

A QUESTION OF TWO TRUTHS? REMARKS ON *PARRHESIA* AND THE ‘POLITICAL-PHILOSOPHICAL’ DIFFERENCE

Matthew Sharpe

Where a community has embarked upon organized lying on principle, and not only with respect to particulars, can truthfulness as such, unsupported by the distorting forces of power and opinion, become a political factor of the first order. Where everybody lies about everything of importance the truth-teller, whether he knows it or not, has begun to act.

Hannah Arendt, ‘Truth and Politics’

In what were to be the final two lecture series of his life, French philosopher Michel Foucault turned his attention to the classical Greeks’ notion[s] of *parrhesia*: literally, ‘all-telling’, but as we shall see momentarily, something much closer to ‘truthfulness’ or even ‘probity’.² Much of Foucault’s career can be read as a series of inquiries into that most dizzying of Nietzschean questions: namely, ‘*what* really is it in us that wants ‘the truth’ ... *why not* rather untruth?’³ Yet Foucault’s last lectures represent a significant development, and arguably a reflective ‘re-visioning’ of, his famous earlier inquiries into the politics of truth. Foucault’s genealogical inquiries of the early 1970s had traced the emergence (*Entstehung*)⁴ of the ‘true discourses’ of the modern human sciences from the ignoble milieus of the early modern prisons, barracks, schools and hospitals.⁵ The inquiries that make up the second two volumes of *History of Sexuality* analyze classical, Roman, and Christian conceptions of ethical self-formation: how individual subjects’ *rappports à soi* could be mediated by way of their relationship[s] with the truth.⁶ Both these forms of inquiry left in abeyance important epistemological questions concerning the status of Foucault’s own texts,⁷ and attracted charges that Foucault’s politics of truth leaves little or no room for specifically *political* forms of agency or praxis.⁸ By contrast, as Flynn has observed, Foucault’s inquiries from 1981–1984 concerning *parrhesia* go a long way to addressing or redressing these issues.⁹ His intention in focusing on *parrhesia* in these lectures, Foucault explained:

was ... to deal with the problem of ... the truth-teller, or of truth-telling as an activity ... who is able to tell the truth [in Greek society], about what, with what consequences, and with what relations to power.¹⁰

Although all instances of what the Greeks meant by *parrhesia* involved telling the truth, Foucault specifies, not all truthful speech can be called *parrhesia* in the Greek sense. At least two further conditions are required for *parrhesia* to be in play. First: Foucault emphasizes that *parrhesia* is true speech that *involves* the speaking subject, since it reflects their sincere convictions concerning the matter at hand, convictions which they are ready to ‘authenticate’ by their public actions.¹¹ (So a paradigmatic modern case might be Luther’s famous ‘here I stand, I can do no other’ at Worms. We will return to this to close). Secondly, as with Luther’s ‘here I stand ...’, the practice of the parrhesiast presupposes the entire political context of the speaker, a context in which their act of speaking the truth makes an intervention or difference. More specifically, *parrhesia* presupposes an asymmetry of political power, whereby the *parrhesiast* is subordinate to his addressee[s], and so always potentially runs a risk by expressing his true beliefs.¹² Although one may profess one’s convictions sincerely before an assembled body, for example, the ‘threshold’ of *parrhesia* will be crossed at the point where these true beliefs concern, or aim to correct, the interests or perceived shortcomings of one’s addressee[s]. In a way that goes a long way to explaining Foucault’s contemporary reclaiming of Immanuel Kant’s work (Foucault’s response to *Was ist Aufklärung?* forms the exergue of the 1982–83 lecture series¹³ Foucault asserts in these lectures the genealogical antecedence of *parrhesia* to the Kantian-modernist notion of the philosophical critique of the powers of reason:

With the [Greeks’] question of knowing who is able to tell the truth, and knowing why we should tell the truth, we have the roots of what we would call the ‘critical’ tradition of the West.¹⁴

Indeed—and here is my point—confronting Foucault’s late lectures on *parrhesia*, one could be tempted to form the opinion that what Foucault addresses in these lectures is an adequate description of Western philosophy *per se*, not just the critical philosophy of Immanuel Kant. Is not the philosopher, by profession, the paradigm instance of the truth-teller in Western society, a figure who—as Foucault detailed in the 1984 lectures—supersedes the prophet and the sage in the religious and mythical orbits, before giving birth to the modern man of science?¹⁵ Does not the philosopher’s activity, by definition, involve the impartial striving (or *philia*) for the truth in studied disregard for the opinions of his contemporaries: a disregard which already singles his pursuit out, in the classical world, from both the rhetoricians and the poets?¹⁶ Is not *the* founding image of the philosopher in the Western tradition Plato’s Socrates of the *Apology*, one of the most magnificent and abiding images we have of a parrhesiast as Foucault describes him¹⁷: namely, a subject the truth of whose words are fully authenticated by his own conduct, even though the stake of his continuing in this way of life was nothing short of political martyrdom?¹⁸

Characteristically, Foucault’s analysis of these topics, and so of the larger question of the relation between philosophy and politics, is much more nuanced. And so, I shall argue in what follows, it *ought* to be. For, as Foucault is not alone in observing, the closer one gets to the historical and philosophical materials, the *less clear* does this paradigmatic ‘Socratic’ image of the philosopher as parrhesiast, citizen or political *engagé* become. In Foucault’s account, the most directly political practice or culture of *parrhesia* in classical Greece coincides with the democratic Athens of the fifth century. It finds its public place[s] in that *isegoria* or constitutional right of adult male citizens to speak freely in the *ecclesia* celebrated by Polybius, supported by their *isonomia* or equality before the law.¹⁹ So Foucault locates its paradigmatic cultural expressions not within philosophy, but in the Ion of Euripides²⁰ and the speeches of Pericles.²¹ Platonic philosophy, Foucault stresses, emerges

later, after the decline and fall of democratic Athens. Philosophy features in his account as one part of a wider ‘proto-Hellenistic’ context wherein *parrhesia* ‘moves beyond being considered primarily as a political act’ to becoming something else.²² Plato’s famous critique of the democratic city and man in *Republic VIII*, Foucault notes, develops motifs present in other conservative critics of the Athenian democracy such as that of Isocrates, whose *On the Peace* (B.C. 355) argued that speakers’ justifiable fears of incurring the disapproval (or ostracism) of the *demos* mean that democratic speech must inevitably devolve into rhetoric or flattery, the very *opposites* of true *parrhesia*.²³ Like two other, influential twentieth century readers of Plato, Leo Strauss and Hannah Arendt (on whom more in a moment), Foucault also cautions us against reading Plato’s great ‘political’ dialogues, the *Politeia* or the *Nomoi*, as literally-true statements of the mature Plato’s political position or aspirations.²⁴ The most telling testimony to Plato’s conception of the political *ergon* of philosophical *parrhesia*, Foucault argues, is instead to be found in Plato’s letters. In particular, Foucault singles out Plato’s famous seventh letter describing his three Sicilian expeditions, wherein the philosopher had spent time in the courts of the tyrants Dionysius and Dion.²⁵

Two things then become salient in Foucault’s reading of Plato’s letter, concerning the issue of the difference between politics and philosophy. First: just as Plato’s Socrates repeats in the *Crito*, the *Gorgias*, and elsewhere that philosophical discourse neither can nor ought to seek to persuade the many (*ó pollos*)²⁶, so the addressees of this seventh letter are a few friends of the murdered tyrant, Dion. These friends have written to Plato in confidence. Having witnessed the death of Socrates at the hands of the restored Athenian democracy, Plato explains, he had withdrawn from direct political participation in the polis, friendless and in despair.²⁷ The highest political potentiality of philosophy Plato instead envisages in the letters (one which he had tried, but failed, to institute in the court of Dionysius) is to act as private counselor, or even – as he characteristically puts it – a ‘physician’ to the bearers of absolute power. In the terms of Jacques Derrida or Heinrich Meier, that is, in the Platonic heritage Western political philosophy involves in the first instance a ‘politics of friendship’²⁸:

The proper context for a truly Platonic *parrhesia*, Foucault contends, cannot be found in the contest for the favor of a self-satisfied citizen body, but only in the structure of *philia* [friendship]... We have then here a modified version of [*parrhesia*] in which *philia* effectively replaces *isonomia* [as its political context or basis — MS]²⁹

Second: as in the *Alcibides Major*, the specific efficacy of Platonic philosophy, as detailed in the letter, is in the first instance to encourage the addressee – the prince or aspirant to tyrannical power – in the care for his own soul (*epimeleia tes psyches*). If Platonic philosophical *parrhesia* does indeed interpret the world, that is, its point is to change the soul of its immediate addressee. It works only by way of engaging the addressee in a private labor (tribe) involving speech (versus writing or *nomoi*) and inter-subjective *elenchus* (versus rhetoric addressing a more or less public group).³⁰ Ancient philosophy, Foucault hence contends in his final lectures on *parrhesia* as in the later volumes of *History of Sexuality*, is in the first instance what he translates as a ‘technology of the self’. As Foucault specifies in *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, we cannot for this reason say that this philosophy is necessarily apolitical, or that there is no link between it and politics.³¹ However, this link must pass by way of the education of the prince or tyrant who, by learning to care for himself *only then* becomes capable of caring for others, or practicing the political *techne* (sic.). And so, readers can note, philosophy after the Platonic conception can be ‘politically’ operative in these

closed forms of regime alone. As Gyorgy Markus has commented:

In the perception of [classical philosophy] the ultimate significance of its insight ... consisted in the fact that [this insight] ... related to that, and only to that, which is unchanging and eternal. Its comprehension therefore elevates the soul above the accidentalities and insecurities that rule the world of everyday experience and opinion, it fosters a spiritual attitude emancipated from the power of tyche, from the surrender to what simply happens to us. Precisely for this reason [classical] philosophia is not some body of knowledge to be learned, but a praxis, the highest form of meaningful and happy, salutary life, *bios theoretikos*. In this respect, as to its ultimate end ... classical Greek philosophy is closer to the great religions of salvation than to modern science.³²

Our point here is that classical philosophy after Plato, as Foucault rightly recalls in his later lectures, is a form of what Foucault calls 'spirituality' in the lectures of 1981-82: namely, a series of regulated practices combining personal *askesis* and the education or ennobling of *eros*.³³ But as such, it is not only closer to the salvific religions than to modern science. It is also *much closer to these religions than it is to specifically political action*, either in anything like the senses we moderns would recognize, or – explicitly in texts like *Nicomachean Ethics X* – in terms of the ancient understanding of the *bios politikos* as that way of life whose highest good is the 'immortality' of fame or honor.³⁴ The elementary 'myth' of philosophy, we should recall in this connection, is Plato's famous cave *eikon* at the start of *Politeia VII*. Yet, firstly: this Platonic *eikon* sets out in no uncertain terms the difference or opposition between philosophy and the life of 'the many' in the *polis* or cave (see anon). The 'rough ascent' of the philosopher turns his soul away from the shifting and beguiling images cast on the wall, towards the true light of the Ideas. And when the philosophical *peregrini*³⁵ returns to try to bring his truths to the many, he finds himself not only disoriented amidst the 'unnatural' half-light of the cave. Like the historical Socrates, he is the object of the ridicule of his fellow citizens. As Plato concludes, 'if they could lay their hands on such a man ... they would surely kill him'.³⁶ Secondly: as Hannah Arendt has emphasized in *The Human Condition*, the *periagoge* or 'turn-around' of the soul of the philosopher towards the truth within the cave *eikon* hence mimics a much more radical *periagoge* which the framing of Plato's myth itself undertakes, in terms of Greek history and understanding:

Whoever reads the cave allegory in Plato's Republic in the light of Greek history will soon be aware that the *periagoge*, the turning about that Plato demands of the philosopher, actually amounts to a reversal of the Homeric world order. Not life after death as in Homeric Hades, but ordinary life on earth is located in a 'cave', an underworld ... and the senseless ghostlike motions ascribed by Homer to the lifeless existence of the soul after death in Hades is now ascribed to the senseless change of them who do not leave the cave of human existence to behold the eternal ideas visible in the sky.³⁷

The very distance between the *bios politikos* or political truth-telling and the *bios theoretikos* or philosophical truth-telling which Foucault's account calls to mind can be isolated precisely, by the following contrast. Arguably Pericles' most famous saying in the funeral oration as reported by Thucydides (and one of the paradigm instances of democratic *parrhesia* analyzed by Foucault³⁸ is Pericles' proud claim that the greatness of Athens comes from the public-spiritedness of its citizens, such that 'we do not say that a man who takes no interest in politics is a man who minds his own

business; we say that he has no business here at all'.³⁹ By contrast, as Leo Strauss and his students have emphasized, Socrates' proposition that justice consists in minding one's own affairs is arguably the only definition of *dikaisune* that is in no way qualified in Plato's *Republic*.⁴⁰



Now: it is surely no surprise to anyone in the contemporary world (and particularly in contemporary Australia, on which more anon) to claim that there is a sharp difference between philosophy, and truth-telling more widely, and politics. Politicians today can probably only envy lawyers their bad reputation when it comes to speaking the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, 'so help me God'. This much of the Platonic or Isocratic story about democratic politicians as rhetoricians or flatterers (*kolakes*) has survived and made it safely back into the public realm, as we might say. Indeed, it almost forms one of those horizontal opinions that go *without saying* today. As Arendt begins the essay 'Truth and Politics': 'no one has ever doubted that truth and politics are on rather bad terms with each other.' Even the position of modern political idealism as paradigmatically expressed in early Marx's aspiration to realize philosophy through collective praxis only gains its radical purchase from the overwhelming historical (or 'pre-historical') weight against which it must, like Sisyphus, insistently struggle.⁴¹ Whether in the early modern doctrines of Machiavellianism or *raison d'état*⁴², or later conceptions of *Realpolitik*, lying and 'being prudent with the truth' have always been regarded as essential tools in the politician's kitbag.⁴³ Every political regime has, and doubtless will continue to keep, custodianship of 'official secrets' in order to carry out what Locke called its 'federative' powers, or what we would after September 2001 call 'homeland security'.⁴⁴ Technical considerations concerning executive efficiency (people could recall here, for example, Hobbes' rationalization of his preference that leviathan be a monarchy;⁴⁵ counsels concerning the alleged malignity and/or 'inventiveness' of the enemy or of human nature itself (as in Strauss or Schmitt);⁴⁶ and the types of considerations Isocrates already adduced against the publication of threatening truths (see above) stand as the timeless and ever-repeated justifications for closed executive government by small numbers.⁴⁷ That Machiavelli's *Prince* simply made manifest such *arcana imperii* to a public audience for the first time is one reason why this book has continued to so lastingly 'scandalize' its readers, including those who hold or aspire to positions of absolute power.⁴⁸

From the other side—the side not of political considerations but of philosophical and religious reflection *after* Plato—the prospect looks scarcely brighter for any lasting 'reconciliation' of political life and truthfulness or *parrhesia*. It is indeed a striking fact, as Arendt notices, that:

Except for Zoroastrianism, none of the major religions included lying as such, as distinguished from 'bearing false witness', in their catalogues of grave sins.⁴⁸

In the Western tradition, truthfulness is neither one of the four cardinal virtues of the ancients,⁴⁹ nor one of the theological virtues appended to these by Aquinas in the Christian period.⁵⁰ Looking back on the tradition of Western thought in *Beyond Good and Evil*, one feature Nietzsche claims to espy is a singular lack of honesty amidst its leading spokesmen.⁵¹ Arendt is hence right when she observes that it is only in the age of modern science, which is also the age of Puritanism, that lies became a serious moral preoccupation. People should perhaps not forget the Pietist heritage of that strictest modern philosophic defender of truthfulness at all costs, the author of 'On the Supposed Right to

Lie Because of Philanthropic Concerns'.⁵² As Agnes Heller details in her book on Renaissance Man, one of the striking *singularities* of the birth of the modern age is the *unprecedented* centrality that questions surrounding truthfulness, hypocrisy, and dissemblance assume in Bacon, Shakespeare, and the new 'knowledge[s] of men'.⁵³

To take up a different aspect of the issue: a survey of the history of political philosophy with a specific eye to the defense or promotion of political *parrhesia* can only unearth similarly slim pickings. J.S. Mill, in the nineteenth century, is almost the first philosophical advocate of freedom or expression in public life on the grounds of the greater truthfulness it might afford to society as a whole.⁵⁴ Kant's earlier appeal for an open public sphere in which his challenge to *sapere aude!*⁵⁵ might bear political fruit is as limited as the strictly limited nature of this 'public sphere' itself (roughly, the learned journals of educated men – although at the time this was revolutionary enough): a point which is brought home by Kant's qualification in the heart of 'What is Enlightenment?' that citizens should 'think what you want, *but obey*' when it comes to their vocational lives.⁵⁶ Although Spinoza is often cited 'as a [philosophical] champion of free thought and speech', his grounds are not in the first instance distinctly political. Just as the *Theologico-Political Tractatus* has as its first aim the safeguarding of philosophy from political persecution, Spinoza's reasons rest instead on his classical-philosophic faith in the infallibility and inalienability of the human capacity to reason, so that 'it is best to grant what cannot be abolished' in any case.⁵⁷ Locke's famous plea for religious toleration (a letter which is written in the first instance from the position of a believer),⁵⁸ can again not be abstracted from the central liberal distinction between public and private which it helped to institute. Religious beliefs and expression should be tolerated, Locke advocates, if and only if they are from this point onwards to remain *restricted to the private realm*, distinct from the political business or affairs of the state.⁵⁹ Finally, even Epicurus' splendid jibe at the Platonists, that their political sponsorship of noble *mythoi* for the many means they are '*dionysiokalakes*'—both tyrant-flatterers and *actors*⁶⁰ is not carried out in the name of a new, more truthful philosophy of politics.⁶¹ It is carried out in the cause of freeing the philosophers from the 'prison' of political affairs altogether.⁶²



Surveying the historical and philosophical record, we might then be tempted to concur with Arendt, when she comments that:

the suspicion arises that it may be in the nature of the political realm to deny or pervert truth of every kind, as though men were unable to come to terms with its unyielding, blatant, unpersuasive stubbornness.⁶³

Or at least, borrowing a term from Averroes and the medievals, people might wonder whether the repeatedly 'missed encounter' between politics and philosophy does not bespeak the resilience of the old doctrine of the *two truths*: one for the *consensus gentium et philosophorum*, and one for or of the many. As Jack Nicholson's formidable Colonel Jessop bawls out to the idealistic young lawyer in *A Few Good Men* (a film whose action, incidentally, takes place at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba): 'The truth? You want the truth? You can't *handle* the truth!'

Probably the last thing we need from philosophers if we are to confront such a seemingly fundamental question as the conflict between truth-telling and politics, is the type of prophetic re-narrating of the history of ideas that either promises us historical redemption from the opposition[s] (Hegel), or consigns us to the tawdry jouissance of being able to say 'I told you so, and anyway this is hardly fundamental'⁶³ as the ship of long-standing liberties and international order goes under. Here, I would rather contend, the type of phenomenological approach favored by Arendt⁶⁴, one which insists on the need to make distinctions *at the level of* political phenomena, rather than seeking out the *grounds* for such distinctions in a 'more primordial' framework⁶⁵, is indispensable. However different the post-Heideggerian attempts to 'think the (essence of the) political' (as, most recently, in Agamben's works) are from the Platonic philosophic Ideas,⁶⁶ both these philosophical approaches end by imposing on the political realm truths that arise from *outside* of this realm:

One can understand that the philosopher, in his isolation, yields to the temptation to use his truth as a standard to be imposed upon human affairs; that is, to equate the transcendence inherent in philosophical truth with the altogether different kind of 'transcendence' by which yardsticks and other standards of measurement are separated from the multitude of objects they are to measure, and one can equally well understand that the multitude will resist this standard, since it is actually derived from a sphere that is foreign to the realm of human affairs and whose connection with it can be justified only by a confusion.⁶⁷

So: let us proceed instead from out of the types of cases and questions that will animate the concerned contemporary citizen, when s/he asks about the relation between politics and the truth. And if this move alone is enough to dissatisfy today's professed or unconscious Platonists, so be it. A litany of issues come to mind: from the consistent attempts of the US government to thwart independent inquiries into intelligence failures before 11 September 2001 to their consistent recourse to the threat of further terrorist attacks to justify increased unaccountability, the violation or by-passing of international law, the unlimited extension of American military jurisdiction without American Law, the more and more open justification of extra-judicial torture and executive surveillance of the citizen population, the suspension of habeus corpus and 'extraordinary rendition'; across the coalition of the willing, the oft-repeated claims in 2002-'03 about Saddam Hussein's arsenal of WMD that turned out to have been so well concealed as not to have existed at all; in Australia, questions concerning the events or non-events surrounding the 'children overboard' affair, the covering up of certain actions and oversights of the Department of Immigration, or about what the government knew when about AWB(the Australian Wheat Board)'s continuing transactions with Saddam Hussein at the same time as he was being presented to the public as a clear and present danger to Australian homeland security, a supplier to Al Qaida, and an incarnation of Evil.

Two things, I want to say, present themselves to us about these cases which will structure my discussion in what follows. The first thing that presents itself about all these cases is that what they turn on is a question of fact: that is, of historical or empirical truth. Secondly, however outraged it is possible to become at the handling of these and other issues (Australian readers will remember the 'Howard Lies!' and 'truth overboard!' nostrums of political opposition before the 2004 election, for instance), it is not clear that in these cases what is at stake is simply deception. Let me deal with these points in turn.

First: the question of the relation between truth and politics presents itself to the citizen, as against the philosopher, as a question concerning specifically factual truths about the passing political matters of the day. The issue is whether some things that were said by politicians and advocates to have occurred or to have been the case in fact were not, and whether some things which have been publicly denied were truly so. Now: as Arendt once more points out, one reason for the lack of philosophical comment concerning truth-telling in politics (as above) is surely that this very type of truth – that of historical fact – has from the beginning of Western philosophy not rated very highly on the scale of types of things human beings can come to know. Although there has been much discussion about the influence of Leo Strauss' esoteric brand of Platonism on the second Bush regime, for instance, it needs to be noted that Plato's defense of the noble *pseudos* in the Republic is not the same type of thing as a defense of lying – although Plato does in passing prudentially advocate the need for guardians to lie to madmen and enemies. *Pseudos* in Greek can mean 'fiction' as much as 'lie'. And in the case of the 'myth of the metals' which is under discussion at this point of the *Politeia*⁶⁷—as in Plato's other 'likely stories' that generally close the dialogues, after the philosophical dialectic has run its course⁶⁸—what is at stake is indeed closer to a framing mythos than a set of factual claims about historical events. Equally, when Plato distinguishes philosophical truth from the affairs of the many, what the truth in question here is opposed to is not deceit or lying. It is *doxa* (opinion), illusion, and the ignorance of the citizens of the cave, or—more famously—the poetry of those who create the shadowy image these citizens see written on the wall.⁷⁰ Plato's paradigmatic opponents as he strives to set up the *bios theoretikos* as *summum bonum* are not liars (except perhaps liars to themselves).⁷¹ They are the sophists, the rhetoricians, and those who might be called today the artistic 'elites' of democratic Athens:

Where [Plato] distinguishes between error and lie – that is, between 'involuntary and voluntary *pseudos*'—he is, characteristically, much harsher on people 'wallowing in swinish ignorance' than on liars.⁷²

The philosophical tradition after Plato has for its part very largely accepted Aristotle's renowned claim in the *Poetics* that even poetry is to be considered higher than history, since it is closer to dealing with the unchanging idealities proper to philosophical reflection. In Aristotle's *Ethics* and elsewhere,⁷² a paradigmatic set of oppositions are established in Greek philosophical thought between those faculties that deal with changeable things, whose completing instance is the *phronesis* or 'canniness' of the statesman;⁷³ and those that deal with invariant or necessary things which are the proper concern of the philosophers: *episteme*, *nous*, *dianoia* and *sophia*.⁷⁴ Even much of modern philosophy after Hegel, who for the first time did take questions concerning historical events philosophically, in many ways does not overturn this hierarchy. For Hegel's thought descended to history, as Arendt is right to note, only in order to philosophically raise it up, by espying beneath its apparently haphazard appearances a transcendent species of logic or necessity, that of the dialectic.

The second thing that presents itself about the list of cases in which the question of politics and truth has recently arisen, I claimed above, is that they are all not simple cases of deception. What did I mean? And: how – if at all – can this square with the first observation, that political truth-telling is above all a question of the facts of the matters? Well: consider first the case of the children overboard affair.⁷⁵ Mr Howard does not any longer deny that the claims that he made in his 2001 election campaign were false. The children pictured in the infamous photographs were only 'overboard' because the whole vessel had already gone under. What the Prime Minister does insist very strongly on is that,

when he made these claims, he was acting upon misinformation, or that he did not have sufficient information to put the images in their true context. But to lie about a matter is different from being ignorant about it, or being in error. This then is not a simple case of lying. As far as we know – or at least insofar as we trust the Prime Minister (and see below, for this will become the issue) – it is a case of a false conjecture, judgment or speculation, motivated by whatever political wish. A similar thing seems to have been in play concerning Mrs Howard, Blair and Bush’s repeated insistence that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction, the *casus bellum* for the ongoing occupation of Iraq. Here again it is not possible to say that this was a simple lie. The claims about the existence of the weapons were again more like false conjectures – or perhaps we might say, in Platonesque: *doxai* or ‘illusions’ based in ‘swinish ignorance’. We might contest the prudence and motives for politically acting on these uncertain premises (see below), but none of these considerations make the *casus bellum* a simple deceit. Finally: consider the types of claims that have been made to justify the ongoing legal changes in the ‘war on terror’ across the coalition of the willing, suspending many of the civil liberties of terrorist suspects and (so in principle) of us all. These claims assert that Australia (for example) could be the object of a terrorist strike. As you can then see, these claims represent a different case, although again they are not lies. Once more, it is instead more accurate to say that one of the essential preconditions for the truth-lie opposition even being in question has not been met by these political claims. The proposition is conjectural in an even stricter sense than the first two cases. Lies, like truthful denotative statements, must address things that are alleged to be the case in the present or in the past. But here we have a statement that claims to say something almost prophetic,⁷⁶ in the sense that it aims at what may or may not be the case in the future.

With these technical points in place, I want to bring together the two observations concerning the (un)truthfulness of our contemporary political leaders.



What demarcates factual truths from the rational, scientific, transcendental or mathematical truths dear to the philosophers, as Arendt stresses, is that these truths have no immanent necessity about them.⁷⁷ They concern acts, events, or states of affairs in the world that are only *contingently* the case, which means they could just as well have been otherwise, or not been the case at all. From a philosophical perspective, that is, the brute ‘that-ness’ or ‘just-being-the-case’ of historical occurrences means that their type of truth is the least substantial form of truth of all. The ‘actuality’ of factual reality, Arendt notes, can rather be said to be hemmed in on all sides by more or less unlimited set of potentialities or ‘possible worlds’. Like T.S. Eliot’s paths we never took in *The Four Quartets*, she means, ‘nothing could ever happen if reality did not kill, by definition, all the other potentialities inherent in any given situation’. To be, factually, is *not to be* a whole series of other possibilities we might previously have imagined or (in cases where we have been disappointed) have striven ardently to effectuate. For Arendt, one corollary of these observations is that the ‘mysterious capability of ours’ to envisage possibilities ahead of or in opposition to what is the case is characteristically not simply celebrated. She agrees with Sartre that it *is* at the basis of our freedom and capacity to *act* in order to change things.⁷⁸ Yet the same human ability to imagine things otherwise than they are, she notes, is at the same time the precondition of lying and deceit: that capability, as she puts it, ‘to say ‘the sun is shining’ when it is raining cats and dogs’, and a potentially ‘boundless’ number of other things besides.⁷⁹ Indeed, Arendt argues that since the type of factual truths mostly in play in the political realm are ‘no more self-evident than opinions’, almost all the cards are stacked in favor of

the politician who takes upon himself the responsibility to be loose with the truth.⁸⁰ Arendt writes:

I mentioned earlier the contingent character of facts, which could have been otherwise, and which therefore possess by themselves no trace of self-evidence or plausibility for the human mind. By contrast, the liar is free to fashion his 'facts' to fit the profit or pleasure, or even the mere expectations, of his audience, the chances are that he will be more persuasive than the truth-teller. Indeed, he will usually have plausibility on his side ... It is not only rational truth that, in the Hegelian phrase, stands common sense on its head; reality quite frequently offends the soundness of common sense reasoning no less than it offends profit or pleasure.⁸¹

In both 'Truth and Politics' and her reflections on the Pentagon Papers (in the paper 'Lying and Politics'), Arendt makes a further striking claim concerning lying, *parrhesia* and politics. Whether a true statement of a fact—say: 'Saddam was a tyrant'—only acquires specifically ideological or political valence when it is placed within certain interpretive contexts, Arendt contends, lying by itself is already a species of praxis, so that 'while... the truth-teller, whether he tells rational or factual truth, most emphatically is not ... the liar is a man of action'.⁸² Whereas speaking a truth may not in all cases be an act aimed to change the conduct of one's addressees, Arendt's thought seems to be, to lie is to actively engender a false opinion in one's audience (or to effectively alter the public record), for reasons you keep to yourself or your friends. There is a second register to this claim, though, that can be brought out by noting a striking feature of her contention in *Origins of Totalitarianism*. Whereas the defining axis to which Arendt recurs in order to specify the nature of democracy, oligarchy, monarchy and even tyrannies remains, classically, that of the relations between ruler[s] and ruled,⁸³ Arendt argues that the unprecedented nature of totalitarian organization *can only be understood in terms of the distance of totalitarian leaders from factual reality*.⁸⁴ Like the empty centre of an onion, Arendt rejoins in 'What is Authority?'⁸⁵ the 'central' figures in these regimes were insulated from 'the reality of the nontotalitarian world'.⁸⁶ They were so insulated not only by their parties, the 'popular front' movements (and the armies who paid the existential price for their leaders' expansionist ambitions), or finally their professedly 'scientific' ideologies. What makes the organized lying of the later modern period so historically unprecedented, Arendt argues, was firstly the sheer scale of the deceptions. Secondly, and notably enough, there is the troubling fact that – as against the Platonic case and traditional statescraft – the addressee of these lies and fictions was no longer the external enemy but the regimes' own citizens.⁸⁷ Yet, thirdly and most strikingly, Arendt stresses how aware the totalitarians in power were of the exigency that, since lies and conjectures make claims about that sphere of things that can potentially be changed by concerted action, one way for them to remain as 'good as their word' was for them to act, *après coup*, in order to *bring into being the states of affairs their lies and provocations had envisaged*. Just as dreams for Freud re-present optatives ('I wish that it were so') in assertoric form ('it is so'), so the elite Bolsheviks for instance knew that when Stalin pronounced that Moscow has the only subway in the world:

... the real meaning of this statement is that all subways [apart from that in Moscow] should be destroyed, and they are not unduly surprised when they discover a subway in Paris.⁸⁸

In this case, this stubborn or inconvenient truth just means that they still had work to do.⁸⁹

The most unsettling thing about Arendt's account of these totalitarian excesses in deceit and self-deceit for a reader in the times of the US's Iraq gambit, though, is just how closely they mirror her analysis in *Crisis of the Republic* of the 1967 Pentagon Papers concerning the US's campaign in Vietnam. What these papers reveal is that this earlier undeclared war was conducted principally by 'problem solvers' located in Washington, in increasing disregard for intelligence coming from people 'on the ground'. As things continued to turn sour, the Pentagon papers show, these 'problem solvers' came to direct their analytic and intellectual acumen to the strategic goal of simply 'avoiding humiliating defeat', rather than achieving any conceivable victory.⁹⁰ Indeed, as Arendt stresses, after 1964, the principal 'theatre' of operational concern for the planners of the Vietnam campaign (see anon) became that of 'public relations'. However remarkable it can seem given the US's status as the world's greatest superpower, she notes, its documented aim in Vietnam became to withdraw from its war without losing face in the eyes of the world, just as it is more and more becoming in the case of Iraq.⁹¹ In the 'defactualized world where political goals were set and military decisions made,'⁹² Arendt writes, the US administration's task became not simply to 'flatter' or soften the harsh realities in Vietnam by way of a sequence of lies about particular things or events. The aim became 'to offer a full-fledged substitute' for these realities to the American public, and to the people of the world. As Arendt puts it, citing some strikingly contemporary-sounding phrases and documents:

The goal was now the image itself, as is manifest in the very language of the problem-solvers, with their 'scenarios' and 'audiences', borrowed from the theatre ... Image-making as global policy—not world conquest, but victory in the battle 'to win the people's minds' [sic.]—[this] is indeed something new in the huge arsenal of human follies recorded in history.⁹³

Read in today's conjuncture, then, Arendt's essay on 'Lying and Politics' does at least serve to give some context and precedent to one feature of the contemporary 'Bush II' regime that critics and 'insiders' agree upon, which otherwise might seem wholly 'new' in this ever-growing arsenal: namely, the present Republican regime's remarkably cavalier approach to truth-telling in politics. To cite a senior White House aide, who explained the regime's position on this issue to *New York Times Magazine* journalist Ron Suskind in words that invoke nothing more closely than Arendt's *Origins of Totalitarianism*:

The aide said that guys like me [Suskind viz. journalists] were 'in what we call the reality-based community,' which he defined as people who 'believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality.' I nodded and murmured something about enlightenment principles and empiricism. He cut me off. 'That's not the way the world really works anymore,' he continued. 'We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you're studying that reality—judiciously, as you will—we'll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that's how things will sort out. We're history's actors ... and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do.'⁹⁴



Like many of the political thinkers to have fled the total states of the twentieth century, Hannah Arendt's analysis of the conduct of politics in the liberal-democratic states, and the prospects for truthfulness in their politics, is markedly sober. In an age of unprecedented technologies for the (re)production and circulation of images, the danger that politics might increasingly approximate the business of the 'hidden persuaders' in the marketing and public relations businesses is clear and present. The civic privatism encouraged by modern liberalism's particular form of the public-private division, she argued, can compliment deeper philosophical and cultural trends which conduce to what she elsewhere terms modern 'world alienation'.⁹⁵ What makes Arendt's reflections on the relations between truth-telling and politics so telling for us today can be put by saying that her work, in effect, puts in place a *new account of the older doctrine of the two truths*. Although her consistent phenomenological emphasis in 'Lying and Politics' and elsewhere is on the *fragility* of the type of becoming, factual truth distinct to the realm of political action, that is, she absolutely does *not* follow most philosophers into the opinion that this fragility licenses 'attempts to find theoretical foundations and practical ways for an escape from politics altogether,'⁹⁶ or its limiting to the closed courts of tyrants and guardians.⁹⁷ Arendt's conception of 'two truths', if we can use this old term in a new way, is not equivalent to the medieval doctrine that there is one truth concerning unchanging things for the few, and one concerning these same things for the many. Her claim is rather that, alongside the realm of all such theoretical truths about unchanging being, there is a specific order of truth proper to the realm of human action. But this order of truth is located ineluctably within the 'dirty' realm and business of the 'becoming' or passing of time, 'between past and future', as she titles one of her works – and hence between what is/has become unchangeable (because historically the case) and the open horizon of possibilities opened up by the human capacity for action and for deceit. For Arendt, philosophical reflection is something that, beginning in the concern for the self of the ancient philosopher,⁹⁸ remains a *privilege* whose minimal preconditions are both privacy and leisure. By contrast, Arendt's account of the truth distinctive to the political realm concurs with those philosophers of science who stress the ineluctable inter-subjectivity of epistemological claims concerning the factual world:

In other words, factual truth is no more self-evident than opinion, and this may be among the reasons that opinion-holders find it relatively easy to discredit factual truth as just another opinion. Factual evidence ... *is established through testimony by eyewitnesses*—notoriously unreliable—and by records, documents, and monuments, all of which can be suspected of forgeries.⁹⁹

As her essay on 'Civil Disobedience' elaborates, then, Arendt's defense of a *sui generis* and distinctly political level of truth accordingly leads her to the valorization of a distinctly political virtue: that of being worthy of trust, or of being as good as one's public word, roles and pledged responsibilities. In a passage that again might remind readers of one of Nietzsche's famous formulations, Arendt writes (with emphasis hers):

the only obligation I as a citizen have a right to assume is the right to make and to keep promises. Promises are the uniquely human way of ordering the future, making it predictable and reliable to the extent that this is humanly possible ... since the predictability of the future can never be absolute.¹⁰⁰

I commented above that, if we take the word of our leaders on trust, it is not true to say that in the children overboard, Iraq WMD, and ‘possible terrorist strike’ claims are simple instances of lies. But given my reasoning here, I want to conclude by stating, forthrightly, that this fact should in *no way* diminish our critical and political doubts about these political claims, thinking and speaking *as citizens*. By drawing on Arendt’s conception of the truth proper to the political realm, I want to argue that, much more troubling than the simple deceits or secrecy of politicians, is the increasing encroachment into the political realm today of claims—some the basis for the most grave actions (including going to war, revoking citizens’ legal protections ...)—which collapse or simply fall outside the sphere of what can be publicly assessed as truthful or mendacious. Factual truth is to political action as rational truth is to philosophical reflection, Arendt claims schematically in ‘Politics and Truth’. Just as philosophy must ail if the possibility of rational truth is foreclosed, so political action can only devolve into something else—principally forms of *techné* and/or violence—when the claims upon which it is based become by their nature ‘above and beyond’ public scrutiny. So I suspect Arendt would counsel us to be hesitant in principle about political action based on conjectures whose factual basis at the time is impossible to establish or refute, especially in times when we have come to find out (repeatedly) that past such claims were untrue to the facts. Arendt would, in my opinion (and readers can consult here Arendt’s account of the central role of a culture of secrecy within totalitarianism,¹⁰⁰ be even more gravely concerned about a ‘war’ conducted against an ‘enemy’ whose advertised danger is exactly that they are not ‘clear and present’. The conspiratorial invisibility of today’s terrorist, we should underscore, means exactly that it is not and cannot be given to ‘we the people’ to know whether these terrorists are present at all, and so whether their nefarious, violent intentions are not to be found just beneath the smile and protestations of good faith of our fellow citizens.¹⁰¹ Since the capacity to lie, as we saw, is given alongside the capacity for human action, so Arendt stresses in her striking critique of the Jacobin terrorists that one can only ever eliminate all suspicions concerning the hearts and minds of others by effacing the public-political realm altogether.¹⁰² Equally: just as the founding virtue of Arendt’s political citizen is the capacity to make and to keep promises, so the consistent ‘transcendence’ by contemporary leaders of the founding ‘category of truth vs. falsehood’ against which this political capacity can be measured, and which supports our shared ‘sense of direction and reality’¹⁰³, can only have the deleterious effect of ‘transforming facts and events back into the potentiality out of which they have originally appeared’ and promoting a culture of all-pervasive cynicism towards political or public life.

So: a final word to close, and to return us to classical *parrhesia*, with which these reflections ‘for the times’ began. In his final lectures, Foucault argued that *parrhesia* ‘can no longer occur in our modern epistemological framework’. The reason is that the Cartesian conception of philosophy consecrates the final divorce of episteme from practices of ethical self-formation.¹⁰⁴ After the epistemic shift initiated by Descartes, in principle anyone could now discover the scientific truth given only the very limited ‘*askesis*’ involved in following correct and repeatable procedures. Correlatively, the enunciation of scientific truth is in the modern conception an ideally wholly anonymous business. Just as anyone can (re-)discover the truth of scientific hypotheses, Foucault means, so the very meaning of modern scientific objectivity is that the enunciator’s public or symbolic identity is not on the line in this speech-act – outside of some very particular, unusual cases (the case of Galileo, for example). By contrast, in classical *parrhesia*, Foucault comments:

I tell the truth; I tell you the truth. And what authenticates the fact that I tell you the truth is that as the subject of my conduct I am effectively and totally identical with the subject of the enunciation that I am when I tell you that which I tell you. I believe that we are here at the heart of *parrhêsia*.¹⁰⁵

Especially since this paper is written in a country which inherits much from the Westminster system of government so admired by Montesquieu, Burke and others, perhaps it will not be drawing too long a bow to suggest that it is such a model of truth-telling that citizens in a democratic age should expect from our politicians and holders of public office. As elected representatives, they surely do have the right to ask the trust of citizens – including, in exceptional instances, our trust in the wisdom of their acting on grounds that are either conjectural, or cannot be disclosed. Yet, as the bearers of public authority, the flipside of this is that we the citizens must have the right to hold them accountable for discharging the accepted responsibilities of their offices, and for the actions or omissions of those in their charge. This would mean, for one example, that the increasingly recurrent excuse of today's Australian ministers (and the Prime Minister) that they cannot reasonably be held to account for all the actions of those in their charge – since they 'personally' clearly do not see all the documents that their departments receive etc. – is completely unacceptable. What is at stake, from an Arendtian perspective, is exactly not whatever we might surmise concerning their good (or bad) intentions to be. These are their own private affairs, and the types of things that can only be surmised by way of the public record of their actions in any case. What is in question here, given Arendt's analyses, is first of all the good faith entrusted in them as ministers, which means: the bearers of public offices which will outlast their particular occupations of them. If democratic politicians can and will continue to have recourse, when it suits them, to the true Machiavellian axiom that 'the responsibilities of government are sufficiently different from those of private individuals to make governmental virtue a rather different matter than that of [private] individuals,'¹⁰⁶ that is, we as citizens should demand that they also stake their name and political positions against their public undertakings.

The stake, in the longer term, is the vitality and the viability of the democratic 'way of life' we are being told by these same leaders that they are in the business of defending.

Matthew Sharpe is an editor of *Parrhesia*. He teaches political philosophy and psychoanalytic studies at Deakin University's School of International and Political Studies. He is the author of *Slavoj Žižek: A Little Piece of the Real* (Ashgate, 2004), co-editor of *Traversing The Fantasy* (Ashgate, 2005) and of articles in political and critical theory in various venues, including Australian journals *Arena*, *Borderlands*, *Australian Feminist Law Journal* and *Critical Horizons* and international outlets such as *Philosophy Today*, *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, *CTheory*, *Law and Critique* and *Political Theory*. Dr Sharpe also teaches in the Melbourne School of Continental Philosophy. His current research is on new forms of political conservatism, its political and ideological positions, roots and progenitors.

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- 1 This paper was originally given at a conference on 'Truth and Truthfulness' in Sydney, Australia, in October 2006.
- 2 James Miller, 'Truth-Telling in Foucault's 'Le gouvernement de soi et des autres' and Persius 1: The Subject, Rhetoric, and Power', *Parrhesia* 1 (July 2006), 26.
- 3 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*. London: Oxford, 1998, section 1.
- 4 See Michel Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History' in P. Rabinow, ed., *The Foucault Reader*. New York: Pantheon, 1984. 76-100.
- 5 See Michel Foucault. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage, 1977; and Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge. Selected Interviews and Other Writings*. Ed. Colin Gordon. Hefordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1980.
- 6 Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality Volume III: The Care of the Self*. London: Penguin, 1990; and Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality Volume II: The Use of Pleasure*. London: Penguin, 1992.
- 7 Viz. at the very least, as many of Foucault's remarks in interview attest, these questions were simply not the direct concern of his own research.
- 8 See for example Thomas McCarthy, 'The Critique of Impure Reason: Foucault and the Frankfurt School,' *Political Theory* 18. 437-469.
- 9 Thomas Flynn, 'Foucault's Lectures on *Parrhesia*' 1998, 116
- 10 Michel Foucault, *Fearless Speech* Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2001, 9. A note on parameters of the opposition: as in the later work generally, Foucault here is concerned for the subject of truth in his position of enunciation, versus the subject as the object of true discourses which hail from elsewhere. In Foucault's thoughts concerning *parrhesia*, the locus of truth is thus (as we will see) not the locus or loci of power, but agents who are at least relatively disempowered.
- 11 Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, 13.
- 12 The French translators render Foucault's *franc à parler* (his rendering of the Greek *parrhesia*) as 'fearless speech'.
- 13 Miller, 'Truth-Telling ...', 29.
- 14 Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, 9.
- 15 Flynn, 'Foucault's Lectures on *Parrhesia*', 104.
- 16 See esp. Plato's *Gorgias*
- 17 Miller, 'Truth-Telling', 45-46.
- 18 Plato, *Apology*, 29b-e.
- 19 Miller, 'Truth-Telling', 32-36.
- 20 Miller, 'Truth-Telling', 33-34.
- 21 Miller, 'Truth-Telling', 35.
- 22 Miller, 'Truth-Telling', 36.
- 23 Cf. Miller, 'Truth-Telling', 35.
- 24 Cf. Miller 'Truth-telling': 43; Leo Strauss, *The City and Man*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964; Hannah Arendt, 'What is Authority?' in *Between Past and Future* London: Penguin, 1968: 108, 129-130.
- 25 Miller, 'Truth-Telling', 39-42.
- 26 Plato, *Gorgias*, 474a-b
- 27 Plato, 7th Letter, 324b-326b.
- 28 Jacques Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*. Trans. Collins. New York: Verso, 1997; Heinrich Meier, *Leo Strauss and the Theologico-Political Problem*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006..
- 29 Miller, 'Truth-Telling', 14-15.
- 30 Miller, 'Truth-Telling', 40-41.
- 31 Michel Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject. Lectures at the College de France 1981-1982*. Ed. Frederic Gros. Trans. by Graham Burchell. USA: Picador, 2001, 170-171.
- 32 Gyorgy Markus, 'After the 'System': Philosophy in the Age of the Sciences (Extract)' full text available at www-site <<http://www.autodidactproject.org/other/markus1.html>>. Compare Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 12: '... there is clearly something a bit disturbing for us in this principle of care of the self. Indeed, going through the texts, the different forms of philosophy and the different forms of exercises and philosophical

or spiritual practices, we see the principle of care of the self expressed in a variety of phrases like ‘caring for oneself’, ‘taking care of one’s self’, ‘withdrawing into oneself’, ‘retiring into the self’, ‘finding one’s pleasure in oneself’, ‘seeking no other delight but in the self’, ‘remaining in the company of oneself’, ‘being the friend of oneself’, ‘being in oneself as in a fortress’, ‘looking after’ or ‘devoting oneself to oneself’, ‘respecting oneself’, etc.’

33 Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p.17: ‘If we call this ‘philosophy’, then I think we could call spirituality’ the search, practice, and experience through which the subject carries out the necessary transformations on himself in order to have access to the truth. We will call ‘spirituality’ then the set of these researches, practices, and experiences, which may be purifications, ascetic exercises, renunciations, conversions of looking, modifications of existence etc. which are, not for knowledge but for the subject, for the subject’s very being, the price to be paid for access to the truth.’

34 Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*. Encyclopaedia Britannica Great Books of the Western World: London. Book I, v; X, vi-vii

35 I want to consciously borrow a term here from Augustine’s *City of Man* to indicate the continuity emphasized by Markus between ancient philosophy and salvific religiosity.

36 Cf. Hannah Arendt, ‘Truth and Politics’ in *The Portable Hannah Arendt*. Ed. by Peter Baehr. London: Penguin, 2000, 547. This and all parenthetical references are taken from Hannah Arendt, ‘Truth and Politics’ in *The Portable Hannah Arendt*

37 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* Chicago: University of Chicago, 1989, 202.

38 Cf. Miller, ‘Truth-Telling’, 35.

39 Dana Villa, *Socratic Citizenship*. Chicago. University of Chicago Press, 2001, 254.

40 Cf. Catherine Zuckert, *Postmodern Platos*. Chicago: University of Chicago, .1996, 151-152.

41 Differently, post-Heideggerian thinkers write as though there were no difference between politics and philosophy, or as if a philosophical uncovering of the horizontal forestructures of succeeding historical epochs might be sufficient for a philosophical reflection upon politics or a political reflection on philosophy. In this way, they too wholly elide the dimension of political action, however vehemently (and violently) it might return in ruminations on ‘decisions’, ‘events’, ‘Acts’. Theirs is a position which of course must then default – since human beings truly are *zoon politikon* whether we like it or not – to the more traditionally Platonic position of considering intra-mundane politics as an ‘irrational’ business above or beneath the philosopher’s concern. See note 30 below on Alain Badiou, but readers could equally think of Agamben’s framing contempt for the contemporary democratic world, figured as ‘the society of the spectacle’, or how Žižek’s (and others’) texts operate with an invisible injunction to transgress or transcend the existing world-system without feeling the need to stipulate why.

42 Michel Foucault, ‘Omnes et Singulatim’ in *Power: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984: Volume Three*. Translated by Robert Hurley. The New Press, 2000, 298-325.

43 I borrow this metaphor from one of the present American regime’s lawyers, who described how from the afternoon of 11 September 2001 onwards, they began to search for as many ‘tools’ as possible to add to the President’s ‘kitbag’. The rest of the world has since seen the results of this technical labor.

44 John Locke (1689) ‘A Letter Concerning Toleration’ full text available at www-site <<http://www.constitution.org/jl/tolerati.htm>> accessed September 2006.

45 Thomas Hobbes (1660), *Leviathan*. Full text available at www-site <<http://oregonstate.edu/instruct/phl302/texts/hobbes/leviathan-d.html#CHAPTERXIX>> accessed September 2006, ch. XIX.

46 Cf. Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953, 153-162; Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*. Translation and notes by George Schwab. Rutgers, 1976.

47 Cf. Mark Rozell, *Executive Privilege, Presidential Power, Secrecy, and Accountability*. Second Edition, Revised. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002.

48 cf. Irving Kristol, ‘Machiavelli and the Profanation of Politics’ in *Neoconservatism. The Autobiography of an Idea*. New York: Free Press 1996; Hugh Urban, ‘Prevarication and the Art Of Ruling’ at www-site <http://www.esoteric.msu.edu/VolumeVII/Secrecy.htm>. 2004.

49 This needs at least this qualification: Aristotle does raise honesty about oneself as a virtue, between excessive humility and boastfulness. In this light, he in fact criticizes Socrates as a dissembler. But this commitment must

be qualified by Aristotle's remarks about the way a *megalopsychos* ought to address his inferiors, if he must address them at all.

50 I owe this point to Associate Professor Ian Weeks in private conversations.

51 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, #6, cf. #227; Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness. An Essay in Genealogy*. USA: Princeton University Press, 2002: ch.1. In order to understand what Nietzsche means, we would need to qualify this against fragments such as *Beyond Good and Evil* #40. I cannot address the issue of esotericism here. Suffice it to say that this technique of writing has to be understood in terms of the conception of philosophy as 'spirituality' conceived above, esoteric writing being the closest approximation to the work of philosophical paideia.

52 Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals: With on a Supposed Right to Lie Because of Philanthropic Concerns*. Translated by James W. Ellington. Cambridge: Hackett, 1993.

53 Agnes Heller, *Renaissance Man*. Trans. by Richard E. Allen. London, Henley and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978, 208-231.

54 Cf. Henry Magid, 'John Stuart Mill' in *History of Political Philosophy*. 3rd edition. edited by Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 796-799.

55 This is usually translated into English as: 'Have the courage to use your own reason!'

56 Immanuel Kant (1784), 'An Answer to the Question 'What is Enlightenment?'' full text available at www-site <<http://philosophy.eserver.org/kant/what-is-enlightenment.txt>> accessed September 2006; cf. Slavoj Zizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. London: Verso, 1989, ch. 2.

57 See Stanley Rosen, 'Benedict Spinoza', in *History of Political Philosophy*. 3rd edition. edited by Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987, 456-475. One might consider here Hobbes' ambivalence here concerning the freedom of conscience, which becomes a point in dispute between Strauss and Schmitt. See Leo Strauss, 'Comments of Begriff Der Politischen', in Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*.

58 John Locke (1689) 'A Letter Concerning Toleration' full text available at www-site <<http://www.constitution.org/jl/tolerati.htm>> accessed September 2006.

59 As Forrester has noted, the Lutherans' advocacy of religious toleration in the reformation period was also notably qualified once the reformers had themselves attained to political power. (Forrester 1987)

60 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, section 7.

61 James H. Nichols, *Epicurean Political Philosophy. The De Rerum Natura of Lucretius*. Ithaca and London: University of Chicago Press, 1976, 14; Victor Gourevitch, 'The Problem of Natural Right and the Fundamental Alternatives in Natural Right and History' in *The Crisis of Liberal Democracy*. ed. Kenneth L. Deutsch and Walter Soffer. Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1988, 30-47, 41.

62 'From the point of view of Platonism, the 'Epicurean' denial of natural right can, then, equally accurately be described as the failure of 'Epicureanism' to provide for its responsible vulgarization'. (Gourevitch 1988: 41).

63 Or in the fuller (in)variant: '... it all began with the Greeks!' As Emerson once observed against such positions: the sun still shines today.

64 The author would add Foucault or Neumann to this list.

65 NB: This is not to say that this approach is not, on its own terms, legitimate, or that it does not produce provocative insights and alignments. It is the nature of these insights, and what they are insights into, that is in question.

66 Plato figures the Ideas as the truth, in the light of the good or sun. Heidegger's predominant metaphor is that of *grund* or *abgrund*, alongside that of the 'clearing' or, emphasizing the temporal component, the *e-vent* (*ereignis*).

67 Plato, *Republic*, 414c and ff.

68 This is point which Arendt notes at Arendt 1968: 129.

69 Cf. Matthew Sharpe, 'Leo Strauss: The Sphinx's Secret? (Or How We Learnt to Stop Worrying and To Believe Through the *Hoi Poloi*'. In *Arena Journal*. New Series, NO. 27, 2006, 149-150.

70 Cf. Plato, *Republic*, 377bff., 586ff.

71 Cf. Plato, *Gorgias*, 482b-c.

72 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*. Book VI, esp. v-ix.

73 Usually translated as 'prudence', but this seems to me deceptive in at least two ways: one, phronesis involves a species a knowledge (to act with phronesis one must 'know what is going on'); two, phronesis is a political virtue for Aristotle, whether 'prudence' in English has a more private connotation: as with someone who is 'prudent with their money'. It also can invoke 'prudishness', which is not close to the Greek sense at all.

74 cf. Plato, *Republic*. Book. VI 509d-513e.

75 For the non-Australian reader: in the month preceding the 2001 general election, the Australian Navy intersected a boat full of asylum seekers in Australian waters. Photos of children in the water were taken, since – as the Australian public was subsequently made aware by eye witness testimony – the overloaded boat had sunk. The government claimed that the photos showed children who had been thrown into the water by the asylum seekers. The PM then made the claim that 'we do not want people who could do that' in Australia one key pillar in his election campaign. In order to appreciate the context, it is worth mentioning that this election was fought in the period immediately following the 11 September attacks in the US, in which national security became decisive. Cf. David Marr and Marian Wilkinson, *Dark Victory* (Allen & Unwin: Crows Nest NSW: 2003).

76 Flynn, 'Foucault's Lectures', 104.

77 Hannah Arendt, 'Lying and Politics: Reflections on the Pentagon Papers', in *Crises of the Republic* London: Penguin, 1971, 11.

78 Arendt, 'Lying and Politics', 11.

79 Programmatically: to say that the human being is a free animal, or a being whose freedom means that her/his existence precedes her/his essence, is also to say that we are the 'lying animals' or 'beings-that-can-lie', after Arendt. We will return to this sobering thought below.

80 cf. Arendt, 'Lying and Politics', 11-12. Again: for the non-Australian reader, this has become a further slogan of the political opposition in Australia (used particularly by the newly appointed leader Mr Rudd) concerning the truthfulness of the Howard government.

81 Arendt, 'Lying and Politics', 11. To clarify, all political action belongs to the sphere of praxis as the voluntary attempt to change elements of the world that are potentially within our control, although – of course – people can and do act in the private sphere all the time.

82 Which she also take up in the opening section of the essay 'What is Authority?' In *Between Past and Future* London: Penguin, 1968. 91-142.

83 The distinguishing marks, as in Aristotle or Plato, being: how many people rule, whether the rule is one restricted by law, and whether the government is carried out with a view to the private good of the ruler(s) or is aimed at securing the common good.

84 Hannah Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism* USA: Harvest Books, 1976, 364-388.

85 Hannah Arendt, 'What is Authority?'. In *Between Past and Future* London: Penguin, 1968. 93-96.

86 Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 367.

87 Arendt, 'Lying and Politics', 13.

88 Arendt, *Origins*, 385.

89 See Arendt, 'Lying and Politics', 17. In line with what follows, it is worth observing that this is a trick that advertisers are very aware of. There are ads for television shows which for example tout their program as 'what everyone is talking about'. While this may not be true when the advertisement is placed, if the ad works to put this idea in enough peoples' heads, it may well become true.

90 Arendt, 'Lying and Politics', 18.

91 Arendt, 'Lying and Politics', 19-20.

92 Arendt, 'Lying and Politics', 22.

93 Arendt, 'Lying and Politics', 20.

94 Hans Blumenthal, *How Bush Rules: Chronicles of a Radical Regime*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006, 15-16.

95 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 1-6, 248-257.

96 For a recent, if idiosyncratic, Platonist account of politics as – insofar as it is of any philosophical interest at all (see anon) – a 'truth-procedure' tied to rupturous 'events' which he approximates to paradigm-shifting theoretical discoveries, see Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics* (in particular the first article where Arendt's defense of

the difference between philosophy and the polis sees her lambasted as ‘a philosophical Pharisee’). In a very classical manner, the flipside of Badiou’s Platonism is an expressed contempt for intra-mundane politics:

The vast majority of empirical political orientations have nothing to do with truth. We know this. They organise a repulsive mixture of power and opinions. The subjectivity that animates them is that of the tribe and the lobby, of electoral nihilism and the blind confrontation of communities. Philosophy has nothing to say about such politics, for philosophy thinks thought alone, whereas these orientations present themselves explicitly as unthinking, or as non-thought. (Badiou, *Infinite Thought*, 70)

Arendt’s and others’ refusal to conflate philosophical and political truth, Badiou argues, amounts to a defense of:

special rights for falsity and for lying The laziness of those who are sheltered from every norm and see their errors or their lies protected by right. (Badiou, *Metapolitics* 15)

The voluntary or involuntary pseudos that this assessment represents (although Badiou is right that Arendt agrees that the possibility of lying is coterminous with man’s being as *zoon politikon* (as above) – will become clear in what follows.

97 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 221.

98 As paradigmatically exemplified by Socrates’ claim in *Gorgias* that he would rather be ‘out of harmony’ with the entire world than with his own soul (Plato, *Gorgias*, 482b-c)

99 Arendt, ‘Civil Disobedience’. In *Crises of the Republic* London: Penguin, 1971, 75; see Arendt *Human Condition*, 243-247.

100 Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 377-388.

101 Cf. Arendt, ‘Truth and Politics’, 564: ‘The traditional political lie, so prominent in the history of diplomacy and statecraft, used to concern either true secrets ... or intentions, which anyhow do not possess the same degree of reliability as accomplished facts: like everything that goes on merely inside ourselves, intentions are only potentialities ...’

102 Compare Arendt’s remarks in *On Revolution* on the Jacobin’s frenzy to ascertain the inner ‘virtue’ of citizens, a frenzy whose result was the collapse of the revolution into the terror, since (at this is Arendt’s claim) one after all cannot – short of torture – ever ascertain the intentions of an other except through judgment of their actions. (Arendt, *On Revolution*, 93-105).

103 Although we cannot follow up on this here, it is worth noting that, although it is informatively true to say that some of Arendt’s thought is conservative, her conservatism is closer to the Montesquienian-Burkean type than to any other. In particular, she hence closes ‘Truth and Politics’ by noting the importance of the independence of the judiciary (Arendt 2000: 571) and the university (Arendt 2000: 571) as sites wherein truth and truth-telling can and should be prized and sheltered. Earlier in the essay, and in ‘Lying and Politics’, Arendt also defends the need for an independent press:

These two remarks illustrate how truth looks in the purely political perspective, from the viewpoint of power, and question is whether power could and should be checked not only by a constitution, a bill of rights, and by a multiplicity of powers, or in the system of checks and balances, in which, in Montesquieu’s words, ‘le pouvoir arête le pouvoir’, ... but by something else ... (Arendt 2000: 555)

See here also Arendt’s remarks concerning the first Amendment in Arendt 1971b.

A QUESTION OF TWO TRUTHS?

104 Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 14.

105 Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 381.

106 Bernard Williams, 'Truth Politics and Self-Deception'. In *In the Beginning Was the Deed USA*: Princeton University Press, 2005, 157.