The Courage to Listen

Government, Truth-Telling, and Care of the Self

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ABSTRACT

Theory and practice in contemporary governance place discourse, dialogue, and storytelling at the center of the field of public administration. These speaking practices involve the capacity both to speak and to listen to what is being said. Public administration emphasizes the former and neglects the latter. But if the breakdown in our "communicative infrastructure" is to be repaired, it is as important to consider how one attends to another's speech as to create settings and opportunities for speaking. Drawing from Michel Foucault's final three lectures, this paper theorizes the role of listening in creating a robust public sphere. Central to the argument are Foucault's analyses of the ancient Greek practices of "care of the self" and a specific kind of truth-telling, parrhesia. Listening is shown to be the central practice of self-care: To be able to listen, we must learn to attend to and take care of ourselves. This practice enables the subject not only to govern others, but also to listen to parrhesiac speech when spoken by others in public. The field has not yet fully understood how the "personal" practice of taking-care-of-oneself and, in particular, cultivating the capacity to listen is the sine qua non for the emergence of a functioning public realm and responsive government.

In postmodern times, the image reigns. Data are visualized, connections are mapped, and processes are rendered transparent and visible to the eye. But what might the preoccupation with our ability to *see* mean for our ability to *listen*? It is a simple question, but the matter is actually at the heart of practical

and theoretical issues in contemporary public administration. For example, the fact that citizens often feel that politicians and administrators do not listen to them has given rise to new forms of public participation and engagement and placed the study of discourse and dialogue at the center of the field of public administration (Fox & Miller, 1995; McSwite, 1997; see Patterson, 2000). In matters of policy, despite near-universal consensus among the world's scientists about the reality of climate change and its portents, the general public does not seem to listen to these warnings. Most important, practices of contemporary governance, such as collaboration and participatory governance, hinge on our ability to speak and listen to one another. Moreover, the growing importance of storytelling in public administration scholarship and practice (Bevir, 2011; Hummel, 1991; Maynard-Mooney & Musheno, 2003) suggests not only that people *tell* stories but that, in one way or another, they also *listen* to stories.

Discourse, dialogue, and storytelling ultimately involve *both* the capacity of someone to speak and someone else to listen, hear, and understand what is being said. However, the field and practice of public administration primarily emphasize the former and neglect the latter. If the current breakdown in our "communicative infrastructure" is to be repaired (Lloyd, 2009, p. 480), it is as important to consider how a listener attends to the information that is spoken as it is to create settings and opportunities for speaking.

Camilla Stivers (1994) has called general attention to the skill of *listening* in crafting a different, more responsive kind of public administrator. She writes that "*listening* [is] an embodied ability, a way of knowing, moral capacity, and potential administrative practice . . . [that] can help us shape a revivified responsiveness, one that avoids passivity and partisanship alike" (p. 365). It seems, further, that the capacity to listen may have vital implications, not only for those involved in the immediate exchange, but also for the very constitution of a public sphere. As Hannah Arendt put it, "public" means that "everything that appears in public can be seen and heard by everybody and has the widest possible publicity" (1998, p. 50). The public realm calls us to listen and be listened to. If we cannot listen to one another, there can be no public space, and thus we may be condemned to dwell in dark times (Stivers, 2008). That is, listening is not simply a matter of being seen or heard by the other. Rather, we must see and hear the other, and this, as will be argued below, depends on our capacity to attend and listen to ourselves in order to know and care for ourselves. But what is involved in *listening*?[1] We need a functional theory of governance that includes not only how to talk to and appear before others in public, but also how to listen to ourselves and others.

Drawing from Michel Foucault's final three lectures at the Collège de France, in this paper we theorize that the capacity to listen can be understood by examining the relationship between forms of truth-telling and the practices of government. Central to our argument are Foucault's analyses of

the ancient Greek practices of "care of the self" (*epimeleia heautou*) and a specific kind of truth-telling (*parrēsia*). Foucault contends that the familiar Socratic injunction to "know thyself" (*gnōthi seauton*) was premised on and enabled by practices of self-care that put our individual being (*ēthos*) at stake in order to change ourselves (*askēsis*). The purpose of self-care is to generate a certain kind of *truth* about ourselves that enables us to govern *ourselves*. It is by becoming subject to this particular form of self-truth that we enable ourselves to competently care for and govern others. In other words, to govern others we must first learn to govern ourselves by attending to and taking care of ourselves.

Listening is the central practice of self-care; to be able to listen, we must learn to attend to and take care of ourselves. That is, we need a certain kind of relationship with ourselves that is grounded in an attentive examination of *how we live our lives*. As we theorize it here, this examination is not a solipsistic, individual practice but, rather, is inevitably social and embedded in our relationships with others who assist and facilitate our self-examination and care. We draw support for this idea from the notion of parrhesia (Greek, *parrēsia*), or frank, free, direct spokenness. Parrhesia is typically described as a kind "fearless speech" (Sementelli, 2009; Stivers, 2004) and as courageous truth-telling in the face of power. Indeed, this is one dimension of parrhesia, but it neglects another aspect of parrhesia that is directly linked to the more personal, transformative practices of self-care and the courage to listen.

We demonstrate how these two dimensions of the "parrhesiac game"— one public, the other personal (Nehmas, 1998, p. 164)—are intimately connected with one another and to the work of self-care. The work of self-care and its practices of listening constitute a certain kind of subject who learns to listen to the truth of their being and way of living. This practice, in turn, enables the subject not only to govern others, but also to hear and listen to parrhesiac speech when spoken by others in, for instance, storytelling. While public administration theory and practice clearly recognize the importance of listening—often explicitly—and of "self-reflection," the field has not yet fully understood how this "personal" practice of taking-care-of-oneself and, in particular, the cultivation of the capacity to listen is the *sine qua non* for the emergence of a functioning public realm.

PROBLEMATIZING "KNOW THYSELF"

Foucault's last lectures (*The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, *The Government of Self and Others*, and *The Courage of Truth*) focus on the relationship and mutual constitution of knowledge (modes of veridiction), power (techniques of government, or conducting the conduct of others), and the potential mode of being for subjects (forms of self-practice, or governing of the self) (e.g., 2008/2011, pp. 3–5, 41–42). In outlining his concern for the ways in which

these three elements work to shape, and are articulated in and through, one another, Foucault explicitly broadens the concern of his earlier research from "the analysis of those specific structures of those discourses which claim to be and are accepted as true discourses" to analyze "the conditions and forms of the type of act by which the subject *manifests* himself when speaking the truth, by which [he means], thinks of himself and is recognized by others as speaking the truth" (2008/2011, pp. 3–4). Characterizing the former as epistemological structures, he describes the latter—in a kind of Heideggerian spirit—as an inquiry into "alethurgic forms," or the form of the act by and within which truth (*aletheia*) is manifested. In sum, Foucault considers the ways in which subjects appear in and through the very way by which true discourse is manifested, and how the alethurgic form is at work in articulating practices by which subjects conduct/govern themselves and seek to conduct/govern the conduct of others. In other words, different forms of truth incite different modes of being and, in turn, inform different forms of governing.

Foucault's multiyear inquiries range far, and we will not detail his meticulous genealogies of the continuities and discontinuities in ancient, Greek, Roman, and early Christian thought. However, in general, these studies into the relationship among of truth, subject, and government may be located at the intersection of two previously introduced key terms: *epimeleia heautou,* the care or application of the self, and parrhesia, frank, free, direct spokenness (2008/2011, p. 9). *Epimeleia heautou* concerns the existence of the self in relation to the self and others in which a certain kind of knowledge is brought to bear. Parrhesia is one mode of truth-telling, an alethurgic form, through which a subject may be manifested. Although Foucault quips that *epimeleia heautou* is only a "marginal notion" in the history of thought, it lies at the heart of his study, for it is through this term that he problematizes "the founding expression of the question of the relations between subject and truth," namely *gnōthi seauton,* "know thyself" (2001/2005, p. 3). He says, "I would like again to bring out the care of the self from behind the privileged status accorded for so long to the *gnōthi seauton* (knowledge of the self)" (2001/2005, p. 68; see also pp. 461–463). In doing so, he historicizes the presumption that the primary relation of self to truth is via *knowledge*. More precisely, Foucault unearths a conception of truth and truth-telling (an alethurgic form) bound up with coming to know and transform one's relationship to oneself, rather than accessing existing knowledge alone.

To this end, in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* Foucault suggests that *gnōthi seauton* (know thyself) "did not originally have the value it later acquired," rather it was "often, and in a highly significant way . . . coupled or twinned with the principle 'take care of yourself' (*epimeleia heautou*)" (p. 4). Indeed *epimeleia heautou* is the general framework or "principle of

all rational conduct" (p. 9) within which the question of knowing oneself is posed (p. 4). *Gnōthi seauton* is "one of the forms, one of the consequences, as a sort of concrete, precise, and particular application of the general rule: You must attend to yourself, you must not forget yourself, you must take care of yourself" (p. 5). As we will see, in taking care, *epimeleia heautou* is bound up with work or intervention on oneself (*askēsis*) such that one's very mode of being comes to be at stake in the process of self-care. Such self-care, then, becomes the basis for sound *action* in the world and with others.

Notwithstanding its centrality in Greek, Hellenistic, and Roman thought, the principle of *epimeleia heautou* was largely forgotten in the Western philosophical and scientific tradition, which came to view such self-concern as egoism or selfishness, a "sort of moral dandyism" (2001/2005, p. 12)—an especially ironic twist given the variety of "self-centered" individualisms (Love, 2012) associated with libertarianism, consumerism, and postmaterial values (Inglehart, 1997). More basically, Foucault locates the primary source of this forgetting or discrediting in what he loosely calls the "Cartesian moment" at which "knowledge itself and knowledge alone gives access to truth" (2001/2005, p. 17) and "the conditions of the subject's access to truth are defined within knowledge" (p. 18). That is, truth is defined in terms of *knowing,* and the conditions for knowing are themselves defined within the domain of knowledge. Truth-as-knowledge basically morphs into *technē,* or the way by which the subject *accesses* truth-as-knowledge (p. 17) in light of the "formal conditions, objective conditions, formal rules of method, the structure of the object to be known" (p. 18).

Two points are critical. First, truth-as-knowledge does not concern the subject in the subject's own being. Rather, as we discuss more fully in the next section, this mode of truth *separates* truth and the subject; truth is now located in a domain apart from one's lived existence. Second, other than knowing, nothing "else is demanded of [the subject]"; there is no requirement of self-work or expectation of change or of altering the subject's "being as subject" (2001/2005, p. 17). The idea is that "I can be immoral and know the truth" because I am "capable of truth *a priori*" (Gros in 2001/2005, p. 522). Truth becomes coincident with the ongoing access to knowledge and detached from *askēsis* (working on the self). In other words, as one gains greater knowledge, one comes to closer to the truth. The notion of putting one's being (*ethos*) into play is lost (p. 190); truth does not cost the subject anything. As Frédéric Gros puts it in his summary of Foucault's lectures, the subject of sound action is substituted for the subject of true knowledge (in 2001/2005, p. 528). To make this point more explicit, we typically may think in public administration that we need true knowledge to ground proper action (Callen, 2013). However, the idea of *epimeleia heautou* suggests an alternative: Sound action is enabled by taking care of oneself and through the labor of *askēsis*.

PLATONISM AND CYNICISM: THE SUBJECT OF TRUE DISCOURSE AND SOUND ACTION

Although Descartes is a popular whipping post, Foucault's use of the adjective "Cartesian" is slightly misleading. Indeed, while Foucault's earlier work largely operated upon an Antiquity-Modernity periodization that would map the forgetting of *epimeleia heautou*, Foucault notes that "this dissociation of [one's access to truth and work on oneself] had begun to take place long before [Descartes]. . . . We should look for [this wedge] in theology" (2001/2005, p. 26), the unfolding of Roman and early Christian thinking (pp. 447–449), and "somewhere between Plato and Socrates" (p. 51). Toward the end of his final lecture, *The Courage of Truth,* Foucault finally comes to locate this "Cartesian" moment within the long-standing, fundamental split in the Western philosophical tradition represented by Platonism and Cynicism. These two philosophical approaches articulate the truth-subject-power relationship differently and elucidate the distinction made above between the subject of true discourse and the subject of sound action. The important aspect of this discussion is that it connects truth and the subject with the issue of government and the question of "who rules?" (Dahl, 1961; Waldo, 1948).

Insofar as it is, classically, philosophy which is concerned with the practical problem of care for the self, Foucault describes philosophy and the technique of truth-telling as fundamentally concerned with a form, or style, of life rather than a rule (*regula*) or a specific body of knowledge (*technē*) (2001/2005, p. 424). As suggested above, Foucault's meticulous and close readings of Western philosophy lead him to conclude that the Western tradition in fact gives us *two* fundamental styles or modalities of living the philosophical "truth," which he categorizes as Platonism and Cynicism (2008/2010, p. 292). These terms name a basic difference in focus: a choice between care of the *soul* (*psukhēs)* and care of one's life (*bios*). We interpret this as fundamentally a choice between cultivating access to a realm distinct from the subject's being as opposed to developing an attentive concern for the conditions of one's material life; a choice between the subject of true discourse and the subject of sound action.

Care of One's Soul

The Platonic mode is, in Foucault's assessment, the "metaphysical" one (2008/2011, pp. 315, 339). It sees care of the self as care of the *soul:* "One must take care of one's soul (*psukhēs epimelēteon*)" (p. 53). "It is only the soul as such which is the subject of the action; the soul as such uses the body, its organs, and its tools etcetera" (p. 56). As expected, the training of the soul, however, is "always something that has to go through the relationship to someone else who is the master. . . . there is no care of the self without the

presence of a master" (p. 58), and the master is "the person who cares about the person's care for himself" (p. 59). Within this relationship, though, the soul is oriented toward something quite specific in which it participates, namely the eternal and divine (p. 70). As such, "knowledge of the divine [becomes] the condition of knowledge of the self" (p. 70).

When the soul is in contact with the divine, it enters into a relationship with truth in the form of wisdom and, with this, becomes capable of caring for itself and others. Who is the master? Who is the agent that guides the self toward knowing its soul and, so, to divine wisdom? The philosopher, of course! "The philosopher, then, loudly promotes himself as the only person capable of governing men, of governing those who govern men, and of in this way constituting a general practice of government at every possible level: government of self and government of others" (2001/2005, p. 135). Indeed the philosopher's mode of being "should constitute the mode of being of the subject exercising power" (2008/2010, p. 294).

The Platonic formula avails itself of important, familiar divisions. There is the division between body and soul and, analogously, between the true world (of forms and the divine) and the world of appearances. Here, the care of the self hinges on turning away from the world of appearances toward the true, *other world* (2008/2011, p. 209) which is "ontologically distinct" from the body (p. 159). The true self is in another register. The deep connection that Foucault sees between this Platonic formula and the Cartesian moment is clear: Both essentially conceive of truth in terms of access to another domain separate from the knower's own life. Although the Platonic formula frames the division as between body and soul, modern science similarly splits truth between the living subject and the objective world. The right to govern, then, accrues to those who have accessed this other register and become subjects of true discourse.

Care of One's Life (Bios)

In contrast to the Platonic mode, Foucault posits the Cynical mode (and, as we will suggest later in the paper, the Socratic), which persisted throughout Antiquity in various forms of Epicureanism and Stoicism and, later, in the Christian mendicant orders and modern revolutionary militancy. In this "historico-critical" mode (2008/2011, p. 315), the meeting place of philosophy and politics is not the philosopher's soul, but the public realm. It is a discourse pointed directly to the general public and *all* categories of listeners and participants. In doing so, it serves not only the prince or governor, but also the polis in general and even humanity more broadly.

What does the Cynic care about? The answer here is life (*bios*), the very form and shape that one's life is and might become. There is no reference to another world, another realm, or a divine arena in which all souls participate.

Ancient Cynicism, in Foucault's recounting, is "a philosophy as test of life, of *bios*, which is the ethical material and object of an art of oneself" (2008/2011, p. 127). "It is well and true an ethical *parrēsia*. Its privileged, essential object [is] life and the mode of life" (2008/2011, p. 149). But this is not Life, as Catlaw (2007) might say, in terms of living a model of the Good Life. Rather, it is the singular and focused testing and examination of the shape and conditions that *one's own life takes* that constitutes the object or purpose.

Contra Platonic metaphysics, this is an *aesthetics* of existence (2008/2011, p. 160). What is interesting here is the stability of the form and its open-endedness. In public administration, this is close to Catlaw's (2007) notion of the "politics of the subject" in which every biological life (*zoë*) might give shape to its own *way* of life (*bios*), a life that is "beautiful, striking, and memorable" (Foucault, 2008/2011, p. 163). There is no other world as a point of reference, only the life one has and how one comes to care for it. Rather than the "Good Life," we explore and enact a true life, the beautiful life that is our own. This idea does, of course, provoke questions about individualism and the kind of "moral dandyism" that Foucault himself noted. As we discuss in the remainder of the paper, however, insofar as this aesthetics of existence is bound up with care of the self, we can see such aesthetics as a fundamentally social accomplishment that is at odds with contemporary market-based egoism. Rather than signaling a retreat from the public sphere, it actually serves to enable its emergence.

THE PRACTICES OF SELF-CARE

Foucault thus presents two very different orientations toward truth and the subject. The Platonic-Cartesian mode emphasizes truth in terms of access to a domain of knowledge that is apart from individual existence. It is, moreover, an exclusive discourse. It is held by the philosopher, who works with the rulers to cultivate access to another realm. In this, we see shades of elite and expertise government, the "guardian class" described by Waldo (1948) and the important critiques of expert rule advanced in public administration (e.g., Box, 1998; McSwite, 1997). This truth, moreover, does not cost the subject anything: No self-work or transformation is demanded. By contrast, the Cynical mode focuses on the unique contours of material existence and sees truth as manifested through that very existence. Existence is the only point of reference, and by virtue of truth being rooted in one's way of life, truth is simultaneously universally available and radically singular. This clearly resonates with the alternative visions of public administration that have emphasized governance embedded in and attentive to its context, such as the settlement movement (Stivers, 2000).

The care of the self is clearly associated with the Cynical mode. But what, more precisely, does care of the self entail? What kind of work and practices does it involve? In broad terms, *epimeleia heautou* is "an attitude toward the

self, others, and the world" (2001/2005, p. 10). It implies a certain way of "attending" to the world and ourselves, but it is also bound up with a series of practices or "actions by which one takes responsibility for oneself and by which one takes, changes, purifies, transforms, and transfigures oneself" (p. 11). Central, then, to *epimeleia heautou* is a kind of attending to or *work* on oneself, and through this work we forge a new relationship to ourselves. To put it another way, as subjects we come into the truth only insofar as we put our very being (*ēthos*) into play and seek to change how we govern ourselves (*askēsis*). So it is not a matter of understanding one's timeless soul or accessing another realm, but of *changing* one's relationship to oneself in order to become prepared to engage in sound action.

What are some examples of the kinds of work (*askēsis*) we might as subjects do on ourselves so that we might come to properly care for ourselves? Foucault identifies and discusses several at length: techniques of meditation, review of one's daily activities, withdrawal, and distancing oneself. However, *listening* is the key practice.

Listening

If listening is the most basic and essential aspect of *epimeleia heautou* (2001/2005, p. 334), how then can we become competent, skilled listeners? We look to both classical philosophy and contemporary discussions of active listening in order to gain direction about the qualities and practices of listening. Listening

> not only requires openness, attentiveness and a non-judgmental attitude, but also an awareness of one's self. . . . [It] demand[s] presence, a state of being where one is fully engaged in what one is doing, in this case listening, with the whole body and mind. It is a state of being where one is fully attending to the task at hand without an agenda, without thinking of the next thing to say, and without expecting results. Just listening. (Ucok, 2006, pp. 1025–1026)

Real listening makes demands on us; properly practiced, it is not a passive activity. These demands can take various forms (2001/2005, p. 340). As indicated in the quotation above, it requires us as listeners to refrain from making habitual responses or putting up intentional or unintentional barriers or roadblocks (i.e., judging, suggesting solutions, or avoiding the speaker's concerns) (Robinson, 2005). Recognizing our habits and the ways in which our verbal or nonverbal actions can prevent listening from occurring must take place before we can begin to specifically foster and improve our active listening skills. To address this, we can prepare our bodies and minds to be receptive to information whether it is compatible or incompatible with our predisposed truths.

First, attentive body language is a common listening skill that involves the way in which we "show up" during conversations or when someone is speaking (Robinson, 2005). This physical representation of listening is usually the most notable way in which we demonstrate our ability to listen and our capacity to hear. Cultivating a certain physically immobile or "statuesque" posture is conducive to proper listening in that it "guarantees the quality of attention and thus allows the logos to penetrate the soul" (Foucault, 2001/2005, p. 345). This speaks to Stivers's (1994) point about listening being an "embodied ability" (p. 365). To listen we need to prepare ourselves and, in essence, generate the stillness and receptivity in our body that we seek in our mind. Indeed, as the closely allied practices of meditation and mindfulness show us, oftentimes when we quiet our body we become aware of the chatter in our minds. Thus, quieting the body can signal to us the readiness of our mind's ability to listen.

Second, silencing and restraining our mental chatter from intervening or planning a reply in our minds while another speaks (Foucault, 2001/2005, p. 341) is an important mental technique to active listening. We can "surround our listening with an aura and crown of silence" and resist converting "what we have heard immediately into speech" (p. 342). That is, when we listen, we want to hold what we hear in us and allow it to have an effect on us, rather than immediately convert it back into speech. Invariably, then, listening slows the rate of communicative exchange (see Catlaw, 2009, pp. 316–318). It is the antithesis of the contemporary talk show call-response and sound bite culture.

Finally, after we have actively listened to another speak and prior to responding, we can check in with ourselves internally to see what we have heard and learned about both ourselves and the other, particularly in relation to our prior disposition toward the subject, and consequently to establish our position with what has been said vis-à-vis the truth (Foucault, 2001/2005, p. 351; see 2008/2010, pp. 235–236). This is consistent with the injunction to let in, hold, and allow the personal effect of what we have listened to.

Listening, more generally, is central to the philosophical life (*bios*) in that philosophy cannot be a "real discourse, a discourse of reality" unless it is listened to (Foucault, 2008/2010, p. 234); we will make a similar argument about parrhesia. "You can learn to be a better listener, but learning it is not like learning a skill that is added to what we know. It is a peeling away of things that interfere with listening, our preoccupations, our fear of how we might respond to what we hear" (McWinney, quoted in Robinson, 2005). To begin this peeling away, we recognize that listening is a skill to be developed experientially and in relationship with others. Thus, listening is a practice of relating to the self and others that puts one in a position *both* to receive and to speak "truth." We will return to this crucial point when we consider the relationship of listening to the public sphere.

CARE OF THE SELF AND PARRHESIA

How, then, do these practices of self-care relate to truth and governing? Care of the self seeks to actualize *truth in existence*—rather than truth as knowledge—by providing us as subject with a truthful discourse about ourselves that, ultimately, can be used as a guide for *action*. The particular modality of truth-telling, the alethurgic practice, is parrhesia.

Like *epimeleia heautou*, Foucault situates his interest in parrhesia in terms of analyzing the correlations or mutual constitution of knowledge, government, and the subject's mode of being. He says,

> In posing the question of the government of self and others, I would like to try to see how truth-telling (*dire-vrai*), the obligation and possibility of telling the truth in procedures of government, can show how the individual is constituted as subject in the relationship to self and the relationship to others. (2008/2011, p. 42)

Parrhesia is fundamentally an *alethurgic* form, or an act of truth-telling, through which a particular kind of subject is manifested. But, as previously noted, there are two versions of parrhesia (2008/2011, p. 8; see Nehmas, 1998, p. 164). There is, first, a public and explicitly political kind of parrhesia, and, second, a form that is linked with the personal practices of taking care of oneself (2008/2011, p. 8).

Political Parrhesia

The first kind of parrhesia is a kind of "fearless speech" or free-spokenness, directed to the public generally. It also expresses the idea of "telling all" in the positive sense of "telling the truth without concealment, reserve, empty manner of speech, or rhetorical ornament that might erode or hide it" and "without hiding behind [the truth]" (Foucault, 2008/2011, p. 10). There is no hiding because the speech and the speaker are conjoined in the parrhesiac act—there is no gap between the speaker and another domain. In doing so, the speaker knowingly enters into danger and assumes considerable risk in the face of those more powerful.

The classic case of parrhesia is Diogenes of Sinope, the founder of Cynicism. Foucault focuses on the life of the Cynic because it presents an especially extreme and distinctive form of living that was "strongly connected to the principle of truth-telling, of truth-telling without shame or fear, of unrestricted and courageous truth-telling, of truth-telling which pushes its courage and boldness to the point that it becomes intolerable insolence" (p. 165). The Cynic is the "scout of humanity" or "guard dog" who darts ahead of society and announces the truth that is, we might say, on the way. Cynic existence itself manifests the truth; the person's life itself

is an alethurgic practice that is risky and dangerous. Unlike Platonism's other world, Cynicism seeks to violate the habits and customs of society and, thereby, forces us to confront another *life* by showing us an existence that we might think to be the very antithesis of the good or "beautiful" so that we may interrogate our own being.

Both Sementelli (2009) and Stivers (2004) have usefully explored this Cynical quality of parrhesia in the context of public administration. Stivers suggests that a theorist can "speak the truth of our present situation from his or her vantage point, speaking to immediate others, but also the world at large" (p. 21). She rightly sees truth, in this sense, as "not a pinning down, but an opening up" (p. 22) and, perhaps, the relighting of the public sphere by offering an "antidote to the double talk and camouflage that have cast a rhetorical fog over the public space" (p. 25). Sementelli provocatively explores the problem of parrhesia in postmodern, anti-essentialist times, in which "truth" itself has become a highly contestable notion, by asking how public administrators can both enable and benefit from parrhesia.

Personal Parrhesia

Foucault's detailed analyses in these lectures, however, reveal an understanding of parrhesia that extends beyond the familiar idea of fearless speech in the public realm. We will call this the "personal" or interpersonal aspect of Socratic parrhesia insofar as:

> It was Socrates, according to Foucault, who for the first time extended the concept and practice of parrhēsia [*sic*] to the communication between individuals, one of whom—the truth-teller—is usually (as was often the case in the political context as well) of a lower rank than the other. This confrontation of individuals constitutes a new, different mode of truth-telling: it is the truth-telling not associated with politics but what we have come to know as philosophy. (Nehmas, 1998, p. 164)[2]

As in the care of the self, Socratic parrhesia involves an ongoing examination of how one leads one's life: "Whatever the subject you start with, you are forced to let yourself be drawn by the discussion into giving an account of yourself, of the kind of life you lead now and have led in the past" (2008/2011, p. 143). This hinges on giving an account "of the way in which one lives" (p. 144). Instead of emphasizing one's soul, as in Platonism, or speaking-truth-to-power, as in public parrhesia, the focus of this Socratic practice is on the way one lives and how one conducts or governs oneself. Linked with personal rather than political praxis, it is through this personal, attentive engagement with our everyday lives (*bios*) that we become subjects of a distinctive kind of truth, or a particular alethurgic form. As described below, this form of parrhesia also involves confrontation, risk, and the potential for transformation but in

a different way, as *ethics* (p. 74). It is this mode of being, we will argue, that ultimately enables the government of others and is a condition for efficacious Cynical parrhesia in the public realm.

This personal mode of fearless speech is not truth-telling as outlined above. Rather, it is a kind of direct speech that takes the form of questioning and testing of one's way of life and relationship to oneself. Through this questioning and testing, it is Socrates or our interlocutor who acts as the "touchstone" against which one "rubs" in order to call forth a truth about one's life and determine what is good and bad for oneself: how to care for oneself.[3] What is passed on by the testing guide or master, clearly, is not positive knowledge in the traditional sense. Rather, it is through attentive questioning that the guide enables us as listener to produce the truth of our own existence and, in doing so, become subject of our own truth. Again, though, this is not a truth about an "inner soul" or the nature of the cosmos. It is an insight into the organization of one's being and mode of existence, and about what is good and bad for that particular life. It is an investigation into how one governs oneself or conducts one's own conduct and mode through which truth is put to work in transforming the *ethos* or way of being of the subject.

Thus, Socratic parrhesia, this testing and questioning practice, is precisely what enables the emergence of the true discourse produced in and by the interlocutor. In political parrhesia, this truth is coincident with the subject, who generates an self-account that is expressed via speech. "The truth I tell you, you see it in me" (2001/2005, p. 409). Here, again, there is no speaking-for or speaking-on-behalf-of another realm of the soul or separate domain of knowledge; there is no representative or mediation between the subject who speaks and the subject of truth.

However, Socratic parrhesia is distinctive in its relational, invariably interpersonal quality. There is a questioner and tester who acts as a guide or master and is skilled in parrhesiac practice. Foucault writes that it allows "the master to make proper use, from the true things he knows, of that which is useful or effective for his disciple's work of transformation" (2001/2005, p. 242). The aims of this personal parrhesia also seem different than its political counterpart. Here one "speaks in such a way that this other will be able to form an autonomous, independent, and full and satisfying relationship to himself" (p. 379). It fundamentally "involves acting on [others] so that they come to build up a relationship of sovereignty to themselves, with regard to themselves, typical of the wise and virtuous subject, of the subject who has attained all the happiness there is to attain in the world" (p. 385). One speaks to the other in order that the other shall become more capable of self-governance and of taking sound action.

So, what might Socratic parrhesia look like in a contemporary context? One arena where this kind of truth-telling and development of self can be

seen is in the increasingly examined and widely utilized realm of executive coaching. The coach/executive relationship typically exists to increase the executive subject's own knowledge of self through questioning, guided self-reflection and assessment, and dialogue. In their meta-analysis of the executive coaching literature, Kampa-Kokesch and Anderson (2001) explain the main reasons why an individual would seek out an executive coach. One of the insights they glean from the literature is that the executive coach provides a client with an experience similar to that which we have identified as personal parrhesia and an opportunity to practice self-care that is not often afforded elsewhere. In discussing the work of Lukaszewski (1988), they explain that the greatest difficulty facing executives was

> the inability to gain access to people who ask questions, provide advice, and give counsel. He noted that most people close to executives are afraid, or do not know how, to confront them regarding their behavior. The purpose of executive coaching is to provide these functions. An executive coach's role is to provide feedback to the executive about his or her behavior and the impact it has on others both within and outside the organization. . . . (Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001, p. 209)

In this regard, executive coaches play the role of the guide or master skilled in parresiastic practice. Moreover, executive coaching also illustrates the associated level of risk on the part of the truth-teller and the one receiving the truth. Executives who work with a coach must be committed to hearing the truths spoken and dedicated to practices of self-care and governance. In turn, the expectation is that this improved capacity for governing themselves will improve their capacity for governing others in the organization (Kilburg, 1996; Olivero, Bane, & Kopelman, 1997; Smith, 1993).

RISK, RELATIONSHIP, AND THE COURAGE TO LISTEN

As previously suggested, risk and danger are central elements of parrhesia. This precariousness is clear enough in the public dimension of parrhesia in which the political consequences of fearless speech are potentially deadly. How can we characterize the risk in this personal, Socratic parrhesia? Risk takes two forms here. First and foremost, as we discussed earlier, Foucault problematizes the idea of truth-as-knowledge because nothing "else is demanded of [the subject]" and there is no requirement or expectation of change or of altering the subject's "being as subject" (p. 17). The idea is that "I can be immoral and know the truth" because the subject is "capable of truth *a priori*" (p. 522). In Socratic parrhesia, the demands are considerable. It not only involves the rigors and discipline of taking care of oneself, but fundamentally puts one's very mode of being and way of living at stake through attentive questioning by a guide. Courage here comes from giving an account

of oneself, of one's own life, and way of living. Truth-telling in this immanent or biopolitical practice is a

> discourse which gives an account of oneself [and which] must define the visible figure that humans must give to their life. . . . [It] faces the risk and danger of telling men what courage they need and what it will cost them to give a certain style to their life. (2001/2005, p. 161)

We risk exposing our failures, inadequacies, and bad habits for the purpose of learning to govern ourselves better. As in the public realm, this is an "irruptive event" (2008/2010, p. 63), the consequences of which are uncertain. Examining and giving an account of oneself, of one's own life and way of living, in light of these risks takes courage.

The second dimension of risk concerns the risk to the relationship itself. Parrhesia is risky insofar as it involves being in relationship with another person (see 2001/2005, pp. 164, 366, 372, 384) or community, and in that practice the *relationship* is at stake. Foucault makes this point quite clearly:

> [I]t involves some form of courage, the minimal form of which consists in the parrhesiast taking the risk of breaking the relationship and ending the relationship to the other person which was precisely what made his discourse possible. In a way the parrhesiast always risks undermining the relationship which is the condition of possibility of his discourse. (2008/2011, p. 11)

This underscores the inevitably *social* and relational aspect of Socratic parrhesia. The courage required in parrhesia is generally associated with a risk inherent to the speaker. The risk, however, is not always so one-sided and is more complex than, say, the risk assumed by a whistleblower who speaks-truth-to-power. It seems that what Foucault emphasizes throughout his lengthy examination of parrhesia is not *only* the riskiness for those who speak, but the risk involved for those who are *subjected* to parrhesia (2008/2011, p. 13). In other words, while it is assumed that there must be courage to speak, courage is also necessary in order to pose and ask questions and to *listen*.

Political parrhesia may be seen as a heroic, solitary act of truth-telling, but precisely the same kind of relationship-based risk is at stake as well. Foucault writes,

> The people, the Prince, and the individual must recognize that they have to listen to the person who takes the risk of telling them the truth. . . . This kind of pact, between the person who takes the risk of telling the truth and the person who agrees to listen to it, is at the heart of what could be called the parrhesiastic game.
>
> So, in two words, *parrhēsia* [*sic*] is the courage of truth in the person who speaks and who, regardless of everything, takes the risk of telling the whole truth that he thinks, but it is also the interlocutor's courage

in agreeing to accept the hurtful truth that he hears. (2008/2011, pp. 12–13)

In public life, the fearless speaker is "bringing his relationship to the other into question, and even risks his life" (2008/2011, p. 12). Hanging over the practice is a "risk to the bond between the person speaking and the person to whom he speaks" (p. 13). And, as with the Socratic practice, not only is the relationship at stake, but the role of listening is also absolutely central to the efficacy of political parrhesia.

CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT AND CONCERNS

One might react with skepticism to our discussion here of self-care, listening, and truth-telling for several reasons. First, given the contemporary state of American politics (deHaven-Smith & Witt, 2009), the proliferation of media and punditry, and the leveling of "opinion" in the Internet age, might it not be terribly naïve to invest hope in the power of listening? Second, could one not contend that a far more critical interrogation of listening is demanded in the face of the co-optation of listening by managerialist discourse, pervasive surveillance practices by governments that actually listen far too much, and ersatz "listening tours" by politicians (Lloyd, 2009)? Third, could self-care not just be a kind of neoliberal avoidance of real material deprivations and poverty? Does it simply say that people just need to take care of themselves *by themselves*? Fourth, contemporary theory raises doubts about the very notion of a truthful discourse. That is, if postfoundationalism undermines the plausibility of any true discourse, what can parrhesia really mean today? Sementelli's (2009) study of parrhesia gets to this issue especially well. He poses the question of whether truth-telling is possible in an anti-essentialist world in which capital-T Truth has no grounding and shows how we can grapple with this challenge.

These are important critiques of the centrality and, more important, the contemporary relevance we have assigned to self-care, listening, and truth-telling. We cannot respond fully here to the range of issues these questions prompt. However, we offer a general response. To begin with, there is no dispute that listening is "one of the most important communication skills in personal, academic, and professional settings alike" (Wolvin, 2012). Yet listening has received considerably less attention than talk and speech in the public administration and governance literature. The presumption seems to be that speakers "do all the work" and speech continues to be privileged (Catlaw & Holland, 2012; Patterson, 2000). As such, we continue to ignore an essential dimension of our communicative infrastructure. However, as we argue here, real listening demands physical, emotional, and cognitive resources; and contemporary research affirms the complexity and importance of listening and the need to *prepare* for it (Wolvin, 2012). This theoretical and practical disregard for listening in public administration radically limits the utility of

deliberation, storytelling, and "giving-voice" as a way to reform and enhance contemporary government and enliven the public sphere.

In our view, rather than *again* seeing listening as a *passive* practice, we theorize that listening offers vital entrée to rethinking the management of contemporary public organizations. The inspiration here comes from Alkadry (2003), who asks, "If citizens talk, will administrators listen?" His research found support for Hummel's thesis about how the experience in bureaucracy suppresses public administrators' willingness to listen to citizens. We can extend this line of inquiry into contemporary organizations that have been reorganized along neoliberal and New Public Management lines. Joe Soss and colleagues have shown how "neoliberalized" social welfare organizations are characterized by paternalistic power relations between case managers and clients, which condition the latter to be silent and passive (Soss, Fording, & Schram, 2011). Thus, a focus on listening in public administration prompts the need to reconsider both bureaucratic and managerialist practices toward the end of creating responsive public organizations.

Along similar thematic lines, neoliberal discourse gives pride of place to "responsible" individual behavior and celebrates individuals who take care of themselves (Catlaw & Sandberg, 2012). Indeed, the poor and marginalized are described as those who do not or cannot take care of themselves (Soss, Fording, & Schram, 2011). Does not a focus on care of the self simply reaffirm this? Absolutely not. In stark contrast to neoliberal responsibility, we have emphasized human relationships in both taking care of the self and in developing the capacity for listening and truth-telling. In this sense, like Harmon and McSwite (2011), we make accomplishing *relationships* the center of ethical practice and reject traditional modernist rationalist approaches to ethics (Callen, 2013). We emphasize, in particular, two kinds of interdependent yet distinct relationships to be accomplished—the relationship between self and self, which is facilitated by the guide or teacher in personal, Socratic parrhesia; and the relationship between the self and others in political parrhesia. Our argument about care of the self and singular truth could not be further from neoliberal responsibility, which asserts normatively preferred models of good citizenship and proper behavior (Soss, Fording, & Schram, 2011). The aim of these practices is not to tell people what mode of citizenship is appropriate, but to engage in a process that allows people to explore their modes of being for themselves. This understanding becomes the basis for sound action in the world (as both speaker and listener) and for grappling with the uncertainty that living with other people inevitably entails.

So, like neoliberal responsibility, care of the self *does* concern itself with human agency; however, it theorizes that agency is an artifact of a set of relationships that is subsequently enabled or disabled by the context in which it is exercised. Our analysis thus raises the issue of the organizational context within which those relationships are created and sustained, and thereby it im-

plies the need for structural as well as interpersonal transformation. This is the case not only for public organizations, but also for contexts that help people learn to care for themselves. Thus, we need to see life in public organizations as intrinsically connected with what goes on in other domains of social life (Rawlings & Catlaw, 2011).

Finally, our discussion opens an avenue for critical and heterodox approaches in public administration to reconsider the status of truth in our discourse. The "truth" we are considering here is clearly rooted in one's individual experience and subjectivity. Following Foucault, we have made a sharp distinction between the Platonic-Cartesian modality of truth as knowledge and access, and the Cynical-Socratic idea of truth as an attentive examination of how one lives one's life (*bios*). Thus, while truth is rooted in singular experience, it is coupled with testing and questioning in relationship with another. In this sense, truth-telling in public becomes a kind of storytelling before an audience whose members know how to take care of themselves.

We theorize this self-care and truth-seeking as a different way of preparing for the world of action in the public realm: "to take care of oneself insofar as one has to govern others" (Foucault, 2001/2005, p. 44). It is by caring for ourselves that we learn the parameters within which we might approach participation in governing others, since in the end, "the only thing that I must and can truly command is myself. And if I am deprived of the command of others, I will not be deprived of this command over myself" (p. 541). It is the cultivation of such self-care that permits us to differentiate the boundaries between ourselves and the roles we occupy in public and organizational life. Only from this space in which we can govern ourselves can we effectively conduct the conduct of others.

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NOTES

1. As Stivers notes, research on listening makes a distinction between hearing and listening (1994, p. 366). Hearing is the physiological process of receiving or letting auditory stimuli into the middle ear that are ultimately transmitted to the brain. Listening involves receiving and also attending, perceiving/filtering, interpreting, and responding (Wolvin, 2012). The focus of this article is on listening.

2. It is, of course, the case that Socrates also engaged in political parrhesia and bore the risk of speaking out in public and to the Assembly. Foucault

contends, however, that Socrates chose to avoid this form of parrhesia because, ultimately, it would have cost him his life and prevented him from doing something positive, namely establishing "with others and himself a particular kind of invaluable, useful, and beneficial relationship" (2008/2011, p. 80). It bears noting, too, that Socrates learned of his own wisdom from the divine via the Delphic oracle. Yet he subjected that communication to testing by disputing and questioning the oracle.

   3. The idea of the "touchstone" is closely aligned with the role of the analyst in Lacanian psychoanalytic theory and practice. For a discussion of the similarities of the work of the analyst and Socratic midwifery, see Catlaw (2006).

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THE COURAGE TO LISTEN