

# On Power, Parrhesia & Health Promotion

# The bigger the turban



# Health promotion sage *Mohan Singh*:

*The health educator who plays roulette must first invent the wheel.*

*He who lives by bread alone needs sex education.*

*Beware, lest the fragile lotus of health education be trampled by the elephants of reality.*

*Neither contemplation of the navel nor the writing of pamphlets can be shown to be cost-effective.*



Mohan Singh, aka Horace G. 'Hod' Ogden (1925–98), was the first director of the Bureau of Health Education at the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The **Most Divine Temple of Health Promotion Wisdom** is still available through Eberhard's website at <https://ldb.org/mohan/>



# When the hipster dances in the East, the wise worry about the bilbies in the West



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When the lion starts to speak of evidence,  
the lemmings better run






As the values are professed,  
the knives come out



Values in Action  
Our UNSW Behaviours

...speaks to  
the **collegiality,**  
**professionalism,**  
**commitment,**  
**engagement, leadership**  
**and service** orientation  
that represents our  
UNSW community both  
now and into the future.

# Research ≠ Knowledge ≠ Policy ≠ Change

	ἐπιστήμη	episteme – <i>knowledge</i>
	τέχνη	techne – <i>skill</i>
	σοφία	sophia – <i>wisdom</i>
	φρόνησις	phronesis – (political) <i>astuteness</i>
	παρρησία	parrhesia – <i>speaking out boldly</i>

Tactical self-preservation

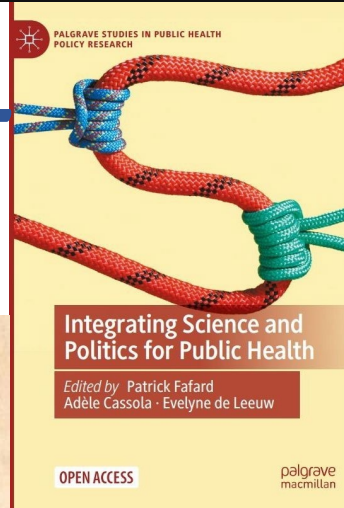
More esoteric truths:  
 Health is political

“Medicine is a social science, and politics is nothing else but medicine on a large scale. Medicine, as a social science, as the science of human beings, has the obligation to point out problems and to attempt their theoretical solution: the politician, the practical anthropologist, must find the means for their actual solution. The physicians are the natural attorneys of the poor, and social problems fall to a large extent within their jurisdiction.”

 Politics: *who gets what*

 Thus: *power*

 Not often expressed



Supreme  
excellence  
consists of  
breaking the  
enemy's  
resistance  
without fighting.



# Let's get personal: 1986



Chernobyl explodes



Challenger detonates



Mad Cow Disease erupts



Ottawa Charter launched



What do we want?





# Let's get personal: 1986

➤ where are we?

*UC Berkeley*

➤ what's with me?

*MPH, iHouse Council*

➤ what do we want?

*Divestment, now!*

➤ how do we make our point?

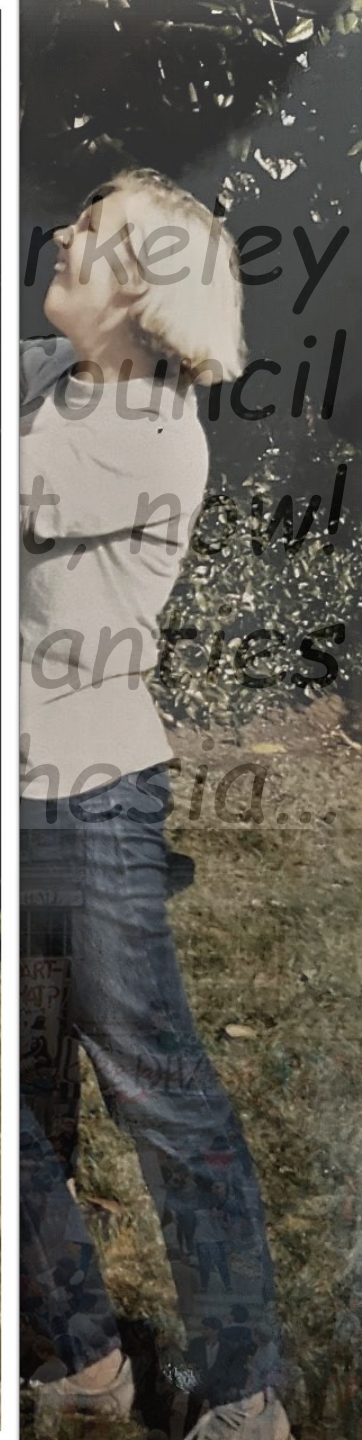
*Soweto shanties*

➤ what do I do?

*Phronesis and parrhesia...*









# But parrhesia comes with risk:

*So you see, the parrhesiastes is someone who takes a risk. Of course, this risk is not always a risk of life. When, for example, you see a friend doing something wrong and you risk incurring his anger by telling him he is wrong, you are acting as a parrhesiastes. In such a case, you do not risk your life, but you may hurt him by your remarks, and your friendship may consequently suffer for it. If, in a political debate, an orator risks losing his popularity because his opinions are contrary to the majority's opinion, or his opinions may usher in a political scandal, he uses parrhesia. Parrhesia, then, is linked to courage in the face of danger: it demands the courage to speak the truth in spite of some danger. And in its extreme form, telling the truth takes place in the "game" of life or death.*

Foucault, M. (Oct–Nov 1983), Discourse and Truth: the Problematization of Parrhesia (six lectures), The University of California at Berkeley.

# Risk, grump, critique, and resilience

- if health is political(ly risky):
- Health *equity* is even more so,
- particularly when you frame it as  
social choice
- falling on the shoulders of  
anxious individuals...
- *(or delusional evidence believers)*



# The parrhesiast tweet/toot/tiktok...

 is a social media rant parrhesia?

 ...*truth... power...*

 there are rules: evidence; respect; and

 accountability

Zerilli, L.M.G. (2020) Fact-Checking and Truth-Telling in an Age of Alternative Facts. *Le foucaldien* 6, 1 1–22.  
<https://doi.org/10.16995/lefou.68>

[Note: In 2022, *Le foucaldien* relaunched as *Genealogy+Critique*.]

Arendt, H. (1969) "Lying in Politics"  
in: *Crises of the Republic*, New York:  
Harcourt Brace & Co.

# Truth and parrhesia...

Trump's "daily deluge of fabrications, deceptions, shams, pretenses, untruths, deceits, mendacities, and 'demonstrable falsehoods,' (dare the news media call them lies?)" observes Mary Dietz, "have been tallied, fact-checked, parsed, characterized, and catalogued on the websites PolitiFact and [FactCheck.org](https://factcheck.org) and by the country's newspapers of record, including an interactive enumeration in *The New York Times*."

Zerilli, L.M.G. (2020) Fact-Checking and Truth-Telling in an Age of Alternative Facts. *Le foucaldien* 6, 1 1–22.  
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*"The ideal subject of totalitarian rule is not the convinced Nazi or the dedicated communist, but people for whom the distinction between fact and fiction (i.e., the reality of experience) and the distinction between true and false (i.e., the standards of thought), no longer exist."*

Arendt, H. (1969) "Lying in Politics," in: *Crises of the Republic*, New York: Harcourt Brace & Co.

*"Ah, scientific evidence is but one opinion. I am free to have another. And you – arbiter, scholar, journo – need to equitably balance all opinions. If you don't, it's my parrhesia to tweet liberally until my truth wins."*

Foucault, M. (2019) "Discourse and Truth," in Fruchaud, H.P. & Laurenzini, D., eds. *Discourse and Truth and Parrhesia*, Chicago, U of Chicago Press ed.

# Truth and parrhesia...

*"One [side] is concerned with the question of how to make sure that a statement is true, that its reasoning is correct, and that we are able to get access to truth. And the other [side] is concerned with the question of the importance for individuals, for the community, for the city, for society of telling the truth and of recognizing which people are able to tell the truth."*

Foucault, M. (2019) "Discourse and Truth," in Fruchaud, H.P. & Laurenzini, D., eds. *Discourse and Truth and Parrhesia*, Chicago, U of Chicago Press ed.





Go together!





Thank you

(and please, be good)

