

**PARRHESIA AND THE QUASI-POLITICAL  
ROLE OF EDUCATORS: AN ARENDTIAN-FOUCAULDIAN  
REFLECTION**

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*This paper argues that the educators' vocation, in the Arendtian sense, is to prepare and cultivate in students the love for the world – amor mundi. Educators are responsible for introducing the world to students through the conservation and preservation of human tradition and the 'realm of the past.' Thus, it requires a practice of truth-telling or parrhesia. However, this parrhesiastic activity is not explicit in Arendt. This paper also invokes Foucault's account of parrhesia to emphasize another main point of this paper, i.e., Arendt's conservationist view of education implies or presupposes the practice of truth-telling. If such an idea is correct, the positioning of education becomes ambiguous. For Arendt, education is located 'in between' the realms of the pre-political and political. However, suppose this implicitness of truth-telling is proven to be correct and affirmed. In such a case, we can say that education and its main motor – educators as intellectuals/scholars have a quasi-political role in society.*

*Keywords: parrhesia (truth-telling), natality, education, quasi-political*

## INTRODUCTION

Education emancipates or enslaves us. The poignant aphorism from Goethe, "the best slave is the one who thinks he is free," somehow describes contemporary education. Education aims to form persons to become rational beings, not vessels of information or to use Chomsky's expression, "filling a vessel with water" (2004, 38). Kant's etiolated but epochal-changing expression *sapere aude* reminds us of self-shackling ourselves if we fail to think on our own and simply blindly follow or obey orders from the perceived authority.

Similarly, Dewey views education as a love for inquiry and life itself. While Nietzsche, in homage to the great Schopenhauer, thinks that education reflects the greatness of men and women. It produced great thinkers who despised humankind because of its laziness, "for it is on account of their laziness that men seem like factory products, things of no consequence and unworthy to be associated with or instructed" (Nietzsche 1997, 127). In this view, education liberates human beings from laziness that produces nothing but conformity. Paulo Freire thinks that education is

transformative. It has an ontological vocation, i.e., to emancipate people from various forms of oppression. An education that suffers from "narration sickness" (Freire 1992, 57) is no education at all. Transformative education and learning do not alienate. For Freire (1992), words are not "emptied of their concreteness...hollow, alienated, and alienating verbosity." Hence, education is both dialogical and praxiological. Learning takes place in a space where students no longer take the role of a passive learner – a receptacle waiting to be filled with information.

Education, therefore, is vital in the formation of both the individual and the society. Moreover, it is transformative such that (mis)education leads to a significant change in the person. Today, it has invested its energies in 'entrepreneurial' activities, laying a vast site for knowledge factories, manufacturing information, skills, and competencies (Bolaños, 2019). Schools become "sites of cultural production" (Aronowitz and Giroux 1997 [1991], 24). Although such a condition is widespread, it does not mean we succumb to it without challenging and resisting such formidable force. If conscious of its role in nation or society-building and human fate, the school must not forget its aims. One of these is its service to truth. Though many philosophers of education and other thinkers disagree with the aims of education, it is safe to say that at least, from the very conception of what it means to learn and educate, the search for truth is one of the core concepts that essentially defines education (Marples 2002; Standish 2003, 221-231). There are various ways of fulfilling this. The practice of truth-telling is one among others. It trains students to cultivate truth-valuing. It is because truth-telling activity provides a space for contestations, interrogations, inquiries, and dialogue. It springs from an inherent human capacity to think and reflect upon one's condition in life and realize that we are plural. The human propensity to inquire and know what is true or not on so many things, may it be the self, knowledge, the world, and the like, is a given fact. Such inquiring practice finds its place in school than in the household.

The school, therefore, is a locus of learning (the truth) grounded on various practices such as truth-telling and close attention to human traditions. As Catherine A. Lugg (2017, 967) explains, "truth-telling is the foundation of any good pedagogy." However, such practices have been shrouded and contaminated by arbitrary goals imposed upon by various external forces that tend to suppress, if not efface or outstrip education of its primary functions. According to Marie Lall in *Education as a Political Tool in Asia* (2009, 1), many views education as "the most logical entry point for the process of change in society" while others see education "as the cure for inequality and poverty" (Robert Samuels 2018, ix). Jeffrey S. Dill and Mary Elliot (2019, 263) characterize modern education as political, that is, "to create citizens that would sustain the ideal of the 'nation.'" However, some essential functions of education must also be emphasized, such as humanizing the world, nurturing human formation through culture or *Bildung* (Kovalainen 2018), emancipating one from various forms of oppression (Freire 1992), and policing (Bingham 2018, 375; Chomsky 2004; cf. Rancière 1991) and to resist acts of totalizing students to mere subjects of educational, technological control (Stiegler 2010). These autochthonous functions of liberal education must be protected and safeguarded in whatever ways possible through truth-telling (Foucault 2001) and conservation of tradition or culture and history (Arendt 1993).

This paper argues that the school as an exemplar space of *parrhesiastic* activity sharpens the role of the educator as a *quasi*-political actor. My argument is based on Hannah Arendt's view of education and Foucault's account of *parrhesia*.<sup>1</sup> Arendt (1993) sees education and its locus as a space 'in-between' the private realm (like labor and work activities) and the political realm (the activity of action). Perhaps, we can say that it is a preparatory space for political activity. To understand her notion of education, we need to closely examine her essay "Crisis in Education" (1993). She explicitly explained there what education is and its role in human affairs. However, what is implicit is a view that educating the young entails a practice of truth-telling or *parrhesia*. I will draw this concept of *parrhesia* from Foucault to show that the implicit presupposition of Arendt's notion of educational praxis affirms what Michael Peters (2003, 219), drawing his view from Foucault, called "parrhesiastical [form of] education." If such is admitted, we can then say that locating education between the pre-political and political spaces becomes suspect. To say that education, and thus educators as *quasi*-political is to consider that education partly shares a political character and no longer remains apolitical. Many consider education political, while others maintain it is essentially non-political (Carr 2003; Aronowitz and Giroux 1997; White 2014). My main aim is not to side with either dimension of education. Rather, based on Arendt's view of education, I want to show that her emphasis on educators as taking a conservationist role towards education presupposes the practice of *parrhesia* (cf. Olssen 1999).<sup>2</sup> Thus, clarifying Arendt's popular view of education and educators' role in human affairs, i.e., by implication, it no longer remains within the ambit of the pre-political realm but moving closer to the political realm. I intend to discuss Arendt and Foucault to show that the latter's views clarify and enrich Arendt's view of education and its educational praxis. In turn, their views help to establish the *quasi*-political role of educators.

One may argue that the pairing may be arbitrary or unwarranted. However, I find both views vital in arguing about the *quasi*-political role of educators. While Arendt considers education as pre-political insofar as for her (1995, 189), the school "represents the world, although it is not yet actually the world." In the *Human Condition* (1985), she distinguishes labor, work, and action as fundamental activities of human beings. Labor and work are done in the private realm, while the action is found in the public realm. Any activity done in the private realm is considered non-political. For Arendt (1993, 185), education "belongs among the most elementary and necessary activities of human society." With this, we may infer that it belongs to the pre-political realm. However, she characterizes the role of educators as implying a role of a political. It can be revealed by suggesting that the educators' activity of 'conserving and preserving the tradition and the 'historical past' is of *parrhesiastic* character. That is why Foucault's account of *parrhesia* is essential here. The importance of arguing for the *quasi*-political role of education/educators is to break the disjunctive belief that education and its educators are either political or pre-political.

To be clear, Arendt and Foucault are not philosophers of education. Their views on it are sparse compared to other issues they have devoted much of their life. However, despite this, their thoughts, regardless of scantiness, attracted many thinkers and philosophers of education. For instance, in the case of Foucault, James Marshall (1996, 137) explains that Foucault "wrote and said a little explicitly on education,"

which "might appear somewhat a daunting task." In Arendt, a significant source of her thoughts on education is a chapter in *Between Past and Future* (1993), while Foucault's thoughts are scattered in some of his works. Perhaps his most explicit discussion on education is in *Discipline and Punish* (1977, 1995). My discussion starts with Foucault's account of *parrhesia*, followed by Arendt's account of education. Following this is a discussion on how education is a space of *parrhesiastic* activity and educators as considered *quasi*-political actors.

## MICHEL FOUCAULT AND *PARRHESIA*

The practice of *parrhesia* is crucial in education on three counts: first, a *parrhesiastic* activity must be endemic to education. It serves as a guiding pillar to practicing authentic liberal and humanistic education. Today there is a gradual retreat from the liberal and humanistic pursuit of education. Such proclivity toward education has been shrouded by the schools' obsession with developing students' technical skills and competencies to highlight what John Marsh in *Class Dismissed* called "skill-based technological change" (2011, 67). Such orientation motivates universities to quantify the quality of education using metrics (Muller 2018, 29).<sup>3</sup> Though these are not wholly unnecessary, overemphasizing them and being obsessed with them is a hazard to valuing and practicing learning. A sinister act of deliberately cultivating in students a universalizing mantra of technical skills enhancement and competencies while intentionally disregarding developing habits of critical thinking and understanding (which are not easily measured by outcomes-based activity) runs contrary to the humanizing spirit of education. The *parrhesiastic* activity resists these antagonistic tendencies. Secondly, the practice of truth-telling fosters a truthful account of the world. Educators who practice *parrhesiastic* exercises have both an ethical and epistemic responsibility. Foucault (2001a) considers truth-telling as a practice of the self-giving form to oneself, which addresses the "question of ethical self-constitution" (Peters 2003). It, therefore, implies that educators have inherent ethical and epistemic responsibility. Thirdly, the emancipative character of truth-telling activity liberates students from thick illusions of idealism and obscurantism. A truth-teller must submit to the conditions necessary for the *parrhesiastic* activity. Like Habermas' (2001) discourse ethics, everyone participating in a discourse needs to remind themselves of the principles of discursive justification of validity claim. Similarly, in his account of the classical notion of *parrhesia*, Foucault identifies similar significant speech traits activity. The discussion below is Foucault's account of Greek *parrhesia* to substantiate these reasons.

The discussion will show how *parrhesia* and its activity, though conceived as a self-formative practice, reveals its political character (Cf. Luxon 2008, 377) as initially conceived by the Greeks. When we relate this to educational activity or practice, we see an instance of the *parrhesiastic* activity. This claim is not without support. For example, M. Francyne Huckaby (2007) posits that educational institutions called "*specific parrhesiastic scholars*" challenge "hegemony in education and its effects on students of color and students with limited economic resources." Maria Tamboukou (2012, 849), similarly, asks the following questions: "what is the role of the academic

when going through 'dark times,' vis-à-vis questions of truth-telling?" It shows that Foucault's account of the Greek *parrhesia*, despite his insistence on its ethical role, cannot be thought of separably from the political.

### Essential Characteristics of Parrhesia

Michel Foucault (2001a) introduces *parrhesia*, or truth-telling, as part of his last lectures. Compared to his early works, Foucault focuses his attention on the Greek tradition of the exercise of *parrhesia* both in the practices of democracy and in the history of western philosophical discourse. Delivered as a lecture both in Berkeley and College de France, he is set to explore another aspect of what he has been long preoccupied with – the issue concerning the care of self (*epimeleia heauton*). We find a different direction in these lectures after the *Discipline and Punish*. This direction is toward the realm of ethical practice. Nancy Luxon (2008) describes Foucault's late lecture as offering a model of expressive subjectivity. For her, expressive subjectivity is "composed of practices of ethical self-governance that would prepare individuals for ethical subjectivity, prompt them towards political action, and find them in their relations to others rather than founding them on claims of knowledge" (Luxon 2008, 378). Foucault begins by clearly stating his aim in his dealing with *parrhesia*. It is not set to establish knowledge-claims which "deal[s] with the epistemological structure" (2011, 3). Instead, he is up to how parrhesiastic practices in discursive forms and activities reveal the dynamics and intricacies of social networks interplaying in such practices. Thus, Foucault (2011, 8) explains, "by examining the notion of *parrhesia*, we can see how the analysis of modes of veridiction, the study of techniques of governmentality, and the identification of forms of practice of self-interweave."

Foucault tries to examine the 'alethuragic forms' of *parrhesiastic* discourse. By alethurgy, Foucault (2011) means the "production of truth, the act by which truth is manifested." For him, what is at stake is primarily an exercise of the care of the self, which has been the central theme of his three-volume *History of Sexuality*. To be sure, *parrhesia* is a political notion. Foucault (2001a, 12) provides an in-depth genealogical analysis of how *parrhesia* was practiced in the ancient Greek culture before its transformation during the Medieval period. According to him, *parrhesia* appeared first in the work of Euripides. Etymologically, it means "to say everything" (*parrhesiazesthai*). However, as time unfolds, the term meaning evolved. Foucault identifies five closely knit concepts that characterize *parrhesia*: frankness, truth, danger, criticism, and duty. In *frankness*, the *parrhesiastes* uses the most direct words and forms of expression. One neither makes any enigmatic statements nor rhetorical, obscure, or nearly incomprehensible linguistic expressions in one's speech. Unlike the rhetorician, the *parrhesiastes* is direct, straightforward, and daring. The rhetorician "provides the speaker with technical devices to help him prevail upon the minds of his audience." At the same time, the "*parrhesiastes* acts on other people's minds by showing them as directly as possible what he actually believes" (Foucault 2001a, 12). The source of the opinion being verbalized is also essential in the speech activity of a *parrhesiastes*. It must come from the speaker himself. Foucault argues that it means a lot to the speaker that what the speaker utters is his own. A *parrhesiastes* is never afraid

to take responsibility for his words. No one is admitted to the task of speaking the truth if this truth is not his own. It is strictly observed, as Foucault notes, in the Greek culture.

Another characteristic of *parrhesia* is truth. Here Foucault (2001a, 14) asks: "does the *parrhesiastes* say what he *thinks* is true, or does he say what is true?" The *parrhesiastes* says what is true, not what he thinks is true because he *knows* it is true. Here the *parrhesiastes*, though, expresses an opinion but such contains the truth because what is at stake is the speaker's honor and integrity. In this case, for a *parrhesiastes* to say his view is equivalent to telling the truth. It implies that he does not speak of something he is uncertain about. Foucault explains that to belong to the community of truth-tellers, one should possess three essential qualities as proof: sincerity, moral qualities, and courage. "The fact that a speaker says something dangerous – different from what the majority believes – is a strong indication that he is a *parrhesiastes*," Foucault (2001a, 15) explains. No courage is required to a *parrhesiastes* if his speech activity is not dangerous. Foucault then considers danger as a characteristic of *parrhesia*.

"[T]he *parrhesiastes* is someone who takes a risk," Foucault (2001a, 16) says. The risk comes in various forms, but this does not amount to simply a risk of life. The risk can be minimal, like merely making the interlocutor angry, a friend disappointed or frustrated, or breaking up relationships. But to a certain extent, it can be maximal to the point that one risks one's life. It does not matter to a *parrhesiastes* because he does not serve himself but the common interest. For Foucault, unlike others, say a king or a tyrant, they cannot take the role of a *parrhesiastes*, for they are afraid to risk knowing they will lose something. A *parrhesiastes* does not feel scared to take risks because he knows he has nothing. Foucault (2001a, 17) says, "when you accept the parrhesiastic game in which your own life is exposed, you are taking up a specific relationship to yourself: you risk death to tell the truth instead of reposing in the security of a life where the truth goes unspoken." Alethic speech requires risk, and it anticipates danger as well. Thus, another salient characteristic of *parrhesia* is criticism.

The person who practiced *parrhesiastic* activity is a critic. The criticism is directed to the other – the interlocutor. Thus, *parrhesia* involves the one who speaks and the one being addressed by it – the interlocutor. We find that the main goal is not to administer the speech for the truth to emerge. However, the main goal is to subject the interlocutor to criticism: identify his shortcomings, advise him to better his position, and encourage and raise valid points for improvement, among others. In ancient Greek, *parrhesiastes* as a critic comes from below. Foucault explains that a father or a mother who criticizes their children or teachers criticize their students does not employ *parrhesia*. However, "when a philosopher criticizes a tyrant, when a citizen criticizes the majority, when a pupil criticizes his teacher, then such speakers may be using *parrhesia*" (Foucault 2001a, 18). In other words, *parrhesiastic* activity identifies particular social stratification. What makes a student a *parrhesiastes* is in virtue of power relation. In a student-teacher relationship, the student is seen as no expert while the teacher is. When criticism is launched from the one who has greater power, this is not *parrhesia* because it is a power-induced criticism. If a teacher criticizes their students' classroom performance, whose fault is it? The teacher's responsibility is to give the best of their ability to motivate students to perform well in class. In such a relationship, the power to criticize is in the hands of the one who has less power than

the one he speaks. Finally, *parrhesia* implies duty. Telling the truth is a duty. Thus, Foucault (2001a, 19) argues:

...to criticize a friend or a sovereign is an act of *parrhesia* insofar as it is a duty to help a friend who does not recognize his wrongdoing, or insofar as it is a duty towards the city to help the king to better himself as a sovereign. *Parrhesia* is thus related to freedom and to duty.

In this sense, he identifies *parrhesia* as a simple act of speech activity with responsibility. Its activity is guided fundamentally by freedom, which implies responsibility, and thus one is obligated to exercise one's duty. If one tells the truth because one knows that one must do so, then it is *parrhesia*. Though initially construed as a political activity, *Parrhesia* also implies an ethical duty. In short, *parrhesiastic* activity is an ethical activity. Foucault shifts his understanding of *parrhesia*'s function from political to ethical in this context.

What essentially involves truth-telling is the presence of the other. Without the other, no conditions can afford to qualify an activity as *parrhesiastic*. Here, Foucault impressed upon the *parrhesiastic* activity the necessity of having a partner, even with oneself. In this form of *parrhesiastic* relation, the parties must be truthful or authentic to one another. In this case, each of the parties involved becomes the other's truth-teller. It is what the 'parrhesiastic contract' entails, according to Foucault. Thus, both parties are bound by the contract that stipulates the conditions for the *parrhesiastic* game or what Foucault (1985, 6) calls the "games of truth (*jeux de vérité*)." In a *parrhesiastic* game, power relation is constituted "in a relationship of self with self and the forming of oneself as a subject" (Foucault (1985, 6). However, although all *parrhesiastes* are indeed truth-tellers, not all truth-tellers are *parrhesiastes*. The question is, in what sense are they not? Foucault's lecture at the Collège de France introduces four truth-telling modalities: prophet, sage, technician/teacher, and *parrhesiastes*. Foucault discovers complex relations in such modalities by which an interplay of two modalities can produce a *parrhesiastic* discourse which will not be discussed here for lack of space.

### The Modalities of Truth-telling

In terms of the modalities of truth-telling, Foucault explains that these modalities in ancient Greek culture and society were quite evident and can easily be classified. While ancient Greece clearly distinguishes truth-telling modalities, this distinction gradually dissolved during the medieval period. What happened then was that they combined various modalities in one institution. Foucault (2011, 29) says, "[i]t seems to be that in medieval Christianity we see another type of grouping bringing together the prophetic and parrhesiastic modalities." In this combination, Foucault found the role of both prophet and *parrhesia* in the priest.

Moreover, he continues, "the same medieval civilization tended to bring together the other two modes of veridiction: that of wisdom, which tells of the being of things and their nature, and that of teaching" (Foucault 2011, 29). This form of

combination is found in the medieval university. Compared to this early period, modernity, Foucault thinks, does not show such a setup and believes it is analyzable. But he asks, "[a]nd what about the modern epoch, you may ask? I don't really know. It would no doubt have to be analyzed" (ibid). Foucault (2011, 27) also insists that truth-telling modalities such as "prophecy, wisdom, teaching, technique, and *parrhesia* should be seen much more as fundamental modes of truth-telling than as characters." It means for Foucault that they should not be taken as social types. Instead, we take this truth-telling as a practice that embodies a person.

These modalities bring into sight the distinctive character of *parrhesiastes*. The critical question here is why it is so important to distinguish the *parrhesiastes* from other modalities of truth-telling? As already discussed above, a *parrhesiastes* exhibits a unique character necessary to bring the self into the domain of care. It means that, for Foucault, it is the *parrhesiastes* who practiced self-examination. Besides being an advocate of political exercise and self-expression in the political sphere, a *parrhesiastes* has moved beyond the political, i.e., becoming ethical – by tending oneself to self-cultivating activities. It is what makes *parrhesiastes* different from other truth-tellers. In a sense, he knows the value of caring for the self. It is saying that one cannot give what one does not have. One cannot say "country first, before self." It must be "self first, before country." Simply because without taking care of oneself and cultivating proper attitudes and virtues, one cannot expect that person to take care of society.

Among the four modalities of truth-telling, Foucault starts by characterizing a prophet. A prophet is considered a truth-teller, but this activity is not his own. The prophet is simply a mediator and a messenger of truth. Foucault (2011, 14) explains, "what fundamentally characterizes the prophet's truth-telling, his veridiction, is that the prophet's posture is one of mediation." His proclamations are not his own. He simply delivers them to people. Indeed the prophet tells the truth. He locates himself between the present and the future. He speaks about the now based on what he received from the outside and what lies ahead. In short, he is a seer. The second characteristic of a prophet is the mode of delivering the truth. The prophet speaks in riddles and in a relatively obscure and unfathomable way. The prophet "does not reveal without being obscure, and he does not disclose without enveloping what he says in the form of the riddle" (Foucault 2011, 14). Though the prophet resembles the activity of a *parrhesiastes*, this resemblance is shaded by the prophet's unusual words, which are not of this world. This form of speech makes the prophet different from a *parrhesiastes*. Foucault (2011, 16) describes the role of a *parrhesiastes* as having an "interplay between human beings and their blindness due to inattention, complacency, weakness, and moral destruction that the *parrhesiastes* performs his role, which, as you see, is consequently a revelatory role very different from that of the prophet." Unlike the prophet, a sage, another modality, bears wisdom. But the sage remains distinct from a *parrhesiastes*.

Foucault understands sages' truth-telling activity as someone who, unlike the prophet, speaks in his name. His utterance of truth does not come from elsewhere but from the self. The sage is believed to possess wisdom, leading him to tell the truth about a matter. However, as Foucault (2011) describes, "even if this wisdom may have been inspired by a god, or passed on to him by a tradition, by a more or less esoteric



teaching, the sage is nevertheless present in what he says, in his truth-telling." The sage is a person with an independent mind. What he says is his own, which resembles a *parrhesiastes*. He is closer to the *parrhesiastes*. However, "the sage...keeps his wisdom in a state of essential withdrawal, or at least reserve" (Foucault 2011, 17). The hermitic living distinguishes the sage from the *parrhesiastes*. He speaks when asked and then withdraws. "He is not forced to speak; nothing obliges him to share his wisdom, to teach it, or demonstrate it," Foucault (2011) explains. This attunement of the sage is called 'structural silence.' His prominent example of this is Heraclitus. Heraclitus decided to withdraw from the *polis* and did not care about the happenings in the *polis*. He was a sage in this sense. However, it is not only the sage's silence and withdrawal that bear his distinctive role and character from the *parrhesiastes* but the sage's nature of speech. His speech is prescriptive since "it is not in the form of advice linked to a conjuncture but in the form of a general principle of conduct and enigmatic" (Foucault 2011, 17). A sage, therefore, is a moral teacher who does not give advice but provides a "prescriptive ensemble of 'moral code'" (Foucault 1985, 25) for proper conduct.

In contrast, the *parrhesiastes* is not like a sage who is reserved, withdrawn and a hermit. Contrary to these characteristics, the *parrhesiastes* is someone who cannot only choose to be quiet amidst the chaos and conflict they are witnessing right before their eyes. A *parrhesiastes* performs his "duty, obligation, responsibility, and task...and he has no right to shirk this task" (Foucault 2011, 18). So three characteristics emerged in a sage: he speaks when he wants to, his speech is enigmatic like the prophet, and lastly, he prescribes human conduct and the 'what is of things.' This modality of truth-telling is not of the *parrhesiastes*.

Another mode of truth-telling is that of a technician. Their parrhesiastic activity is defined by their practices of delivering knowledge – the know-how of things. As Foucault (2011, 24) described, "the technician, who possesses a *techné*, has learned it, and is capable of teaching it, is someone obliged to speak the truth, at any rate, to formulate what he knows and pass it on to others." This characteristic distinguishes him from a sage and a prophet. Whereas the sage employs structural silence and withdrawal whenever he likes, the technician is not. The technician should tell the truth about what he knows. He has the responsibility to teach students how to acquire know-how knowledge. This character seems to reflect the trait of a *parrhesiastes*. Like the technician, the *parrhesiastes* has an obligation or responsibility to speak whenever he sees appropriate and fit. The *parrhesiastes* is fearless in his speech because what he is to speak about puts him in danger or risk. However, this is not the case for the technician because they are responsible only for teaching students specific skills – the know-how form of knowledge that does not require fearless speech. The difference, therefore, is the goal of obligation. While parrhesiastic speech aims to issue something of significance to the whole community, a technician must "ensure the survival of knowledge" (Foucault 2011, 25). In short, Foucault (2011) explains, "the technician's and teacher's truth-telling brings together and binds; the parrhesiast's truth-telling risks hostility, war, hatred, and death." Here, *parrhesiastes* introduces into discourse through his activity of truth-telling the issue concerning ethos.

We find the distinctive characteristics of various forms of truth-tellers. The prophet speaks of truth about the present and the future, thus, of fate. However, the prophet does not possess such truth because he is just a mediator. While the sage is

wise and so he speaks with an enigmatic accent. He is characterized as reserved and hermetic. The technician/teacher, on the other hand, possesses *techné* – the ability to teach and transfer know-how knowledge to others. He is obligated to speak the truth insofar as knowledge of the subject matter is concerned. In contrast, the *parrhesiastes* is a risk-taker and a nurturer of self.

We can say then that each mode of truth-telling says something about their role revealed in the form of discourse they are engaged in. However, it also poses a certain level of difficulty on the identity of these truth-telling models in today's time. Moreover, given the complex forms of discourses, we engage in today and how these discourses are intermixed or combined. Such hybridity further complicates the problem. Nevertheless, it is not the issue of this paper to address such a problem. Instead, this paper simply wants to show that the practices of *parrhesia* reflect and enrich the character or role of education and the school as its locus and as an almost but not entirely political space, and how *parrhesia* helps reveals the implicit political role of educators in Arendt's account of education. What follows is a brief presentation of Arendt's view of education, drawing from her essay "The Crisis in Education."

## HANNAH ARENDT ON EDUCATION

Like Foucault, some philosophers and scholars of education are attracted to Arendt's ideas concerning education, not on account of its success in laying down a foundation of education or proposing an educational theory. However, what interests these scholars, critics, and apologists alike is Arendt's quite challenging and unpopular position regarding the place of education in politics. As Mordechi Gordon (2001, 1) describes, what draws some educational theorists is Arendt's controversial "distinction between the political and education [as] two very different realms that should be kept separate." Despite this controversial distinction, critics and theorists of education believe that this "distinction is important because it provokes us to reexamine the manifold relationships of education and politics" (Gordon 2001). Such distinction is clear for Arendt (1993, 177) since, for her, "Education can play no part in politics because in politics we always have to deal with those who are already educated." It clearly shows Arendt's position regarding the role of education and its proper location. However, to better understand this issue, we need to investigate what Arendt said in her essay.

In the essay "The Crisis in Education," Arendt opens her discussion with a reminder about the value of crisis. She (1993, 174) explains that a crisis "tears away facades and obliterates prejudices – to explore and inquire into whatever has been laid bare of the essence of the matter." Therefore, it is an opportunity to examine and reflect on what we are doing. For Arendt, the crisis in education has to do with thinking that education must fulfill a political role. For instance, Dill and Elliot (2019, 11) comment that Arendt's view on education, especially indoctrination, "inhibits [our potential] to comprehend how a political world comes into being." However, the context of Arendt's view of indoctrination is clearly not pertaining to education but to totalitarian propaganda. Arendt (1994, 308-309) says, "[i]ndoctrination is dangerous because it springs primarily from a perversion, not of knowledge, but of understanding...Indoctrination can only further the totalitarian fight against

understanding, and [sic] it introduces the element of violence into the whole realm of politics." For her, the essence of education is natality – "the fact that human beings are *born* into the world" (Arendt 1994, 308-309). In line with this, Maria Tamboukou (2016, 139) understands Arendt as placing "education at the heart of politics, since natality and new beginning are also central in her conceptualization of the political." However, this does not follow. This misunderstanding of education as a political tool or "the most important source of social or political change," (Young-Bruehl 2004, 317) is an illusion as if "a new world is being built through the children's education" (Arendt 1993, 177). She argues that it is a misconception about education to think it delivers and shapes a new world through educating the children. Take, for instance, Elizabeth Young-Bruehl's (2004, 317) biographical account of Arendt:

Hannah Arendt was very strict about this principle, [education as conservative] and she maintained it in her own political action. Some years later, when a branch of the Student Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam contacted her for a donation, she agree, but then changed her mind after reading their pamphlet: 'When we talked over the phone, she informed the committee's fund raiser, 'I was not aware that you intend to involve high school students, and I regret to tell you that I will not give a penny for this purpose, because I disagree with the advisability of mobilizing children in political matters.

The role of education, therefore, is simply to introduce children to the world through representations, knowing and learning the traditions and the historical past. What is being introduced is "not yet actually the world" (Arendt 1993, 189); thus, no political engagement has yet taken place. This introduction to the world is a preparation for their real engagement with it afterward. As Jon Nixon (2020, 49) implicitly asserts that the primary purpose of education for Arendt is "to enable each individual to develop the capabilities and disposition necessary to enter the public sphere as independent-minded citizens."

Arendt thinks that the crisis in education and why 'Johnny cannot read' rests on unfounded and destructive assumptions. In order to be clear, the context of Arendt's discussion on education is centered on children's education. However, given the context, I believe her general observations apply to higher education as well. The first assumption is the banishment of the child from "the world of grown-ups," which leads to the broken of "real and normal relations between children and adults." It is because Arendt (1993, 181) explains:

...the authority that tells the individual child what to do and what not to do rests with the child group itself – and this produces...a situation in which the adult stands helpless before the individual child and out of contact with him.

The independence of the child led to a more "terrifying and truly tyrannical authority, the tyranny of the majority," of the child's group. As Arendt (1993, 182)

points out, the damaging result is "conformism and juvenile delinquency." The second is an assumption on pedagogy. Arendt criticizes the hegemonic rule of psychological knowledge of learning and education that heavily shaped and directed the design of educational practices. Arendt argues that what has been given so much focus is no longer the course's mastery but how to teach. "Pedagogy has developed into a science of teaching in general in such a way as to be wholly emancipated from the actual material to be taught," Arendt (1993) explains. The third assumption is about the modern theory of learning. As she (1993, 182) observes, the "pernicious role that pedagogy and the teachers' colleges are playing in the present crisis was only possible because of a modern theory of learning." This view of learning Arendt perceives as substituting "doing for learning" that "you can know and understand only what you have done yourself" (1993). Such reflects the current predicament concerning "metrics fixation" (Muller, 2018) and outcomes learning, which Arendt may have something to say on this. For her, such practice is "not to teach knowledge but to inculcate a skill, and the result was a kind of transformation of institutes for learning into vocational institutions" (Arendt 1993, 183). For Arendt (1993, 193), all of these can be traced to our failure to maintain a strong sense of affinity or closeness toward our tradition and the "realm of the past." Such a view of education is considered unique. As Gordon (2001, 2) explains, "Arendt provides us with a way of conceptualizing the educators' relationship to the past and tradition that is different from that of both mainstream conservatives and critical theorists."

### **Arendt on the Conservation of Tradition and History and Natality**

For Arendt (1993, 193), education is a space that preserves and conserves traditions and memories of the past. The task of an educator is to "mediate between the old and the new so that his very profession requires of him an extraordinary respect for the past." For this reason, Arendt finds education as entirely divorced and independent from the realm of political life. She (1993, 195) states, "[t]he problem of education in the modern world lies in the fact that by its very nature it cannot forgo either authority or tradition, and yet must proceed in a world that is neither structured by authority nor held together by tradition." Hence, for her (1993), "we must decisively divorce the realm of education from the others, most of all from the realm of public, political life." The implication of this is relatively straightforward for Arendt, i.e., "the function of the school is to teach children what the world is like and not to instruct them in the art of living" (Arendt 1993, 195). Education must create the conditions for the setting right of the world. It means educators must take responsibility in introducing the world to students as it is and remind themselves that the world's disclosure is an act of evocation by which we invite students to take hold and act to reshape it. But it is puzzling to think that she defines education in terms of natality in the same essay. This phenomenon of natality is an essential element of political activity. As Arendt (1958, 9) explains, "[political] action has the closest connection with the human condition of natality." To think of the essence of education as natality, does she imply that education is a pursuit within the political grid? My view is that it is not. When Arendt thinks of natality as the essence of education, following Natasha Levinson (2001), she does not mean that

education is a political activity that initiates the capacity for renewal. We must remember that natality, for Arendt, is one of the "most general condition[s] of human existence," which instantiates in various human activities such as political activity. It means, therefore, that natality is not an exclusive condition of political action but "may be the central category of political" (1958, 8). Just like political activity, education can renew itself by consciously paying attention to the traditions and the realm of the historical past. Through an act of conservation and preservation of the traditions and the historical past, education can renew itself – to start a new beginning. Thus, paradoxically we are "heirs to a particular history and new to it" (Levinson 2001, 13). Other than the capacity for renewal, in my view, natality in education must be thought too as a challenge. Arendt emphasized the value of grounding one's teaching vocation on the human tradition and historical past. The challenge is how we can draw from these traditions the new beginnings when according to Lall (2009, 3), "manipulation of historical narratives for the purpose of bolstering state legitimacy" is quite evident. Given this, how can we help students create new ways of looking at the world? Educating them founded on the traditions and historical past means that it is something new to hope for only if we can think, according to Arendt (1978). What then is crucial to education for Arendt, according to Tamboukou (2016, 137), is the "process of 'feeling at home in the world.'" It can be done by enabling "young people to know and come to terms with their past, understand their present through an awareness of what their involvement in the web of human relations means and, in this way, turn a creative eye to the future."

### **Educators' Amoretic Orientation: Resistance against De-humanized Education**

The thought that natality is the essence of education is directly connected with Arendt's valuing of the human world – a world that we constantly create and remake. The idea of newness secures the human world from constant threat and futile destruction like overcoming totalitarian regimes, which partly reflects the state of education. We may say then those universities or educational institutions play a significant role in society's formation. That is why the capacity to create something novel allows the human world to thrive. Arendt thinks that educators, through their inherent authority, are responsible for the world. The problem was the tradition that strengthens one's academic authority was in crisis. She (1993, 190) wrote, "the crisis of authority in education is most closely connected with the crisis of tradition, that is with the crisis in our attitude towards the realm of the past." She asserts that an educator's responsibility is to protect "the child against the world" and "the world against the child, the new against the old, the old against the new." What this means for Arendt is that educational activity is an activity that requires a 'conservative attitude,' to convey "the sense of conservation...whose task is always to cherish and protect something." She refers here to conserving and preserving traditions and historical past – the whole society's culture.

Her reflection on education is implicit in the presupposition that truth-telling plays a significant role. Educators should value students' independence by providing them spaces and opportunities to engage in activities that develop a sense of care and love for the world (*amor mundi*) – an *amoretic* orientation towards the world. Such an

attitude aims to dispel and prevent some pedagogies' totalitarian tendencies that promote one-dimensional thinking, thoughtlessness, and humanistic subversions. As Tamboukou (2016, 141), drawing from Arendt's reflection, puts it, "the role of teachers [is] not in conveying skills, but rather in passing on subject knowledge that would enable their students to grasp the world instead of moralizing them into it." In line with this, Arendt (1993, 190) observes, "an education without learning is empty and therefore degenerates with great ease into moral – emotional rhetoric." Educators must strive to restrain themselves from indoctrinating the students to secure uninterrupted newness. According to Arendt (1994, 308), indoctrination is "a short-cut in the transcending process itself, which it arbitrarily interrupts by pronouncing apodictic statements as though they had the reliability of facts and figures" because such activity for her "destroys the activity of understanding altogether." They should serve as an aid in developing students' capacity to think independently and inculcate the value of inquiry. Educators are responsible for handling the 'weight of the tradition' by efficiently performing their tasks. They need to "prepare them [students] in advance for the task of renewing a common world" (Arendt 1993, 196). At the end of the essay, Arendt empathically states, "[e]ducation is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it and by the same token save it from that ruin which, except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and young, would be inevitable" (Arendt 1993, 196).

Today, seeing many universities being obsessed with world rankings (Cf. Bekhradnia 2019; Gadd 2020), we realize that we are in crisis because common sense has disappeared from our midst. We have been overwhelmed by ruinous pedagogical frameworks and approaches that have forgotten the most basic learning. The employment of mechanisms that focus only on harnessing students' technical skills and competitiveness makes the university look like a highly (in)efficient and de-humanized institution. The problem in education is the failure to correctly see the function of the 'conservationist attitude' toward the human traditions and the historical past as salient in mapping the direction of the society. Its main goal is for the people not anymore to commit the same tragic mistakes of the past. As Arendt reminds us that crisis invites us to ask ourselves, 'what are we doing?' Education's primary task is to provide a space and capacity to create new beginnings. In doing so, students must be equipped with the various capabilities, humanistic and scientific alike, not just measurable skills to manage and navigate the world. This worldly referential character – *amor mundi* – attempts to overcome world estrangement as a cradle of radical evil of totalitarian practice. The *amoretic* orientation of educators as adults towards students sustains the world and fuels the world's continuous existence. The *amor mundi* attitude is a key to the constant creating and recreating of the world amidst the continual stream of new beginnings.

## **FOUCAULT AND ARENDT ON THE ROLE OF EDUCATORS AND THEIR *QUASI*-POLITICAL CHARACTER**

Although technicians like teachers, according to Foucault, have a distinctive character quite different from the *parrhesiastes*, it is far from clear that the meaning is

unmistakable. I agree with Huckaby that specific intellectuals known as academic scholars are qualified to be called *parrhesiastes*. She explains that the "strategic and specific positions" of these intellectuals placed them on a dangerous plane since they are "situated within the immediate and concrete awareness of struggles through the specificity of their own lives and work, and are therefore able to appropriate local knowledge(s) within truth games for the purposes of political struggles" (2007, 514). For Foucault, the intellectual is the 'spokesman of the universal.' He explains, "[t]o be an intellectual meant something like being the consciousness/conscience of us all...Just as the proletariat...is the bearer of the universal...so the intellectual, through his moral, theoretical, and political choice, aspires to be the bearer of this universality in its conscious, elaborated form" (Foucault 2001b, 126). The point is that we find Foucault thinking that an intellectual, an academic scholar whose niche is located in the school, practices *parrhesia* similar to that of a Greek *parrhesiastes*. It is the political aspect of the life of an intellectual/scholar that gives him the form of being a *parrhesiastes*. They who speak dangerous truths in various degrees are *parrhesiastes*.<sup>4</sup> As Lugg, reacting to the 'pro-Fascist Trumpian age,' emphatically puts it, "we have the truth, no matter how fragile it may be. In a regime that is literally built on lies, the truth is the most powerful and dangerous political tool that we can employ (2017, 969). These circumstances clearly show that an intellectual or scholar tries to challenge the hegemonic practices and worldviews. Hence, according to Huckaby (2007, 514), they "must become astute about their position within power relations and how they function in the construction of knowledge." It leads us to think that education is transformative and fosters freedom. These two salient characteristics of education reflect the kind of features the *parrhesiastes* possesses. However, above all, these characteristics are based on our natural inclination to know and seek the truth. When education is a practice of truth-telling, it becomes transformative.

Educators are responsible for introducing the world to students, orienting students to the world without our imperial imposition of singular reading of the world. It is then the proper task of teachers/educators to show what the world is and not make any doctrinal assertions and impositions on what the world should be, which leads to moralism and indoctrination. Instead, they should expose students to the many ways the world is experienced and interpreted. Of course, such exposure to the world does not fix the world as a singular phenomenon or a one-dimensional object of analysis or reflection. But it motivates the students to imagine new possibilities for the future. Educators must prepare the students to engage with various realities found in the world. It means to involve them in action to make the world a true home of humane individuals. It can only be realized when we resist the reductive approach to education. Students are not mere subjects of control, manipulation, dictation, or experimentation. They are citizens too engaged in "vicarious decision-making" (White 2014, 94) or what Arendt calls capacity for action in the future. White (2014) asserts that "in an increasingly de-politicized culture, it is precisely these sorts of 'skills,' or rather dispositions, that universities (and schools) should encourage in their teaching, and not simply focus on those 'employability' skills." Such relentless attempt and constant desire to manipulate the destiny of education through the employment of various controlling mechanisms are a true reflection of what Hartmut Rosa (2022, viii)

describes as "modernity's incessant desire to make the world engineerable, predictable, available, accessible, disposable (i.e., *verfügbar*) in all aspects."

It is, therefore, worthwhile to pause and consider how education can facilitate the promise of truth-telling and the *amor mundi* attitude. The formation of prevalent powerful and sinister forces that try to reduce students into subjects of control and mechanistic-scientific criteria threatens the quality of education. To quantify and measure students' capabilities to determine whether they are learning or not is a show of utter disregard for the qualitative character of learning which is exemplified in students' capacity to think (Arendt 1978). The primacy of some dubious assessment tools devalues students' capacities to be independent and critical thinkers. This qualitative capacity has been supplanted by instrumental and strategic thinking. There is nothing wrong with giving students market-ready skills, but to have it as a primary goal or measure of success is utterly mistaken.

It leads us to think that the practice of truth-telling is pivotal to resisting these antagonistic forces to percolate the humanistic aims and endeavors of education. Thus, educators play a significant role in preventing the hijacking and infiltration of these forces that enervate the natural mandate of education, i.e., to humanize the world and be fully human.

## CONCLUSION

What I have shown in this paper is twofold. First, I presented Foucault's account of *parrhesia* as a salient element in supporting my claim about the implicitness of truth-telling in Arendt's rendition of the role of an educator as a conservationist of the human tradition (*Bildung*) and the historical past. Second, I have presented how this view of *parrhesia* and its inherent activity renders the locus of education ambiguous. Thus, contrary to Arendt's claim, education no longer assumes a place between the two distinct realms in this transposition. Instead, education through the practice of truth-telling by specific intellectuals/scholars moves it closer to the political realm but not exactly totally within it. Thus, I used the expression *quasi*-political term.

## NOTES

1. Contrasting them is not unusual. For example, Maria Tamboukou, in her article, discusses Arendt and Foucault on truth-telling. But her account focuses on the problem of a pariah in Arendt. See Maria Tamboukou, Truth Telling in Foucault and Arendt: Parrhesia, the Pariah and Academics in Dark Times. *Journal of Education Policy*. Vol. 27, no. 6 (November 2012): 849.

2. To relate parrhesia to education is not a daunting task since the practice of *parrhesia* from Ancient Greece to the Greco-Roman times, according to Olssen, shares a strong affinity with the notion of the care of the self, such that "educating oneself and caring for oneself is interconnected activities, especially those aspects of the care of the self for which one seeks a teacher, making them forms of adult education (p. 153)." See Mark Olssen, *Materialism, and Education*. London: Bergin & Garve, 1999.



3. Muller describes the current "metric fixation" of the educational institution as changing the landscape of determining the quality of universities' education and students' learning. As Muller explains, "The key premise of metric fixation concerns the relationship between measurement and improvement" (p. 29).

4. Huckaby identifies five types of scholars or intellectuals that fit into the category of parrhesiastes, namely: academic warrior, fringe academic, new jack professor, radical scholar, and renaissance intellectual.

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