power is not evil, and that it is not a right which you possess, or something that can be transferred or alienated. 'Power is coextensive with the entire social body. Subjects and power give rise to a network of relationships inside of which there runs an energy that continuously reshapes the consolidated structures' (244). Thus 'the subject is constituted by relations of power so that along with subjugation there simultaneously occurs subjectification' (245). A relation of power is composed by at least a certain form of liberty on both sides. The 'microphysics of power' is a famous notion introduced by Foucault just to explain all this.

It may be useful for our treatment also to show what Foucault wants to explain with the concept of 'pastoral power': the deep bond between the 'government of souls', or the 'economy of souls', of the first Christian century and the 'government of men' typical of Western politics in modern times. The 'pastoral relationships' in Foucault's mind are not eternal, but had a beginning in a certain moment, and therefore they do not refer to some natural human propensity. Already in the Egyptian and Babylonian civilisations, 'God is the shepherd (*berger*) of men. In a word, this metaphor of the shepherd, this reference to pastorship allows a type of relationship between God and the sovereign to be designated, in that if God is the shepherd of men, and if the king is also the shepherd of men, then the king is, as it were, the subaltern shepherd to whom God has entrusted the flock of men and who, at the end of the day and the end of his reign, must restore the flock he has been entrusted with to God' (Foucault 2009, lecture five). This conception, which was unknown to Greek culture, was developed by the Christians, after having passed through the Hebrews. 'The shepherd is someone who feeds and who feeds directly, or at any rate, he is someone who feeds the flock first by leading it to good pastures, and then by making sure that the animals eat and are properly fed' (ibid): it is impossible not to notice here one of the origins forming the contemporary myth of endless growth, with which the *degrowthers* fight. What in the early Christian period was expected by God and his priests, is nowadays expected from economy and technology. Let's not forget that the shepherd is someone who keeps watch, so inevitably at the same time controls and limits freedom. But, let's be careful, 'all the dimensions of terror and of force or fearful violence, all these disturbing powers that make men tremble before the power of kings and gods, disappear in the case of the shepherd (*pasteur*), whether it is the kingshepherd or the god-shepherd' (ibid.), and just the same occurs in the actual governance: the lack of autonomy is something happily accepted by the average citizen, even though strongly criticised by the opponents to growth. It comes even more evident to our eyes, if we consider that for Foucault the most fitting similarity makes the shepherd akin to a physician (today, we could remark, to an economist too). This kind of power is individualizing, 'that is to say, it is true that the shepherd directs the whole flock, but he can only really direct it insofar as not a single sheep escapes him' (ibid), which implies '*omnes et singulatim*' as the author says. Foucault's deduction is enlightening: 'Of all civilizations, the Christian West has undoubtedly been, at the same time, the most creative, the most conquering, the most arrogant, and doubtless the most bloody. At any rate, it has certainly been one of the civilizations that has deployed the greatest violence. But, at the same time, and this is the paradox I would like to stress, over millennia Western man has learned to see himself as a sheep in a flock, something that assuredly no Greek would have been prepared to accept' (ibid).

In order to even better differentiate the ancient Greco-Roman culture from the Christian world, the French philosopher ushers the concept of *apatheia*. While for the former (in Stoicism and late Epicureanism for instance) it had had the meaning of a control the individual can exert over his or her passions through the exercise of reason, for early Christianity it means renouncing to the disturbances that come from the body, as well renouncing one's own judgement and will. Further explained: 'All those Christian techniques of examination, confession, guidance, obedience, have an aim: to get individuals to work at their own "mortification" in this world' ('*Omnes et singulatim*: Towards a Criticism of Political Reason', in McMurrin 1981, 239), which inevitably leads to 'detachment from the world, disinterest and indifference to what is happening in history and in the city' (Forti [2012] 2015, 252). This distinction and its political implications were perfectly evident to Arendt ([1958] 1998, 14-17), who put into evidence the transition from the citizens' political action, so fundamental in the Greek *polis*, to the *vita contemplativa* (contemplation) exalted by the Christian theory, above all after Augustine.

**B.2 – Power and subject at present**

The *fulcrum* of Foucault's intellectual research has always been the subject; the question of power has constantly come along with the first one. How human beings are made subjects in our culture? To his mind, four modes of objectification transform human beings into subjects: the modes of inquiry which try to give themselves the status of sciences, like the objectivizing of the speaking subject; the objectivizing of the productive subject, the subject who labors, in the analysis of wealth and of economics;  the objectivizing of the subject in what he calls 'dividing practices', in which the subject is either divided inside himself or divided from others (the mad and the sane, the sick and the healthy, the criminals and the 'good boys'; finally, the way a human being turns himself into a subject, for instance through the care of the self, one of the arguments of our discussion (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983, 208-226).

Power relations (of men over women, of parents over children, of psychiatry over the mentally ill, of medicine over the population, of administration over the ways people live) and the forms of resistance and attempts made to dissociate these relations are inextricably interconnected and ones are not well understandable without the others. Foucault's effort is to define more precisely what anti-authority struggles have in common. It is very precious for the debate on *degrowth* to expose these common features for the French theoretician: they are 'transversal' struggles, that is, not limited to one country (of course, they develop more easily and to a greater extent in certain countries, but they are not confined to a particular political or economic form of government); the aim of these struggles is the power effects as such (for example, the medical profession is not criticized primarily because it is a profit-making concern but because it exercises an uncontrolled power over people's bodies, their health, and their life and death); these are "immediate" struggles with people criticizing instances of power which are the closest to them, those which exercise their action on individuals, id est they do not look for the 'chief enemy' but for the immediate enemy; they are struggles which question the status of the individual: on the one hand, they assert the right to be different, and they underline everything which makes individuals truly individual, and on the other hand, they attack everything which separates the individual, breaks his links with others, splits up community life, forces the individual back on himself, and ties him to his own identity in a constraining way; they are an opposition to the effects of power which are linked with knowledge, competence, and qualification: struggles against the privileges of knowledge, but they are also an opposition against secrecy, deformation, and mystifying representations imposed on people; finally, all these present struggles revolve around the question 'Who are we?', representing a refusal of these abstractions, of economic and ideological state violence, which ignore who we are individually (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983, 210). The *degrowth* movement clearly embodies most or all of these peculiarities, differentiating itself from what remains of Marxist organised groups.

'Generally, it can be said that there are three types of struggles: either against forms of domination (ethnic, social, and religious); against forms of exploitation which separate individuals from what they produce; or against that which ties the individual to himself and submits him to others in this way (struggles against subjection, against forms of subjectivity and submission)' (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983, 211). The real challenge for *degrowth* is to manage in melting these forms of struggle into a unique aggregation, where each form is not in contradiction with the others, but on the contrary enforcing the others, and giving them even more significance.

### B.3 – Power according to Simone Weil and Judith Butler

Power as conceived by Weil [1909 - 1943] has a lot in common with Foucault's orientation. Weil ([1955] 2004, 56-57) departs from these premises: 'The causes of social evolution must no longer be sought elsewhere than in the daily efforts of men considered as individuals. These efforts are certainly not directed haphazardly; they depend, in each individual case, on temperament, education, routine, customs, prejudices, natural or acquired needs, environment, and above all, broadly speaking, human nature, a term which, although difficult to define, is probably not devoid of meaning. But given the almost infinite diversity of individuals, and especially the fact that human nature includes among other things the ability to innovate, to create, to rise above oneself, this warp and woof of incoherent efforts would produce anything whatever in the way of social organization, were it not that chance found itself restricted in this field by the conditions of existence to which every society has to conform on pain of being either subdued or destroyed. The men who submit to these conditions of existence are more often than not unaware of them, for they act not by imposing a definite direction on the efforts of each one, but by rendering ineffective all efforts made in directions disallowed by them'. Like in Foucault's thought subjectivation takes place in both its apparently opposite meanings, every subject is inevitably subject to others' power, wills, efforts. Power is not just located by the king, the government, or the state: it circulates from and among everyone in every social organisation.

By Weil ([1955] 2004, 62-63) it is speculated that 'power contains a sort of fatality which weighs as pitilessly on those who command as on those who obey; nay more, it is in so far as it enslaves the former that, through their agency, it presses down upon the latter', and 'what is more, the two struggles that every man of power has to wage - first against those over whom he rules, secondly against his rivals - are inextricably bound up together and each is all the time rekindling the other'. The idea of authentic freedom comes as a consequence, and appears really close to Foucauldian 'technologies of the self': 'True liberty is not defined by a relationship between desire and its satisfaction, but by a relationship between thought and action; the absolutely free man would be he whose every action proceeded from a preliminary judgment concerning the end which he set himself and the sequence of means suitable for attaining this end'. Action upon oneself, action upon external society, action upon power relationships therefore result as the different faces of the same thing.

As far as power relationships are concerned 'actually, in all oppressive societies, any man, whatever his rank may be, is dependent not only on those above or below him, but above all on the very play of collective life - a blind play which alone determines the social hierarchies; and it does not matter much in this respect whether power allows its essentially collective origin to appear or else seems to reside in certain specific individuals after the manner of the dormitive virtue in opium' (Weil [1955] 2004, 91-92). Weil's consideration of contemporary times is painted with very dark tones, and without any doubt constitutes an inspiration for critics based on *degrowth* concepts: 'It is impossible to imagine anything more contrary to [the] ideal than the form which modern civilization has assumed in our day, at the end of a development lasting several centuries. Never has the individual been so completely delivered up to a blind collectivity, and never have men been less capable, not only of subordinating their actions to their thoughts, but even of thinking' (102). In this pessimistic vision, it can be done 'nothing, except endeavour to introduce a little play into the cogs of the machine that is grinding us down; seize every opportunity of awakening a little thought wherever they are able; encourage whatever is capable, in the sphere of politics, economics or technique, of leaving the individual here and there a certain freedom of movement amid the trammels cast around him by the social organization' (114).

Butler [b. 1956] on her hand immediately caught the fecundity of Foucauldian interpretation of power and subjectivation (Butler 1997, 83-84). 'If discourse produces identity by supplying and enforcing a regulatory principle which thoroughly invades, totalizes, and renders coherent the individual, then it seems that every "identity," insofar as it is totalizing, acts as precisely such a "soul that imprisons the body"' (86). 'This "subjection" or *assujetissement* is not only a subordination but a securing and maintaining, a putting into place of a subject, a subjectivation' (90-91). Consequently, if in agreement with Foucault we understand the psyche to be an imprisoning effect in the service of normalization, then we should imagine a psychic resistance to normalization. 'Fortunately, for Foucault the subject who is produced through subjection is not produced at an instant in its totality. Instead, it is in the process of being produced, it is repeatedly produced (which is not the same as being produced anew again and again). It is precisely the possibility of a repetition which does not consolidate that dissociated unity, the subject, but which proliferates effects which undermine the force of normalization' (93). A fundamental means of resistance is the possibility of resignification, of mobilizing politically the Nietzschean 'sign chain': the uses to which a given sign is originally put are 'worlds apart' from the uses to which it then becomes available; this temporal gap between usages produces the possibility of a reversal of signification, but also opens the way for an inauguration of signifying possibilities that exceed those to which the term has been previously bound.

Butler (1997, 97-98) evidences the affirmation by Foucault of multiple possibilities of resistance enabled by power itself. As the French philosopher underlines, there is a plurality of resistances in the strategic field of power relations, taking multiple forms according to the special case: spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, rampant, or violent, quick to compromise, interested, or sacrificial. 'But this does not mean that they are only a reaction or rebound, forming with respect to the basic domination an underside that is in the end always passive, doomed to perpetual defeat' (Foucault [1976] 1978b, 96). Resistance thus is configured as an effect of the very power that it is said to oppose. 'This insistence on the dual possibility of being both constituted by the law and an effect of resistance to the law marks a departure from the Lacanian framework, for where Lacan restricts the notion of social power to the symbolic domain and delegates resistance to the imaginary [like Castoriadis], Foucault recasts the symbolic as relations of power and understands resistance as an effect of power […] For Foucault, the symbolic produces the possibility of its own subversions, and these subversions are unanticipated effects of symbolic interpellations' (Butler 1997, 98-99).

### B.4 – The individual and the social, or better the singular and the plural

Since in the above mentioned conception of power, the single person is involved in a very complex network of power links, it could be useful to add some hints at what connects and what divides human beings among themselves. Jean-Luc Nancy ([1996] 2000, 28), one the most eminent living thinkers, suggests that 'Being singular plural: these three apposite words, which do not have any determined syntax ("being" is a verb or noun; "singular" and "plural" are nouns or adjectives; all can be rearranged in different combinations), mark an absolute equivalence, both in an indistinct and distinct way'. Just in this coincidence the 'meaning of Being' has to be searched. Indeed 'the co-implication of existing (*l'exister*) is the sharing of the world. A world is not something external to existence; it is not an extrinsic addition to other existences; the world is the coexistence that puts these existences together' (29). 'This could also be put in the following way: if Being is being-with, then it is, in its being-with, the "with" that constitutes Being; the with is not simply an addition. This operates in the same way as a collective (*collégial*) power: power is neither exterior to the members of the collective (*collège*) nor interior to each one of them, but rather consists in the collectivity (*collégialité*) as such' (30).

The political implications are hard to be taken, but they could help in the direction of some improvement, which is the purpose of *degrowth* project. Since today 'this earth is anything but a sharing of humanity. It is a world that does not even manage to constitute a world; it is a world lacking in world, and lacking in the meaning of world. It is an enumeration that brings to light the sheer number and proliferation of these various poles of attraction and repulsion' (Nancy [1996] 2000, xiii).

### B.5 – *Parrhesia* as a strategy of countervailing

According to Foucault's vision, choosing an own *ethos* and giving oneself a form is not a merely aesthetic choice, in the decadent sense of 'making one's life a work of art, but is equivalent to a 'recognition of the self as a singular event that reveals the incommensurability of space within which we can accept or resist the pressures of power' (Forti [2012] 2015, 266). Just in the difficult task to give shape to one's *bios* outside of external norms, *parrhesia* can play a key role for a lifestyle and for an expression of the self, Foucault claims.

Before defining the exact meaning of *parrhesia*, it may be proper to explain shortly what represents for the French thinker this kind of work upon oneself, which he compares to a specific 'technology'. Foucault (1988b, 17-18) is interested in 'the different ways in our culture that humans develop knowledge about themselves: economics, biology, psychiatry, medicine, and penology'. For this very purpose, 'we must understand that there are four major types of these "technologies", each a matrix of practical reason: (1) technologies of production, which permit us to produce, transform, or manipulate things; (2) technologies of sign systems, which permit us to use signs, meanings, symbols, or signification; (3) technologies of power, which determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination, an objectivizing of the subject; (4) technologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and semis, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality' (18). The last category is the most relevant one for our treatment, but the four are all deeply interrelated and conditioning one another. The technologies of the self are based on the hermeneutics of the self, which once more time should be distinguished in two different contexts: the Greco-Roman philosophy up to the early Roman Empire, and the Christian spirituality, with its monastic principles, developed in the fourth and fifth centuries of the late Roman Empire.

The first philosophical elaboration of the concern with taking care of oneself appears maybe in Plato's *First Alcibiades*. It is related to the begin of Alcibiades' public and political life, for which he wish to own the proper instruments, in order to gain personal power over all others, both inside and outside the city. Then Socrates intervenes and, in a dialectic between political and erotic discourse (Alcibiades has been his young beloved), asks Alcibiades about his personal capacity and the nature of his ambition: does he know the meaning of the rule of law, of justice or concord? Evidently not, therefore Alcibiades must apply himself, and must take care of himself, a goal for which he has to acquire *techne*. 'Concern for self always refers to an active political and erotic state. *Epimelesthai* expresses something much more serious than the simple fact of paying attention. It involves various things: taking pains with one's holdings and one's health. It is always a real activity and not just an attitude' (Foucault 1988b, 24). It flows into a search for the own identity. In this process, the effort of the soul to know itself is directly involved as the principle on which just political action can be founded, in accordance with the Delphic principle: 'Know yourself'. 'Being occupied with oneself and political activities are linked. The dialogue ends when Alcibiades knows he must take care of himself by examining his soul' (26). This connection may be a very useful touchstone for the *degrowth* movement, which seems to be more disposed to it than other forms of political militancy; for example the Marxist tradition is interested in class self-consciousness, much less in the individual, spiritual one. It is a pity that, as Foucault warns us, already a long time ago, 'in the later Hellenistic and imperial periods, the question is presented in an alternative way: When is it better to turn away from political activity to concern oneself with oneself?' (ibid). Nonetheless still by Seneca self-examination looks like being carried on in an administrative language, 'as when a comptroller looks at the books or when a building inspector examines a building' (33). Here faults are simply good intentions left undone, and the rule is a means of doing something correctly, not judging what has happened in the past. It is only with Christian ideology that faults become culpable sins, possible causes for eternal damnation, and consequently confession looks for bad intentions.

'Kant, Fichte, Hegel, Nietzsche, Max Weber, Husserl, Heidegger, the Frankfurterschule, have tried to answer' the question: "What are we today?"' (Foucault 1988b, 145). In Foucault's opinion another field of questions should be associated with the first one: 'the way by which, through some political technology of individuals, we have been led to recognize ourselves as a society, as a part of a social entity, as a part of a nation or of a state' (146). In the Modern era, the technologies of the self turn into the political technology of individuals, but in a paradoxal way: the world wars provoked such a butchery in the very moment, 'when the great welfare, public health, and medical assistance programs were instigated' (147). So that 'one could symbolize such a coincidence by a slogan: 'Go get slaughtered and we promise you a long and pleasant life'. Life insurance is connected with a death command. The coexistence in political structures or large destructive mechanisms and institutions oriented toward the care of individual life is something puzzling and needs some investigation' (ibid), and as well it needs more investigation to understand whether economics and policies aimed at uninterrupted growth reflects the same mechanism, where massive death takes place not only in the battlefields created with the purpose of economical exploitation, but in everyday life too, as a result for environmental changes, led by the same economical exploitation, which hypocritically promises better existence for everybody.

As Foucault (2001, 11) points out, 'the word *parrhesia* appears for the first time in Greek literature in Euripides [c. 484-407 B.C.], and occurs throughout the ancient Greek world of letters from the end of the fifth century B.C. But it can also still be found in the patristic texts written at the end of the fourth and during the fifth century A.D. - dozens of times, for instance, in Jean Chrysostome [A.D. 345-407]'. As far as the exact meaning is concerned, '*parrhesia* is ordinarily translated into English by "free speech" (in French by *franc-parler*, and in German by *Freimüthigkeit*). *Parrhesiazomai* or *parrhesiazesthai* is to use *parrhesia*, and the *parrhesiastes* is the one who uses parrhesia, i.e., the one who speaks the truth' (ibid). Thus, 'in *parrhesia*, the speaker is supposed to give a complete and exact account of what he has in mind so that the audience is able to comprehend exactly what the speaker thinks. The word *parrhesia*, then, refers to a type of relationship between the speaker and what he says. For in *parrhesia*, the speaker makes it manifestly clear and obvious that what he says is his *own* opinion. And he does this by avoiding any kind of rhetorical form which would veil what he thinks. Instead, the *parrhesiastes* uses the most direct words and forms of expression he can find' (12).

An element which typically and frequently characterizes this kind of dialogue is a clear difference of status between the speaker and his audience, together with the fact that the former says something which is dangerous to himself and thus involves a risk for him. He 'says what *is* true because he *knows* that it *is* true; and he *knows* that it is true because it is really true. The *parrhesiastes* is not only sincere and says what is his opinion, but his opinion is also the truth. He says what he *knows* to be true. The second characteristic of *parrhesia*, then, is that there is always an exact coincidence between belief and truth' (Foucault 2011, 14). Obviously this conviction is far from our modern conception: after Descartes this coincidence is obtained in a certain evidential experience, of mental origin. For the Greeks, instead, it did not take place in a mental experience, but exactly in a *verbal activity*. In ancient Greek culture the *parrhesiastes* never seems to have any doubts about his own possession of the truth. 'If there is a kind of "proof" of the sincerity of the *parrhesiastes*, it is his *courage*. The fact that a speaker says something dangerous -- different from what the majority believes – is a strong indication that he is a *parrhesiastes*' (15). In order to exemplify, 'when a philosopher addresses himself to a sovereign, to a tyrant, and tells him that his tyranny is disturbing and unpleasant because tyranny is incompatible with justice, then the philosopher speaks the truth, believes he is speaking the truth, and, more than that, also takes a risk (since the tyrant may become angry, may punish him, may exile him, may kill him)' (16). Another important particularity denoting the so called parrhesiastic game is that dialogue through questions and answers is a major technique, while the continuous long speech is a rhetorical or sophistical device.

*Parrhesia* is an essential characteristic of Athenian democracy, and one of the aims of this paper is to discover its actual value, for *degrowth* action and for the democratic procedures as a whole. In Foucault's opinion, 'we can say quite generally that *parrhesia* was a guideline for democracy as well as an ethical and personal attitude characteristic of the good citizen. Athenian democracy was defined very explicitly as a constitution (*politeia*) in which people enjoyed *demokratia*, *isegoria* (the equal right of speech), *isonomia* (the equal participation of all citizens in the exercise of power), and *parrhesia*. *Parrhesia*, which is a requisite for public speech, takes place between citizens as individuals, and also between citizens construed as an assembly. Moreover, the *agora* is the place where parrhesia appears' (22).

With the rise of the Hellenic monarchies *parrhesia* changes its perspective and becomes centred in the relationship between the sovereign and his advisors or court men. In this new situation it is the advisor's duty to use *parrhesia* to help the king with his decisions, and to prevent him from abusing his power: *parrhesia* is necessary and useful both for the king and for the people under his rule. Then, by the time of the Epicureans, *parrhesia* turned into the care of oneself, regarded as a techne of spiritual guidance for the 'education of the soul'. Philodemus [c. 110 - 35 B.C.], one of the most significant Epicurean writers, for example, wrote a book about parrhesia which concerns technical practices useful for teaching and helping one another in the Epicurean community.

## C – Historical, philosophical, and literary forms of *parrhesia*

### C.1 - *Parrhesia* in Euripides and Polybius

The tragedian Euripides [485 – 406 B.C.] used this word in six tragedies of Euripides: *Phoenician Women*; *Hippolytus*; *The Bacchae*; *Electra*; *Ion*; and *Orestes*. Foucault (2001, 27) thinks 'that *Ion* is entirely devoted to the problem of *parrhesia* since it pursues the question: who has the right, the duty, and the courage to speak the truth?' Ion is the son of the young girl Creusa, seduced by Apollo, so that she conceives a son whom, she exposes, abandoning him, to hide her dishonour. Hermes takes him away on the order of Apollo himself, carries the child in his cradle to Delphi, where he is placed in the temple. Apollo's priestess, the Pythia, feeds him and makes him a temple servant. Creusa meanwhile, no one around her knowing that she was seduced by Apollo and that she has had a son, is married to Xuthus, who is a foreigner.

Creusa and Xuthus come to Delphi to ask Apollo, whether they would give birth to a child, but Creusa wants also to know, which destiny his son from Apollo has met. Apollo's temple, the oracle at Delphi, was the place where the truth was told by the gods to any mortals who came to consult it. But this time human beings, in spite of the silence of Apollo, will discover by themselves the truth they are so eager to know. 'Apollo does not speak the truth, he does not reveal what he knows perfectly well to be the case, he deceives mortals by his silence or tells pure lies, he is not courageous enough to speak himself, and he uses his power, his freedom, and his superiority to cover up what he has done. Apollo is the *anti-parrhesiasres*' (44). He is reticent or tells half-truths because he is guilty to Creusa; he lets Xuthus and Ion believe that they are father and son (of unknown mother). Ion cannot like this situation: as 'the son of a non-Athenian father and a non-Athenian mother cannot in any way exercise that founding function in the town which is precisely Ion's function, his vocation. He cannot exercise that function, and the approximate nature of Xuthus' truth is translated in fact into a sort of juridical ban or juridical impossibility' (Foucault 2010b, 93). It appears here the problem of political rights, which is inseparable from the possibility of *parrhesia*: Ion 'he wants the truth because he wants to justify the right. He wants to justify his right, his political right at Athens. He wants the right to speak there, to say everything, speak the truth, and speak freely. In order to justify his *parrhesia* he needs the truth finally to be told, a truth which will found this right' (98).

Therefore we discover here a double bind between *parrhesia* and political action: in the tragedy the former is the pre-condition for the latter, but at the same time the latter expresses itself at best through the former. This *parrhesia* is however something other than the pure and simple status of citizen, and it is not given by tyrannical power. Foucault (2010b,104) thinks '*parrhesia* is, in a way, a discourse spoken from above, which comes from a source higher than the status of the citizen, and which is different from the pure and simple exercise of power. It is a form of discourse which will exercise power in the framework of the city, but of course in non-tyrannical conditions, that is to say, allowing others the freedom to speak, the freedom of those who also wish to be in the front rank, and who may be in the front rank in this sort of agonistic game typical of political life in Greece and especially in Athens. It is then a discourse spoken from above, but which leaves others the freedom to speak, and allows freedom to those who have to obey, or leaves them free at least insofar as they will only obey if they can be persuaded'. Obviously, it consequently represents a political risk, being a discourse which leaves room free for other discourse and assumes the task of persuading the others. Making use of *parrhesia* within the framework precisely means handling, dealing with both *logos* and *polis*, the constitutive principles of *demokratia*.

The context in which Euripides writes *Ion* is that of post-Periclean Athens, when the problem arises of who will really exercise power within the framework of legal citizenship. Given that the law is equal for all (the principle of *isonomia*), and given that everyone has the right to vote and to give his opinion (*isegoria*), the question is about the people 'who will have the possibility and the right of *parrhesia*, that is to say, to stand up, speak, try to persuade the people, and try to prevail over his rivals, at the risk, moreover, of losing the right to live in Athens, as happens when a political leader is exiled or ostracized, and possibly of his own life' (Foucault 2010b,106). This reflects the debate at Athens at that time, between Cleon, the democrat, or the demagogue, who claimed that everyone should be able to have this *parrhesia*, and, on the other hand, let's say the movement of an aristocratic tendency around Nicias, who thought that *parrhesia* should in fact be reserved to an elite. It is easy to trace back the actuality of this confrontation, in a moment of opposition between *populism* and *technocracy*. Euripides has no desire to put forward a constitutional solution, which would say who should exercise *parrhesia*, but he wants to show that *parrhesia* cannot be inherited as a violent, tyrannical power, and at the same time it is no more simply entailed purely by the status of the citizen. According to the French philosopher, the tragedy *Ion* 'immediately corresponds, in fact, to a precise political problem, [and] that at the same time it is the Greek drama about the political history of truth-telling, about the foundation, both legendary and true, of truth-telling in the realm of politics' (ibid).

What is very important for the conception of democracy, is that this tragedy shows the passage from the truth dispensed by the gods through the oracle, to the truth searched and found through the free speech among citizens. In fact, in Ion's story, 'Humans will forge the path to truth-telling, to the truth-telling about Ion's birth which will finally be able to establish his right to tell the truth in the city' (Foucault 2010b, 107). *Parrhesia* in its political content is a human practice, a human right, and a human risk; it is linked with the well-known statutory privilege, in ancient Athens connected to birth. Besides this we see a second practice, which refers to a situation of injustice, and which is instead the cry of the powerless against someone who misuses his own strength, a sort of judicial *parrhesia*. Finally, there is a third way of telling the truth which can be designated as *parrhesia*: a moral kind, which consists in confessing the offense which weighs on one's conscience, and confessing it to someone who can guide us and help us out of our despair or out of feeling at fault. The last two forms are not political *strictu sensu*, but complete the strictly political acceptation (Foucault 2010b, 154). As a conclusion it is correct to say that 'that *parrhesia* is something that characterizes much less a status, a static position, or a classificatory characteristic of certain individuals in the city, than a dynamic, a movement which, beyond pure and simple membership of the body of citizens, puts the individual in a position of superiority in which he will be able to take charge of the city in the form and through the practice of true discourse' (157).

In *The Histories* (Book II, ch. 38) Polybius [c. 206 – 124 B.C.], speaking of the nature and form of Achaean government, affirms that among the Greeks the Achaeans are defined by the fact that their constitution involved *isegoria* (let's say, equality of speech, equal right to speech), together with parrhesia. So, if democracy in general is characterized or specified only by these two elements (*isegoria* and *parrhesia*), it is very important to find out which the relationship is between the two notions. Euripides' *Ion* may explain the enigmatic formula of Polybius. If *isegoria* is the statutory right to speak, and this right of speech is constitutive of citizenship, *parrhesia* is linked both to the *politeia* (the city's constitution) and to *isegoria*. They are its pre-conditions, but *parrhesia* does not end in them: it allows a certain ascendancy of some over others, and by telling the truth to persuade the people with good advice, thus to direct the city and take charge of it (Foucault 2010b,158).

Evidently the last statement evokes the problems of *dunasteia*, of power, and nothing seems more dangerous to Foucault (2010b, 159) 'than that much vaunted shift from politics (*la politique*) to the political (*le politique*), which in many contemporary analyses seems […] to have the effect of masking the specific problem and set of problems of politics, of *dunasteia*, of the practice of the political game, and of the political game as a field of experience with its rules and normativity, of the political game as experience inasmuch as it is indexed to truth-telling and involves a certain relationship to oneself and to others for its players'. Thus the problem of politics (of its rationality, of its relationship to the truth) emerges around the question of *parrhesia*, a notion which precisely serves as the hinge between *politeia* and *dunasteia*, between the problem of the law and the constitution on the one hand, and the problem of the political game on the other.

It may result interesting to compare the employment of the word in another Euripides' drama, *The Phoenician Women*, in which he presents the famous Oedipal dynasty (of Eteocles and Polyneices), and in which, according to the plot he adopts, Polyneices broadly represents the position of the democrat, and Eteocles represents that of the tyrant. Here Polyneices, speaking to Jocasta, explains that the main sorrow of exile is the lack of *parrhesia*, being subject to the power of those who are not wise. Once more this 'shows that the function of *parrhesia* is precisely to be able to limit the power of the masters. […] When *parrhesia* is lacking, men, citizens, all are doomed to the master's madness' (Foucault 2010b, 161). In the play *Hippolytus* then it is introduced another important premise for *parrhesia*, at least in Greek civilisation: the good reputation, or the public honour. 'The text says that the mere fact of someone, a son, being aware of his mother's or father's offenses renders him slave. That is to say, once again, according to the principle that a man of noble birth is a slave if he cannot speak freely, then awareness of his mother's or father's offense is enough to make a man slave and deprive him of free-spokenness. Here it is perfectly clear that *parrhesia* is not simply given by status' (162). Finally, in *The Bacchae* the word is employed by a servant messenger, who brings some rather unpleasant news to Pentheus concerning the excesses of the Bacchae, and before speaking frankly (*parrhesia*), he asks for permission and for assurance that he won't be punished for his report. 'This is what could be called […] the parrhesiastic pact: if he wishes to govern properly, the one with power must accept that those who are weaker tell him the truth, even the unpleasant truth' (163).

In *Orestes* by the same author, appears a rather negative version of *parrhesia*: in the assembly that must condemn or accomplish the main character, the third guy who intervenes uses a free speech, described as *amathes*, that is to say, uneducated, rough, and coarse. It is a *parrhesia* not indexed to the truth, and therefore potentially leading to the disaster, just because it may nonetheless persuade (*pithanos*), acting on his hearers, badly influencing them. It is confronted with that of the fourth figure, who does not have a flattering appearance, so he cannot play on his physical glamour, but is courageous (*andreios*). What's remarkable, this courage refers to two things: it refers to physical courage, of someone who is capable of defending his land (this is said in the text), and at the same time of taking part in oratorical battles; then it refers to moral characteristics: he is pure and irreproachable (*akeraios*), but prudent (*xunetos*) as well. Moreover, he is a small farmer (*autourgos*), therefore a man who is capable to fight for his own land, in opposition to the professional politicians, we would say today, that lead sterile discussions with dangerous jousts. What Euripides shows is that *dunasteia*, the real exercise of power in the city, is not to be entrusted to those who hang about in the *agora* all day, but should be effectively reserved to the *autourgoi*, those who work their own fields with their hands and are ready to defend the city (Foucault 2010b, 166-167).

To solve the dilemma of good or bad *parrhesia*, in Foucault's opinion the best form should be at one time composed by four elements: democracy, ascendancy (the ability for leadership), truth-telling, and political courage. A clear example of the first category is Pericles' discourse, as reported by Thucydides [460 – 395 B.C.] in Books One and Two of *History of the Peloponnesian War* (Foucault 2010b, 174-180), whereas a testimony of the second one is given by Isocrates [436 – 338 B.C.] in the beginning of *On the Peace*, and by Demosthenes [384 – 322 B.C.] in the beginning of the *Third Philippic*, where there is no longer a good understanding between *parrhesia* and democracy, not just because of the refusal of truth-telling, but because truth-telling gives way to something which imitates it, to false truth-telling (181-183).

Here come the paradoxes, not only of *parrhesia*, but of democracy as a whole. The first is: true discourse introduces something completely different and irreducible to the egalitarian structure of democracy, even though the true discourse is what enables democracy to exist, and to continue to exist. 'On the other hand, inasmuch as true discourse in democracy only comes to light in the joust, in conflict, confrontation, and rivalry, it is always threatened by democracy. And this is the second paradox: there is no democracy without true discourse, for without true discourse it would perish; but the death of true discourse, the possibility of its death or of its reduction to silence is inscribed in democracy' (Foucault 2010b, 184). These are the two great paradoxes at the centre of the relations between democracy and true discourse: a *dunasteia* indexed to true discourse and a *politeia* indexed to the exact and equal distribution of power. In a time like ours, when we are used to 'posing the problems of democracy in terms of the distribution of power, of the autonomy of each in the exercise of power, in terms of transparency and opacity, and of the relation between civil society and the sate', it is very useful to recall the old question of true discourse and the necessary, indispensable, and fragile caesura that true discourse cannot fail to introduce into a democracy which both makes this discourse possible and constantly threatens it' (ibid).

### C.2 – Implications of the political conception of *parrhesia* for *degrowth*

At the end of the Peloponnesian War the conditions under which there can be a correct relationship between *politeia* and *parrhesia*, between democracy and *parrhesia*, were under scrutiny. It was the period of 'confrontation in Athens between supporters of a radical democracy and supporters of a moderate democracy, or of an aristocratic return, an aristocratic reaction' (Foucault 2010b, 174). What makes this historical situation very interesting for us. Periclean democracy had represented a 'model of the good adjustment between a democratic *politeia* and a whole political game permeated by a *parrhesia* indexed to the *logos* of truth' (ibid). Anyway, this optimal adjustment of the democratic constitution to truth-telling involved the problem, still actual: how can democracy withstand the truth?

Everything functioned well under Pericles' charismatic leadership, but afterwards? 'Can all the problems of the relations between truth and the organization of the city be settled once and for all? Is it possible for the city to have, once and for all, a clear, definite, fundamental, and as it were immobile relationship to the truth? This is, roughly speaking, the problem of the ideal city' (195), and of the perfect democracy. A problem become even more thorny, in the epoch of very sophisticated and technologized mass media ('fake news'), of increasing populism and right wing aggregations, taking advantage of the crisis for the political representation system.

It is a great responsibility for *degrowth* and for all the movements supporting radical democracy to face again and again this link between truth-telling and public power. If '*parrhesia*, truth-telling, appears as a necessary and universal function in the field of politics, whatever the *politeia*' and 'politics, in whatever way it is practiced, by the people, by some, or by one, needs this *parrhesia*' (Foucault 2010b, 301), we should now use it to defend democracy and make it more open and wide. Asara (2015) in her essay about political ecology and the Indignados movement writes: 'Equality before the law, *isonomia*, was not only a political choice or a rule of the game in ancient Athens, but an institution that had maintained thanks to an ethos that generalized and valued the freedom of speech (*isegoria*), the attribution of equal weight to citizens' voice in the assembly (*isopsèphia*) and the moral duty to talk frankly (*parrhesia*)'.

### C.3 – *Parrhesia* in Socrates and Plato

Socrates [c. 470 – 399 B.C.] is a typical parrhesiastic figure. It becomes evident in Plato's *Laches* (or *On Courage*): although this Platonic dialogue is rather short, the word *parrhesia* appears three times [178a5, l79cl, l89al]. Lysimachus and Melesias, two of the participants, promise to express their minds freely, using *parrhesia*, to confess their lives' limits. This confession is made to two other older citizens, Laches and Nicias (both of them quite famous generals), in the hope to receive so as frank answers and judgements. The topic of the piece is *courage*, but none of the participants, nor Socrates, are able to get to a satisfactory definition. Nonetheless the other four characters agree that the philosopher fits the role of teacher and pedagogue best of all, and therefore he should try to lead the others to a correct definition. Two elderly men, Lysimachus and Melesias, belonging to eminent Athenian families, are concerned about the kind of education they should give to their sons. As they admit not to be well-educated, they doubt to be able to decide what constitutes a good education, and to choose the good, truth telling (parrhesiastic) teachers. The solution is left to Socrates, in virtue of his parrhesiastic qualities. 'But unlike the *parrhesiastes* who addresses the *demos* in the assembly, for example, here we have a parrhesiastic game which requires a personal, face to face relationship' (Foucault 2001, 96). In this relationship to Socrates, the listener is led by Socrates' discourse; the passivity of the Socratic hearer, however, is not the same kind of passivity as that of a listener in the assembly. Here, the listener is led by the Socratic *logos* into 'giving an account' of the manner in which he spends his days. This is neither a (Christian) confession of own faults, nor a narrative of the historical events that have taken place in own life, but rather a procedure to demonstrate whether a person is able to show a consequential relation between the rational discourse, the *logos* used, and the way of life. But what entitles Socrates to assume the role of *basanos* (touchstone) of other people's lives? Because 'there is a harmonic relation between what Socrates says and what he does, between his words (*logoi*) and his deeds (*erga*). Thus not only is Socrates himself able to give an account of his own life, such an account is already visible in his behaviour since there is not the slightest discrepancy between what he says and what he does' (100). Formerly *parrhesia* has been the personal quality of a courageous orator and political leader, or the personal quality of an advisor to the king; 'now with Socrates the problematisation of *parrhesia* takes the form of a game between *logos*, truth, and *bios* (life) in the realm of a personal teaching relation between two human beings' (102).

If in Euripides' *Ion*, *parrhesia* was opposed to Apollo's silence; in the political sphere *parrhesia* was opposed to the *demos'* will, or to those who flatter the desires of the majority or the monarch. In this third, Socratic philosophical game, *parrhesia* gets opposed to self-ignorance and the false teachings of the sophists. This is confirmed in the *Apology*, where Socrates' role is presented as a mission assigned to him by the oracular deity at Delphi, Apollo himself. Like the Delphic oracle, Socrates' discourse requires that one overcomes self-ignorance about one's own situation. The differences consist in that Socratic *parrhesia* means to disclose who a person is, not his/her relation to future events, but his/her present relation to truth. 'In Plato [c. 428 – 348 B.C.], and in what we know of Socrates through Plato, a major problem concerns the attempt to determine how to bring the political *parrhesia* involving *logos*, truth, and *nomos* so that it coincides with the ethical *parrhesia* involving *logos*, truth, and *bios*' (Foucault 2001, 104). Plato's effort is to keep united the two aspects: in the *Laws*, for example, he states that even in the city ruled by good laws there is still a need for someone who will use *parrhesia* to tell the citizens what moral conduct they must observe.

As the Hellenistic monarchies grew and developed, political parrhesia increasingly assumed the form of a personal relation between the monarch and his advisors, thereby coming closer to the Socratic form. Increased emphasis was placed on the royal art of statesmanship and the moral education of the king.

### C.4 – Implications of the philosophical conception of *parrhesia* for *degrowth*

It is quite famous the philosophical distinction between the 'Socratic' Socrates and the 'Platonic' Socrates, scilicet the question about the probable difference between the real Socrates and its interpretation by Plato. What interests us, is that correspondingly two different possible journeys binding ethics to truth were opened up. One was marked by Pythagorism, and consisted in the transition from impure to pure, from the contingent to the eternal. The other one, which is more relevant for us, was more 'political': it 'views truth as a practice with no objective guarantees, sustained solely by the courage of saying what one believes to be true' (Forti [2012] 2015, 268). This second route, more evident in *Laches*, creates a perspective that is different from the soul's contemplation of eternity, instead gives start to an 'aesthetics of existence', which confronts political power with the instruments of *parrhesia*.

Here we can find some elements that are typical of *degrowth* action, or at least should be to empower it even more: the courage to stand up, sometimes in a small minority group, against the current ideas and the international, politico-economical power; the care of the self which becomes exhortation of others to a proper behaviour and style of life. Among a lot of dissident movements, *degrowth* emerges for its aspiration to combine a coherent vision of the future with a daily example, which should not only show the ways to exploit natural resources and to harm the environment much less, but demonstrate as well that this choice may elevate the pleasure of living.

In the core of *degrowth* experience is the concept of care. If for Seneca 'the *stultus* is essentially someone who does not will, who does not will himself, who does not want the self, whose will is not directed towards the only object one can freely will, absolutely and always, which is oneself' (Foucault 2005, 133), 'the individual cannot escape from it by himself' (ibid). More precisely, ‘between the *stultus* individual and the *sapiens* individual, the other is necessary. Or again, intervention by the other is necessary between, on the one hand, the individual who does not will his own self and, on the other, the one who has achieved a relationship of self-control, self-possession, and pleasure in the self, which is in fact the objective of *sapientia*. […] The care of the self consequently requires, as you can see, the other's presence, insertion, and intervention (133-134). Therefore the Greek concept of care shown by Foucault is already mutual and social. Which brings us back to the actual concept linked to *degrowth*: ‘Care is the daily action performed by human beings for their welfare and for the welfare of their community. Here, community refers to the ensemble of people within proximity and with which every human being lives, such as the family, friendships or the neighbourhood’ (D’Alisa, Demaria, and Kallis 2015, ch. 11).

## C.5 – *Parrhesia* in Epicureans and Cynics

As seen, after Socrates *parrhesia* may occur as an activity in the framework of small groups of people, or in the context of community life, as well as in human relationships occurring in the framework of public life, or finally in the context of individual personal relationships. Foucault (2001, 108) puts into evidence that ‘*parrhesia* as a feature of community life was highly regarded by the Epicureans; *parrhesia* as a public activity or public demonstration was a significant aspect of Cynicism, as well as that type of philosophy that was a mixture of Cynicism and Stoicism; and *parrhesia* as an aspect of personal relationships is found more frequently either in Stoicism or in a generalized or common Stoicism characteristic of such writers as Plutarch’. Of course, the three indicated forms are only guiding examples; the actual practices were, of course, much more complicated and interrelated.

Unfortunately, it is known very little about the Epicurean communities, and even less about the parrhesiastic practices in these communities. The Epicurean thinker Philodemus [c. 110 – 35 B.C.] wrote a text about *Parrhesia* (*On Frank Speaking*), recording Zeno of Sidon’s lectures, which has arrived to us very fragmented. Philodemus regards *parrhesia* not only as a quality, virtue, or personal attitude, but also as a *techne* comparable both to the art of medicine and to the art of piloting a boat; of course, the technique of piloting or navigation is primarily of metaphorical significance: several centuries later, Gregory of Nazianzus [c. A.D. 329 – 389] would call spiritual guidance the ‘technique of techniques’ (*ars artium*, *techne technon*). Probably in the Epicurean communities there was ‘classroom’ teaching, where a teacher addressed a group of students; and there was also instruction in the form of personal interviews where a teacher would give advice and precepts to individual members; a distinction was drawn between general teaching and personal instruction or guidance, marking a distinction in the pedagogical relationship between teacher and disciple or student. In comparison with the Socratic dialogue, the Epicurean schools show again a pedagogical relation of guidance where the master helps the disciple to discover the truth about himself, but in addition a form of ‘authoritarian’ teaching in a collective relation where someone speaks the truth to a group of others. In these schools appeared the role of the ‘spiritual guide’ for others, that was more highly valued than that of group lecturer. There also took place a practice which might be called ‘mutual confession’ in a group, where each of the community members in turn would disclose his/her thoughts, faults, misbehaviour, and so on. It was defined ‘the salvation by one another’ (‘to save oneself’ in the Epicurean tradition meant to gain access to a good, beautiful, and happy life, without referring to any kind of afterlife or divine judgment). This evidences the very important emphasis on friendship that was given in the Epicurean culture (Foucault 2001, 108-115).

It has remained very little about Cynic doctrine, but we do possess numerous testimonies regarding the Cynic way of life: Cynic philosophers were far more interested in choosing and practicing a certain way of life than in writing its theorization. ‘Regardless of what we can determine about the origins of Cynicism, it is a fact that the Cynics were very numerous and influential from the end of the first century B.C. to the fourth century A.D.’ (Foucault 2001, 116). What was peculiar of Cynics, or at least what characterised them at a much more extreme level than other schools like Stoics and Skeptics, was the high value attributed to a person's way of life: the manner in which a person lived was a touchstone of his relation to truth. They drew this conviction from the Socratic idea, however, they thought that the truth should be easily accessible to everyone, that ‘their teachings had to consist in a very public, visible, spectacular, provocative, and sometimes scandalous way of life […] They wanted their own lives to be a *blazon* of essential truths which would then serve as a guideline, or as an example for others to follow’ (117). All this was not alien to Greek philosophy, so even if there were Indian philosophical influence on Cynic doctrine and practice, the Cynic attitude is, in its basic form, just an extremely radical version of the very Greek conception of the relationship between one's way of life and knowledge of the truth. ‘The Cynic idea that a person is nothing else but his relation to truth, and that this relation to truth takes shape or is given form in his own life - that is completely Greek’ (ibid).

The importance of personal life model comes clear with the exemplar, mythical, heroic figure of Diogenes the Cynic [c. 412 – 323 B.C.], who can also clarify Cynic *parrhesia*. It was composed by three practices: critical preaching; scandalous behaviour; and ‘provocative dialogue’. Preaching was a form of continuous discourse, occasionally characteristic of the Stoics too (but in front of a rather small audience), addressing a large crowd. ‘For example, they liked to speak in a theatre, or at a place where people had gathered for a feast, religious event, athletic contest, etc. They would sometimes stand up in the middle of a theatre audience and deliver a speech’ (Foucault 2001, 119). Differently from the Sophists, these philosophers aimed at coming to the attention of people who stood outside the philosophical elect. From this perspective. The contents of preaching were freedom, the renunciation of luxury, criticisms of political institutions and existing moral codes, and so on, what opened the way for some Christian themes and ways of communication; what may still sound familiar to contemporary activists, and *degrowthers* in particular. The Cynics preferred not to affirm directly what the good and the evil are. ‘Instead, the Cynics refer to freedom (*eltutheria*) and self-sufficiency (*autarkeia*) as the basic criteria by which to assess any kind of behaviour or mode of life. For the Cynics, the main condition for human happiness is *autarkeia*, self-sufficiency or independence, where what you need to have or what you decide to do is dependent on nothing other than you yourself’ (120). Therefore Cynics very radically privileged a completely natural life-style. A natural life, supposed to eliminate all of the dependencies introduced by culture, society, civilization, opinion, and so on. ‘In short, their preaching was against all social institutions insofar as such institutions hindered one's freedom and independence (ibid).

Cynic scandalous behaviour often consisted in bringing together two rules which seemed contradictory and remote from one another. For example, since Diogenes ate in the *agora*, he thought that there was no reason why he should not also masturbate there, for in both cases he was satisfying a bodily need. This shamelessness (*anaideia*) well explains the origin of the word ‘cynic’, from the Greek word meaning ‘dog-like’ (*kynikoi*); Diogenes was also called ‘the Dog’. The parrhesiastic technique of ‘provocative dialogue’, instead, is perfectly exemplified by the famous encounter between Diogenes and Alexander the Great which actually took place at Corinth: in front of the king, the philosopher vaunted that he ‘cajoled no man by flattery, but told everybody the truth and, even though he possessed not a single drachma, succeeded in doing as he pleased, failed in nothing he set before himself, was the only man who lived the life he considered the best and happiest, and would not have accepted Alexander's throne or the wealth of the Medes and Persians in exchange for his own poverty' (Foucault 2001, 125). In this way Alexander was convinced to take part in Diogenes' parrhesiastic play, which may look like the Socratic dialogue, but evidences some deep differences: it is Alexander who tends to ask the questions and Diogenes, the philosopher, who answers, which is the reverse of the Socratic dialogue; moreover, whereas Socrates plays with his interlocutor's ignorance, Diogenes wants to hurt Alexander's pride, for example, calling him a bastard, and telling him that someone who claims to be a king is not so very different from a child who, after winning a game, puts a crown on his head. 'The Cynic parrhesiastic game is played at the very limits of the parrhesiastic contract. It borders on transgression because the *parrhesiastes* may have made too many insulting remarks' (127).

Also Plutarch [c. A.D. 56 – 127] wrote about *parrhesia* in personal relationships. From his point of view, an authentic friend should always act as a *parrhesiastes*, not as a flatterer, even though one's own vanity tends to be attracted by the flatterers. The criteria for a right choice must be based, once more, on the conformity between what the real truth-teller says with how he behaves (the Socratic harmony); secondly, 'the permanence, the continuity, the stability and steadiness of the true *parrhesiastes*, the true friend, regarding his choices, his opinions, and his thoughts' (Foucault 2001, 136). The steadiness of mind as a fundamental quality is not absolutely new, but coming from late Stoicism. 'In early Christian spirituality, Satan is often represented as the agent both of self-delusion (as opposed to the renunciation of self) and of the mobility of mind - the instability or unsteadiness of the soul as opposed to *firmitas* in the contemplation of God' (138).

## C.6 – *Parrhesia* in Christianity

In the transition to Christian religion, the concept of *parrhesia* undergoes some substantial modifications: a very interesting and important shift from that truth game, constituted by the fact that someone was courageous enough to tell the truth to other people to another truth game which now consists in being courageous enough to disclose the truth about oneself. This new kind of parrhesiastic technique requires what the Greeks called *askesis.* Although the word *asceticism* derives from it, for the Greeks it had a broader meaning of practical training or exercise. Thus the Greek conception of *askesis* differed from Christian ascetic practices, which have as its ultimate aim or target the renunciation of the self, whereas the moral *askesis* of the Greco-Roman philosophies had as its goal the establishment of a specific relationship of self-possession and self sovereignty to oneself. 'Christian asceticism takes as its principal theme detachment from the world, whereas the ascetic practices of the Greco-Roman philosophies are generally concerned with endowing the individual with the preparation and the moral equipment that will permit him to fully confront the world in an ethical and rational manner' (Foucault 2001, 144). Most of the texts written in late antiquity about ethics were not at all concerned with advancing a theory about the foundations of ethics, but were practical books containing specific recipes and exercises one had to read, to reread, to meditate upon, to learn, in order to construct a lasting matrix for one's own behaviour. Differently, 'in the case of Christian self-examination, the monitoring of representations has the specific intention of determining whether, under an apparently innocent guise, the devil himself is not hiding. For in order not to be trapped by what only seems to be innocent, in order to avoid the devil's counterfeit coins, the Christian must determine where his thoughts and sense impressions come from, and what relation actually exists between a representation's apparent and real value' (161-162).

The word *parrhesia* came to Christian culture through Judeo-Hellenistic texts, the *Septuagint* for instance (Foucault 2011, 325). Philo of Alexandria [c. 20 B.C. – c. A.D. 45] used the concept to condemn mystery forms of religion, repeating what the Cynics said against them, saying that if there is truth, then it must be openly told to everybody (326). In this case, *parrhesia* still concerns a relationship with other humans, but more and more alongside with the spreading of the new religion it 'involves something like openness of heart, the transparency of the soul which offers itself to God's sight. And at the same time as this openness of heart, this transparency of the soul before God occurs, there is a kind of ascending impulse of this pure soul which lifts it up to the Almighty' (ibid). It leaves the horizontal axes towards the vertical one.

In in the New Testament literature, the term *parrhesia* appears a number of times, and with a meaning different from that given by Philo: it no longer ever appears as a modality of divine manifestation (God is no longer the parrhesiast), but it simply becomes a mode of being, a mode of human activity, which 'does include, to some extent, in a certain context, and in certain circumstances, the connotation of courage, of speaking boldly, but it is also an attitude of the heart, a way of being, which does not need to manifest itself in discourse and speech' (Foucault 2011, 329). Moreover it takes the sense of 'the confidence that God will hear those who are Christians and who, as such, having faith in Him, ask of Him nothing other than what is in accordance with His will' (330). At the same time the previous Greek value for *parrhesia* does not get completely lost: oral, verbal preaching, the fact of speaking out, of arguing with the non-Christians, and arguing with them at the risk of one's life, is characterized as *parrhesia*, which becomes an apostolic virtue. In *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, Paul [c. A.D. 5 – 17] asks the Ephesians to pray for him so that, he could boldly and freely make known the mystery of the Gospel. *Parrhesia* then begins to acquire an ambiguous value, amplifying the ambiguity 'already noted in the Greeks, when it appeared as the virtuous individual's courage to address others and try to bring them back from error to the truth, as well as the freedom of speech, disorder, and anarchy of everyone being able to say everything and anything' (331). Next to 'the courage to assert the truth one knows and to which one wishes to bear witness regardless of every danger' (ibid), there must be the courage which is confidence in God, and this confidence cannot be separated from one's courageous stance towards others. Socrates', or Diogenes', bravery differed from the martyr's one: 'the former is only the courage of man addressing other men, whereas the courage of the Christian martyrs rests on this other aspect, this other dimension of the same parrhesia, which is trust in God; confidence in salvation, in God's goodness, and also in His listening' (332).

Afterwards in Christian ascetic monasticism the word acquires even a negative signification. Dorotheos of Gaza [A.D. 505 - 565], for example, in his *Instructions* develops a strong opposition to *parrhesia*, which is accused to consist in driving the fear of God far from oneself, by thinking neither of death nor of punishment: in the confidence that one claims to have in God, one turns around and away from the fear of God, from the fear of what will happen when one dies, from the fear of Judgment and its punishments (Foucault 2011, 335).

### C.7 – Implications of the moral conception of *parrhesia* for *degrowth*

The friendship that is a fundament of Epicurean groups is for sure an interesting precedent to be investigated and compared with the strict, personal connections that found the wish to *conviviality* described by Illich (1973). 'It represents faith in the possibility of space for relationships, recognition, pleasure and generally living well, and thereby, reduces the dependence on an industrial and consumerist system (Deriu in D'Alisa, Demaria, and Kallis 2015, ch.15).

Evidently, the Cynics, though in their extreme tones, represent an attractive model for the 'voluntary simplicity' proposed by *degrowth*. The filiation is quite clear if we follow a detailed definition of the concept: 'voluntary simplicity involves embracing a minimally 'sufficient' material standard of living, in exchange for more time and freedom to pursue other life goals, such as community or social engagements, more time with family, artistic or intellectual projects, home-based production, more fulfilling employment, political participation, spiritual exploration, relaxation, pleasure-seeking, and so on –none of which need to rely on money, or much money. Variously defended by its advocates on personal, social, political, humanitarian, and ecological grounds, voluntary simplicity is based on the assumption that human beings can live meaningful, free, happy, and infinitely diverse lives, while consuming no more than an equitable share of nature' (Alexander in D'Alisa, Demaria, and Kallis 2015, ch. 29).

The 'political' value that the Cynics bestowed to scandalous behaviour is worthwhile of attention, in a *degrowth* perspective. What is more scandalous today than rejecting compulsory shopping and expensive objects, useful just as 'status symbols'? What is more scandalous than doubting about an economical expansion without limits? What is more scandalous than giving attention to the human and social solidarity, progressively sacrificed on the altar of growth? Well, for the Cynics the scandalous attitude 'brings to light, in their irreducible nakedness, those things which alone are indispensable to human life or which constitute its most elementary, rudimentary essence. In this sense, this mode of life simply reveals what life is in its independence, its fundamental freedom, and consequently it reveals what life ought to be' (Foucault 2011, 171). The actuality of these words confirms Foucault's observation that 'Cynicism is not, as is often thought, just a somewhat particular, odd, and ultimately forgotten figure in ancient philosophy, but an historical category which, in various forms and with diverse objectives, runs through the whole of Western history' (174). The long history of Cynicism is based on this theme of life as scandal of the truth, or of style of life as site of emergence of the truth (*bios* as alethurgy).

Already in past, but also in recent, history the Cynic way of life represented a real revolutionary attempt. 'Cynicism, the idea of a mode of life as the irruptive, violent, scandalous manifestation of the truth is and was part of revolutionary practice and of the forms taken by revolutionary movements throughout the nineteenth century. Revolution in the modern European world […] was not just a political project; it was also a form of life. Or, more precisely, it functioned as a principle defining a certain mode of life. And if, for convenience sake, you want to call "militantism" the way in which life as revolutionary activity, or revolutionary activity as life, was defined, described, organized, and regulated, we can say that militantism, as revolutionary life, as life devoted wholly or partially to the Revolution, took three great forms in nineteenth and twentieth century Europe' (Foucault 2011, 183-184). Is *degrowth* the most credible heir or one of the most credible heirs of this revolutionary tradition? It is a relevant argument for reflection, even though the very rapid changes in the last decades should always make us renegotiate the noblest traditions too. As always, the opportunity is not just to copy and uncritically actualise, but to take some cues and test it in the challenge of present times. Can *degrowth* play the role which was of Cynicism, that of the 'scandalous banality of philosophy', since 'Cynicism made a scandal of philosophy grasped, practiced, and clad in its banality' (232)?

'Cynicism is always both inside and outside philosophy (the familiarity and strangeness of Cynicism in relation to the philosophy which serves as its context, milieu, vis-à-vis, opponent, and enemy), the Cynic constitution of the philosophical life as scandal, is the historical stamp, the first manifestation, the point of departure for what has been, I think, the great exteriorization of the problem of the philosophical life in relation to philosophy, to philosophical practice, to the practice of philosophical discourse' (Foucault 2011, 237). If this is even truer for political philosophy and for social thought, it appears very clear, which irreplaceable function *degrowth* theorization and *praxis* could get in the contemporary public scenery.

'Discourses, criticisms, and scandals must show others that they are completely mistaken on the subject of good and evil, and that they are looking for the nature of good and evil in the wrong place' (Foucault 2011, 313): if it fitted the Cynics in the past, it may fit the *degrowthers* at present. The analogy between the reality we are living, directed by powerful economic entities far away, and the post-democratic Greek society, governed by the Macedonian monarchy before falling into Romans' possession, is quite evident. If in those 'societies so attached to the values of beauty, to plastic values in the human body and actions, in the bearing and posture of individuals, it is easy to imagine that it was not very easy to accept this valorisation of dirtiness, ugliness, and lack of grace which is a part of Cynicism' (259), we can easily draw a vivid impression of what may be *degrowth* disruptive provocation nowadays. This inversion of physical values undoubtedly played and can play a role which was and can be not slight. In any case, this inversion understandably gave rise to a fecund scandal.

Another very acceptable example for *degrowth* comes from these unusual thinkers of late Hellenism: the 'principle of a straight life which must be indexed to nature, and solely to nature, ends up giving a positive value to animality' (Foucault 2011, 264). As we may consider obvious, 'this is something odd and scandalous in ancient thought. In general terms, and summarizing considerably, we may say that in ancient thought animality played the role of absolute point of differentiation for the human being. It is by distinguishing itself from animality that the human being asserted and manifested its humanity. Animality was always, more or less, a point of repulsion for the constitution of man as a rational and human Being' (ibid). Unfortunately it is still so in a certain measure, although the Lamarckian and Darwinian ideas of evolution have been widely accepted. The modern Anthropocentrism should be one of the targets, and not the least important, for *degrowth* struggle.

A last consideration about the Cynics concerns their suggestive principle 'change the value of the currency', regularly utilized in their tradition. It is told that the same Diogenes, going to Delphi and asking the god how things stood with himself, got this answer: 'Alter the value of currency'. Evidently the expression has a metaphorical sense, founded on the connection between currency and custom, rule, law: '*nomisma* is currency; *nomos* is the law' (Foucault 2011, 227). Thus to change the value of the currency means to adopt a certain standpoint towards convention, rule, or law: Nietzsche will claim for the 'transvaluation of all values'. 'The principle of altering the currency is regularly associated with Cynicism and, in the lives of philosophers recounted by Diogenes Laertius, there is a whole series of anecdotes which regularly associate the Cynics with money, to its practice and correct or corrupt use' (240), which sounds incredibly actual, even on a practical ground. Let's not forget the virtuous practices for *degrowth*, among which there is a place for plans regarding 'public money: 'It is argued that public creation and circulation of money, free of debt, under democratic control could enable the provisioning of large-scale societies on the basis of social justice and ecological sustainability' (Mellor in D'Alisa, Demaria, and Kallis 2015, ch. 41).

## D - *Degrowth* as an ethical revolution

'Truth is *ethopoietica*; it starts from the bottom and rises up to strike those who are above. It is irrelevant whether the content of the statement is true, if the *parrhesiastes* gains legitimacy on ethical ground' (Forti [2012] 2015, 267). This is an optimal point of start to understand the possible value of *parrhesia* for a radical political opposition, and particularly for *degrowth* movement. In the world of 'post-truth' substituting abstract theoretical discussion with a proper mix of thought and action (a strong correspondence of *logoi* and *erga*), where the latter is well exemplified by a clear style of life, is probably the most successful way to social modification. Which can be understood and practised by the *degrowthers* better than by most other organizations. Courage, risk, frankness, and personal involvement distinguish the *parrhesiastes*: all quality that should accompany the political action of *degrowth* supporters in their struggle which dares to challenge so many 'common sense' opinions.

As Arendt ([1958] 1998, 186) taught, every kind of public action is always fraught with dangers. 'The connotation of courage, which we now feel to be an indispensable quality of the hero, is in fact already present in a willingness to act and speak at all, to insert one's self into the world and begin a story of one's own. And this courage is not necessarily or even primarily related to a willingness to suffer the consequences; courage and even boldness are already present in leaving one's private hiding place and showing who one is, in disclosing and exposing one's self'. Evidently, if the risk of ostracism is added, as a result for absolute countercurrent ideas, the necessary courage must multiply. Through Arendt and Foucault, Socrates' example has arrived to our epoch, and is still eloquent for political activists, willing to put the most consolidated opinions into scrutiny.

Who looks for a *degrowth* solution, feels very well that he/she 'cannot resort to the restoration of a shattered normativity, but instead seek the possible emergence of freedom in the space that removes normativity from power' (Forti [2012] 2015, 268). In the same line of thought, 'we do not become subjects only by making ourselves receptors of a truth that comes from outside. Subjectification does not arises solely in subjecting ourselves to a power that "saves" by eradicating the negative in us once and for all. We can also become and remain subjects through a continuous athletics of the judgement, through constant discernment that ponders all over again, each and every time, what is good and what is evil' (270). In order to achieve an 'other life', a real life that can be different from the present one. Foucault was used to repeat that 'power in itself is not evil'. 'Political evil does not simply depend on a lust for power that is unable to curb itself. Nor does it derive purely from an alienating structure and from a corrupt system. The possibility of the evil od domination is also linked to the way we constitutes ourselves as subjects, to how a subject responds to, maintains, accepts, or reacts to relations of power. This, then, is what is at stake in Foucault's investigations between the folds of the tradition: to reveal a passage, a narrow one, to be sure, that is always in danger of being closed, leading us to the place of a possible disruption – the disruption of the dispositifs that set up a vicious circle along with power' (ibid).

Can this disruption consist with *degrowth*? '"De-growth" is a political slogan with theoretical implications, or what Paul Ariès  calls an "explosive word" that is designed to silence the chatter of those who are addicted to productivism' (Latouche [2007] 2009, 7). Id est it discusses the dispositif which is nowadays the pivot of the circles of power: growth, considered, publicized, accepted, culturally shared as the only possible way to improvement, to progress, to personal and collective salvation. Thus it may embody the Foucauldian hope of a path towards a (partial, temporary) liberation, so described by Forti ([2012] 2015, 271): 'it is the way of a possible "ethical revolution", the singular revolution of a *bios* that manages to become an ethos, and of an ethos that can make itself into a *praxis* – the practice of a constant exercise of freedom'. Which leads to 'a sort of "anarchic constitution" of the self, in the literal sense of the term: a self that, while remaining the actor of its own responsibility, still relates to itself, to others, and to the city with the least amount of dependency possible. No different from Nietzsche's Dyonisus-Zarathustra, whose courage consists in finding the difficult balance of self-government, the anarchic subject of *parrhesia* also responds to how it manages to give itself form – because becoming subjects does nor mean shielding ourselves from the pressures and orders that arrive from the outside. It also signifies, in accord once again with Nietzsche, knowing how to bring conflict and division inside the self and how to withstand with them. In this sense, as Foucault so often repeated, either the revolution will be ethical or will never be'.

All this statement in short deals with an 'aesthetics of existence' that may concern the project of *degrowth*. 'Degrowth as an aesthetics of existence is about, first, imagining the various forms such a society of material sufficiency may take, and secondly, working toward creating such a society — individually, socially, economically and politically — in order for the entire community of life to flourish within sustainable bounds. This raises questions not merely about what to do in order to create a degrowth society that is shaped by such aesthetic values as balance and harmony, but also questions about how our aesthetic experience of the world may change during the transition to such a society. For better or for worse, aesthetic matters are fundamental both to society and the individual' (Alexander 2017, 12).

It is just in this crosspoint between the social and the individual, aesthetics and thought, ethos and political activity, that we should situate the 'decolonization of imaginary', or the modification of the representations that mobilize feelings. Following Latouche in D'Alisa, Demaria, and Kallis (2015, ch. 25), 'if *growth* and *development* are beliefs, and therefore imaginary significations like "progress" and all founding categories of the economy, then to get out, to abolish and go beyond them (the famous Hegelian Aufhebung), means that the imaginary must be changed. The achievement of a degrowth society therefore in part, means to decolonize our imaginary'.

The outlined Foucauldian path, which from the 'knowledge of self' and the 'care of the self' should lead to an harmonic development of the lifestyle and the public action, is undoubtedly preparatory for that *autonomy* which represents one of the founding values for *degrowth*: 'the ability to give laws and rules to ourselves independently and consciously' (Deriu in D'Alisa, Demaria, and Kallis 2015, ch. 9). 'To clarify, and for the sake of definition, autonomy should necessarily promote a sense of self that includes a conscious recognition of the relationships that bind us to life. Human existence is not simply inter-subjective, it is social and historical, as well' (ibid).

In accord with what many theoreticians tersely and prophetically noted (see Weil [1955] 2004; Arendt [1958] 1998; Bettelheim [1960] 1991; Illich 1973; Castoriadis 1989), 'Capitalism and consumer culture produce an acceptant populace, uncritical of elements and decisions made by others. This concerns initially trivial things – material aspects, organizational, and technical – but gradually it involves the acceptance of patterns of behaviour and social meanings that underlie the materialism. In theory, our society produces technologically and economically powerful individuals. But reality is exactly the opposite. The more powerful a society is – in its facilities and its technological means – the more an individual feels powerless and experiences anxiety about his condition and therefore has to find someone, or better yet something, to lend himself to' (Deriu in D'Alisa, Demaria, and Kallis 2015, ch. 9).

# E - Bibliography

## E.1 - By Foucault (Mills 2003, 128-131)


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[This is one of Foucault's more difficult texts. Here he is grappling with the theoretical problems brought about through the use of the notion of discontinuity, that is the sense that there are sudden breaks in history, where regimes, ideas and ways of organising knowledge change. It is here that Foucault maps out the notion of a discursive formation, and describes the way that discourses emerge and are regulated. He describes the constitution of the archive and the statement here, and he describes the archaeological method.]

Foucault, M. (1963) 1973a. *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*. New York: Pantheon.
[Although this book is essential for those interested in the development of Foucault's ideas, it is perhaps a little specialised for many readers. It does however contain within the introductory chapter a marvellous description of the 'cure' for hysterics in the eighteenth century which involved being immersed in baths for 10 hours a day for 10 months. It focuses only on the late eighteenth century and analyses in rather technical language the relations between medical discourse and institutions.]

Foucault, M. (1966) 1973b. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. London: Tavistock.
[As always with Foucault, this book opens with a tremendous vignette: a description by the novelist Jose-Luis Borges of a Chinese encyclopaedia which classifies animals into a) those belonging to the Emperor; b) embalmed; c) tame; d) suckling pigs; e) sirens; f ) fabulous and finally n) that from a great distance look like flies. This outlandish categorisation scheme underlies the driving principle of the book, which aims to force the reader to critically analyse the way that knowledge is organised within different historical periods. Although a complex book, in that Foucault is dealing with analogies between different sciences in the way that they organise ways of knowing, it is, nevertheless, a book which contains many illustrative examples.]

Foucault, M. (1975) 1977. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Pantheon.
[Foucault analyses here the changes there have been in the way that people considered to have committed crimes have been punished, from public torture and ritual disembowelling and branding to the current disciplinary regime where those considered to be criminals are locked

away in prisons or mental hospitals. Rather than assuming that there has been progress in the way that criminals are treated, Foucault suggests throughout this book that we need to critically analyse the confinement of criminals. The first two chapters on torture in the eighteenth century make for grim reading, but they usefully force us to reflect on current disciplinary regimes. The third section on discipline is very readable and the section on the examination is particularly insightful.]

Foucault, M. (1973) 1978a. *I, Pierre Rivière, Having Killed My Mother, My Sister and My Brother*. Paris: Gallimard.
[This book consists of the memoir by Pierre Rivière, a nineteenthcentury French peasant, who was convicted of killing three members of his family, together with one short essay by Foucault, six essays by members of the study group which he set up to examine this confession and contemporary material by doctors, psychiatrists, newspaper reports, letters and court proceedings. This book is a good introduction to the way a Foucauldian analysis can be made to work on a text.]

Foucault, M. (1976) 1978b. *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: The Will to Knowledge*, New York: Pantheon.
[This is by far the most accessible book by Foucault. He writes in a fairly informal way here and discusses sexuality and the way that we think about sexuality and repression giving a range of different examples, such as children's masturbation, homosexuality and women's hysteria. In this book, more than any other, he lays out his ideas on power relations and the way power functions in society.]

Foucault, M. (1984) 1985. *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 2: The Use of Pleasure*. New York: Pantheon.
[Here Foucault seems to be trying to formulate a new ethical framework. In this volume, rather than writing a history of sexual desire, Foucault focuses on what he calls 'a hermeneutics of the self ', that is, an analysis of the relation between pleasure and the moral concerns that sexual pleasures lead to, in this case, in ancient Greek culture. This concern with Greek and Greco-Roman sexual practices and moral codes may seem fairly alien, but Foucault's general concerns with an 'aesthetics of existence' are very pertinent to contemporary cultural analysis.]

Foucault, M. (1984) 1986a. *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 3: The Care of the Self*. New York: Pantheon.
[Although this volume is entitled 'The care of the self ' it is very much concerned with the interaction between the self and others. In fact it could be seen more as an analysis of the concern with the care that others should take of themselves.]

Foucault, M. (1962) 1986b. *Raymond Roussel*. Paris: Gallimard.

Foucault, M. 1988a. *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings, 1977 - 1984*. New York: Routledge.

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Foucault, M. 2011. *The Courage of the Truth: Lectures at the Collège de France 1983-1984*. Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

**E.2 - On Foucault**

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Burchell, G., C. Gordon, and P. Miller, eds. 1991. *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Dreyfus H., and P. Rabinow, ed. 1983. *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Duncker, P. (1996) 1998. *Hallucinating Foucault*. New York: Vintage.

Gane, M., ed. 1986. *Towards a Critique of Foucault*. London: Routledge.

Gutting, G. 2005. *Foucault: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Macey, D. 2004. *Michel Foucault*. London: Reaktion Books.

Miller, J. 1993. *The Passions of Michel Foucault*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Mills, S. 2003. *Michel Foucault*. London: Routledge.

Rabinow, P., ed. 1984. *The Foucault Reader*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
[This is a collection of some of the more important essays by Foucault, including ‘What is an author?’; ‘Nietzsche, genealogy, history’; and selections from texts such as ‘The Order of Things’ and ‘Power/Knowledge’.]

Rabinow, P., ed. 1997-2000. *The Essential Works of Michel Foucault*. 3 vols. New York: New Press.

**E.3 - Other books**

Alexander, S. 2017. *Degrowth as an 'Aesthetics of Existence'*. Melbourne: MSSI Monograph Series, Sustainable Society Institute, The University of Melbourne.

Asara, V. 2015. *Democracy without Growth: The Political Ecology of the Indignados Movement*. Barcelona: Universitat Autònoma of Barcelona, Ph.D. Programme in Environmental Science and Technology.

Arendt, H. (1958) 1998. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Bettelheim, B. (1960) 1991. *The Informed Heart*. London: Penguin Books.

Butler, J. 1997. *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Castoriadis, C. 1987. *The Imaginary Institution of Society*. Cambridge: Polity.

D'Alisa, G., F. Demaria, and G. Kallis, ed. 2015. *Degrowth: A vocabulary for a new era*. London: Routledge.

Forti, S. (2012) 2015. *New Demons: Rethinking Power and Evil Today*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Illich, I. 1973. *Tools for Conviviality*. London: Harper & Row.

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