WHO DO YOU SAY I AM? DEMOCRACY AND THE SPIRITUALITY OF TRUTH IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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PRELIMINARY VERSION - PLEASE DO NOT REPRODUCE OR QUOTE WITHOUT THE CONSENT OF THE AUTHOR
CONTENTS

- Introduction
- Ancient Types of Truth
- History of Truth-Telling
- Definition and Characteristics
- “Technology of the self”
- Problems and Political Effects
- Let’s Practice!
- Reflection
- Closing
- Recommended Reading
- Contact info
And they that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places; thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of paths to dwell in.

ISAIAH 58:12
ANCIENT TYPES OF TRUTH

Teacher— arts, crafts, skills, professional life (techne)

Philosopher – wisdom, logic, rhetoric, debate, dialectic

Prophets – religion, faith in Truth

Parrhesiastes – one’s own truth, risk w/o reward, uses discourse/conversation
HISTORY

**Parrhesia** begins with the Greeks about the 5th century BCE and persists until about 5th CE

First in Classical Athenian democracy (5th and 4th BCE)
Then in the courts of the Hellenistic monarchies (4th to 1st BCE)

It eventually becomes, under the Roman Stoic Seneca for example, a personal spiritual practice
Parrhesia is the ancient spiritual practice of truth telling.

It literally means “free speech” - “pan” + “rhema”

Speaking what? The truth!

alethia = truth = reality = virtue

A duty one did alone, spoken to power at great danger and risk

DEFINITION AND CHARACTERISTICS
THE ART OF LIFE

“Techne tou biou” - the art of life

• the education of the soul,
• technologies of the self,
• the care of oneself (epimeleia heautou)

Personal practices for the main event of political speech

• Journaling – Hupomnemata
• Letters – epistoli, epistolary

Discourse requires an interlocutor – basanos - ("touchstone")
There is, however, another matter of great importance and difficulty, concerning which God should legislate, if there were any possibility of obtaining from him an ordinance about it. But seeing that divine aid is not to be had…

…there appears to be a need of some bold man who especially honors plainness of speech and will say outright what he thinks best for the city and citizens—ordaining what is good and convenient for the whole state amid the corruptions of human souls, opposing the mightiest lusts, and having no man his helper but himself standing alone and following reason only.
PROBLEMS AND POLITICAL EFFECTS

Problem! How do we judge the quality of truth-telling?

Problem! How do we deal with disagreement and conflict?

Questions: What is the aim of parrhesia? How do we judge success?

Megalothymos vs megalopsychos – desire to be superior vs desire to aid others
LET'S PRACTICE!

GROUPS OF 2-3

BASANOS AND PARRHESIATES – THIS IS AN EXERCISE TO HONE ONE'S PARRHESIATIC SKILLS - REMEMBER SENSITIVITY AND CONFIDENTIALITY?

CREATE A DISCOURSE WITH ONESELF VIA ANOTHER

BEGIN WITH INTRODUCTION, THEN ONE ASKS FOR A POLITICAL POSITION/OPINION, SOMETHING PROVOCATIVE

ASK WHY? RECEIVE ANSWER, THEN ASK WHY AGAIN, AND AGAIN...

UNTIL ONE ARRIVES AT THE TRUTH

THEN SWITCH AND DO THE SAME FOR THE OTHER PERSON
THE SPIRAL OF PARRHESIA

2nd Moment
REST
(Sense of God’s Presence, Peace, Interior Silence)

3rd Moment
UNLOADING
(As a result of the deep rest of body, mind and spirit, the defense mechanisms relax)

4th Moment
EVACUATION
(of primitive emotions and thought and return to sacred word)

Ordinary Level of Awareness

Spiritual Level of Awareness

Divine Presence

True Self

Interior freedom

(Beginning of the prayer)

Down the stream of consciousness
REFLECTION

What was your experience when speaking? Listening? Observing?

Three kinds of awareness: one must develop

What do you see as the strengths of this approach to democracy? Weaknesses?

Questions? Concerns?
WHERE DO YOU GO FROM HERE? WHAT WILL YOU DO?

HOW WILL YOU STAND APART FROM FAMILY/GROUP/NATION, SO YOU MAY STAND TOGETHER?

REMEMBER: SPIRITUALITY IS POLITICAL; THAT IS POLITICAL EFFECTS ARE AN UNAVOIDABLE, AND INDEED DESIRABLE, PART OF ONE’S SPIRITUALITY
Parker Palmer, *Healing the Heart of Democracy*

Henri Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer*

Thomas Merton, *Seeds of Destruction* and *Faith and Violence*
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