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ARTICLE

Untruth as the New Democratic Ethos: Reading Michel Foucault's Interpretation of Diogenes of Sinope's True Life in the Time of Post-Truth Politics

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ABSTRACT. Since 2016, the rise of post-truth politics has created a situation of democratic discontent in the west. While many scholars tend to regard post-truth politics as a threat to democratic order, I would like to propose that what we have been witnessing in this form of politics has been the transformation of the democratic ethos. By turning to Michel Foucault's lecture on the true life of Diogenes of Sinope, delivered at College De France in 1984, I ascertain the framework for demonstrating how we can approach a new shape of democratic ethos in our era of post-truth politics. I argue that in Diogenes's true life, Foucault saw the concrete life, which could liberate each individual from the constraints of their conventional lives by emphasizing the material conditions of all human bodies. Diogenes's life could then be a form of self-emancipation since it not only showed how untrue the conventional life was but also released each individual from any conventions estranged from them. Relying on this point, I propose the notion of untruth as the new ground of our democratic lives. Though post-truth politics destroys the objective form of truth, the untruth—as its main element—can play a leading role in grounding our democratic ethos to the extent that it asserts our capability of self-emancipation.

Keywords: post-truth politics, truth-telling, Michel Foucault, Diogenes of Sinope, philosophical life, democratic ethos

INTRODUCTION

> *Post-truth* is an adjective defined as 'relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.[1]

In 2016, Oxford University Press announced their chosen word of the year: post-truth. The main reason they chose 'post-truth' was due to how frequently it was used in professional commentaries during the Brexit referendum campaign in the United Kingdom and presidential elections in the United States, in which the destruction of the true/false distinction proliferated. According to *Oxford Language*s, "Rather than simply referring to the time after a specified situation or event – as in *post-war* or *post-match* – the prefix in *post-truth* has a meaning more like "belonging to a time in which the specified concept has become unimportant or irrelevant"".[2] Apart from describing the new age, then, post-truth also underlines a defect in our political order: the loss of objective truth as the condition of democratic breakdown.

Some scholars choose to frame this defect through the lens of epistemological politics.[3] Meanwhile, many scholars focus on the crisis of trust, which has a strong connection with the rise of emotion, instead of reason, in politics.[4] Nevertheless, as some critics have charged, the devaluation of trust in public discussion casts a critical light on Michel Foucault due to the popularity of his idea, especially his genealogical approach to assaulting the truth-claim of modern science that emboldens those skeptical of the status of objective truth as a pillar of democratic co-existence.[5] Because of Foucault's ability to expose the historicity lying within any truth-claims, these criticisms imply that he cannot avoid being held responsible for the democratic crisis of post-truth politics.

However, this line of argument is not without its challenges. Torben Dyrberg, for example, has pointed out that Foucault's thought could envision a new democratic setting, especially Foucault's late comment on the practice of democratic truth-telling in Athenian politics during 500 BC.[6] This position is shared by Sergei Prozorov, whose intention is to rescue Foucault from being labeled as the precursor of the contemporary truth denialism. He argues that Foucault's

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[1] "Word of the Year 2016," Languages.oup.com. https://languages.oup.com/word-of-the-year/2016/ (accessed September 2, 2022).

[2] Ibid.

[3] See Steve Fuller, *Post-Truth: Knowledge as a Power Game* (2018); Linsey McGoey, *Unknowers: How Strategic Ignorance Rules the World* (2019); Stuart Sim, *Post-Truth, Scepticism and Power* (2019)

[4] Such as Jason Harsin, Jayson, "Regimes of Posttruth, Postpolitics and Attention Economies," *Communication, Culture and Critique* 8:2 (2019), 327–333; Ignas Kalpokas, *A Political Theory of Post-Truth* (2019); Benjamin Tallis, "Living in post-truth," *New Perspectives* 24:1 (2016), 7–18; Russell Muirhead and Nancy Rosenblum, *A Lot of People Are Saying: The New Conspiracism and the Assault on Democracy* (2019).

[5] See Kurt Andersen, "How America lost its mind", theatlantic.com. https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/09/how-america-lost-its-mind/534231/ (accessed September 20, 2022); Casey Williams, "Has Trump stolen philosophy's critical tools?", nytimes.com https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/17/opinion/has-trump-stolen-philosophys-critical-tools.html (accessed September 12).

[6] Torben Dyrberg, "Foucault on Parrhesia: The Autonomy of Politic and Democracy," *Political Theory* 44:2 (2016), 265-288.

reading of the Athenian practice of democratic truth-telling not only affirms the existence of truth but also exhibits how this existence is inseparable from the life of a democratic regime.[7] These arguments impute democratic features to Foucault's thinking. Yet, relying so heavily on Foucault's reading of Athenian democratic truth-telling is problematic for the reason that such a reading was succeeded by his discussion of how this democratic truth-telling was in decline and rendered politically impractical.

This becomes clear if we pay attention to Foucault's lecture on 2 March 1983, where he continued his genealogical account of truth-telling. The main content of that lecture was the modification of truth-telling into the technic of flattery, giving way to the rise of the new political technique at that time, namely, rhetoric.[8] As Foucault commented, with the advent of rhetoric, Athenian politics was turned into a matter of persuasion that was incapable of distinguishing between what is true and what is false. This is why, after ascertaining features of the practice of truth-telling in democratic Athens, Foucault shifted his account of truth-telling from the democratic practice to the psychological exercise for those who had to govern the city.[9] Seen from this perspective, Foucault's description of an Athenian democratic truth-telling is just a prologue to his main story: the character of philosophical truth-telling that helps its performer to govern themselves properly.

To be clear, I do still see a contribution to democracy in Foucault's thought, notably in his discussion of the practice of truth-telling. However, the form of truth-telling that Foucault emphasizes is not the democratic practice of Athenian citizens. I would like to propose that in spite of the political exercise of Democratic Athens, the main point of Foucault's investigation of the practice of truth-telling belongs to the philosophical form of living. Thus, the form of truth-telling that plays a crucial role in Foucault's thought, as the basis on which we can derive his contribution to the democratic regime, is the form of truth-telling associated with philosophical life, whose culminated form is expressed through the true life of Diogenes of Sinope, also known as Diogenes the Cynic.

Bearing this in mind, this article is divided into three parts. The first part deals with the concept of truth-telling and its relationship with the philosophical way of life, which Foucault spent his last three years shedding light on. I argue that Foucault's concern in philosophical truth-telling derives from the theme of care of the self, whose aim is to demonstrate a proper philosophical practice that can challenge the operation of power. The second part concerns Foucault's reading of the true life of Diogenes of Sinope, which Foucault considers a radical form that not only propels the practice of truth-telling into a culminated shape but also demonstrates implications of truth-telling for democratic politics. After drawing out the democratic features from Foucault's reading of Diogenes's true life, I apply this feature, in the third and last part, as a framework to grasp the positive character of post–truth politics. My argument is that while the loss of objective truth in post-truth politics might be viewed as a condition of the breakdown of democratic order, this loss can also signify the arrival of untruth as

[7] Sergei Prozorov, "Why is there truth: Foucault in the age of post-truth politics," *Constellations* 26:1 (2019), 27-28.
[8] Michel Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others: Lectures at the College de France 1982-1983* (2010), 301-304.
[9] Ibid, 305-306.

the new ground on which the new democratic ethos, asserting our capability of self-emancipation, will emerge.

TRUTH-TELLING, CARE OF THE SELF, AND FOUCAULT'S PHILOSOPHICAL WAY OF LIFE

Originally, Foucault touched on truth-telling in his Collège de France lecture in March 1982, before scrutinizing it in a much fuller manner in his last two lectures courses in 1983 and 1984. At first glance, the word 'truth-telling' seems to reflect a strange sense in Foucault's translation since the original word is 'parrhesia', which is equivalent to 'free speech' or 'free-spokenness'(*franc-parler*). Thus, 'parrhesia' and 'truth-telling', from the etymological point of view, are not automatically identical to each other. However, this translation does not come from any defect on the part of Foucault's skill; instead, it indicates his intent to attach a subtle philosophical meaning to the word.

According to Foucault's 1983 Collège de France lecture, parrhesia is a practice embedded within the life of a person who would direct others to constitute their relations to their own selves.[10] In this respect, parrhesia should be seen as a practice capable of constituting the two layers of a relationship: the relationship among persons and the internal relationship with oneself. Parrhesia is, then, a practice belonging to a group of techniques through which one can create a substantial relationship to oneself. But how can it be possible to constitute these kinds of relationships without presupposing some certain form of truth? Is it possible to realize a relationship with oneself without thinking about the role of truth? At this point, it is important to highlight that, apart from being a practice constituting the relationship in which one could realize one's own self, parrhesia is also described by Foucault as something that could not come into being unless the message it imparts is considered true.[11] *Truth* is therefore the condition under which parrhesia is made possible. If parrhesia is a practice that can facilitate the development of one's relationship to self, the truth determining a condition of this relationship will only emerge in the form of truth-telling. In this way, truth-telling does not primarily depend on the notion of truth, since truth-telling denotes a certain kind of practice that enables truth to ground the way one constitutes oneself.

Focusing on practices, as the core of truth-telling, allows us to think about the relation between the practice of telling and the truth coming out from what is being told. To be sure, this relation is nothing new in Foucault's thought. In his 1969 book *Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault pointed out that what constituted someone as a subject of truth-telling lay in certain forms of relations which alienated the truth-teller from his own will. Using an illustration from the case of medical science in the nineteenth century, Foucault argued that beneath the status of a doctor who was eligible to pronounce a medical statement presupposing the truth of a human's organs, there was the relation between certain skills (the specialized knowledge), the site of institution (hospital), and the function of 'doctor', which various people could perform in response to the symptoms of the patient.[12] In this case, truth did not spring from the

[10] Ibid, 43.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972), 50-55

teller himself but from the rules operating throughout political society at some definite points in time. This is conveyed in Foucault's 1970 lecture in which he stated that, "It is always possible that one might speak the truth in the space of wild exteriority, but one is "in the true" only by obeying the rules of discursive "policing" which one has to reactivate in each of one's discourse." [13]

This brings us to the Nietzschean influence in Foucault's approach of truth. What mostly concerned Foucault up to 1970 was the Nietzschean manner in treating the truth like a product of the will to power.[14] This might explain why some scholars approach truth-telling, in Foucault's late thoughts, as the completion of the Nietzschean philosophical project, namely, the use of power to disclose that beneath the modern metaphysically scientific regime of truth is the discursive product of the will to power.[15] But, is it necessary to consider Foucault's Nietzschean position, in favor of the will to power, as the disclaimer of truth? In my view, although it is obvious that Foucault is influenced by Nietzsche's philosophical direction, such influence need not lead him to nullify truth in his philosophical manner. Danielle Lorenzini pinpoints a compromise: Foucault follows Nietzsche's philosophical project, but this does not aim at questioning the value of truth as much as question our unconditional acceptance of it.[16] This means that in spite of being discarded from Foucault's project, truth still plays a crucial role in his philosophical manner. Yet, if truth has a place in Foucault's project, it has nothing to do with an epistemological issue, as it functions to effect people to change their lives.[17] In other words, as guided by Nietzsche's project to produce 'the new truth', Foucault makes use of truth in terms of an effect that urges people to transform themselves in reference to it; truth, for Foucault, is not something regarded as truth beforehand, since it is a product actualized in the way its subjects change their lives in their concreteness. Subjectivity, as Foucault said, "is not conceived of on the basis of a prior and universal theory of the subject".[18] Instead, subjectivity should be "conceived as that which is constituted and transformed in its relationship to its own truth".[19]

Using this understanding as background, Foucault's main concern in proposing the notion of truth-telling could be nothing other than what he called 'care of the self', since the notion captures an operation of truth playing as a ground of practices that allow practitioners to constitute their own selves. This comes as no surprise given that Foucault first described the notion of truth-telling (*parrhesia*) in the second hour of the March 1982 Collège de France lecture and identified it to be the principle that commanded a way of speaking as part of a spiritual

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[13] Michel Foucault, "The Order of Discourse," in *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, ed. Robert Young (1981), 61.

[14] Michel Foucault, *Lectures on the Will to Truth: Lectures at the College de France 1970-1971 and Oedipal Knowledge* (2013), 197-198.

[15] Such as Thomas Flynn, "Foucault as Parrhesiast: His Last Course at the College de France")1984(, in *The Final Foucault*, ed. James Bernauer and David Rasmussen (1988); Paul Veyn, "The Final Foucault and his Ethics," in *Foucault and His Interlocutors*, ed. Arnold Davidson (1997)

[16] Danielle Lorenzini, "Genealogy as a Practice of Truth: Nietzsche, Foucault, Fanon," in *Practice of Truth in Philosophy: Historical and Comparative Perspectives*, eds. Pietro Gori and Lorenzo Serini (2023).

[17] Ibid.

[18] Michel Foucault, *Subjectivity and Truth: Lectures at the College de France 1980-1981* (2017), 12.

[19] Ibid, 12.

exercise (*ascesis*) in the Hellenistic philosophical practices, whose theme was care of the self or how one could realize oneself.[20] This does not sound strange for scholars working on Foucault's late writings. Nancy Luxon, for instance, views Foucault's notion of truth-telling as a new manner of subject-formation, offering modern individuals a set of practices to transcend any impasse created by any operation of power.[21] Edward McGushin, in the same fashion, suggests that truth-telling is part of Foucault's mission of searching for the pre-Christian experience of subjectivity as a device to displace the modern form of subject.[22] Hence, it could be summarized that truth-telling is a way of acting considered not only as the way one could *act* but also as a way one could *be* through an act that lets one's truth be spoken. In short, truth-telling is nothing but a form of modality that permits the acquisition of a quality of experience which makes the modification of the self possible.

Conceiving truth-telling as an act of self-modification is fruitful in capturing the insight of Foucault's recovery of the ancient imperative of care of the self. As McGushin explains, Foucault's notion of the self has no relationship to the idea situating the self as one's fundamental essence, such as its substance or form.[23] Instead, Foucault's notion of the self is something ambivalent that disperses among different states of experience, which is then only unified through some form of action that triggers the process of re-subjectivation. The self, according to Foucault, has never been a permanent state of existence waiting to be discovered and cared for; on the contrary, it is an object that will not come into being unless some required form of action is activated. The self, then, is the product—rather than the cause—of action. This point is driven home by a thorough examination of the original word, translated by Foucault as 'care'.

Delivered in his 1982 lecture at the Collège de France, Foucault's use of the term 'care', as part of the precept 'care of the self', was equivalent to the Greek term '*epimeleia*', which could etymologically be referred to as physical action or a certain series of exercises.[24] "Epimeleia also always designates a number of actions exercised on the self by the self, action by which one takes responsibility for oneself and by which one changes, purifies, transforms, and transfigures oneself", he explained.[25] It is therefore understandable why Foucault chose this word to lay down his framework for reading ancient Greek philosophical corpuses; it allowed him to grasp those corpuses in a full manner. That is to say, Foucault can grasp these ancient philosophical texts both as the theoretical edification of cosmology and as a practical guide for concretizing a form of subjectivity in consonant with such edification. He elaborated:

> With this theme of the care of the self, we have then, if you like, an early philosophical formulation, appearing clearly in the fifth century B.C. of a notion which permeates all Greek, Hellenistic, and Roman philosophy, as well as Christian

[20] Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of The Subject: Lectures at The College De France, 1981-1982* (2005), 365-368.
[21] Nancy Luxon, "Ethics and Subjectivity: Practices of Self-Governance in the Late Lectures of Michel Foucault," *Political Theory* 36:3 (2008), 377-402.
[22] Edward McGushin, *Foucault's Askesis: An Introduction to the Philosophical Life* (2007), 11-15.
[23] Ibid, 32.
[24] Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of The Subject*, 82.
[25] Ibid, 11.

> spirituality, up to the fourth and fifth century A.D. In short, with this notion of *epimeleia heautou* we have a body of work defining a way of being, a standpoint, forms of reflection, and practices which make it an extremely important phenomenon not just in the history of representations, notions, or theories, but in the history of subjectivity itself or, if you like, in the history of practices of subjectivity.[26]

Furthermore, by ascertaining the notion of care of the self, we can see how this framework helps to culminate his critical aim. Foucault proposed, in his lecture during a summer trip to Japan in 1978, that philosophy should not pursue the old task of founding the laws or forms of order. Rather, it should perform the task of disrupting the form of power operating inconspicuously within political society.[27] Philosophy, as he depicted, was no longer a search for eternal truth, for the reason that it must complete the political mission of showing how one could counteract power:

> Perhaps philosophy might still play a role on the side of counter-power, on the condition that it no longer consists of laying down the law but of facing the power; philosophy stops to think of itself as prophecy, pedagogy, or legislation, and thus perform the task of analyzing, elucidating, highlighting, and intensifying the struggles taking place around power, that is, the strategies of adversaries within the relation of power including the employment of tactics, and the sources of resistance, which leads philosophy to stops posing the question of power in term of good and evil, but posing it in terms of existence.[28]

Taking this point into account, not only is philosophy the way one should actualize in one's concrete life; it also realizes the way to counter the operation of power. This is the reason why, in my proposal, we should focus on Foucault's account of philosophical truth-telling. If

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[26] Ibid. Here, it is worth addressing that Foucault seems to have followed the specific thread of interpreting the ancient philosophical corpuses which was flourishing in France at that time. As Arnold Davidson points out in detail, Foucault's interpretation of ancient philosophical texts is indebted to many French historians of ancient philosophy, one of which is Pierre Hadot, whose pioneering work in approaching ancient Greek and Roman literature as a manual for spiritual exercise gave Foucault a lens for viewing ancient philosophy (see Arnold Davidson,"Spiritual Exercise and Ancient Philosophy: An Introduction to Pierre Hadot," *Critical Inquiry* 16:3 (1990), 475-482) Yet, this does not mean that Foucault's approach to ancient philosophical texts goes hand in hand with Hadot's treatment of ancient treatises. In fact, Hadot criticizes Foucault's reading of ancient philosophical texts to the extent that he views Foucault's discussion of the self as anachronistic, see Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercise from Socrates to Foucault* (1995), 206-208. For the response to Hadot's critique, see McGushin, *Foucault's Askesis*, 104.

[27] Michel Foucault, "La philosophie analytique de la politique" [1978], in *Dits et Ecrits, 1954- 1988 III : 1976-1979,* eds. Daniel Defert, Francois Ewald and Jacques Lagrange (1994), 540.

[28] Ibid. The original version of the passage is: "Peut-etre la philosophie peut-elle jouer encore un role du cote du contre-pouvoir, a condition que ce role ne consiste plus a faire valoir, en face du pouvoir, la loi meme de la philosophie, a condition que la philosophie cesse da se penser comme prophetie, a condition que la philosophie cesse da se penser ou comme pédagogie, ou comme législation, et qu'elle se donne pour tâche d'analyser, d'élucider, de redre visible, et donc d'intensifier les luttes qui se déroulent autour du pouvoir, les stratégies des adversaires a l'intérieur des rapports du pouvoir, les tactiques utilisées, les foyyers de resistence, a condition en somme que la philosophie ces de poser la question du pouvoir en terme de bien ou de mal, mais en terme d'existence."

Foucault's philosophical task aims to disrupt the operation of power, and if care of the self is the framework he proposes to enliven the form of philosophy in our contemporaneity, it is the case that philosophical truth-telling, as the concreted form of philosophical practice framed through care of the self, can be a vehicle that Foucault could drive to arrive at his philosophical task of disrupting power.[29] What we should then emphasize is how his account of philosophical truth-telling could provide a democratic implication that challenges the operation of power, an implication expressed thoroughly in the true life of Diogenes of Sinope, whom Foucault considered in his last year.

DIOGENES'S TRUE LIFE: THE CYNIC'S PHILOSOPHIC LIFE AS A LIFE TRANSFORMING THE WORLD

Before examining how Foucault read—and was inspired by—Diogenes's true life, it is significant to note that he did not start exploring philosophical truth-telling with Diogenes, since his first philosophical hero was Socrates, whom he credited for elevating truth-telling beyond Athenian democratic practice and into philosophical exercise. However, although Foucault considers Socrates as a pioneer in philosophizing the practice of truth-telling, he knows very well that Socratic truth-telling was encroached on by Plato, who—albeit successfully passing on a philosophical practice of truth-telling to the subsequent traditions—betrays the spirit of Socrates's teaching by directing such practice in a metaphysical direction rather than keeping it within the level of the way of life.[30] This might be the reason why Foucault, in his last year, put more weight on the true life of Diogenes of Sinope, who honored the Socratic spirit of truth-telling by showing how truth could be practiced concretely in everyday life. This means that Diogenes of Sinope, according to Foucault, was not only the true heir of Socrates but also performed the way of life that Foucault would have liked to exhibit as a culmination of the philosophical way of life against power.[31]

Foucault marked the starting-point of the true life of Diogenes of Sinope in his March 1984 lecture at Collège de France. Using the story recorded by Diogenes Laertius, the beginning of Diogenes's Cynic philosophy could be traced back to the moment when he came to meet the oracle to ask about the purpose that his life sought to fulfill.[32] Here, it could be said that the

[29] See further in Luxon, "Ethics and Subjectivity"; Stuart Elden, *Foucault's Last Decade* (2016); Flynn, "Foucault as Parrhesiast: His Last Course at the College de France" [1984], in *The Final Foucault*, ed. James Bernauer and David Rasmussen (1988), 102-118.

[30] Michel Foucault, *The Courage of Truth: Lectures at the College de France 1983-1984* (2011),161-166. See also Flynn, "Foucault as Parrhesiast," 111; Simona Forti, "Parrhesia between East and West: Foucault and Dissidence," in *The Government of Life: Foucault, Biopolitics, and Neoliberalism*, ed. Vanessa Lemm and Miguel Vatter (2014), 206.

[31] This does not mean that Foucault is cherishing Diogenes as the one who can provide all solutions to our present problems. Instead, as he once said in an interview in 1975, Foucault considered his work as the model that everyone was free to use and adjust according to the specific situation in which they were involved. It hence means that the logics he ascertained from his reading of Diogenes are far from the universal framework, wholly intact without any need for modifications, but they do offer some aspects, inspirations, or insights that anyone can use in their own ways, see Michel Foucault, "From Torture to Cellblock," in *Foucault Live (Interviews, 1961-1984)*, ed. Sylvere Lotringer (1996), 149.

[32] Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, 226.

source guiding Diogenes's philosophic life is nothing more than a pronouncement of the oracle. Of course, Socrates's philosophical life began with the same pronouncement. However, although both Diogenes and Socrates seem to share the same philosophical motive that focuses on the mode of life, Diogenes does not perform his mode of life in the same philosophical manner as Socrates. While Socrates commenced his philosophical practice by testing the oracle's pronouncement,[33] Diogenes began his philosophical life by following the oracle's words, which advised him to 'change the value of the currency' (parakharattein to nomisma).

At first glance, the advice that Diogenes received from the oracle—to change the value of currency, or money—looks awful, given that, according to the report of Diogenes Laertius, it commanded him confusedly to falsify the value of the coins he had been given by his father, leading him to be punished and exiled from his hometown.[34] Yet, as Foucault discussed, changing the value of the currency also has a positive meaning, with respect to the appropriation of life, in that it could activate the identical relationship between the self and its truth.[35] Changing the value of the currency, in this sense, could mean 'the revaluation of currency', which places care of the self into the discussion. By the words 'the revaluation of currency', Foucault understands 'the modification of life', which "replaces the counterfeit currency of one's own and others' opinions of oneself, with the true currency of self-knowledge".[36] The more one knows oneself, the more one could expel one's fake currency, and the more one could access one's truth. The precept of 'changing the value of currency' is therefore the precept of modifying one's existence, keeping the self in touch with its own truth.

From this premise, it comes as no surprise that Diogenes, according to Foucault, advocates a way of life that confronts a traditional form of value, one that prevents the revelation of truth. His point is understandable, provided that the Greek root of the word 'currency'— 'nomisma' —could be etymologically linked to the word 'nomos', which means 'the rule, custom, or law'.[37] The precept 'change the value of currency' that Diogenes received from the oracle could also be seen as activating a form of behavior that entails a transformation of the traditional way of living. If 'care of the self' is located in the kernel of Diogenes's precept of 'changing the value of currency', this care of the self will take proper demonstrable shape only in a way of life that breaks away from the traditional forms of value.[38]

Here, it becomes apparent why Foucault sees the embodiment of the other life (vie autre) in Diogenes's philosophical practice. Diogenes's philosophical life, as conceived by Foucault, is a life in the form of an otherness that could liberate its performer from the traditional—and untrue—way of life. If one chooses to live according to Diogenes's Cynic way of life, one must relate oneself with one's truth, which at the same time posits one to live in another way than the life with which one used to be familiar. Foucault presented this point as follows:

> What I would like to emphasize now is you can see that the alteration of the currency, the changes of its value, which is constantly associated with Cynicism, no

[33] For the case of Socrates, see Ibid, 84-86.
[34] Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of The Eminent Philosophers* (2018), Book 6, 20-21.
[35] Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, 242.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid, 227.
[38] Ibid, 242.

> doubt means something like: the forms and habit which usually stamp existence and give it its feature must be replaced by the effigy of the principles traditionally accepted by philosophy. But by the very fact of applying these principles to life itself, rather than merely maintaining them in the element of logos, by the fact that they give a form to life, just as the coin's effigy gives a form to the metal on which it is stamped, one thereby reveal other lives, the lives of others, to be no more than counterfeit, coin with no value.…In this respect, Cynicism was not just the insolent, rough, and rudimentary reminder of the question of the philosophic life. it raises a very grave problem, or rather, it seems to me that it gave the theme of philosophical life its cutting edge by raising the following question: for life truly to be the life of truth, must it not be an other life, a life which is radically and paradoxically other? It is radically other because it breaks totally and on every point with the traditional form of existence, with the philosophical existence that philosophers were accustomed to accepting, with their habits and conventions.[39]

Regarding Diogenes's philosophical life as the *other* life, Foucault's main concern is the *shameless* life as the radical form of the true life. As Foucault discusses, the theme of the *true* life was usually treated, by many philosophers before Diogenes, as a life conducted by the principle of non-concealment: what one spoke would be identical to how one spent one's life.[40] Yet, it is important to note that this treatment seems to be based on the basis of the ontology of the soul, leaving the material conditions of life—such as the physical gestures, or the corporeal body—untouched. Situated in this context, the shameless life, or the true life displayed by Diogenes, could be viewed as an otherness of that treatment in the way that it places truth at the most material level, namely, the level of the bodily gestures of those who live it. Diogenes's unconcealed life, as Foucault explained, "is the shaping, the staging of life in its material and everyday reality under the real gaze of others, of everyone else, or at any rate of the greatest possible number of others".[41]

In another sense, by materializing truth through his bodily gestures, Diogenes could present his treatment of true life in a manner that disturbed both the previous philosophical tradition and, especially, the conventional form of value. The latter point is very crucial to make sense of Diogenes's famous—but scandalous—lifestyle, which receives complete expression through the way it problematizes the division between private and public life. As Foucault relays via the report of Diogenes Laertius, Diogenes usually performed some activities traditionally regarded as 'private' in the public domain, such as eating, sleeping, being naked, masturbating, or having sex; there was no home for him, insofar as *home*, for the Greeks at that time, signified a secret place in which one could practice some behaviors privately.[42] In this sense, Diogenes's shameless life was a transparent life or a life that made everything visible; he did not have any privacy or anything that needed to be kept secret. Even when he died, he did so in a public place, like a sleeping beggar who died in a city's gymnasium.[43] This made

[39] Ibid, 245.
[40] Ibid, 251-253.
[41] Ibid, 253.
[42] Ibid, 254-255.
[43] Ibid, 253-254.

Diogenes, in Foucault's eyes, a philosophical hero who employed and amplified an unconcealed life to the point that it was capable of overturning the conventional form of living. It also showed that by exercising this true life, philosophy was unleashed from its previous limitations and then enabled to perform a critical task without being constrained by traditions. Foucault said:

> Under the slogan of the unconcealed life, traditional philosophy basically assumed or renewed the requirement of propriety; it accepts its customs. Applying the principle of non-concealment literally, Cynicism explodes the code of propriety with which this principle remained, implicitly or explicitly, associated…The philosophical life thus dramatized by the Cynics deploys the general theme of non-concealment but frees it from all the conventional principles.[44]

Drawing on this perception, it is important to take into account the role of courage in Diogenes's Cynic philosophical life. If Diogenes's true life is a life of battling against any social conventions, how could this life be performed without courage in the first place? Would it have been possible for Diogenes to turn himself against any social norms were he not courageous? For Foucault, Diogenes's courage is the courage to criticize all forms of traditional values; Diogenes risked his life to scandalize those values in order to lay the ground on which the truth could be revealed.[45] "Cynic courage of truth consists in getting people to condemn, reject, despise, and insult the very manifestation of what they accept, or claim to accept at the level of principles", Foucault clarified.[46]

Emphasizing the Cynic character of Diogenes's philosophical courage here could also reveal the radical hallmark of his account of care of the self. For Foucault, what made Diogenes's care of the self distinctive, and radical, was the way he let his own life be formed by the otherness with which the people had not been familiar. The level on which Diogenes's care of the self mainly played, then, was not the individual level. Instead, the aim of his Cynic care of the self was no less than for the whole of humanity, of which he was a part, whose common reality should not be blurred by a diversity of norms or by traditional values.[47] As Foucault put it: "When taking an interest in others, the Cynic must attend to what in them is a matter of humankind in general".[48] There was no distinction, according to Diogenes, between care of the self and care of the other, for the simple reason that both he and the other belonged to humankind. By changing his life into the other life—a life whose emergence could challenge the traditional forms of values—Diogenes could accomplish his care of the self by presenting the general character of humanity. This pointed to a way by which anyone could consider living a life autonomous from the constraint of social norms. With reference to humankind, Diogenes could care for himself by caring for others, or— to put it in another way—care for the other by caring for his own self.

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[44] Ibid, 255.
[45] Ibid, 233-234.
[46] Ibid, 234.
[47] Ibid, 312-313.
[48] Ibid, 312.

Through an inspection of this radical account of care of the self, the political effect of Diogenes's philosophical life can be discerned. This effect does not merely appear as a transformation of subjectivity, for Diogenes's care of the self does not play at the individual level but rather at the level of all humanity. Politics, for Diogenes, is nothing less than a transformation of the world; a transformation that not only liberates humankind from social conventions but also a world within which people could live their life truly.[49]

Considering Diogenes's politics as a transformation of the world is crucial here because it gives Foucault a device for his critical project against power. At this point, I share the same position with scholars who have found an affinity between Foucault's reading of Diogenes's true life and his philosophical modality of critique.[50] Yet, what I would like to add to this line of argument is the insight of the freedom working underneath the political operation of the Cynic's true life. Indeed, this point manifests readily, provided that the transformation of the world, as an effect of Diogenes's politics, is the result of the freedom that manifests from not getting caught up in the traditional way of life. Diogenes's true life, according to Foucault, offers nothing less than the revelation of what life could be in its independence, or in its fundamental freedom, namely, a life tied to nothing except its true being.[51] This insight of freedom, as perceived by Foucault, should thus be understood as an emancipated life or a life in the process of becoming *other*; a life to which it is impossible to be fixed with some identification of value. In this sense, Diogenes's insight into the world's transformation is a matter of concretizing freedom by revolutionizing not just the way one lives but also the world into which one was thrown.[52]

On this basis, it is not difficult to postulate the democratic vision derived from Foucault's reading of Diogenes's true life. To the extent that this true life entails a transformation of the world, Foucault's account of Diogenes's true life could furnish a democratic ethos as an inclination urging society to transform into a place in which everyone can live their life freely. At this point, we realize that far from being the promulgator of a way to dismantle democracy, Foucault seems to be advocating new ground for a democratic foundation inasmuch as the culmination of his critical project, expressed through his reading of Diogenes's true life, pinpoints the potential of democratizing our political society, that is, the potential of remaking our democratic order more democratically.

UNTRUTH AS THE DEMOCRATIC ETHOS IN OUR POST-TRUTH POLITICS

In the previous sections, I have shown the features of Foucault's late thought, particularly his consideration of the true life of Diogenes of Sinope and how it could point to an emergence of the democratic ethos. In this part, I would like to conclude by demonstrating how this ethos could be applied as a framework for post-truth politics.

According to my discussion in the preceding section, Diogenes's life, in Foucault's reading, is a life that uses its body to manifest truth. This not only promotes an experience of freedom,

[49] Ibid, 302-303.
[50] Such as Flynn, "Foucault as Parrhesiast"; McGushin, *Foucault's Askesis*, 163.
[51] Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, 171.
[52] Ibid, 183.

or self-emancipation, but also triggers a point at which the world-transformation could begin. Here, the main logic lying beneath this way of life is the expression of untruth through the manifestation of truth. When Diogenes actualizes his truth through the bodily gestures of his true life, he can, at the same time, objectively expose the untruth of what many people regard as truth. The more Diogenes manifests his truth, the more the objectivity of that untruth is acknowledged.

This means that although Diogenes wants to transform the world by displaying how true his way of life is, what convinces others to accept his display does not come from the positive content of his truth. In contrast, what is really at work here is a negative performance operating in Diogenes's life and the way that it reveals to others the *untruth* of what they have regarded as truth. Diogenes's project of transforming the world does not commence by imposing the content of his own truth onto others. Rather, his project operates through the proliferation of a negative position toward what is generally regarded as truth; here, the world's transformation does not come from the positive ontology, since what allows it to take place is the negative one. Hence, Foucault remarked: "In fact, we should not think that the Cynic address a handful of individuals in order to convince them that they should lead a different life than the one they are leading…He shows all men that they are leading a life other than the one they should be leading…And thereby it is a whole other world which has to emerge, or at any rate be on the horizon…".[53]

In this respect, we can see how Foucault's reading of Diogenes's true life can be linked to the political movements in the post-truth condition. This link cannot be explained through the objective content of truth. Diogenes's true life starts from the negative stance: towards the untruth of what was regarded as truth. It might therefore be the case that challenges to the objective ground of truth are driven not only by an inclination to destroy that objective truth but also by a desire to position themselves against the untruth. Ironically speaking, the political demonstrations in the world of post-truth might be demonstrations of truth, not because they could attach the positive content of truth to their goals but because they are fighting against the untruth associated with what they are trying to destroy.

Seen from this aspect, post-truth politics should not be perceived as a condition under which the democratic order is dismantled because of the impossibility of holding truth on objective grounds. On the contrary, post-truth politics should be understood as the taking place of a new democratic ethos made possible by the moment when what was once regarded as truth is opened to becoming something untrue. If the objective ground of truth is made impossible in the post-truth condition, it is because of the proliferation of this new democratic ethos playing out as a condition under which each individual can actualize their capability of self-emancipation.

But how could this negativity lead to a political platform for a collective movement? If Diogenes's philosophical life was the life that made the others skeptical about what they have regarded as truth, how could this skeptical experience be oriented to form a collective mode of politics? With respect to these questions, we should not forget that Foucault treats Diogenes's life of exposing untruth through the framework of care of the self, whose aim was not

[53] Ibid, 314-315.

only to actualize freedom in the way each individual spent their life but also to shed light on the vision of equality that inspired the collective platform in which they could build their symmetrical relationship. This latter point will be affirmed if we consider that Diogenes's care of the self, according to Foucault, operates by referring to the idea of humankind, whose common reality permitted him to attest any conventions or traditional values. This means that while Diogenes used his true life to exhibit the untruth of what was formerly regarded as truth, he also promoted the vision of equality, in which the commonness of everyone, as part of humanity, was concretized through the political blueprint that structured their relationship with each other in a symmetrical manner. If the freedom materialized through Foucault's Cynic life of Diogenes is the capability of self-emancipation, this freedom must go hand in hand with equality, as it presupposes the symmetrical relationship in which no one is captured under the power of the other. The more each individual realizes the untruth of what they previously regarded as truth, the more they can emancipate their own lives from conventions, hold up equality as the condition enabling their ideal political setting, and thus actualize their freedom.

This reading aligns Foucault with the anarchist vision of democratic theorists like Mark Devenney. It replaces the conventional framework of politics, where democracy serves as the ruling power, with a focus on democracy as the moment when the ruler's authority is challenged, thereby leading to a more equal transformation of our society.[54] In other words, I am suggesting that the democratic vision that we can draw from Foucault's reading of Diogenes's true life could be something like the process by which equality asserts itself through the moment of countering order rather than the popular form of political government. Certainly, considering Foucault in this anarchic direction needs more explanation, but this is not the aim of this article.[55] What I would like to argue here is how his reading of Diogenes's true life can provide us with a logic of untruth that promotes the vision of democracy. From there, we can affirm how Foucault's treatment of philosophical truth-telling can furnish us with a way for thinking about the ways to disrupt power and thus make our democratic order more democratic.

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[54] Mark Devenney, *Towards an Improper Politics* (2020), 107-115.

[55] For those who consider Foucault in the direction of anarchism, and share the same direction with my reading, see Catherine Malabou, "Cynicism and anarchism in Foucault's last seminars," in *Afterlives: Transcendentals, Universals, Others*, ed. Peter Osborne (2022), 133-145.

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