

Modalities of Parrhesia

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Abstract

This paper reflects some of my PhD research into the ability of subjects to express themselves in a 'free and frank' manner to authority figures in an educational context. In doing so I draw particularly on Michel Foucault and his concept of Parrhesia, Leo Tolstoy's writing connected with social action and education, together with Lauren Berlant's concept of 'Impasse'. Writing under these influences I begin with an outline of autonomy, freedom and truth before entering into a description of one aspect of Foucault's Parrhesia. I then relate this to a sample of my interview respondents' experiences in an educational context, before continuing with a short discussion of coercion and authority.

Introduction

Leo Tolstoy, the nineteenth century Russian novelist, writer and thinker made a point of speaking freely and frankly regardless of the consequences to those in authority. Maude (1987:459) describes Tolstoy as a person who 'did not spare himself' in communicating what he thought to be true 'or in trying to practice it'. The consequences for him speaking freely and frankly came at a cost to both himself and those around him. He became a thorn in the side of authority and many of his writings were banned in his native Russia and could only be published abroad. 'Happiness', writes the Greek fifth century historian Thucydides, 'depends upon being free and freedom depends upon being courageous'. Both of these latter concepts of 'freedom' and 'courage' are reflected in Foucault's description of Parrhesia, the practice of boldly speaking freely and frankly to authority.

Autonomy and Freedom

A useful starting point in giving an account of Foucault's Parrhesia is to reflect upon autonomy and freedom and the extent to which a subject is ever free to speak and act autonomously. Cremonesi et al (2016:1) characterises Foucault's approach as one in which 'he tended to avoid' using the word 'autonomy' within his discussions and analysis of power relations that constitute the subject. However, Foucault does touch upon autonomous actions in his descriptions of the ancient Greek 'techniques of the self' whereby a subject is able to exert a certain amount of influence upon constituting themselves. Cremonesi et al (2016:3) refer to this as a form of autonomy connected to 'transformative practices' that can usefully be employed by subjects to bring about change. Foucault alludes to autonomy in his essay 'What is Enlightenment' (Foucault 2007:97ff) where he discusses the influence of 'complex historical processes' (111) from the 18th century Enlightenment era upon modernity. Foucault describes the modern subject as an 'object of a complex and difficult elaboration' (108) in which the subject attempts to 'invent' or 'produce' themselves within a legacy of historical determination thereby influencing all 'doing, thinking and saying'. (113).

The nineteenth century Russian poet Tyutchev (Nabokov 1944:34) reflects this in his poem 'Silentium' in which he urges the subject to 'live in your inner self' as one's thoughts can be 'blinded by the outer light' of historical, cultural and society influences. Tolstoy (1894:106) writes

concerning the human striving to break free from restraint where 'life is defined beforehand by laws, culture and history in order to exert a measure of autonomy. A subject consciously lives 'on his own account' (Tolstoy 1976:655, 1997:665, 2006:669, 2007:605), in freedom of will but both subject and will also act as an unconscious instrument influenced by culture and history. Stirner (2014:145) similarly writes that one becomes 'free of much but not everything' explaining that one can only achieve a level of autonomy in aspiring to what one can fully control. Ultimately, however, one remains 'haunted' by 'wheels in the head' or 'bats in the belfry' (Stirner 1971:58) which influence and guide our reasoning and autonomy.

The nineteenth century philosopher Schopenhauer influenced both Foucault and Tolstoy's thinking on autonomy. Schopenhauer (2000:45) does not regard a subject's 'will' as being 'free' and points out that this is far from the case. Individual actions are strongly influenced by 'motive', i.e. something in the world either desired or avoided, and 'character', i.e. one's personality, or individual 'will', partly given and partly shaped by experiences and influences in the world. When motive and character interact, the subject reacts to the motive by means of their character which itself (2000: 32) is influenced by their given nature and prior experiences. Freedom of autonomy, therefore, lies in an ability to 'do as we will' (Magee 1983:192) but not that our will is fully 'free to will as it will'. The theosopher Krisnamurti reflects a similar view (1975:16) that whilst a subject must be encouraged to reach out for autonomy of action 'there can be no freedom from the tyranny of symbols and systems' nor can there be total freedom from the past or the environment one inhabits.

Foucault's autonomy is always 'limited and determined' (2007:115) and therefore could be described as a form of 'constrained freedom' (Mandelstam 1980:85). Nonetheless there exists a 'struggle for freedom' (Foucault 2007:116) in which the subject exercises limited influence to 'organise their ways of doing things', and 'modifying rules and practices'. (117). This process occurs within what Foucault describes as the three broad areas of 'relations of control over things', of action upon others' and 'relations with oneself'. (117).

One way in which the subject can express an element of 'constrained freedom' in these three areas is through the exercise of Parrhesia, of speaking freely and frankly to those in authority. Foucault (2001:12) outlines the concept of Parrhesia as firstly containing an element of frankness, an opening of the heart to express everything on one's mind toward someone of a higher' status than oneself. The second element within Parrhesia concerns expression of something 'true' or which the speaker holds to be a truth (14). A third element of Parrhesia concerns the free and frank expression of truth which contains an element of both courage and risk (16) on the part of the speaker. The authority person may not always welcome or be happy to hear such frankness. Parrhesia could therefore take on the form of advice (17) confession, or criticism toward the authority figure. Lastly, Parrhesia can also contain a motivational element of 'duty' or 'necessity' for a person to speak out freely (19).

The act of Parrhesia contains an element of freedom for the subject to choose to speak out to authority freely and frankly. Foucault (1997:284) describes the practice of freedom as closely bound to ethics when it is informed by reflection. Although ethics itself is informed by rules, regulations, culture and historical precedent, it allows the subject some room to practice autonomy and freedom of thought and deed 'within and through the constraints set by our

bodies and the world' (Taylor 2011:83). Freedom itself is a precondition for authority to wield power but also allows the subject to resist the imposition of power. (Dreyfus & Rabinow 2013:221). Although subjects are 'entangled in a web of human relations' (Arendt 1998:223) and struggle to 'liberate themselves from necessity' (121) this need not act as a reason to have no freedom. The act of freedom can also be exercised through practising what Arendt refers to as 'non-acting or abstention' and what Foucault would call resistance. Examples of 'resistance' can be seen in both micro and macro human experiences. Mandelstam (1989:173ff) for example, writing in the fearful times of Stalinist Russia, relates her feelings of being persecuted and in constant fear of arrest or deportation by the authorities. Inhibited by an inability to speak out freely and frankly, Mandelstam developed strategies to thwart, side-step and respond positively to engage with authority. Whilst fear can be constructive in keeping a person in touch with reality, freedom needs to overcome thinking that, 'I cannot be right if everybody else thinks differently' (279). Freedom, Mandelstam advises, needs to be 'won only through inner struggle', a process that involves overcoming 'both oneself' and the 'world at large' through developing an 'inner freedom' (279). Mandelstam does this through committing the State prohibited poetry of her husband to memory. 'Free is the slave who overcomes fear' Mandelstam counsels, and whilst this may not come easily to all, developing 'inner freedom' of thought can be the 'blade of grass or woodchip that can alter the course of the swift-flowing stream'. (173). For some of my interview participants response to authority has been achieved through, for example, consulting wider sources of information, lampooning, learning new strategies or drawing upon past experiences. The Russian philosopher Bakhtin writes that a process of inner strength provides the starting point to encourage a feeling of freedom from being overwhelmed, thwarted or intimidated by authority (Saul-Morrison 1985:146). This is a process that Griffin & Tyrell (2011:365) describe as akin to being aware of how our inner thinking adjusts to the outside experiences we encounter. This re-alignment of thinking Griffin and Tyrell describe as 'removing the mind veils' that make reconciling inner to outer thinking problematic. Krishnamurthi (1975:188) opines that freedom of fear comes about through self-knowledge which leads the mind to 'looking at the fact' without translating that fact negatively.

Tolstoy sought to create a 'new consciousness of community' (Murphy 1992:235) in his experimental schools that allowed children and young people more freedom to organise their own learning thereby freeing themselves from the 'Procrustean bed' of imposed teacher led curriculum. Tolstoy was against the intellectualisation of life and education (Charles-Baudouin 1923:176) which he felt put obstacles in the way of a child's ability to learn naturally. He regarded children as possessed of an instinctive ability to learn which acted as a 'natural reagent' in their own self-directed learning pathway. For Tolstoy freedom was not just the absence of compulsion; it comprised a coming together of teacher and child with freedom to select the best method and materials to be studied. Absolute freedom was not fully attainable in that the nature of the child was open to suggestion from the environment, parent and teacher. Tolstoy however recognised this, placing much emphasis upon training his teachers to protect children from 'mischievous' or harmful suggestions that may sway the child's reason. In every way Tolstoy sought to create conditions conducive to fostering the 'free assimilation of knowledge' through informal and non-compulsory methods (Murphy 1992:89). This approach to encouraging freedom of action, expression and thought was not dissimilar to the ideas put forward by the 18th century political philosopher William Godwin, with whom Tolstoy was familiar, maintaining that for education and learning to be effective it was necessary to proceed by experiment and observations to

facilitate the natural enquiring mind of the child or young person. An 'awakened mind', wrote Godwin, was the most important purpose of education (Godwin 1797:4) and instrumental in that purpose was the ability of the learner to feel free and express themselves without fear or hindrance to those in authority over them.

The importance of exercising an element of freedom through Foucault's Parrhesia, i.e. the act of speaking out freely and frankly to someone in authority, allows the speaker to make clear their feelings, truth, hopes and enquiries in expectation that they will be taken notice of benevolently. The fifth century BC Greek historian Thucydides (1972:75) in a speech remonstrating with the stronger Spartans implores his listeners not to receive his words in an 'unfriendly spirit' as he attempts to point out their 'faults. For Foucault (2011:10) truth should be communicated in a personal manner in which the speaker communicates clearly what they think. The hearer enters into this process benevolently regardless of their own thoughts or speakers 'blindness or ignorance'. (12). To act otherwise stifles enquiry and hinders learning.

Truth

Being bold enough to communicate a truth raises the question of what is truth. The question of truth Tolstoy (1894) describes as akin to a person walking in the darkness with a light thrown before them from the lantern they carry. The carrier of the light only sees what is lit up before them and not what remains in darkness. The light carrier can shine the light wherever they choose to dispel some of the darkness. Tolstoy talks of these dark areas as unseen truths. These are truths not yet revealed, truths that have been 'outlived, forgotten and assimilated' (290) together with truths which 'rise up before the light' of reason and become recognised. The latter truths are those wherein degrees of freedom reside. Tolstoy concludes (291) that a subject has a threefold relation to the concept of truth. Firstly, that some truths are so embedded within consciousness that they operate in an unconscious manner, secondly, some truths are through experience 'being revealed', and lastly, those truths that have been revealed, but are not fully understood, recognised or assimilated require the application of reason to decide upon them.

Truth for Foucault (Miller 1993:69) is not something that has a permanent fixed existence, nor can it be found or discovered within or without the self. Truth is both 'invisible and discrete'; its effect upon the body can be identified through 'normalisation' and 'compliance' communicated through 'multiple forms of constraint' (Foucault 1980a:131) via institutions, governments, science and politics. Foucault (1997:281) described studying 'how subjects fit into games of truth' where they encounter specific effects of power (Chomsky and Foucault 2006:169ff) and contest interpretations of truth present in 'production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation.' In order to contest accepted practices, rules or regulations the use of Parrhesia to express a different truth through free and frank conversation constitutes participation in the 'politics of truth' (170) and an act of freedom.

Tolstoy, writing in a letter to Petr Verigin the leader of the persecuted Doukhobors in Russia during the winter of 1898 (Donskov & Gladkova 2019:215ff), notes that one should be bold in communicating one's thoughts to those in authority through both speech and writing. Tolstoy recognised that speaking freely and frankly the truth could be received by those in authority either with seriousness, ambivalence, or simply be dismissed or ignored. In speaking freely and frankly Tolstoy advises optimistically that the listener has a duty to listen empathetically so that

one 'feels the soul of the speaker' (216) and can, if the listener has a mind to, question the speaker further and take notice. The speaker, though, must be prepared for their words to be dismissed, misunderstood or ignored. If speaking freely and frankly one's views are 'set to paper' (or perhaps in our modern age, print or social media), then, equally, voice may be ignored but there is a chance that 'kindred spirits turn up' (216) to support and affirm one's expressions. In communicating freely and frankly Tolstoy adds a note of caution that one still needs to take care of 'what you say and hear....print or read (217). In a further letter that winter, Tolstoy recommends to Verigin that he embrace both printed and vocal means to communicate freely and frankly his feelings to those in authority as long as those views seek only to bring about the 'well-being of all people' (228) and to do no harm to others. A subject's desire to communicate a heartfelt truth to an authority often requires courage and can involve a masked or clearly intentioned desire to be critical or cynical.

Cynicism as one form of Parrhesia

The Ancient concept of cynicism connected with Foucault's Parrhesia differs somewhat from its modern equivalent. Allen (2020:4ff) describes modern cynicism as a form of 'hopeless criticism' often born out of 'frustration and despair', something expressed privately or apologised for publicly. Whilst both Ancient and modern cynicism have these elements in common, Ancient cynicism is a bolder entity, often 'deliberately deviant from conventional thinking' (3) and much more focussed upon expressing a truth, revealing a different reality.

Within my research participant's experiences of speaking freely and frankly there appeared firm strands of what may best be referred to as 'well-meaning' critique of those in authority positions. Some respondents were indignant at the treatment they experienced by authority, others were conscious that their rights as an individual had been affronted, whilst others related stories of moral injustice or unfairness. My interview respondents related their experiences of authority figures in educational contexts reflecting Foucault's (2011:166) concepts of cynicism, truth-telling and Parrhesia. In particular the cynics function of speaking out boldly without fear as being useful for both speaker and society at large (167). Through such actions a speaker may seek the opportunity to exercise a degree of 'constrained freedom' in order to influence 'relations of control over things', others' or oneself. (Foucault 2001:117).

'Constrained freedom' of action and the simultaneous ability to influence one's situation is illustrated in Foucault's retelling of the tribulations encountered by Diogenes, son of a money changer in Ancient Greece advised by the Oracle of Delphi to 'change or revalue his currency'. The meaning of this in the Ancient context implies that a subject should look within themselves, (242) question and re-evaluate the beliefs and opinions they hold, consider breaking with rules, habits of behaviour, customs etc to inform a new way or 'currency' of thinking. This form of thinking is akin to the 'Cynic's Life', that is, a life which questions and does not hold back, when necessary, from speaking out freely and frankly. The Cynic's Life as described by Foucault (237ff) broadly reflects the characteristics of a philosophy of life which involves being pre-prepared or trained to speak freely and frankly, looking after oneself, study life strategies and being true to oneself. These characteristics have revealed themselves in some of my interview respondents' accounts of speaking out freely and frankly to those in authority across different contexts and scenarios. The four respondents' accounts that follow broadly fall under these four characteristics and have been chosen to reflect these themes. The speaker's understanding of themselves and

their motivations for speaking out is a useful starting point (Tamboukou 2003:19) in describing the experiences of subject's actions in speaking freely and frankly to authority in educational contexts. Tamboukou holds that the first step is to ascertain the truth held by a respondent' in their thinking in order to fully grasp how their accounts "shatter any pre-existing certainties" (19). The manner in which respondents reacted to authority figures often appeared to be dependent upon their prior experiences and acquired attitudes. For example, respondent 'A/B' spoke of being 'frightened' in the face of authority; 'G' describes an inner voice acting as a 'cognitive brake' on speaking out, declaring "You've got it in the back of your head..."; 'H' describes avoiding "...upsetting authority..."; 'M' describes being "...inhibited and afraid..." of possible repercussions.

All respondents, although they reflect different age groups, cultural backgrounds and contexts, initially felt they held a positive view and expectation of authority figures in schooling before the experiences they related. Each of the respondents held similar over-riding concepts of trust in authorities, the schooling process, its importance in contributing to future well-being and, above all, to the belief that schooling would be fair and just. For each of the respondents their experiences of authority figures in educational contexts has changed the way they think about schooling and authority. This change of thinking toward authority reflects one of Foucault's cynic characteristics which involve an element of danger or risk to the speaker in expressing their views freely and frankly. Foucault (238) describes this in terms of either 'contributing to the beneficial organisation of one's life' or at the other extreme negatively leading to disastrous or difficult consequences for the speaker.

Experiences of Parrhesia

E/F spoke of her experiences of speaking freely and frankly in an educational context. E/F is an ambitious, articulate and competent woman in her late 20's who had experienced a disrupted education in her teens and encountered past opposition from authority figures. Her experiences reflect the 'dual nature' of risk and benefit in speaking freely and frankly. The context in which E/F found herself was difficult and emotive linked to her employment in the education sector. E/F describes her job as giving much satisfaction with feelings of success and being enjoyably engaged in worthwhile activity supporting students. Together with colleagues 'E/F' was unexpectedly faced with redundancy and the ending of a job greatly valued. 'E/F' relates how feeling moved to speak out freely and frankly to the authority figure who had gathered her and colleagues together to inform them of their redundancy. 'E/F' describes her initial feelings of being 'scared' and 'overwhelmed' by the authority figure's presence, something that was exacerbated by the choice of an unfamiliar office venue. However, that fear and her initial feelings of being 'frightened' were replaced by anger at what 'E/F' felt was a grave injustice inflicted upon herself and colleagues. 'E/F' summoned the courage to speak out and describes the authority figures initial 'shock' at being interrupted in their flow – and her own surprise at speaking out. The authority figure became 'flustered' as 'E/F' spoke her 'truth to power' whilst her colleagues sat quietly. Her bold actions were not well received by the authority figure and the consequences left unease in 'E/F' as to whether to expect a good future employment reference. 'E/F' felt that her free and frank speaking, "...had not got her anywhere...", and had probably injured any future chances of being re-employed by the institution. Despite this negative self-comment 'E/F' did acknowledge that whilst not endearing herself to the authority figure 'E/F' felt 'affirmed' within herself that her actions were correct. The act of 'E/F's speaking out freely

and frankly reflects one aspect of Foucault's description concerning the duality contained in the 'Cynic Life'. This 'duality' compels on the one hand a subject to speak out freely and frankly, something beneficial to a person's inner development, whilst at the same time injurious in terms of consequences. In another encounter with authority in a different educational context 'E/F' reflects, "I feel that he thought he was more qualified than me....so this is why he knew more....um....and he basically didn't pay any attention to anything I said..." [after 'E/F' spoke freely & frankly]. "He had a sort of bad attitude every time we met after that...um...kinda disregarding a lot of things I'd say."

Another element of the 'Cynic Life' described by Foucault (238) is also illustrated by a story Foucault relates from the life of Diogenes. The philosopher was attempting to speak freely and frankly to those going about their daily business in a town square. He was ignored until he changed tactics and instead began imitating a bird song thereafter quickly gathering an interested crowd. Once a crowd had gathered, he lambasted them explaining that whilst they were happy to be entertained and amused by frivolous activities, they completely ignored him when he spoke of serious things. Diogenes had resorted to amusement in order to convey a serious message.

Mirroring this anecdote, one of my interview respondent's transcripts ('A/B'), relates a similar attention-grabbing opportunity to speak freely and frankly to those in authority positions by lampooning indirectly decisions taken by management. 'A/B' is an articulate young woman in her late 20's who had experienced much success in her schooling by working hard and achieving good qualifications. Reflecting upon her teenage experiences in secondary school 'A/B' was not enamoured by the changes a new headteacher was imposing upon the school community. 'A/B' set about responding to the headteacher and senior teachers' attempts to implement new curriculum, ethos and institutional organisation which was apparently (in 'A/B's opinion) unwelcome to both teachers and students. Direct confrontation with those in authority was seen as useless and simply resulted in 'tokenistic' listening on the part of those in authority. Therefore, other creative means were harnessed in order to speak out freely and frankly. This took the form of joining with others to produce satirical writing, plays and stories. Each play and story drew attention to absurdities such as oft repeated school mantras or decisions that the group felt were facile, sexist or unpopular. The respondent felt that to raise these issues directly would indeed be detrimental to her well-being and therefore together with her close friends expressed their challenge to authority in quiet mockery. Unlike the bold actions of respondent 'E/F', the powerless position of 'A/B' and her supportive friends felt that their voice must through necessity be a subdued but no less critical one in the face of authority. In contrast to 'E/F' and her emotionally charged redundancy situation, 'A/B' spoke freely and frankly in a quieter manner but in common with 'E/F' felt her actions were also speaking up for those around her who remained silent. 'A/B' felt that despite the lampooning and mockery instigated toward authority both herself and others in the group still continued to follow the dictates of the new regime and work hard for their final grades. 'A/B' declared that despite opposition to the new regime 'A/B' had to work within it, "...good students towed the line and said 'yes' and 'no' at the right places....we had no authority to say anything...it was just the dynamic...[being spoken to and treated like that]...was like just stuff that happens, you know". The need to gain qualifications and not be seen as a 'naughty girl' ensured her outward compliance. As 'A/B' stated, together with her friends they were 'still in it for themselves' and did not want to jeopardise their standings or reputation. Nonetheless it remained important for them to exert a degree of oppositional

autonomy as they were swept along in the face of unwelcome changes. The process of exercising free and frank responses had met an inner need to express feelings as well as honing skills of observation, language development and forging bonds of friendship with others.

A further connection to the 'Cynic Life' (Foucault 2011:238ff) draws from Diogenes. In order to take care of oneself life needs to involve the practice of seeking out what is 'useful in and for existence'. Ginott (1972:33) relates an illustrative story involving a haughty philosopher being rowed across a river by a humble boatman. The philosopher berates the boatmen because of his lack of learning and knowledge of philosophy only to discover when a calamity causes the boat to capsize it is the boatman and not the philosopher who has the practical skill to swim and save himself. Identifying and knowing what is 'useful in and for existence' (Foucault 2011:238) in any given situation can be beneficial for self-preservation and to achieve one's aims. Even though 'freedom is constrained' a subject can still exert an element of autonomy through the act of speaking freely and frankly in order to seek out what is needed for a favourable outcome.

Respondent's 'L' and 'H', both parents to school age children reflect this aspect. Respondent 'L' in her mid-forties and a university student, had not experienced a great deal of success at school. Subject 'H' was in her mid-thirties, very articulate and had given up a successful career in the business world to concentrate upon further study and family life. 'H' felt strongly that the local school was not fully meeting the needs of her children and spoke of being rebuffed and thwarted in seeking justice for them. In her experiences as a parent talking to authority figures in a school context 'H' described 'playing the game' with those in authority, a game in which the rules administered by the authority figures, (reflecting Foucault 190b:151), appeared to be 'impersonal' and 'bent to any purpose' that suited the institution: "...you have to be a shrewd negotiator.... keeping emotions out of it...can't be too critical...or confrontational...". 'H' described initially being inhibited talking to authority figures but went on to say that she drew confidence from the knowledge she had of her child's needs and information gleaned from outside sources. This knowledge strengthened 'H' in the face of authority but also allowed her to access personal skills to resist and achieve the desired ends for herself and her young son.

'H' felt 'puzzled and frustrated' at the responses received from authority figures in seeking justice for her son at their local school. The school authority figures acted as 'gatekeepers' refusing to recognise her concerns. Despite attempting to speak freely and frankly 'H' felt her position as a non-professional prevented her voice being taken seriously explaining that, "...you get so down trodden about it...". Inwardly however the parent did reject the professional advice being given recalling that, "...it got my hackles up...". 'H' described herself as someone who, "...tried never to clash with others...", but equally rejected the professional opinion being put forward of her son. The way in which 'H' exerted her voice and autonomy was to, "...play the game... [to] ... go along..." with the professional advice even though feeling it wrong. 'H' termed this as, "...taking it on the chin..." by putting up with advice in order to bring herself into favour with those in authority in the hope of eventually obtaining justice.

'H' made herself useful and helpful in a voluntary role within the school structure and consciously used the relationships with staff and authority figures to achieve her desired outcomes. 'H' felt uncomfortable in general with the idea of simply speaking out freely and frankly to authority figures and was fearful of the negative consequences this might entail for

both her and her son in being marginalised. “I always wanted to work with people.... I don’t want to upset people...they [the school] said, ‘how do you feel about it’?... you can’t say no, can you”? The fear of being seen as a ‘nuisance parent’ or professionals hindering her attempt to obtain justice for her child were ever present for her.

Once on the ‘inside’, initially as a parent helper and then as a member of staff, ‘H’ felt more ‘trusted’ as one of the ‘supporters’ of the institution. At that point ‘H’ felt more comfortable raising issues to those in authority once a closer relationship had been built. ‘H’ expressed her view that professionals found it easier to work with ‘supportive parents’, i.e. those parents who simply cooperated with the institution’s interpretation of a situation. ‘H’ was careful to preserve her own feelings of self-worth and to study what was useful in her given situation. Confrontation was not seen as a practical option as her experience had taught her that speaking freely and frankly ‘was not always a good idea’. What ‘H’ had observed in her struggle with authority was that building relationships ‘on the inside’ with those in authority was a useful skill to foster. This, in turn, provided her with a feeling of personal confidence and knowledge to influence those in authority and thereby finally obtain some justice for her son.

Respondent ‘L’ had similar experiences as a parent to respondent ‘H’ in that they both felt ‘thwarted’ and ‘rebuffed’ by authority figures in a school context who would not listen to concerns about her child. Respondent ‘L’ describes her interactions with school authority figures as, “...quite a learning curve...”, as her previous experiences of authority figures had been in an adult business orientated workspace. ‘L’ felt that a person would be unsuccessful in achieving their ends unless they, “...really fight for it...”, but confessed that in talking with educational professionals one had to become, “...less critical... [and]...tip-toe around professionals...”. Talking to authority figures in school was like, “...walking on egg shells”. ‘L’ felt that unlike her previous adult workplace school authority figures were more, “...sensitive to any criticism...”. Consequently ‘L’ avoided, “...burning her bridges...” and presenting as a ‘problem parent’ and instead developed skills of directive praise, and “...becoming a shrewd negotiator...”. These skills ‘L’ felt were necessary to woo the professionals and obtain her desired ends. ‘L’ actively sought opportunities outside of the school context to expand her knowledge and acquire the help needed to influence her situation by consulting independent professionals and parent support organisations.

These sources proved beneficial in giving her confidence to lobby on behalf of her child. The knowledge ‘L’ gained together with her own personally identified need to equip herself with the right skills and knowledge eventually contributed to her being able to express herself freely and frankly. Reflecting upon her experience’s ‘L’ identified that it was necessary for her to bring about a change of register from that used in her previous adult business workplace to one more acceptable in an educational context. In doing so ‘L’ had acquired what was ‘useful in and for existence’ thus allowing her to more effectively speak freely and frankly to teaching professionals. Respondent ‘L’ as with respondent ‘H’ both achieved their desired outcomes by making a point of studying what was ‘really useful in and for existence’. Foucault (2011:238).

A final aspect of Foucault’s description of the Cynic Life (239) involves subject’s being true to the ‘precepts one formulates’ for oneself. This may involve ‘revaluing one’s currency’ in the light of experience but, equally, it can apply to questioning and ultimately upholding the beliefs of that

currency as noted in respondent 'T'. Discussion revealed that respondent 'T' was a young woman for whom truth is something highly valued and means a great deal to her thinking and behaviour. As an older teenager her negative experience with authority was compounded by her parent's unsympathetic reaction to her plight. 'T's experiences led her to believe that truth is not always highly valued or acknowledged and this has impacted sharply upon her thinking as an adult. Respondent 'T' recalled incidents from her secondary school days in which as an older teenager experienced being wrongly accused of an incident. 'T' had gone to the aid of a fellow student who was in distress only to be wrongfully accused by a teacher of being one of the main protagonists in the affair. 'T' felt strongly to protest about the injustice experienced and spoke her mind freely and frankly both to the authority figures within the school and to her parents, none of whom believed her. 'T' carried the feeling of unfairness with her into adult life declaring that her parents felt, "...your teacher said...[therefore]...you must have done it...", despite being, "...someone that was never in trouble...". The experience made her, "... wary and suspicious of authority figures...".

Respondent 'T' felt 'intimidated' and her experiences described as, "...leaving a big imprint...", resulting in her adult life becoming, "...very cautious how I talk to people...". 'T' now preferred not to. "... make a fuss...", rather than speak freely and frankly. Respondent 'T' did not fare well in her second brush with authority in school. Normally a hard-working student 'T' on one occasion was deemed not to have worked well and complete all her tasks. 'T' found herself sent to her head of year and was, "...lectured about falling behind...". Her reaction on this occasion, (recalling her previous experiences) was to, "...sit quietly and listen..." rather than protest at the injustice of being labelled as slacking, saying nothing, "...I just...I just...sat...and didn't say anything because [of her memory of] the first time...". Memories of that incident left her feeling authority figures were not interested in hearing the truth if it did not suit them. As a young woman who greatly valued the truth in herself and others it left her feeling, "...I could not say what I wanted to say..." and that, "...now I'm really cautious...". Respondent 'T' felt inhibited to, "... say something out of turn...", over anxious, and only mindful, "...to leave a good impression..." when encountering authority". 'T' related that, "...used to be quite out-going...", but seven years after is still puzzled by the reactions of those in authority. Now an adult, 'T' was in no doubt that both her parents and the authority figures had been unsympathetic and consequently had called into question her trust in authority.

Each of the four aspects of the 'Cynic Life' described by Foucault involves speaking freely and frankly requiring courage to speak the truth as one sees it and is an important connecting thread in being true to oneself. Equally the courage on the part of authority to accept a truth freely and frankly communicated without retribution is also a virtue. Foucault (2011:13). The striving for truth (Nietzsche 2016:88) is only of importance in so much as it is connected to the 'unconditional will to justice' and respondent 'T' after some persistence was eventually able to persuade her parents of the true situation connected with her experiences.

Impasse

In each of the interview transcripts given by the respondents there is an underlying desire to exert an element of autonomy and achieve goals through speaking out freely and frankly or by developing strategies that reflect an ability to communicate with authority figures. Confidence in overcoming fear of the negative effects of dealing with authority can emerge through the process

of Impasse. (Berlant 2011:199ff). Impasse describes different ways that subjects can react to the disruption of the norm, a space in time, a cul-de-sac in which thinking occurs after perhaps a dramatic event, or when one finds oneself adrift, or where old sureties are dissolved. Respondent's 'H' and 'L' found themselves locked into what Berlant describes as a 'significantly problematic object' of desire. (24). Both respondents were fighting for what they regarded as justice on behalf of their child. The relationship with authority figures acting as gatekeepers generated emotionally fraught and problematic feelings that were seemingly inescapable. This often led to reactions of 'Impasse', inertia, a cul-de-sac of thinking, strewn full of anxiety. For these parents their experiences acted to 'dissolve their old sureties' (200) of how they dealt with authority. Their experiences caused them to deeply reflect upon their situation and ultimately consider different strategies to achieve their ends. Similarly, Tolstoy's letters of encouragement to the persecuted religious community of Doukhor's in pre-Soviet Russia reflect Berlant's third aspect of Impasse in which a subject's experiences of disruption of all that had previously been held dear led them to improvise new solutions to problems in order to achieve new, yet unknown, outcomes. In a letter to Peter Verigin in March 1909 Tolstoy discloses that he found many of the most important experiences and understandings in his own life arose from his 'inner struggles' both within himself and with those in authority. (Donskov and Gladkova 2019:275). Through the process of Impasse confidence can emerge through reframing perceptions of the relationship with authority, or as Foucault describes, 'changing one's currency'. (2011:226). Aristotle (1976:207ff) describes a similar process naming it 'deliberation' whereby a subject harnesses external knowledge and combines it with internal knowledge and intuition to form strategies towards a desired end. Many of the interviewee experiences highlight the tension that exists between the exercise of authority and when that authority becomes coercive.

Coercion and Authority

Tolstoy (1894:144) describes authority as a means of forcing a subject to comply acting as, '...the cord, the chain' with which they find themselves 'bound and fettered'. (145). For Tolstoy the object of authority is always to restrain those who seek personal interests 'to the detriment of the interests of society'. Tolstoy was an encourager of personal freedom as long as it was not injurious to others and felt that an individual's energies should be spent upon freeing themselves as a bee might divert from the swarm. He lamented that instead people sought a 'united' way of obtaining freedom by 'riveting their chains faster and faster' through binding themselves into organisations and movements. (188). The organisation of hierarchy, he felt, applied pressure on those 'above' and those 'below' to 'throw the responsibility of their acts upon one another'. (226). One of the themes that emerged from my interview subjects concerned the way in which respondents felt thwarted in their efforts to negotiate authority, especially where authority figures were reluctant to take responsibility for their decisions and actions. Blaming or citing those 'above them' or those 'below them' within institutional hierarchy. Subject 'L' spoke of having to be 'a shrewd negotiator' of being 'intimidated' by those with higher authority and that, "...there is so much blame sharing [amongst professionals] and finger pointing". Frustrated at the school authority figures 'L' spoke of her previous encounters with authority in the business world. 'L' felt that authority figures in an educational context would rarely accept personal responsibility and came to realise that, "...you are never given one person who is accountable for delivering this stuff...". This led to her feeling 'wary' and exasperated when speaking with authority figures. Foucault (2011:36) points out that speaking freely and frankly to authority is not always accepted or welcomed in a democracy. Those who do practice speaking freely and frankly may not be

respected (37) and cause irritation, whilst those that flatter or say what is respected and accepted by authority may be listened to. Thomas and Loxley (2004:39) illustrate the problem that arises where the 'needs' of the child or parent do not coincide with the institution's 'needs' to operate in the way they think best. The resultant effect can be for the institution to 'close ranks' and exert their higher authority.

Conclusion

The Eighteenth-century social philosopher William Godwin maintained that an 'awakened mind' was the most important purpose of education (Godwin 1797:4) and what made it more possible was the ability of the learner to feel free and express themselves without fear or hindrance to those in authority over them. For Tolstoy (1967:110), writing in the mid Nineteenth-century, an effective education system which truly had the learner's interests and needs at heart could never be one in which compulsion of attendance and curriculum dominated leaving little opportunity for student autonomy or voice. For Tolstoy freedom was not just the absence of compulsion it comprised of a coming together of teacher and child with freedom to select the best method and materials to be studied. Without the opportunity to practice speaking freely and frankly to those in authority one's ability, it could be argued, to achieve a meaningful voice in the process of education is compromised.

To this end, Foucault's highlighting of the Ancient Greek practice of Parrhesia allowing unimpeded voice to authority takes on importance. The process however needs to be a meaningful one and not simply tokenistic, without fear of retribution from authority. As with the Ancient perception of Cynicism, the cynic or free and frank speaker needs to be seriously encouraged, practised and given strategies to enable them to fearlessly speak truth to power. The Russian philosopher Bakhtin writes that a process of 'inner strength' provides the starting point to encourage a feeling of 'freedom from' being overwhelmed, thwarted or intimidated by authority. Saul-Morrison (1985:146). Similarly, Mandelstam (1989:279) advises that freedom needs be 'won only through inner struggle', a process akin to 'Impasse' that involves overcoming 'both oneself' and the 'world at large'. To act otherwise it may be argued stifles enquiry and hinders effective learning, schooling and education.

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