Love, a political measure for the civil society

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1. Declaration of love

Michel Foucault's thought was an always evolving one. In my view, such a trait represents one of his highest intellectual merits, which testifies to the generous nature of his genius and also explains the complexities of his theoretical heritage. The transformative power of his work is such that it has been constantly evolving not only during his lifetimes but also in the by-now full 30 years that have followed his premature death. Consequently, we are forced to recognize that Foucault's oeuvre can hardly be reduced to few simple formulas or simplified schemas (as, sadly, we have grown accustomed to). This fact is particularly striking when one considers his courses at the Collège de France, where the endless meticulous analytical enumerations never turn to any ossification of reasoning and categories. Foucault claimed that, not only his courses, but his books too were in fact *tâtonnements*, 'incertitudes'. He understood himself as an experimenter, and truly was one of the most exquisite. The very fact that his courses' titles do not always match their actual content, the fact that they have shifting topics, that approached subjects seem to resurface over and over again from slightly changing angles until an almost complete reversal of the original viewpoint is attainted and a completely novel ground is laid out: all these elements conjure up Foucault's courses as a grandiose instance of territorial explorations. Michel Foucault, a territoriologist – and, inherently, a trajectologist…

What I have said so far will certainly sound established, if not utterly trivial, to most Foucault scholars. So, what is the use of this clumsy preamble, apart from a pathetic declaration of love for Foucault as an intellectual model? The fact is that, by placing Foucault's work under the aegis of an experimental attitude, I also dare positioning the present text under a similar heading. For only within such a context, perhaps, can I hope to develop a set of arguments that, all things considered, might sound preposterous to the most established and respectable Foucault experts around. Foucault has been hailed, and is routinely presented, as a historian (or archeologist, or genealogist) of rationalities and discourses, as a theorist of power and resistance, as the scholar of governmentality, discipline, biopolitics, and subjectivity. More rarely, if ever, has he been discussed a philosopher of love. The latter, however, is the task I would like to assign to myself here. More specifically, I would like to focus on that sort of small *Kehre* in Foucault's production that occurred during the year 1979. It is the crucial passage between the two courses *Naissance de la biopolitique* (1978-1979) and *Du gouvernement des vivants* (1979-1980). Reconstructing the context in which the latter course was given, Michel Senellart (2012: 324) writes that the title *On the Government of the Living* was deposited by Foucault in Spring 1979, but that, ultimately, the course delivered in the months from January to March of 1980 had a 'completely different focus': not really the government of the living, but the government of humans by truth.

Certainly, from this moment on, truth acquires an increasing crucial position in Foucault's research, which was not so prominent in his previous studies on discipline and governmentality. True, he had already touched upon the notion of confession and admission (*aveu*) on sexual matters in 1975, during the course on *Les anormaux*. At the time, though, the stress was still essentially on admission as a ritual of submission. The admission of truth was described as grounded in the most legalistic aspects of Christian religion. In particular, Foucault (1999: 161-164) recalled that during the 13th century penitence became a sacrament, the sacrament of penance, and this transformation was intertwined with the logic of law, giving way to a '*tarifage quasi*

juridique de la pénitence' and a stern obligation to 'admit everything'. Also, during the 1970s, at various moments and on the occasions of various interviews – even in the famous television exchange with Noam Chomsky – Foucault remarked that both the modern judge and the psychiatrist do not content themselves with establishing that people are, respectively, criminal or crazy: they also need to have the condemned and the madman *admit*, recognize and openly declare their own condition[1].

At this stage, the context in which truth made sense was the modern elaboration of a positive power, which inherently calls for a form collaboration on the part of its subjects. This consent necessarily stretched beyond mere extortion – or at least, could perform extortion in disguise (Foucault 1976). Such a modern domination is, in any case, not merely repressive or coercive, for it does not aim at simply crushing subjects; rather, it takes their life in charge and creates a strategic grid around it, wherein its expression can make sense. In other words, everything the subject does is preliminarily placed inside a pre-existing grid of intelligibility. This enables power to distinguish itself from both a straightforward function of consent, and a simple function of violence. Specifically, whereas violence acts upon bodies and things, power acts upon actions and conducts. Thus, for power to exist, it requires an acting subject who remains 'other' and positions him/herself in various ways inside a predetermined field of responses. The subject is, yes, subject to power, but never wholly subsumed by it; it never vanishes into it. The core of these ideas, Foucault will of course also retains later (e.g., Foucault 1982); but it is interesting to observe how, during the 1970s, the context in which truth featured was the shaping of a rationality that established a punctual correspondence between a political anatomy of the body and a physiological morality of the flesh, understood as veritable terrains of truth – anatomy and morality serving as two prototypical top-down disciplines.

Since 1980, on the other hand, truth seems to take on new significations for Foucault. It first features prominently in the analysis of *alethourgy*[2] developed in the opening pages of *Du gouvernement des vivants* (1979-1980). Subsequently, it extends and expands into the reconstruction of *parrhesia* during the latter courses *L'herméneutique du sujet* (1981-1982), *Le Gouvernement de soi et des autres* (1982-1983) and *Le courage de la vérité* (1983-1984)[3]. As Foucault turned to the early Christian era and, soon after, to the Greek classical and Hellenistic antiquity, he proceeded to excavate the theme of *epimeleia heautou*, or *cura sui*, the practice of 'taking care of oneself' and its larger cultural significance. He underlined how a whole culture of the self and a series of empirical technologies of the self – deployed into a *tekhne tou biou*, a full blown art of living – accompanied the practice of taking care of oneself. In other words, from January 1980, Foucault's inquiry is set within the wide and complex horizon of the relationships between the self and the others, the procedures through which one becomes a subject, and the order of problems associated with this phenomenon.

As a consequence, a much more active subject appears on stage than the one whose voice was 'interdicted' and 'excluded' by modern *savoirs* – a position Foucault had elaborated on 2 December 1970 during his inaugural speech at the Collège, *L'ordre du discours* (1971). At that time, as the reader remembers, the will to

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[1] In the conference 'Sexuality and solitude', see e.g. the anecdote about how a certain 19th century psychiatrist Leuret extorted form his patient the admission of being a madman by torturing him with cold water showers (in Foucault 2001b: §II, 987-997).

[2] The term is coined by Foucault drawing from what is, to my knowledge, an *hapax* to be found in the little-known grammarian and allegorist Heraclides, alias Heraclitus the grammarian or Pseudo-Heraclitus, author of the *Allegoriae Homericae*. At §67, the adjective ἀληθουργέστερον can be found, the superlative form of ἀληθουργής, which, joining the words for 'work' and 'truth', means 'someone who operates with truth'.

[3] I am not in the position to say much about the course *Subjectivité et vérité* (1980-1981), which is currently still unpublished – except what can be inferred from the five-page course outline in Foucault (2001: §II, 1032-7). Notably, though, it is this course which inaugurates the study of *epimeleia* through the analysis of Plato's *Alcybiades* as an instance of *gouvernement de soi par soi même*.

know and the will to truth were described as merely 'implacable' anonymous disciplinary and institutional devices. It was the logical continuation of a thread of research laid out since his doctoral thesis about those subjects, such as the madmen in particular, who had been deprived of discourse (Foucault 1972[1961]). For how much Foucault always strived to disaffiliate himself from the label 'structuralism' in order to affirm the originality of his own approach, it is undeniable that in the second half of the 1960s his name had been associated with those of Lacan, Braudel, Levi-Strauss, Benveniste, Barthes and Althusser as a new wave of thought cast against Sartre's existentialism. Not by chance, *éliminer le sujet* was the expression used by Jules Vuillemin in 1969 when he announced the creation of the Chair in *Histoire des système de pensée* at the Collège de France, to which Foucault would have been elected the following year[4]. On the contrary, in 1980, it is the hard work and the spiritual tribulations of the subject in pursuit of truth that come to the foreground. If, from 1979-1980 onward, 'telling the truth about oneself' increasingly turns into a central analytical point in Foucault's work, one critical 'point of reversal' is perhaps marked by the passage in which Foucault (2012: 8-9) concludes that that scientific knowledge itself is but *one among the many* possible types of *alethourgy*. In other words, while during the 1970s most interpretive effort went into explaining how power is actively productive of knowledge and, specifically, of scientific knowledge, now scientific knowledge itself is repositioned inside a larger field of truth production, which may leave room for other formations as well. This way, the whole *savoir-pouvoir* approach is superseded and pushed towards a new stage, provisionally called *gouvernement par la vérité*, governance by truth.

2. Points of reversal

In *Du gouvernement des vivants* the initial barycenter of analysis still pivots around the exercise of power. In this context, taking truth seriously into account gives, in the first place, a specifically non-utilitarian twist to the issue of power exercise. From this perspective, Foucault (2012: 10) establishes that 'the force of power is not independent from something like the manifestation of truth, well beyond what is merely useful or necessary for good governance'. This statement contains one precious insight, insofar as it underlines that truth or, more precisely, truth production and truth requirements, necessarily stretch beyond utility. Arguably, it wouldn't make much sense if truth were just another name for ideology, or a somehow functionalized set of believes. Thus, to begin with, Foucault marks out the territory of truth as something that is related to power, and even indispensable to power, yet irreducible to its economic and strategic side. The term *supplément* (a term which, incidentally, has encountered broader success in deconstructionist philosophy) is employed here to highlight such an anti-reductionist stance: truth is provisionally portrayed as a dimension of power that exceeds, and perhaps even escapes, practical efficacy. However, in my view, this realization does not capture yet the most innovative side of Foucault's later reflection in full. In order to capture some further stakes in this analysis of truth, it might be helpful to place these concerns within an enlarged scenery.

Broadly speaking, it is common to outline the existence of four technologies of power in Foucault. Certainly, similar efforts at systematization read schematic and unable to capture the evolving dimension and the deeper lines in this author's inquiry, yet we can provisionally accept them as sketchy usable maps to venture into a much more complex and metamorphic terrain. Most importantly, the four-fold distinction is not meant as a historical sequence but rather as an array of distinct rationalities, or *analytic forms of power* (Foucault 1976: 109), which are certainly grounded in specific cultural histories yet do not form subsequent linear stages. The four categories of *sovereignty*, *discipline* (or anatomopolitics), *biopolitics*, and *the self* can be employed to single out four different ways in which the governance of humans can be carried out. These headings

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[4] More precisely, the Chair in *Histoire de la pensée philosophique*, which had been held by Jean Hyppolite until his death in 1968, was renamed for Foucault. Simultaneously, a new Chair in *Sociologie de la civilisation moderne* was created, soon to be assigned to Raymond Aron.

correspond to different regimes and different forms of knowledge, namely the legal, the normative, the normalizing, and – albeit more tentatively – the ethical.

Following various passages from *Surveiller et punir* (1975: *passim*), *La volonté de savoir* (1976: 117 *et passim*), *Sécurité, territoire et population* (2004a: 22 *et passim*), *Naissance de la biopolitique* (2004b: 297), *L'herméneutique du sujet* (2001a: 279-281) and *Le Gouvernement de soi et des autres* (2008: 332), it is possible to summarize as follows: sovereignty operates according to a legal code, with prohibition at its foundation. Sovereignty, as a relation between a king and a voluntary legal subject, one essentially endowed with free will, raises the issue of the political and legal 'contract' of subjection. With its institutional forms, sovereign power defines a capital or political center which owns a territory and rules over it. Also, a whole array of symbols and symbolisms (emblems, coats of arms etc.) is inherent in the display of sovereignty, as especially embodied in the great rituals of punishment. In European history, the monarchical form of sovereignty has provided the most powerful blueprint for conceiving power, to the point that it has hampered a conceptual understanding of the set of new modern power formation ('Dans la pensée et l'analyse politique, on n'a toujours pas coupé la tête du roi'). By and large, sovereignty represented a *pars destruens* for Foucault, who repeatedly argued for the need to shift from a formal-juridical conception of power to a technological one.

Discipline, on the other hand, operates in a capillary way, at the infra-legal level, through the meticulous and 'orthopedic' power of the norm. Discipline is a sort of 'counter-law', also in the sense that instead of merely imposed from the outside, it inherently looks for collaboration on the part of the subjected. It is a much more modest-looking form of power, which operates upon enclosed spaces, non-symbolic institutions (prisons, barracks, asylums, schools…) where elements – including persons – can be arranged hierarchically according to a pre-programmed visibility diagram. In this type of space, discipline operates on individual bodies by training, surveillance and inspection, aiming at generating in single individuals specific dispositions to act and eliciting specific performances, so that, in the measure in which discipline improves, punishment becomes less and less necessary. Also, disciplinary examination turns humans into 'cases' to be assessed and ordered into a repertoire, which eventually precipitates into the handbook, the kernel and *liber magistri* of a given discipline. In sum, despite that fact that Foucault will later refer to discipline as anatomopolitics, it should be clear that it does not only addresses (to speak Husserl-like) the body as *Körper*, as anatomical body, but simultaneously the body as *Leib*, as living body.

Thirdly, biopolitics, or biopower, designates a whole ensemble of techniques and devices of security through which a whole population is taken in charge. Biopolitics thus operates over mobile ensembles populating open spaces, ensembles which cannot be broken down into single individuals. Biopolitics addresses the milieu, the environment, and calculates the possible events inherent to a biological population; its regulation consists in a tactical 'disposition' of things and humans to cope with phenomena of circulation and diffusion, ranging from street traffic to infectious diseases. Statistical rates, trends and thresholds are thus the epistemic notions that pertain to this type of governance. Notably, biopolitics is crossed by a tension between, on the one hand, a dream of total control, best embodied by the 18th-century 'sciences of police' and, on the other, a series of counterpoints introduced by political economy as a liberal science whose attempt is to govern precisely through the self-limitation of governance, accepting all the fluctuations that are inherent in economic transactions.

Fourthly, the culture of the self that comprises the practices of taking care of oneself (*epimeleia heautou*) and telling the truth about oneself (*parrhesia*) points towards a dimension which, while grounded in the individual as a point of application, is irreducible to discipline. In this case, we face a subject who actively explores, interprets and constitutes itself thanks to a series of practical exercises (*askeseis*) of self-management and self-governance. The central function here is not pedagogy, as in disciplinary rationality, but rather *psychagogy*: in other words, the aim is not to endow the subject with a set of predefined attitudes, but to transform its ethical mode of existence. In Socrates and Plato, in particular, we find the definition of *psychagogy* as a *tekhne tou biou*, a

technique (technology or art) of living. Thus, the practice of *askesis* which appears in the classical Greek antiquity is not really a renouncement to the self, but a technique for constituting the self: it does not represent an attempt to subject individuals to the law, but rather an attempt to shape them in relation to truth telling.

Now, at first sight, the four technologies of power just enumerated would seem broad enough to map the largest share of Foucault's preoccupations. Except that, in a 1982 short text, Foucault makes an important claim which marks a veritable point of reversal with respect to the above four-fold analytics of power: his real object of analysis, he declares, is not power, but the subject: 'the goal of my work during the last twenty years … has not been to analyze the phenomena of power, nor to elaborate the foundations of such an analysis. My objective, instead, has been to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects' (Foucault 1982: 208). Here, the process of becoming-subject is presented as something that potentially exceeds power and its manifestations or which, in any case, calls for interpretive categories which cannot be limited to those of power. Retrospectively, one can infer that the forms of power known as sovereignty, discipline and biopolitics were only some of the many possible ways of subject-making. In the course given at the Collège on that same academic year, Foucault (2008) specifies the nature of his 'real objective' as residing in the study of the *foyers d'expérience*, which include simultaneously the elements of knowledge, government and the subject.

The phrase *foyers d'expérience* (focuses of experience) certainly deserves more extensive investigation. However, let us content for now with establishing that the 1980s courses devoted to the in-depth analysis of *parrhesia* in Greek culture find a precise counterpart in such a theoretical re-orientation. In particular with Socrates and Plato, the specific object of philosophy appears to be, not any substantive knowledge about a specific discipline as such, but the way the subject experiences that discipline. For instance, when philosophy questions the life of the polis, the object of inquiry is not politics but rather political *subjectivity*, that is, the role played by the subject in political life (Foucault 2008: 295). In other words, the task of philosophy – and here is perhaps where the topic of investigation joins most closely Foucault's own philosophy – is to accompany the life of the subject (which, importantly, is not the life of the individual). This is an extremely innovative turn which opens up a working program which unfortunately Foucault could never tackle in its full consequences. However, because of this major point of reversal, we are left with an impelling question: is the self still to be regarded as a technology of power, or is it perhaps better to conceive it of as a whole new lens through which the issue of power, and more generally the issue of social existence, can be observed?

In the later courses by Foucault, subject-making is described as the production of a *sujet* who is simultaneously a *sujet dans une relation de pouvoir* and a *sujet dans une manifestation de vérité* (Foucault 2012: 79). Subjection and subjectivation, in other words, might reveal very different aspects of what it means to be a subject, but they occupy the same place and take place simultaneously. It is quite important, I think, to stress the non-reductionist take Foucault proposes here. Because truth and power are so close to each other, one might be tempted to conclude that truth is simply a power tool or an effect of power. After all, a not very dissimilar approach was taken in 1971 in *L'ordre du discours*, where, behind truth, Foucault uncovered the presence of a precise 'will to truth' (which would later be investigated as 'will to knowledge'). So, after all, why should truth count as something different from subjection? Since 1980, in my view, Foucault attempts to distance himself from the various analyses *à la* Adorno and Horkheimer that denounce reason as an allied of oppression, an idea that is somehow still looming in the notion of 'will to truth', and which had, by that time, dominated the 1970s epistemological debate (in respect of this, one can also recall the post-Popperian scene in the philosophy of science and, in particular, the works by Paul K. Feyerabend and Imre Lakatos).

More specifically, by exploring the subject, Foucault is far from renegading his lineage drawn from authors like Nietzsche, Artaud and Bataille. Yet a new necessity seems to motivate him in these later years: on the one hand, to distance himself from the relativistic idea of reason as but another tool for oppression, or as a

mere technical allied of power; on the other, of course, not ending up endorsing any absolutist claims about the universality of a single truth. By exploring truth as a relational device that is intimately connected with the shaping of subjectivity, Foucault seems to suggest that what is really essential about truth is the fact that it produces *modes of existence* for subjects. Truth matters to the extent that it transforms the way in which the subject lives. There is a clear consonance here with the works by classical antiquity scholars Jean-Pierre Vernant and Marcel Detienne, and in particular with Detienne's (1967) first book on *les maîtres de vérité*. Not by chance, Foucault exposes the phenomenon of *parrhesia*, *franc-parler* or truth-telling, by setting up an opposition with the pragmatic dimension of language. In contrast with the speech acts described by the British language philosopher John L. Austin, where the fact of uttering something creates specific practical effects, Foucault describes *parrhesia* as a dramatic form of language. In a 'dramatics of discourse', the fact of saying something transforms, not the object (as in pragmatics), but the subject, who is thus called to explore, determine and make explicit her or his mode of existence. The issue, in other words, is one of *témoignage*, of testimony.

In *Du gouvernement des vivants*, particularly with the notion of *alethourgy*, Foucault still insists on the binding nature of truth. A regime of truth is defined by a set of obligations and constraints to tell the truth. The exploration of early Christian authors is thus strategic. For instance, the notion of *metánoia*, or conversion, in Philo of Alexandria (c. 20 BC – c. 50 AD) and the notion of *probatio animae* in Tertullian (160 – c. 225 AD) can be understood as strategies of self-visibilization, whereby the subject is asked for an extensive survey of its own spiritual and psychic territory. Similarly, the notions of *exomologesis* and *exagoreusis* in Saint John Cassian (360 – 435 AD), corresponding respectively to the exposure of oneself as a sinner and the full confession of one's deeds to a spiritual father to whom one entrust oneself, are functional to the requirements of the examination of conscience[5]. Hence, as said above, Foucault establishes that there can be no exercise of power without an *alethourgy*. Somehow, we are still close to an idea of self-surveillance or self-disciplination, where the subjected person is called to collaborate to her/his own subjection. In this respect, interestingly, the course closes with the analysis of *subditio*, which Foucault (2012: 265 ff.) describes as *la soumission, le fait d'être sujet*. Perhaps inadvertently, Foucault employs a word that does not exist in the sources and is not to found in the dictionary. Indeed, as the editors Ewald, Fontana and Gros scrupulously inform us, Cassian speaks of *subjectio*, not *subditio*. Yet surprisingly the word *subditio* turns out to be extremely interesting, for it preludes to the existence of a *subditus*, a subjected subject, a subordinate. There are, in sum, various meaningful interwoven threads between *alethourgy* and subjection.

Nonetheless, it is also interesting to notice that the definition of *alethourgy* is nearly the opposite of what ten years earlier Foucault had called 'the order of discourse'. *Alethourgy* is presented as 'the ensemble of verbal and non-verbal procedures through which we bring into light what is posed as true as opposed to false, hidden, unsayable, unpredictable, forgotten' (Foucault 2012: 8). The theme of the 'limits of the sayable' is still clearly present; but now we discover that veridictional procedures can also be of non-verbal nature. The function of such non-verbal provision might sound odd considering Foucault's subsequent focus on the practice of truth-telling. However, in my view, it has a precise rationale. If we read the definition of *alethourgy* closely, we can find in it the seeds for a radical overcoming of the disciplinary framework of power. Indeed, the phrase 'non-verbal procedures' hints at the fact that these practices contain an 'I'-element whose nature cannot be reduced to the verbal dimension. In other words, these are procedures that can only work *in the first person* and for a *single living person*: every *alethourgy* is an auto-*alethourgy* (*ibid*. 49).

Here is where we begin to appreciate more palpably the difference that exists between such practices of the self and the analytical technology of discipline: an *alethourgy* cannot make reference to definite external, objective, previously-established knowledge. True, Christian *alethourgy* is full of prescriptions and commends

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5 These practices are also examined in the later, more famous seminar on the technologies of the self (Foucault 1988).

total obedience. Yet, in the exploration of *psychagogy* and *parrhesia* a palpably different facet emerges with clarity. Discipline subjects bodies to the norm in order to engender in them dispositions to act; *psychagogy*, on the contrary, does not envisage any pre-established norm: there in no a-priori right way of being, no prepackaged recipe. Already with *exagoreusis*, the direction of conscience must be clearly distinguished from a mere command-obedience scheme of power. Whereas discipline proceeds by conquest, from the outside towards the inside of the individual, *parrhesia* is no game of conquest; it is an exercise (*askesis*) of thoroughly personal nature. As such, it can only begin form the inside. It is not about engendering a disposition, for the right disposition must already be there before the exercise can start. So, *psychagogy* is a subtle issue which is irreducible to procedures of 'normation' and 'normalization'. Radically understood, it is not even a procedure. We tend to imagine an exercise as something that follows a set of rules, and certainly ascetics contains a number of rules; but these are technical rules, not norms, and they can only hope to function once the correct attitude towards them is already in place. In the following courses by Foucault, as the emphasis shifts from *alethourgy* to *parrhesia*, that is as we move backward from the Early Christian era to Classical Greek culture, the absolute external binding to truth will be clearly overcome. Since truth is an exercise a soul entertains with itself, there can be no external (transcendent) obligation towards it. The obligation, if ever, can only be an internal (immanent) one. In this sense, *parrhesia* can even be more neatly distinguished from discipline than *alethourgy*.

It is also curious – as well as, I would add, rewarding – to observe how the exploration of *parrhesia* finally gives an answer to the question Foucault had asked more than a decade before, in the opening page of *L'ordre du discours* (1971: 9): 'What is so perilous in the fact that people speak…?'. Such a 'peril' corresponds quite fittingly to the element of courage entailed by *parrhesia*. Telling the truth always requires courage, for it entails specific risks. The subject runs a risk by practicing the frankness of *parrhesia*: not only an external risk which consists in 'speaking truth to power' – certainly, though, this dimension is quite present, as Plato's bad experience with the tyrant of Syracuse Dionysius the Elder reminds us – but an internal risk as well, whereby, by entering the dynamics of truth, the subject accepts the potential consequences that descend from exploring, transforming, reshaping and even undoing itself. My guess is that here is also is where love comes into play. We will deal more extensively with this insight in the next section. For now, let us just observe how the element of potentiality places the parrhesiast in an open field of risks. Such an openness towards potential events to come shares resemblances with the third technology of power examined above, i.e. biopolitics, and in particular with the notion of security. Indeed, modern security devices operate on the possible events that might affect a demos, a living population. To take an instance, in prophylactic medicine the practices of variolation (inoculation) and vaccination make sense only once we accept the premise that individuals will circulate, meet with each other, and potentially infect each other; and once we establish that, at present, we do not know when and there these events will occur. Yet, just as it is irreducible to the procedures of *normation disciplinaire*, *parrhesia* is likewise irreducible to *normalisation sécuritaire*. For, truly, *parrhesia* cannot be defined exhaustively in procedural terms: it is open also in this sense.

To better appreciate what is at stake in the 'openness' that is inherent in *parrhesia*, let me retrace the most general question concerning governance: what is its specific object? On various occasions, Foucault identified this object as the *conduite* of humans. From this perspective, to govern means to act on someone's action, to operate on something that is already operating on its own. We have to do not only with a moving target, but with a reacting one. The existence of margins of maneuver is thus essential to governance. These 'margins' are what we also call freedom. Therefore, not simply is freedom not the opposite of government but, technically speaking, governance can only be exercised on someone who is free. This way, freedom represents a presupposition and a *de facto* material precondition of governance, perhaps even its best ally. Foucault seems to have fleshed out most of these realizations during his 1979 course on liberalism, *Naissance de la biopolitique*, particularly as he ventured into exploring the tensions between the physiocrats' view on the prominence of the *raison d'état* and the liberals' call for a completely new type of governance, soon to be formalized as *état de droit* (Foucault 2004b: 288-289). The notion of society *qua* civil society makes it

appearance in this context, which in turn explains its major conceptual characteristics. Let us now quickly review how all these ingredients of governance, freedom and subjectivity contribute to the materialization of dynamic points of equilibrium inside the social, or what we might call 'barycenters of society'.

3. Barycenters of society

Hannah Arendt (1958: 28) famously argued that 'the emergence of the social realm, which is neither private nor public, strictly speaking, is a relatively new phenomenon whose origin coincided with the emergence of the modern age and which found its political form in the nation-state'. From this point of view, society may be an old phenomenon, but is a modern notion[6]. In large part, I think, Foucault would concur with such a thesis, and much of his reconstruction of the birth of the human sciences during the 18th and 19th century can be read as an extensive, sustained investigation of precisely this 'emergence of the social realm' as a specific layer of knowledge (Foucault 1966). The translation of Aristotle's phrase *koinonía politiké* (*Politics* I, §1) into Latin as *societas civilis*, made by early modern humanists in the 16th century, marks the inception of this mysterious entity, the 'civil society'. Only since the late 18th century, though, would civil society appear as a domain of analysis endowed with its own consistency, its own logics, and its own laws. As a science of society – or, a series of sciences: economics, statistics, sociology, anthropology, political science etc. – developed and institutionalized themselves, an overall dualism would reinforce itself, the one between the civil and the political society, or between society and the state – a dualism which could have been hardly conceivable before the mid 18th century. But one should not overlook that there is a third hidden body in this equation (hence, a three-body problem, just as in physics), namely the individual subject. Its role with respect to civil society and the state will determine a complex dynamic of equilibrium and disequilibrium among these poles.

In the 20th century, an earlier theorist of the functions of the civil society is, of course, the Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci. For his part, Foucault devoted to the topic of civil society a noteworthy analysis at the end of *Naissance de la biopolitique*, that is, at precisely the turning point towards the subject we are examining. There are reasons to suspect this is not a coincidence. To my knowledge, there is little evidence Foucault ever engaged Gramsci directly, although some indirect reference to the Gramscian renaissance of the 1970s can be spotted in his work[7]. Nonetheless, these two authors share important insights. Historically intriguing is also the fact that Gramsci was almost contemporaneous of the birth of German neoliberalism launched by a group of scholarly economists that was later to be analyzed by Foucault. Despite his harsh prison conditions and limited access to current literature[8], Gramsci understood precisely some underlying nexuses and trends of what would later come be known as, precisely, neoliberalism. Miikka Pyykkönen (2010) has already done excellent work in fleshing out the main ideas of both Foucault and Gramsci around the notion of civil society, highlighting their similarities and differences. Consequently, drawing from that background, in what follows I'll outline very crudely just a handful of meaningful points that could be of interest for the present discussion.

[6] 'It is not – Arendt (1958: 24) explains – that Plato or Aristotle was ignorant of, or unconcerned with, the fact that man cannot live outside the company of men, but they did not count this condition among the specifically human characteristics; on the contrary, it was something human life had in common with animal life, and for this reason alone it could not be fundamentally human. The natural, merely social companionship of the human species was considered to be a limitation imposed upon us by the needs of biological life, which are the same for the human animal as for other forms of animal life'.

[7] The first critical edition of Gramsci's *Quaderni* was edited by Valentino Gerratana in 1975, while the French translation only appeared in 1983. A very partial *Selection* was available in English since 1971.

[8] Also considering that the Fascists' outspoken aim was to 'stop this brain from functioning for twenty years', *Quaderni dal carcere* is almost a miraculous work of resistance.

Gramsci understood civil society as an expression of what he called *hegemony*, that is, a pattern of established power relations among social groups in a given historical political situation, which he called 'historic bloc'. Hegemony is not simply a matter of domination because it also requires 'direction' or, if one wishes, headship, leadership. In other words, with Gramsci, hegemony stretches beyond the pure 'economic-corporative' level, calling for a veritable 'ethical-political' layer (Gramsci 1975: 703). Under many circumstances, the leading or directing group is even required to at least partly sacrifice its own direct economic interests to preserve its hegemony (*ibid.* 1591). Just as Foucault would do 45 years later, Gramsci closely associated the topic of civil society with liberalism and its problems. And the reason is Gramsci saw the bourgeoisie as a morally expansionist class, whose tension is towards assimilating both culturally and economically the whole society. The bourgeoisie, in other words, promotes and spreads an attitude of 'will to conformism' which is essential to build an ethical or, if one wishes, hegemonic State. In the measure in which the latter is capable of transcending the stage of domination, repression can be left behind (in the process, says the Italian philosopher, the State provisionally acts as a 'night guardian'). *A contrario*, the occurrence of repressive moments when the State manifests itself as force only signals a weakening in the civil-socializing process and lack of effective hegemony (for her part, Arendt would speak of lack of authority).

Illiberal governments, Gramsci reasoned, attempt to enact a control of the political society – that is, of the State apparatus – over the civil society. But this can only be an extrinsic and external control, like it happens for instance with the political control and censorship over the media ('state journalism'). Such attempts, in the long run, are doomed to fail. By contrast, the real hegemonic success happens where civil society has the opportunity to flourish and strengthen itself. For when civil society becomes fully 'organic', the very distinction between the political and the civil is no longer necessary and they can both be overcome by a new formation, the 'regulated society' (ibid. 734). It is in this case, that, under perfectly hegemonic conditions, civil society can be said to have absorbed simultaneously the State and the law (*ibid.* 764). Totalitarianism operates to the same aim, but moving form the opposite direction: in this case, it is the political party that makes an attempt to occupy the whole civil society, presenting itself as a compact total unit (*ibid.* 800)[9].

In practice, civil society is simultaneously an object of conquest, a battlefield among different social and political groups, and the outcome of a given configuration of force ratios in a given historic bloc. In any case, it is not an inert entity but possesses an agency of its own. Indeed, in those States Gramsci calls 'advanced nations' (arguably, referring to France, Germany and England) civil society has developed into a complex and robust entity capable of resisting the pressures of the immediate economic element (*ibid.* 860). In these cases, civil society has, on various occasions, proved to be even stronger than State structure (*ibid.* 866). Gramsci uses the following famous image: the State is only an advanced entrenchment, beyond which there lays a complex system of fortresses that extends *en profondeur*, deep into the territory (*ibid.* 866, 1615). So one can nourish the illusion of conquering the State by a rapid war of movement which overpowers the first trench, but it is actually beyond that line that the real battle begins, in that wearing, static war of position in which every gain or loss can prove fatal.

For Gramsci, the liberal ideology is premised upon the principle of the division of powers (*ibid.* 751) – notice the remarkable coincidence with Foucault's description of the notion of *état de droit* in neoliberalism – and the character of the *homo oeconomicus*. In 'Noterelle di economia', Gramsci remarks that the *homo oeconomicus* is but an abstraction of the economic agents who are operating in any given social and historical context. Form this point of view, every society has its own *homo oeconomicus* (*ibid.* 1253); but once, as liberalism does, the *homo oeconomicus* is taken as normative model, this can only mean that a new balance between economic structure, civil society and the State is being put in place. Hence, Gramsci advances an interpretation of the notion of

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[9] The role played by the political party in totalitarian regimes is described in very similar terms by Foucault (1997). A 1933 dreadful article by Carl Schmitt on *Staat, Bewegung, Volk* expresses this theory from the Nazi point of view.

'individual initiative' which attempts to distinguish it from a mere manifestation of free-will voluntarism and private interest. In fact, such a notion, which is so important for economic liberalism, constitutes a systemic requirement of not only economic type. Within any given hegemonic context, Gramsci argues, every individual is, in a sense, 'a functionary' (*ibid*. 1028). This does not mean that every individual is a public administration employee, rather that, by operating spontaneously, by developing her or his own individual initiative, she or he is also developing a productivity which ultimately identifies with the productivity of the State, ethically understood. Here is where the notion of civil society proves to be a crucial structure (or superstructure) of articulation, and where the requirements of freedom and hegemony meet: civil society is made of individuals who are capable of self-government, thus providing an organic complement to the government exercised by the political society (*ibid*. 1020). In this task of developing a fully working civil society, the State is of course not neutral. In contrast to the situation of the 'advanced nations' and their civil society configured as a system of in-depth fortresses, there might also be situations where 'statolatry' is called for (and here, perhaps, Gramsci is referring to the situation of Italy). Statolatry refers to the strategic use of the political society as a scaffold wherein civil society can be shaped. Contrary to authoritarian politics, which aims at having a political party occupy and suffocate the civil society, the aim of statolatry within a liberal framework is actually to nurture civil society through the political society. Of course, this also entails specific risks: the veritable Achilles' heel of liberalism is actually the situation in which the administrative ruling bureaucracy, entrusted with so much power, turns into a corporative caste (*ibid*. 751) whose action, so to speak, hijacks the ethical mission of hegemony.

Even from such a cursory and imperfect excursus into some of Gramsci's ideas concerning hegemony, civil society and liberalism, noticeable aspects of resonance with Foucault's preoccupations emerge. True, Foucault (2012) mentions hegemony only in passing and carefully distinguishes his own usage from what he refers to as the 'modern one'. He prefers taking the term in its 'ancient meaning', he says. By doing so he basically employs hegemony as a synonym of, or an alias for, governance. However, in the light of what said, there is perhaps a more correct translation of Gramsci's notion into Foucault's vocabulary, namely, positive power. Modern, positive power takes life in charge and sets for itself the task of nourishing it, essentially through either disciplinary or security devices, i.e., respectively, anatomopolitics and biopolitics. But a problem also appears, which in Gramscian terms could be described as follows: the ethical-political dimension of the State is not always capable of subsuming and taming the economical-corporative interests that work through it. In Foucault's terms, positive power as elaborated in the governmental sciences of police, statistics and demography can hardly cope with freedom. The totalizing unity of juridical sovereignty stands in opposition to the non-totalized multiplicity of economic stakeholders.

In contrast to the set of modern State governmental *savoirs*, liberalism ascertains the absence and the impossibility of an 'economic sovereign'. It proposes a vision for a type of governance that does not reject freedom but rather intrinsically operates with it. So, the governmental self-restraint preached by liberalism (*l'art de gouverner le moins que possible*) is not a limit to governance but its most effective tool. Restraining governmental action means leaving freedom to play. Yet freedom is not to be imagined as a Rousseau-like primordial state of nature; quite on the contrary, it is something that must be created, predisposed, and supported. For his part, Gramsci had already clearly seen that economic liberism is a political, not an economic project, to the point that he qualified it as a form of 'State regulation'. Foucault's (2004b) analysis of the rise of liberal governmentality, on the other hand, discussed it as the most important challenge to the dream of total government harbored by the modern state reason. With neoliberalism, the *homo oeconomicus* turns into the framework of intelligibility of social action and a measure of the social at large: governance must be functional to the market and thoroughly oriented to the market. Incidentally, one cannot fail to observe that, just as Gramsci wrote at a time while German Ordo-liberalism was being elaborated, so Foucault did teach his 1979 course just at the time when a new wave of neoliberalism was turning governmental with Margaret Thatcher's Premiership of the United Kingdom (1979-1990) and Ronald Reagan's United States Presidency (1981-1989).

Rather than a movement generically aimed at 'deregulation', neoliberalism in fact entailed a whole range of active interventions on society by the government. The commonsensical depiction of neoliberalism as merely allergic to society (e.g., Thatcher's *dictum* 'society does not exist') is likewise simplistic. Indeed, as explained by Foucault, since its original German formulation neoliberalism called for a whole *Gesellschaftspolitik*, a 'politics of society'. However, the nature of these interventions did not run in the direction of redress and redistribution: neoliberal interventionism does not aim at redressing the inequalities that are produced by the market; on the contrary, it aims at creating the conditions and removing the obstacles that would, respectively, facilitate or hamper the functioning of the market dynamics. Thus neoliberal governance can be imagined as an attempt at 'marketing society', that is, at imagining the whole society as a marketplace. The market, with its 'natural' mechanisms of concurrence among enterprises, comes to stand as the ultimate model for the social at large. The political ontology of neoliberalism is so much premised upon firms in competition that individuals themselves are conceptualized as firms – as *per* the theory of human capital. But how could such a vision hope to work? Where did it draw its success from? Both Gramsci and Foucault indicate that hegemony or positive power works by cooptation, it requires collaboration on the part of free individuals. How to ensure that individuals would take part in a game that after all proves so little attractive to most of them?

Besides this problem of external attractiveness, there is also the problem that the principle of market maximization is at risk of internal self-destruction. For the market is an ambiguous institution, which is both creative and destructive of social ties. It creates interactions (i.e., transactions) but the egoism that is intrinsic in economic actors also carries with it the constant tendency to undo social relations and, with them, ultimately, the market itself. In order to cope with the two problems of external attractiveness and internal self-destructiveness, liberal governmentality needs supplementing the institution of the market, which in any case remains its ultimate goal and model. Here precisely civil society reveals itself as crucial. Civil society is the type of collective formation that enables to install economic relationships, let them play and prosper in order to maximize concurrence, without having to artificially touch market dynamics. So, if the *homo oeconomicus*, the free individual as a firm, is an essential gear of neoliberal governance, the civil society is no less one. In this sense Foucault (2004b: 290) claims that the actual object of liberal governmentality is civil society *tout court*. Certainly, the egoism that is intrinsic in economic relations ultimately tends to undermine society, yet between economic concurrence and civil society it becomes possible to provisionally institute a new type of workable barycenter. The variables upon which liberal governmentality intervenes are not the variables of the market, but the social environmental variables that are beyond the direct interests of the *homo oeconomicus*. In this sense, precisely, the *homo oeconomicus* proves to be 'governable through the environment'[10], such an environment being civil society itself. With Gramsci, we could say civil society provides the needed ethical-political supplement to the economical-corporative logics of the market[11]. But, as soon as civil society, or what Arendt called the social realm, enters the governmental equation, new geometries and new measures also make their appearance.

4. Measures of the out-of-measure

In his lecture of April 4th, 1979, Foucault reconstructs the Scottish moral philosopher Adam Ferguson's *Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767). Although much of Ferguson's treaty could also go under the rubric of

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[10] '… l' homo oeconomicus va devoir le caractère positif de son calcul à tout ce qui, précisément, échappe à son calcul.' (Foucault 2004b: 281)

[11] While I have no space here to elaborate on it, the idea that there is a juncture between economics and ethics is, of course, also at the root of Max Weber's inquiry.

'Comparative history of civilizations', or 'Political passions and virtues' (along with Montesquieu and other authors of that period), it certainly also represents a foundational moment in the modern liberal conceptualization of the social realm, and it is in this light that Foucault's analysis proceeds. Notably, Ferguson crystallizes the tripartite image of savagery, barbarism and civility as three major developmental stages of humankind, whereby savages are said to live in a condition of primitive equality, barbarians ('rude nations') in a stern hierarchy of rank and distinction, and the civilized – the civil society – to be characterized by 'national union', a 'concerted plan of political force', and the development of the 'commercial arts' (Ferguson 1767: III, §II). Ferguson argues that the civilized are superior to the other human stages thanks to the division of labor, which produces unprecedented levels of wealth (IV, §I). Yet Ferguson, as Foucault remarks, also presents the civil society as more than an association of economic actors. The superiority of the civilized, he writes, lies in fact that they have managed to balance 'politeness' and 'the use of the sword' (IV, §IV). Ferguson realizes commerce is a mixed blessing for, while producing wealth, it also breeds great 'inequalities of fortune' (V, §III). From this perspective, the civil society appears as redressing institution, whose balancing power is based on an array of non-egoistic instincts. Certainly, these may be both positive feelings, such as benevolence, and negative ones, such as envy; in any case, asserts Ferguson, 'it is in conducting the affairs of civil society that mankind find the exercise of their best talents, as well as the object of their best affections' (III, §VI).

We could also say that, whereas the market contains an inherent vector of deterritorialization, insofar as it pushes actors towards always new and further transactions which lie beyond local sociality, civil society territorializes people and creates local communities based on affections of non-economic nature. It is perhaps no surprise that a Scottish moral philosophers like Ferguson indicates feelings such as politeness, benevolence, sympathy and consideration (or, if you want, recognition) as the foundational passions of the social realm. For the sake of my argument, it is sufficient that we retain the idea that civil society is a territory of talents and affections. This considerable idea enables us to bring to a close all the elements introduced so far, especially if we consider that Foucault's interest in this passage is crucially related to his idea that truth production and truth requirements necessarily stretch beyond utility. At this point, I think, I can push myself a little beyond the sources and exegetic work, to submit the following hypothesis: it is by investigating the nature and measure of these non-utilitarian social affections that we might discover that love occupies a crucial location between subjectivity and the civil society. Certainly, I am consciously pushing things a little bit forward, given that love is definitely beyond the benevolence named by Ferguson, while neither Gramsci nor Foucault speak much of it in this context. Nonetheless, the notion of love might help us digging deeper into the shifting barycenters of the social equation or, in the terms we have elaborated so far, into the power-freedom-subjectivity nexus.

Admittedly, the geometry of these sentiments and passions is all but stabilized. For instance we know that with the word *philía* Greek culture designated a type of relation that spanned friendship and love. If I take the term love it is because in our cultural context it designates something that overcomes other blunter pro-social feelings. And, to return to our opening point, such an overcoming might also give us a new take on the passage from *Naissance de la biopolitique* (1978-1979) to *Du gouvernement des vivants* (1979-1980) in Foucault's work. As we have seen, while the former course introduced civil society as the principal referent of liberal governmentality and as its principal point of application, the latter introduced truth and subjectivity as concerns related to how people govern themselves. We have subsequently also observed that, well before Foucault, Gramsci had already pointed out the complementarity of governance and self-governance, describing political society *qua* the governance of bureaucrats (government) as being always complemented by civil society *qua* the self-governance of private individuals. Love seems to be located at the point of convergence and in the zone of indistinction between these two practices. In this sense, I suggest, it represents

a *political measure of the social*[12]. To clarify this hypothesis and conclude the paper, let me elaborate on the two dimensions of intensity and measure.

As everybody knows – and feels – at the personal level love is always risky business. This element of risk is intrinsic to the fact that love happens 'in the first person' and affects the structure of the subject deeply. Something similar takes place at the societal level. Beyond its nature of personal feeling, love is a societal passion, too. It is 'within me' and 'between us'. Love manifests a sociability that spreads across social formations building ties of the utmost intensity – and not always of a positive type, *bien sûr* – for love knows well how to be obsessive, aggressive, possessive... Understood in its societal character, love best represents the non-economic – and even anti-economical – element that is shared by all the social passions enumerated by Ferguson. Simultaneously, as said, it pushes them farther, towards a higher degree of intensity – often a dangerous one. We could even say: it provides us with the prototype of intensity. In this sense, love is not simply and generically pro-social feeling, for it undoes at least as much as it binds. Love is excruciating, excoriating. Understood in its personal character, love entails the *prise de risque* that is inherent in all first person experiences. It shapes subjectivity just as much as truth does. Recall that, conceptualizing truth as *témoignage*, as subjective first-person testimony, the late Foucault implicitly distinguished it from the abstract and impersonal disciplinary knowledge he had studied during the 1960s and in1970s (see e.g. the 1975 course on *Les anormaux*, where the link between truth discourse and scientific discourse seems inescapable). This way, the exercise of truth is placed in a dimension of risk and courage, in an experimental dimension which no disciplinary textbook can any longer guarantee. If so, there are two fundamentally different types of truth in Foucault's inquiry. In my view, love manifests the latter form at best: love is the looming presence in the parrhesiastic discourse of truth, while it remains thoroughly alien to disciplinary truth.

Just as love, sexuality also entails the experience of intensity. In this sense, Foucault's major concerns with sexuality is certainly nearby. However, I think, we should proceed by distinguishing the issue of love from the analysis of sexuality, the body of knowledge known as 'erotics', and the topic of the uses of pleasure (Foucault 1984a). Love is certainly muddled with desire and carnality, but this dimension has received so much attention that it risks obscuring more than clarifying. Rather than looking at Foucault's major works on sexuality, I think another reference could be helpful to us now. It can be found in a little quoted short interview from 1981, *De l'amitié comme mode de vie*. In this interview, released to a gay journal, Foucault interestingly observes that what mainstream morality finds it difficult to accept in homosexuality is not actually sex, but precisely *love*: 'Je pense que c'est cela qui rende « troublante » l'homosexualité : le mode de vie homosexuel plus que l'acte homosexuel lui-même. Imaginer un acte homosexuel qui n'est pas conforme à la loi ou à la nature, ce n'est pas ça qui inquiète les gens. Mais que des individus commencent à s'aimer, voilà le problème' (Foucault 2001b: §II, 983). The unsettling nature of love appears here as even stronger than that of sexuality. Sexuality is more stable than love, yet love really unsettles even sexuality. In a sense, the relation between sexuality and love is a bit like the relation between the two types of truth recalled above, impersonal and personal, or the two facets of subjectivity, subjection and subjectivation. With love, we are dealing with a transformational, diavolutionary foyer of experience, the discovery of a terrain of unsettling mobility inside both individual subjects and collective subjectivities. It is a movement that runs along a brink of aperture which potentially also brings fracture and trauma with it.

At the individual level, the importance of practices like *exagoreusis*, the in-depth investigation of one's conscience, lies in that they push the subject to probe the mobility of her or his own soul – in other words, they bring her or him to face love as a basic dimension of spiritual and psychic unrest. Just as with *parrhesia*, there can be no a priori reassurance about when this *askesis* will be accomplished and where it will have led

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[12] Here I am drawing in particular form the notion of *measure* developed by Pierangelo Schiera (see especially Schiera 2010, 2011).

the subject in the meanwhile. My idea is that civil society finds itself in a very similar condition. The birth of biopolitics marked the recognition of mobility as an essential component of social formations – hence, the necessity to cope with all those phenomena of circulation that take place in the open field and which can never be thoroughly fixated or relegated into enclosed spaces. Yet once we re-read the impersonal requirements of biopolitics in the light of the personal experience of subjectivity in its dynamic unfolding, we also realize that an encompassing reconceptualization of the modern notion of the social realm might be needed. Taking love onboard enables us to dissociate the social from a merely conservative or reproductive domain. The emphasis on reproduction and conservation has been essential to the search for social laws – so that even when one studies, say, innovation, in fact one studies the laws of innovation, etc. The disciplinary development of the social sciences in the last century and a half has understandably had a penchant for fixity. After Foucault's theorization of biopolitics, several other reflections have sought to circulation, mobility, associability, fluidity, reflexivity and liquidity back into the social equation. Still, it turns out that the subject exceeds these requirements. For it is not only circulatory but also *in transition*: a variable geometry of intensive tribulation, as *askesis* of probing and response comes with it. If we call this immanent domain of responsiveness 'the ethical', then we should say that, at both the personal and the societal level, love asserts such an ethical – or, with Gramsci, ethical-political – dimension of subjectivities, with all its farthest-reaching consequences. Love: atmospheric, meteoric, climacteric…

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