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The Excruciating Work of Love: On Foucault's Kehre Towards the Subject

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Declaration of Love

Michel Foucault's thought was an always evolving one.[1] In my view, such a trait represents one of his highest intellectual merits, which testifies to the generous nature of his genius. Simultaneously, it 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, unfortunately, we have grown accustomed to see. This fact is particularly striking when one considers his courses at the Collège de France, where the endless meticulous analytical

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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 conceived of himself as an experimenter, and truly was one of the most exquisite kind. The very fact that the titles of his courses do not always match their actual content, that a course shifts to a different topic during the exposition, that approached topics 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 exploration. 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 archaeologist, or genealogist) of rationalities and discourses, as a theorist of power and resistance, as the scholar of governmentality, disciplination, and biopolitics. More rarely, if ever, has he been discussed a philosopher of love as essential ingredient of subjectivity. More specifically, this chapter focuses on that sort of *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, p. 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.

Truth Matters

Certainly, from this moment on, truth acquires an increasing crucial position in Foucault's research. In his previous studies on discipline and governmentality, it was not so prominent. 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 that 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, pp. 161–4) recalled that during the thirteenth 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* [almost-judicial taximeter of penitence] 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.[2]

At that stage, the context in which truth made sense was the modern elaboration of a positive power, one that inherently calls for collaboration on the part of its subjects. Consent to power necessarily stretches beyond mere extortion—or at least, extortion is performed in disguise (Foucault, 1976). Such a modern type of domination is, in any case, not merely repressive or coercive for it does not aim at simply crushing subjects; rather, it takes their whole life in charge, creating a strategic grid around it, a grid of intelligibility within which its expression can make sense. Everything the subject does is preliminarily placed inside such pre-existing grid. This fact enables power to distinguish itself from

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[2] See, for instance, in the conference 'Sexuality and solitude', the anecdote about how a certain nineteenth-century psychiatrist doctor Leuret extorted form his patient the admission of being a madman by torturing him with cold water showers (Foucault, 2001b, §II, pp. 987–97).

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 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 will, of course, also be retained later by Foucault (e.g. Foucault, 1982); but it is interesting to observe how, during the 1970s, the context in which truth appeared 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. The terrain of truth was thus defined with reference to two disciplines, anatomy and morality, which conveyed a typical top-down, objectivizing approach.

Since 1980, on the other hand, truth seems to take on new significations for Foucault. It first features prominently in the analysis of *alethourgy* developed in the opening pages of *Du gouvernement des vivants* (1979–1980).[3] Subsequently, it extends and expands into the reconstruction of *parrhesia* during the latter courses *Subjectivité et vérité* (1980–1981), *L'herméneutique du sujet* (1981–1982), *Le Gouvernement de soi et des autres* (1982–1983), and *Le courage de la vérité* (1983–1984).[4] 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' in its farthest 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 accompanying 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

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[3] 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 of *Allegoriae*, 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'.

[4] Specifically, *Subjectivité et vérité* (1980–1981) is the course that inaugurates the study of *epimeleia*, analysing the Hellenistic discourse on the *aphrodisia*—especially in Artemidorus, Xenophon, and Plutarch—as an instance of *gouvernement de soi par soi même*.

subject—that is, someone who can say 'I' of oneself—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 famously 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 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 psycho-social figures, such as the madman, who had been dispossessed of their own voice (Foucault 1972). 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 routinely associated with those of Lacan, Braudel, Lévi-Strauss, Benveniste, Barthes, and Althusser. In various ways, all these diverse thinkers were seen as part of a new wave of thought cast against Sartre's existentialism. Not by chance, *éliminer le sujet* (do away with the subject) 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.[5] On the contrary, in 1980, it is the hard work and the spiritual tribulations of the subject in pursuit of her own truth that come to the foreground. If, from 1979 to 1980 onward, 'telling the truth about oneself' increasingly turns into a central analytical point in Foucault's work, perhaps one critical 'point of reversal' is marked by the passage in which Foucault (2012, pp. 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 of his interpretive efforts went into explaining how power is actively productive of knowledge and, specifically, scientific knowledge, now scientific knowledge itself is repositioned inside a larger field of truth production practices, leaving room to additional epistemic formations.

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[5] 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.

This way, the whole *savoir-pouvoir* approach is superseded and pushed towards a new stage, provisionally called by Foucault *gouvernement par la vérité*, governance by truth.

An Analytics of Power

In *Du gouvernement des vivants*, the initial barycentre 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 the exercise of power. From this perspective, Foucault (2012, p. 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, Foucault's *Kehre* wouldn't make much sense if truth were just another name for ideology, or a somehow functionalized set of beliefs. 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 Derrida's 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 is not yet enough to capture in full the most innovative side of Foucault's later reflection.

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 this author's evolving thinking and deeper lines; 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–developmental sequence, rather, as an array of distinct rationalities or *analytic forms of power* (Foucault, 1976, p. 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 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, p. 117 *et passim*), *Sécurité, territoire et population* (2004a, p. 22 *et passim*), *Naissance de la biopolitique* (2004b, p. 297), *Subjectivité et vérité* (2014, p. 77–98), *L'herméneutique du sujet* (2001a, p. 279–81), and *Le Gouvernement de soi et des autres* (2008, p. 332), it is possible to summarize as follows: sovereignty operates according to a legal code, with prohibition at its foundation. Sovereignty is a relation between a king and an inhabitant of the kingdom who accepts voluntary subjection; fictively at least, the inhabitant possesses free will and subscribes to a special bond. Accordingly, sovereignty raises the issue of the political and legal 'contract' of subjection. With its institutional forms, sovereign power defines a capital or political centre, which owns a territory and rules over it. Also, a whole array of symbols and symbolisms (emblems, heralds, 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 towards a technological one.

Discipline, on the other hand, operates in a molecular, 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 those who are subjected to it. It is a much more modest-looking form of power, a 'grey' power which operates inside enclosed spaces, non-symbolic institutions (prisons, barracks, asylums, schools, etc.) where elements—including persons—can be arranged hierarchically according to a pre-programmed diagram of visibility. In this type of space,

discipline operates on individual bodies thanks to training, surveillance, and inspection, aiming at generating in single individuals specific dispositions to act and react, thus eliciting specific performances. In the measure in which discipline improves, punishment becomes less and less necessary; in any case, discipline shuns expressive punishment. 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 the fact that Foucault will later refer to discipline as anatomopolitics, it should be clear that it addresses not only (to speak Husserl-wise) the body as *Körper*, as anatomical body, but simultaneously the body as *Leib*, as living body.

Third, 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 eighteenth-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 the economic transactions carried out by free actors.

Fourthly, the culture of the self comprises the practices of taking care of oneself (*epimeleia heautou*) and telling the truth about oneself (*parrhesia*). It 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, which are developed via the development and rehearsal of a dual relationship with an authoritative other. Here, codification is just an illusion. The central function 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. In this sense, the practice of *askesis*, which appears in the classical Greek antiquity, does not really entail a renouncement to the self. Rather, it is a technique for constituting the self: it does not represent an attempt to subject individuals to the law, but rather an attempt to free them so that they can shape themselves in a truthful relation.

Points of Reversal

Now, at first sight, the four technologies of power just enumerated seem a broad enough terrain 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, p. 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 further interpretive categories not 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* ('nuclei', 'centres', 'focuses', or 'cores' of experience) certainly deserves more extensive investigation. However, for now let us just content ourselves with establishing that the courses from

the 1980s devoted to the in-depth analysis of *parrhesia* in Greek culture find a precise ground, or 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 or technique as such, but the way the subject experiences that discipline or technique. 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, p. 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. It opened up a whole research programme which unfortunately Foucault could never tackle and develop to its fullest. Because of such major point of reversal in his work, 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 of it 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, p. 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 occur 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, a posteriori, an effect of power. After all, a not very dissimilar approach was taken in 1971 in *L'ordre du discours*, where, behind truth, Foucault detected the presence of a precise 'will to truth' (which would later be investigated as 'will to knowledge'). So, after all, why should truth be different from subjection? Since 1980, in my view, Foucault attempts to distance himself from the various critical 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 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).

From Alethourgy to Parrhesia: The Peril of Speaking (About Oneself)

Exploring subjectivation, Foucault is far from renegading his lineage deriving from authors such as Nietzsche, Artaud, and Bataille, along with their quest for a *pensée du dehors* (thought of the outside). Yet, a new necessity seems to motivate him in his 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 ally of power; and, on the other, doing so without ending up endorsing any absolutist claim about the universality of any single truth. By exploring truth as a relational device that is intimately connected with the shaping of subjectivity via inter-subjective formative practices, Foucault seems to suggest that what is really essential about truth is the fact that it produces specific *modes of existence* for subjects. Truth matters to the extent that it transforms the way in which the subject lives, and the fundamental formative experience consists in facing the ethical imperative 'you must change your life!'. Foucault (2014, p. 15) claims that it is impossible to develop a theory of subjectivity without a study of the relationship to truth, given that subjectivity is 'something that constitutes itself and transform itself in the relationship which it entertains with its own truth'. There is a clear consonance here with the works by the scholars of the classical antiquity Jean-Pierre Vernant and Marcel Detienne, and in particular with Detienne's (1967) first book on *les maîtres de vérité* in the ancient Greece. 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 and followers, where the fact of uttering something creates specific practical effects, Foucault depicts *parrhesia* as a *dramatic* form of language. In a 'dramatics of discourse', the fact of saying something transforms, not the object (as it was the case in *pragmatics*), but the subject, who is inherently called to explore,

determine, and make explicit her 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 a strategic choice. 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 an extensive survey of one's own spiritual and psychic territories is elicited from the subject. 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 entrusts oneself, are functional to the requirements of the examination of conscience.[6] Therefore, 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 own subjection. In this respect, it is interesting to remark that the course is concluded by the analysis of the procedure of *subditio*, which Foucault (2012, pp. 265–9) describes as *la soumission, le fait d'être sujet*. Perhaps inadvertently, Foucault employs a word that does not exist in the sources and cannot be found in any dictionary. Indeed, as the editors Ewald, Fontana, and Gros scrupulously inform us, Cassian speaks of *subjectio*, not *subditio*. Surprisingly, however, the inexistent word *subditio* turns out to be extremely insightful, for it preludes to the existence of a *subditus*, a subjected subject, a subordinate. In synthesis, one can find here various meaningful interwoven threads that bounce forth and back between *alethourgy*, subjection, and subjectivation.

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

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

what is posed as true as opposed to false, hidden, unsayable, unpredictable, forgotten' (Foucault, 2012, p. 8). The theme of the 'limits of what can be said' is still clearly present; but here we also discover that veridictional procedures can be of *non-verbal* nature, too. 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 of a prescription. 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* (Foucault, 2012, p. 49), and, as such, is unique.

Here is where we begin to appreciate 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 endlessly recommends total obedience. Yet, in the exploration of *psychagogy* and *parrhesia*, a different facet appears. Discipline subjects bodies to the norm in order to engender in them dispositions to act and react; *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 separated 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 from the inside, as a self-initiated move. It couldn't make sense without a personal urge, as it is not about engendering a disposition: the right disposition must already be there before the exercise can start. So, *psychagogy* is a subtle issue, irreducible to the procedures of 'normation' and 'normalisation'. Radically understood, *psychagogy* is not even a procedure. We tend to imagine an exercise as something that follows a set of existing rules, and certainly ascetics contains a number of such guidelines; but these are best understood as technical rules (if you want x, then

do y), not imperative norms, and they can only hope to function once the correct attitude towards them is already established. In the following courses given by Foucault, the emphasis shifts from *alethourgy* to *parrhesia* and the historical frame moves backward from the early Christian era, through the Hellenic period, to classical Greek culture. As such shift occurs, reference to an absolute external bond to truth is likewise 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 be more neatly distinguished from discipline than could be done in the case of *alethourgy*. As in James P. Carse's (1986, p. 4) 'infinite games', 'whoever *must* play, cannot *play*'.

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, p. 9): 'What is so perilous in the fact that people speak […]?' Such a 'peril', we see now, 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 practising the frankness of *parrhesia*: not only an external risk which consists in 'speaking truth to power'—certainly, 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 where love comes into play. We will deal more extensively with this insight in the next sections. 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, that is, biopolitics, and in particular with the notion of security. Indeed, modern security devices operate on the possible or probable 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 admit that, at present, we do not know when and where exactly these events will occur. But, 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 an open undertaking also in this sense.[7]

The Neoliberal Subject

To better appreciate what is at stake in the 'openness' that is inherent in *parrhesia*, let us retrace the original question of governance: what is its specific object? On various occasions, Foucault identified this object as the *conduite* of humans, the conduct of conducts. From this perspective, to govern means to act on someone's action, to operate on something that is already spontaneously operating on its own. Not only is the target movable and moving, but it is also reacting. The existence of margins of manoeuvre is thus essential to governance. These 'margins' are what we also call *freedom*. Therefore, freedom is not simply not the opposite of government but, technically speaking, governance can only be exercised on someone who is free. In 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, particularly as he ventured into exploring the tensions between the physiocrats' view concerning the primacy of the *raison d'état* vis-à-vis the liberals' call for a completely new type of governance, soon to be formalized as *état de droit* (Foucault, 2004b, pp. 288–9). The notion of society *qua* civil society makes it appearance in this context, which in turn explains its major conceptual characteristics.

In contrast to the set of modern State governmental *savoirs*, liberalism ascertains the absence and the impossibility of one 'economic sovereign'.

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[7] Incidentally, the idea that there is no ready-made recipe to become a subject, and that nobody can substitute your own personal quest, is also strongly present in Jewish thinking, particularly in the twentieth-century philosophers Martin Buber and Emmanuel Lévinas (see Buber, 1948; Lévinas, 1961). Buber, in particular, stresses that there is no universal law to reach God: every human being—he writes—can have access to God, but each one of them has a different access. Encountering God can never be assured by just following any set of rules.

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 liberals (*l'art de gouverner le moins que possible*) does not constitute 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. Incidentally, the Italian philosopher of praxis, Antonio Gramsci, had already understood that economic liberalism is a political, not an economic, project—to the point that he had qualified it as a form of 'State regulation'. On the other hand, Foucault's (2004b) analysis of the rise of liberal governmentality frames the latter as the most important challenge to the dream of total government harboured by the modern state reason. With neoliberalism, we might say, the *homo œconomicus* replaces the *homo juridicus* and turns into principle of intelligibility of social action at large. The perspective of the *homo œconomicus* asserts that governance must be *functional to* the market and consistently oriented towards it. A new measure of the social appears here. And incidentally, one cannot fail to observe that Foucault taught his 1979 course just at the time when the new big wave of neoliberalism was turning governmental with Margaret Thatcher's Premiership of the UK (1979–1990) and Ronald Reagan's US Presidency (1981–1989).

Rather than a movement generically aimed at 'deregulation', neoliberalism entails a whole range of new, active interventions on society by the government. The commonsensical depiction of neoliberalism as merely allergic towards society (e.g. Thatcher's *dictum* 'society does not exist') is simplistic and misleading. Since its original German formulation in the 1940s, Foucault remarked, neoliberalism called for a whole *Gesellschaftspolitik*, a 'politics of society'. Simply, 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 conditions that facilitate the functioning of the market dynamics, concurrently removing the obstacles that may hamper their full deployment. Neoliberal governance can be imagined as an attempt at, so to speak, 'marketing society', that is, at imagining the whole society as 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 be willing to take part in a game that after all proves so little attractive to most of them?[8]

Besides the problem of external attractiveness, neoliberal governance also faces the problem that the principle of market maximization is at risk of internal self-destruction. For the market is an ambiguous institution, both creative and destructive of social ties. It creates interactions in terms of transactions and exchanges, but simultaneously the egoism intrinsic in economic actors 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. 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 œconomicus*, the free individual understood as competing firm, is an essential gear of neoliberal governance, the civil society is no less one. In this sense, Foucault (2004b, p. 290) claims that the actual object of liberal governmentality is, properly, civil society. Certainly, the egoism that is intrinsic in economic relations ultimately tends to constantly undermine society, yet between economic concurrence and civil society, it becomes possible to provisionally institute a new type of workable barycentre. Also, the variables upon which liberal governmentality intervenes are not the variables of the market, rather, the social environmental variables that are beyond the direct interests of the *homo œconomicus*. In this sense, the

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[8] Such a research question has been subsequently excavated by Boltanski and Chiapello (1999).

homo œconomicus proves to be 'governable through the environment'[9]: the human environment is civil society. With Gramsci, civil society provides the needed ethical–political supplement to the economical–corporative logics of the market.[10] But, as soon as civil society, or what Arendt called *the social realm*, enters the governmental equation, new measures and a new composition of subjectivity also make their appearance.

In his lecture of 4 April 1979, Foucault reconstructs the *Essay on the History of Civil Society* by the Scottish moral philosopher Adam Ferguson ([1767](#)). Much of Ferguson's treaty could also go under the rubric of 'Comparative history of civilizations', or 'Political passions and virtues' (along with Montesquieu and other authors of that period). But 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, understood as three major developmental stages of humankind: 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 humans who possess a civil society—are characterized by 'national union' and a 'concerted plan of political force' that ensure the development of the 'commercial arts' (Ferguson, [1767](#), III, §II). Ferguson argues that the civilized are superior to the other human stages because of 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 a utilitarian 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 that commerce is a mixed blessing for, while producing wealth, it also breeds great 'inequalities of fortune' (V, §III). From this perspective, the civil society represents a redressing institution, whose balancing power is based on an array of

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[9] 'l'homo œconomicus va devoir le caractère positif de son calcul à tout ce qui, précisément, échappe à son calcul. [the *homo œconomicus* owes the positive character of his own calculations precisely to all that exceeds his own calculation]' (Foucault, [2004b](#), p. 281).

[10] While there is no space to elaborate on it here, let us just remark that the idea of a link between economy and ethics is, of course, also at the root of Max Weber's inquiry into the spirit of capitalism.

non-egoistic 'instincts'. Certainly, these instincts may include positive feelings, such as benevolence, as well as negative ones, such as envy. In any case, Ferguson says, '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).

The first liberal thinkers observed that the market contains an inherent vector of deterritorialization, insofar as it pushes actors towards always new and further transactions which lie beyond local sociality. Facing the centrifugal, expansionist (as well as, we may add, colonizing) and dis-embedding dynamic of the market, civil society is conceptualized as a form of reterritorialization that reintegrates people and creates local communities based on affections of non-economic nature. Ferguson indicates feelings such as politeness, benevolence, sympathy, and consideration as the foundational passions of the social realm.[11] Civil society is a territory of talents and affections, and the cradle of the liberal subject.

The Loving Subject

In this context, the passage from *Naissance de la biopolitique* (1978–1979) to *Du gouvernement des vivants* (1979–1980) in Foucault's production can be read as a radical reframing of the issue of the neoliberal subject. Whereas the former course introduces civil society as the principal referent of liberal governmentality and as its principal point of application, the latter turns to truth and subjectivity as two concerns that are intimately connected to the way in which people can govern themselves. In other words, we could say, a crucial shift occurs from *the bland benevolence* of the civil society to *the burning love* of the subjective experience. Turning to classical Greece, the Hellenistic period, and the early Christian era, Foucault (2014, p. 35) proceeds to rethink subjectivation as something that takes place inside a triangular space defined by three vectors: first, a personal relationship with an authoritative other (a master, a spiritual guide, a *directeur de conscience*, ultimately, a psychoanalyst); second, an engaging and demanding relationship to truth and truth-telling; third,

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[11] Note how the issue of consideration preludes to the Hegelian theme of recognition.

an ongoing, protracted individual work upon oneself to interrogate one's real desires, apprehend them, and master them. To some extent, these three vectors seem to correspond to the triad of direction (*mathesis*), meditation (*melete*), and exercise (*askesis*).

At this point, love should be carefully distinguished from the analysis of sexuality, despite the fact that it is a reflection on sexuality that provides Foucault with an entry point into the puzzle of the loving subject. To begin with, the corpus known to the Greeks as 'erotics', or the knowledge of the *aphrodisia*, introduces Foucault (1984a, 2014) to the topic of the uses of sexual pleasure. The *aphrodisia* posed to the ancients the issue of sexual measure. It raised questions such as, how to apprehend one's demand for sex and sexual pleasure? How to measure that desire? How to take pleasure, and within which limits? How to deal with the people who are involved in one's erotic act? The complex task of mastering oneself in one's use of pleasure is a pursuit of the 'correct' pleasure as 'measured' pleasure. In the cultural space of the Western world, Foucault (2014, p. 95) remarks, the *aphrodisia* correspond to an auroral experience where the subject can, for the first time, 'take into account the other who is in the process of becoming a subject'. What most interested Foucault is probably the fact that, once again, in this process no external (disciplinary) measure is conceivable and yet the whole reflection constantly revolves around a specific need of measure.[12] In Western culture, such a call for measure provides the original mould where the nuclei or foyers of experience emerge. What is important of carnal desire is that, in its intimate consubstantial inter-subjective and social aspects, it makes explicit the two dimensions of *intensity* and *measure* that are inherent in subject formation at large. Here, it is particularly important to distinguish measure from any objective external rule or regulation.

Love is certainly muddled with carnality and the sexual experience. However, the latter dimension has received so much attention that it risks obscuring the peculiar status of love. Rather than looking at Foucault's major works on sexuality, another reference could be helpful. It can be found in a short interview from 1981, *De l'amitié comme*

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[12] Max Weber termed *Bedürfnisse* such needs-requirements for measure.

mode de vie ('Of friendship as a way of life'). In this interview released to a gay journal, Foucault interestingly observes that what mainstream morality finds difficult to accept in homosexuality is not actually sex, but precisely *love*: 'I think this is precisely what makes homosexuality "troubling": a homosexual living style, rather than a homosexual act in itself. What really troubles people is not imagining a homosexual act as something against law or nature. The real problem is when people start loving each other' (Foucault, 2001b, §II, p. 983). Here, the unsettling nature of love appears stronger than that of sexuality. Sexuality is, after all, and despite its ongoing interrogation about measure, definitely more stable than love. Really, love unsettles sexuality. In a sense, the relation between sexuality and love is akin to the relation between the two types of truth recalled above, that is, respectively, impersonal and personal, or the two facets of subjectivity, subjection, and subjectivation. With love, we are dealing with a personal, subjectivating, transformational foyer of experience. It is the discovery of a terrain of unsettling mobility inside both individual subjects and collective subjectivities, a whole terrain of 'diavolution.'[13] The movement of love runs along a brink of aperture which potentially also brings fracture and trauma with it. It is probably in the work of Pierre Janet (1929) on subjectivity as a social undertaking that a hidden source of inspiration for the investigation of the later Foucault can be found. In Janet, the development of personality is described as an ongoing work towards, simultaneously, unification and distinction. The subject is an ensemble of operations, of small and large acts that enable the individual to set up, keep, and perfect its own unity while simultaneously establishing its own distinction from the others. That is why, for Janet, personality—better, subject-hood—is a social collective accomplishment. Similarly, in the 1930s, the experience of the *Collège de sociologie* would bring authors such as Bataille, Caillois, and Leiris to interrogate those social manifestations of excess (the feast, the unproductive expenditure, etc.) that are consubstantial to the transformational side of the social relation.

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[13] I have introduced the notion of 'diavolution' in Brighenti (2008).

Experiences of Intensity and Measure

In Western culture—and likely, in all human cultures—the geometry of sentiments and passions is never thoroughly stabilized. For instance, in Greek culture, the word *philia* designated a type of relation that spanned friendship and love. But, as we have seen, something happens at some undefined point in the range from benevolence, through affection, to unrest. The span of love is the same span of subjectivity in its inter-subjective, social constitution: it contains in itself a crucial point of reversal between the impersonal and the personal, between the objective and the subjective. Love occupies a crucial location between subjectivity, sexuality, and society. In this sense, it might help us digging deeper into the shifting barycentre of the social equation, into the freedom–desire–subjectivity nexus.

At the personal level, love is always a risky business. This element of risk is intrinsic to the fact that love necessarily happens 'in the first person', affecting deeply the structure of the subject. Something similar takes place at the societal level. Beyond personal feeling, love is a societal passion—it is simultaneously 'within me' and 'between us'. Love as a *personal measure of the psychic* and, simultaneously, a *political measure of the social*. Its sociability spreads across all social formations, building ties of the utmost intensity. Such ties are not always of a positive type, *bien sûr*. For love knows well how to be obsessive, aggressive, possessive. Understood as societal phenomenon, love best embodies the non-economic and even anti-economical element of the social passions enumerated by Ferguson. Simultaneously, however, it pushes those passions farther, towards the highest degree of intensity. Love provides us with the prototype of intensive experience—for his part, Jung (1952, p. 64) described it as an 'extreme example of anthropomorphism and, together with hunger, the immemorial psychic driving-force of humanity'. In this sense, love is not simply a generically pro-social feeling. On the contrary, it can untie 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 radical first-person experiences. In this sense, it shapes subjectivity just as much as truth does.

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 in 1970s (see, e.g., the 1975 course on *Les anormaux*, where the link between truth discourse and scientific discourse seems inescapable). Such exercise of truth is necessarily placed in a non-juridical dimension of risk and courage, an *experimental* dimension, which no disciplinary textbook can guarantee. Love represents at best this second type of truth: it is the looming presence in the parrhesiastic discourse of truth, which remains thoroughly alien to disciplinary truth. At the individual level, the importance of practices like *exagoreusis*, the in-depth investigation of one's conscience, lies in the fact that they push the subject to probe the mobility of her or his own soul—in other words, they bring one to face one's love as a basic dimension of psychic and relational 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 the subject in the meanwhile. No love comes without the experience of the point of reversal, the *metanoia*.

Once we reread the impersonal requirements of biopolitics in the light of the personal experience of subjectivity in its dynamic unfolding, we realize that an encompassing reconceptualization of the modern notion of the social realm might be called for. Considering love as a pivotal element in the psycho-social nexus enables us to radically transform the standard sociological imagination of the social domain itself. There has been a tendency, especially on the part of political philosophers, to view the social as a merely conservative or reproductive domain.[14] Certainly, in the social sciences, the emphasis on reproduction and conservation has been functional in the search for social laws, naturalistically understood. The disciplinary development of the social sciences in the last century and a half has understandably had a penchant for fixity. It is only after Foucault's theorization of biopolitics that several other reflections have sought to bring back into the social equation an array of more dynamic notions such as mobility, associability, fluidity, and reflexivity. And still, it turns out that the subject exceeds all these requirements. Actually, the subject is not only circulatory, not only in motion and engaged in subsequent associations. It is also *in transition* (inner transformation), as a variable geometry of intensive tribulation, an *askesis* of inter- and

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[14] See, for example, Mouffe (2005).

intra-psychic probing and responding accompanies it at all time. 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—with Gramsci, ethical–political—dimension of subjectivity, with all its farthest-reaching consequences. Love: atmospheric, meteoric, climacteric.

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