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ARTICLE

On Foucault's Legacy: Governmentality, Critique and Subjectivation as Conceptual Tools for Understanding Neoliberalism

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ABSTRACT. The text addresses Foucault's critical understanding of neoliberalism as a new contemporary governmentality strategy for the conduction of people's lives. A major aspect of Foucault's analysis of neoliberalism relies on his understanding of the neoliberal *homo oeconomicus* as dependent on subjectivation processes related to self-assumed values and standards oriented by the competitive economic market. Our hypothesis is that governmentality, critique and subjectivation are the core notions that shaped Foucault's understanding of neoliberalism and form the legacy of his seminal analysis. Contrary to critics who affirm that Foucault flirted or even became fascinated with neoliberalism, we argue that he offered critical tools for its understanding in a critique that is not to be confused with denunciation, however. Accordingly, we discuss Foucault's conception of critique and relate his analysis of neoliberalism to his notions of governmentality and subjectivation. Finally, we briefly point out how some contemporary critics of the neoliberal order have appropriated and developed Foucault's conceptual tools in their own understanding of it. We conclude that although Foucault did not propose a comprehensive theory of neoliberalism, he offered important critical insights for the understanding of it in our times.

Keywords: Foucault, neoliberalism, governmentality, critique, subjectivation

INTRODUCTION

The grandeur of a thinker relies on his/her work's capacity to endure in time and inspire generations to come. While Foucault had already been acclaimed while alive, his thinking has, 40 years after his death, undeniably produced lasting effects on many other contemporary thinkers. This is the case with his seminal analysis of neoliberalism, understood as a contemporary governmentality strategy for conducting the life of people. Published

under the title of *Naissance de la biopolitique*,[1] this 1978-1979 lecture course delivered at the *Collège de France* has become a major source for many contemporary intellectuals concerned with the task of critically addressing neoliberalism as it has evolved, such as Pierre Dardot, Christian Laval, Wendy Brown and Judith Butler, to name only a few. Of course, none of these should be considered Foucauldians – an awkward denomination if we remember that Foucault did not intend to establish a school. Rather, they have discussed contemporary neoliberalism by appropriating and enlarging Foucault's conceptual tools.

The purpose of this text is to highlight Foucault's conceptual insights and methods to understand neoliberalism, briefly pointing out how such ideas have been borrowed and transformed by some acute contemporary interpreters of the present global neoliberal order. To do so, we start by addressing the critique according to which Foucault flirted, embraced or even became fascinated with neoliberalism. To confront those critics, we argue that Foucault's analysis of neoliberalism should be related to his investigations on governmentality, critique and his genealogical analysis of different historic forms of becoming a subject.[2] In fact, those are the crucial subject-matters he was addressing precisely around the time he delivered the lectures where he addressed neoliberalism. In other words, to uncover the originality of Foucault's analysis of neoliberalism, one should relate them to his investigations of different forms of governing the lives of people, as well as to his discussions about different forms of becoming a subject, which in turn are also connected to his discussions on pastoral power and the meaning of critique. More specifically, Foucault thought of neoliberalism as a way of governing people's lives through new forms of subjectivation driven by the standards of the competitive market. Thus, the critical aspect of his analysis of neoliberalism derives from his understanding that neoliberal governmentality engages the subject in a set of practices, beliefs and truth discourses that produce their own self-subjugation. This is the hallmark that distinguishes Foucault's critical analysis of neoliberalism and the theoretical feature that has inspired so many contemporary analysts of it.

FOUCAULT'S INFATUATION WITH NEOLIBERALISM?

We start by addressing Michael Behrent's article where he argues that Foucault embraced neoliberalism as a more suitable governing practice since it prescinded of any sort of humanistic grounds.[3] Being a historian, Behrent seeks to historically contextualize Foucault's lectures at the *Collège de France* between 1976-1979, and he aptly provides a rich depiction of the French political and economic debates at the time. According to him, Foucault's "fascination"[4] with neoliberalism came at a moment when many French intellectuals were

[1] Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2008).
[2] Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population* (2009); *What is Critique?* and *The Culture of the Self*. (2024), Kindle Edition.
[3] Michael Behrent, "Liberalism without humanism: Michel Foucault and the free-market creed, 1976-1979," *Modern Intellectual History* 6:3 (2009), 539.
[4] Behrent, "Liberalism without humanism," 539.

questioning their previous leftist standpoints and denouncing the French Marxist left as being too bureaucratic and too related to the orthodoxy of properly reading Marxist texts, as well as lacking adequate governing practices and being rather uncritical of the mass murders committed by the Soviet Communist Party. Behrent argues that a "broader rehabilitation of economic liberalism" was rising during the late 1970s in France and suggests that Foucault would have become part of that intellectual and political movement. He offers as proof the fact that Foucault dedicated two entire lectures at the *Collège de France*, those from 1977-1978, *Sécurité, Territoire, Population*, and from 1978-1979, *Naissance de la biopolitique*, to address liberalism and neoliberalism. According to him, in those lecture courses, "Foucault did not critique" liberalism and neoliberalism but rather "strategically endorsed" them.[5]

Behrent considers that American audiences had become so eager to praise Foucault's radical stances that they missed the fact that in the late 1970s he "flirted with an outlook anchored on the political right: the free-market creed known as neoliberalism."[6] In other words, American audiences had been prevented from acknowledging and understanding "*what* he actually said about liberalism, and *how* his pronouncements on liberalism were a response to a very particular political moment."[7] According to him, the 1973 world economic crisis caused the state and the welfare state to start to crumble in France, opening the path for the defenders of economic liberalism. He suggests that, "Spurred by these events, Foucault seems to have recognized the affinity between his theoretical objection to state-based conceptions of power and the economic liberalism that was the subject of contemporary debates."[8] According to him, both Foucault and neoliberals shared the same "suspicion of the state", although his "antistatism was, in the first instance, theoretical."[9]

It is known that Foucault questioned traditional concepts of political power by arguing that the state should not be viewed as the primal source of power relations, i.e., as a political pinnacle from which power descends from the top down to the ground and underground of civil society. It is also beyond doubt that Foucault criticized the French *gauchisme* of the late 1970s and even earlier. Furthermore, Foucault's work was going through important theoretical changes around that time, as we shall clarify. However, by stating that Foucault's political and theoretical standpoints at the end of the 1970s should be viewed as grounded in those French historical debates, Behrent runs the risk of overdetermining Foucault's analysis of liberalism and neoliberalism. Without questioning the importance of historically contextualizing Foucault's thinking, one should avoid the risk of oversimplifying the complexity of Foucault's theoretical premises. In other words, to adequately analyze the reasons that led to important theoretical shifts in Foucault's

[5] "Liberalism without humanism", 539.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid., 545.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.

thinking in the late 1970s, one should engage in a more detailed internal analysis of his notions of critique, subjectivation and governmentality; topics which would interest Foucault subsequently and which are simply absent from Behrent's interpretation.

From a more internal reading standpoint, Behrent argues that Foucault's shift to the right was related to his previous anti-humanistic stances: "The theoretical condition of possibility of Foucault's neoliberal moment was his insight that economic liberalism is, essentially, a liberalism without humanism."[10] This is a more credible argument since it is true that Foucault favored an interpretation of liberalism which did not base it on metaphysical assumptions about human freedom or human rights as a political way to limit absolute power. In fact, Foucault understood liberalism as a set of governing practices through which state power would be restrained under the justification of economic efficiency. Behrent aptly argues that by refusing to stress the political side of liberalism, Foucault disentangled it from the rights of man, thus fostering an understanding of liberalism which could easily accommodate his own previous antihumanism: "Thus, his exploration of economic liberalism … ended up revealing how deep his antihumanism ran."[11]

There is a well-known passage in *The Birth of Biopolitics* in which Foucault mentions that the Chicago School did not need to vilify wrongdoers, since they were seen as people who decided to run the risks of committing a felony: "the subject as *homo economicus* does not imply an anthropological identification of any behavior whatsoever with economic behavior. It simply means that economic behavior is the grid of intelligibility one will adopt on the behavior of a new individual."[12] However, is this quote strong enough to justify the claim that Foucault would have adhered to neoliberalism because of his own previous anti-humanistic stances?

Finally, Behrent argues that Foucault's endorsement of neoliberalism was related to his critical reevaluation of *Discipline and Punish,*[13] a work in which, so he claims, the French philosopher had advanced the radical thesis that disciplinary power is "power's most contemporary form."[14] According to Behrent, "A close reading of his *Collège de France* lecture courses of the late 1970's leaves little doubt that he believed his views on discipline were in need of significant qualification. Ultimately, this enterprise would dovetail with his exploration of economic liberalism."[15] To begin with, it is quite debatable whether Foucault stated that disciplinary power was the hallmark of power in modernity. At the very end of that work, he declared that he had hoped that his book could "serve as a historical background to various studies of the power of normalization and the formation of knowledge in modem society",[16] thereby making no explicit ontological claim that disciplinary power was the most important form of power in modernity.

[10] Ibid., 546.
[11] Ibid., 546-547.
[12] Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*, 252.
[13] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punishment*. *The Birth of the Prison* (2012).
[14] "Liberalism without humanism," 555.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Foucault, *Discipline and Punishment*, 308.

Behrent correctly hints at the target but misses the shot by wrongly interpreting some important Foucauldian conceptual changes at that time. He is correct when he points out that Foucault revised some of his ideas from *Discipline and Punish* in his lecture course on *Security, Territory, Population* by distinguishing how discipline and security apparatuses produced their specific power effects.[17] In fact, when Foucault proposed the notion of "bio-politics"[18] in the last chapter of the first volume of his *History of Sexuality*, he already introduced relevant additions and nuances to his previous analysis on the disciplinary power in modernity. However, none of this led Foucault to abandon his previous work nor to consider that disciplinary power would have been confined "to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries" instead of "making it coterminous with modernity itself."[19] Much to the contrary, in *Security, Territory, Population*, Foucault stated that

> discipline was never more important or more valued than when the attempt was made to manage the population: managing the population does not mean just managing the collective mass of phenomena or managing them simply at the level of their overall results; managing the population means managing it in depth, in all its fine points and details.[20]

Behrent also confuses the issue by misinterpreting "bio-power"[21] or "the organization of power over life",[22] since Foucault understood it as the coupling of biopolitics and disciplinary power. In a rather famous passage, Foucault declared that, "The disciplines of the body and the regulations of the population constituted the two poles around which the organization of power over life was deployed."[23] In other words, the "anatomo-politics of the human body", centered on the disciplines, and the "bio-politics of the population", centered on the regulation of the "species body",[24] were not "antithetical", since "they constituted rather two poles of development linked together by a whole intermediary cluster of relations."[25] Even more problematic is Behrent's understanding of biopolitics, which he exclusively relates to Foucault's analysis on liberalism and thus forgets that such a notion had been designed to address an important historical change concerning the grounds upon which the state justified its interventions in the life of the population in modernity.

Foucault's main argument was that, under biopolitics, the modern state managed to administrate the living conditions of the population in accordance with a new historic motto: "to *foster* life or *disallow* it to the point of death."[26] Thus, by defining biopolitics as

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[17] Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 57-58.
[18] Foucault, *History of Sexuality, An Introduction* (1990), 124.
[19] "Liberalism without humanism", 556.
[20] Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 107.
[21] Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 125.
[22] Ibid., 124.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid. 123.
[26] Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 123.

a set of political governing investments on the life of the population, Foucault argued that the state's sovereign power ceased to be exerted upon its subjects exclusively as a "right of seizure"[27] since it also and mostly started "working to incite, reinforce, control, monitor, optimize, and organize the forces under it: a power bent on generating forces, making them grow, and ordering them." [28] A major political consequence related to such a historic shift was the fact that the state's legitimate right to kill their subjects was no longer asserted on the prerogative of protecting the life of the Sovereign but was placed under the need to safeguard and improve the living conditions of the population.

Behrent's questionable understanding of biopolitics as being mainly related to liberalism also dismisses the fact that when Foucault devised it, he immediately associated it with 19th century state "racism".[29] Briefly put, Foucault understood racism as a modern state mechanism with which to produce the killing of masses of people for the sake of reinforcing certain forms of social life deemed as more respectful and normalized: "the death of the other, the death of the bad race, of the inferior race (or the degenerate, the abnormal) is something that will make life in general healthier: healthier and purer."[30] Nazism was then seen by Foucault as the epitome of biopower since it encompassed the most radicalized forms of disciplinary power and biopolitics. [31]

In other words, with the notion of biopolitics, Foucault discovered that many state interventions to encourage, protect, stimulate and administer the living conditions of the population could also end up having a bloody counterpart: "If the population is watched over by the state in its own interest, of course the state can massacre the population when necessary. Thanato-politics is the reverse side of bio-politics."[32] Thus, it is rather biased to affirm that, "At the very moment when free-market ideas were influencing economic debates … Foucault came to the conclusion that many of the biopower's most exemplary traits were exhibited by economic liberalism."[33] Foucault did not reduce or equate biopolitics with economic liberalism, nor did he take it as the new hallmark of "modern forms of power", one which "must give ample room to freedom."[34] It is true that Foucault started to revise and amplify the scope of his previous investigations about the many historic forms of becoming a subject in *Security, Territory, Population*. However, he did not abandon his previous ideas about disciplinary power, as Beherent claims. Instead, he reframed some aspects of his previous ideas and stated that biopolitics, discipline and sovereign power, although different and independent from each other, had coexisted with each other:

[27] Ibid., 121.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended* (2003), 254.
[30] Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 255.
[31] *Society Must Be Defended*, 283.
[32] Michel Foucault, *Dits et Écrits*, vol. IV (1994), 826. My translation.
[33] Behrent, *Liberalism Without Humanism*, 557.
[34] Ibid., 558.

> we should not see things as the replacement of a society of sovereignty by a society of discipline, and then of a society of discipline by a society, say, of government. In fact we have a triangle: sovereignty, discipline, and governmental management, which has population as its main target and apparatuses of security as its essential mechanism.[35]

Although it makes sense to claim that Foucault did not understand freedom under liberalism as a metaphysical property of human beings *per se*, Behrent leaves aside the fact that Foucault did not conceive of freedom under liberalism exclusively in terms of strict economic rules or laws to be obeyed by those who govern. Of course, Foucault did assert that, under liberalism, "Failing to respect freedom is not only an abuse of rights with regard to the law, it is above all ignorance of how to govern properly."[36] Yet, he also conceived that, under liberalism, freedom had to be politically produced by many sorts of state interventions for it to appear in an open milieu and exert its effects: "freedom is nothing else but the correlative of the deployment of apparatuses of security."[37] Thus, liberalism does not simply rely on economic freedom but must create, organize and consume freedom in different ways, including acts of coercion, threats and even the destruction of freedom itself:

> Liberalism formulates simply the following: I am going to produce what you need to be free. (…) And so, if that liberalism is not so much the imperative of freedom as the management and organization of the conditions in which one can be free, it is clear that at the heart of this liberal practice is an always different and mobile problematic relationship between the production of freedom and that which in the production of freedom risks limiting and destroying it. (…) Liberalism must produce freedom, but this very act entails the establishment of limitations, controls, forms of coercion, and obligations relying on threats, etcetera.[38]

Let us now briefly turn to Zamora's critique of Foucault as having been "seduced" by neoliberalism in the late 1970s.[39] To the same extent as Behrent, he contextualizes Foucault's discussion of neoliberalism by situating it "in the conflict between old and new lefts, in the post-1968 left's increasing opposition to the post-war left."[40] Since Foucault was critical of French Marxism, Zamora claims that he was also contrary to the socialist revolution and thus eventually became sympathetic to neoliberalism in the context of the

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[35] Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 107-108.
[36] *Security, Territory, Population*, 353.
[37] *Security, Territory, Population*, 48.
[38] Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*, 63-64.
[39] Daniel Zamora and Michael C. Behrent, *Foucault and Neoliberalism* (2016), Kindle edition, position 312. In the Preface to that work, Zamora is more cautious when he states that "Our intention is thus not to attempt to answer the wrong question: namely, whether Foucault became neoliberal at the end of his life." Ibid., position 348. However, this careful standpoint will radically shift after the publication of the book, as we shall see.
[40] See Edges Blog: CSC interviews Daniel Zamora (2016) in http://culturalstudies.gmu.edu/articles/9276, 1.

French political and economic debates of the late 1970s. According to Zamora, this is the historical context to "understand one of the aims of his lectures on the birth of biopolitics."[41] Zamora tries to document such a claim by analyzing Foucault's views on healthcare security issues, which he considers to have been influenced by neoliberal theoreticians such as Friedman and Hayek.[42] However, it seems difficult to give credit to such a claim while Zamora is not able to clearly trace such influences back to Foucault's lecture course on neoliberalism. To give an air of plausibility to his historically contextualized argument, Zamora affirms that "(…) Foucault did legitimize in many ways, the idea that there was no alternative to the market."[43] However, once again, he did not substantiate this claim with any Foucauldian quotation.

One may grant Zamora's argument that Foucault's question was not specifically about "'exploitation' or 'inequality' but about 'micropowers' and 'diffuse systems of domination', more about being 'less governed' than 'taking' power."[44] Thus, he concludes that "identity politics and 'revolts of conduct' bolstered a deeply humanitarian struggle for 'respect,' 'integration,' and a 'life of dignity,' yet at the expense of a much less 'moral' struggle for redistributing wealth."[45] Zamora also claims that Foucault is responsible for what has been called a "turn to *ethics* on the French left"; a shift characterized by a concern with "issues of domination and discrimination"[46] culminating in the "substitution of 'human rights' for 'class struggle'", which is a move "perfectly compatible with capitalism."[47] From such arguments, Zamora derives the conclusion that "Foucault's focus on forms of normalization produced by the state and oppressive institutions will also be a reason for Foucault's interest in neoliberalism."[48] By associating Foucault's interest in neoliberalism with his rejection of the state, Zamora tries to associate him with "state phobia".[49] Yet, although Foucault refused to elaborate a general theory of the state, he was deeply concerned with studying state actions and interventions. In fact, what mattered to him was discussing the state's activity under the notion of its governmentalization: "What is important for our modernity, that is to say, for our present, is not then the state's takeover (*étatisation*) of society, so much as what I would call the 'governmentalization' of the state."[50]

Zamora also affirms that Foucault discovered hidden forms of power effects in modernity at the price of covering up the sources of capitalist exploitation.[51] By qualifying the specific struggles that interested Foucault as "moral" and identitarian ones, thus implying

[41] CSC interviews Daniel Zamora, 2.
[42] *Foucault and Neoliberalism,* position 2002.
[43] Ibid., 2.
[44] CSC interviews Daniel Zamora, 3.
[45] *Foucault and Neoliberalism*, position 2128.
[46] CSC interviews Daniel Zamora, 3.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 76.
[50] Ibid., 109.
[51] CSC interviews Daniel Zamora, 4.

that they would be depoliticized, Zamora constructs the fallacious argument according to which "far from drawing a theoretical perspective that examined the relationship between exclusion and exploitation, Foucault gradually saw the two as opposed, even contradictory, principles."[52] Yet, Foucault thought that different forms of social struggles had their interconnections. Thus, in a 1972 dialogue with Deleuze, Foucault stated that specific struggles against particularized forms of power and their "constraints and controls" remained "linked to the revolutionary movement of the proletariat to the extent that they fight against the controls and constraints which serve the same system of power", that is, that of "capitalist exploitation." [53] It is known that Foucault would gradually distance himself from this political position. However, his views on the connections between different forms of struggles and political movements remained unaltered. Accordingly, in a 1982 text, **"**The subject and power",[54] Foucault argued that throughout history

> there are three types of struggles: either against forms of domination (ethnic, social and religious); against forms of exploitation which separate individuals from what they produce; or against that which ties the individual to himself and submits him to others in this way (struggles against subjection, against forms of subjectivity and submission.)[55]

Although he pointed out that in the contemporary world "the struggle against the forms of subjection – against the submission of subjectivity – is becoming more and more important," he did not fail to notice that "the struggles against the forms of domination and exploitation have not disappeared. Quite the contrary."[56] And he then concluded that "the mechanisms of subjection cannot be studied outside their relation to mechanisms of exploitation and domination."[57] In other words, Foucault wanted to avoid the traditional leftist idea that sees the struggles against subjection as derivative in relation to the struggles against domination and exploitation, since for him each of them "entertain complex and circular relations with other forms."[58]

Both Zamora and Behrent are right when they claim that Foucault conceived of neoliberalism as not being disciplinary and thus as not reproducing the distinction between normal and abnormal subjects, but that does not mean he uncritically embraced its market creed as a better pattern to the conduction of people's conducts. Rather, he analytically depicted how, under the neoliberal order, subjects tend to engage their lives with market related standards and then start conducting themselves by the market's competitive arrangements. However, to reach such a conclusion, it is necessary to address Foucault's

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[52] Ibid., 3.
[53] Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* (1977), 216.
[54] Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," in *Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, ed. Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (1983).
[55] Foucault, "Subject and Power," 212.
[56] Ibid. 213.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid.

analysis of neoliberalism under the conceptual framework of critique, governmentality and subjectivation – the core of his theoretical interests from the late 1970s until his death in 1984.

CRITICAL TOOLS TO UNDERSTAND FOUCAULT'S ANALYSIS OF NEOLIBERALISM

Although the notions of governmentality, subjectivation and critique may be discussed independently, and while they are not specifically addressed in *The Birth of Biopolitics*, we consider these to be the core notions that compose the conceptual framework within which Foucault developed his understanding of neoliberalism. We also think that many contemporary critics of neoliberalism have adopted and developed precisely those notions in their critical analysis of it.

Let us first turn to Foucault's notion of governmentality, which suddenly appeared in *Security, Territory, Population*.[59] This is also the lecture course where Foucault first addressed pastoral power as a major historic process which traversed Christianity and thus helped in fashioning historic institutions that produced modern individuality and subjectivity. Foucault's investigations into pastoral power did not lead him to abandon his previous ideas concerning discipline as a "subtle, calculated technology of subjection"[60] or that "discipline 'makes' individuals."[61] However, he revised and enlarged them by introducing a new dimension according to which the subject actively engages in his/her own subjection by submitting to certain truth discourses; a discovery that led him to introduce another term to his lexicon, namely, that of "subjectivation".[62] Pastoral power was seen by Foucault as constituting a "prelude"[63] to modern forms of governmentality which are more specifically operated through state political technologies and apparatuses. However, as Arnold Davidson has pointed out, "one should not overlook the fact that pastoral power and governmentality are historically and philosophically contiguous in that they take as the object of their techniques and practices the *conduct* of human beings."[64] In fact, the notion of government as conduction of conducts opened the path to Foucault's last and utmost research interests concerning the government of others and self-government. Actually, the broad understanding of government as "the activity of conducting (*conduire*), of conduction (*la conduction*)" allowed Foucault to investigate "the way in which one conducts oneself (*se conduit*), lets oneself be conducted (*se laisse conduire*), and finally, in which one behaves (*se comporter*) under the influence of a conduct as the action of conducting or of conduction (*conduction*)."[65] Finally, this was also the lecture course where

[59] Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 108.
[60] Foucault, *Discipline and Punishment*, 121.
[61] *Discipline and Punishment*, 170.
[62] *Security, Territory, Population*, 184.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Arnold Davidson, "Introduction," in *Security, Territory, Population*, xviii-xix.
[65] *Security, Territory, Population*, 193.

Foucault introduced the notion of "counter-conducts",[66] a topic which he immediately related to his reflections on the meaning of critique.

To what theoretical needs was Foucault responding when he invented the notion of governmentality, and what were the theoretical gains it provided him? How did Foucault think of the relationship between the governmentality techniques proper to pastoral power and the constitution of modern subjectivity and individuality? How did Foucault relate his understanding of critique to the struggles of counter-conduct that confronted and still antagonize modern prevalent forms of subjectivity? We believe that these are the questions that should be asked before one comes to interpret Foucault's understanding of neoliberalism since they constitute the major theoretical topics that preceded and succeeded his interpretation of that contemporary governing technique.

After having associated biopolitics with Nazism and Socialism as its most extreme cases,[67] Foucault's research underwent important shifts in *Security, Territory, Population* under the notion of "governmentality" (*gouvernamentalité*).[68] Foucault conceived of governmentality as reuniting in itself at least three complementary political functions. First, governmentality encompassed "the ensemble formed by institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, calculations, and tactics" that granted the exercise of a specific set of power relations which had "the population as its target, political economy as its major form of knowledge, and apparatuses of security as its essential technical instrument."[69] Second, governmentality designed the historic "tendency" that assured the "pre-eminence" of "government" over other sorts of power relations such as "sovereignty, discipline, and so on."[70] Finally, governmentality was also understood as "the result of the process by which the state of justice of the Middle Ages became the administrative state in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and was gradually 'governmentalized.'"[71]

In *Security, Territory, Population*, Foucault proposed a historical analysis of the emergence and development of governmentality, understanding it as the varied substrate of multiple government technologies which gave consistency and concrete reality to the modern state. Accordingly, Michel Sennelart noticed that "The problematic of 'governmentality' therefore marks the entry of the question of the state into the field of analysis of micro-powers."[72] With the notion of governmentality, Foucault could finally discuss state administrative policies, strategies and power technologies while refusing the figure of an omnipotent and omnipresent state power – the supposedly "cold monster"[73] capable of controlling every corner of social life. Sennelart also observed that while Foucault first introduced the notion of governmentality to specify certain historic "governmental

[66] *Security, Territory, Population*, 201.
[67] *Society Must Be Defended*, 260-261.
[68] *Security, Territory, Population*, 108.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Michel Sennelart, "Course Context," in *Security, Territory, Population*, 381.
[73] *Security, Territory, Population*, 248.

practices" which would be "constitutive of a particular regime of power" such as liberalism, he also gradually came to use it under a more general and "abstract meaning"[74] to describe "the way in which one conducts the conduct of men",[75] as Foucault stated in *The Birth of Biopolitics*. Of course, since his previous lecture course, he had already specified that "one never governs a state, a territory, or a political structure. Those whom one governs are people, individuals, or groups."[76]

Foucault defined liberalism as a "rationalization of the exercise of government" whose specificity is to maximize "its effects while diminishing, as far as possible, its cost (understood in the political as well as in the economic sense) (...)."[77] Of course, to see liberalism as a way of governing people did not imply understanding government as if it was "an institution (…), but as the activity that consists in governing people's conduct within the framework of, and using the instruments of, a state (…)."[78] If to govern is to exert power so as to conduct the conducts of the population, then one should understand Foucault's discussion of liberalism and neoliberalism as a set of specific power strategies and truth discourses whose aim is to induce or produce certain behaviors in the population, as well as to control, surveil or eradicate others deemed as socially dangerous or undesirable. In Foucault's analysis of both liberalism and neoliberalism, the individuum and his/her freedom were thought of as effects and products of governmental actions produced by state interventions or by the economic market as a site for the conduction of people's behavior.

Let us now approach Foucault's other theoretical discoveries while he addressed pastoral power. To sum it up, he understood pastoral power as a long-lasting religious technology destined to conduct the conducts of people within Christianity and even before Christianity. Pastoral power is a religious technology for the governing of individuals and their souls, and it extends its reach to entire communities since it relates to "everyday conduct (*conduite*), in the management of lives, as well as in goods, wealth, and things."[79] Although pastoral power should not be viewed as some sort of permanent or unaltered power structure throughout Western history, Foucault conceded that "in its typology, organization, and mode of functioning, pastoral power … is doubtless something from which we have still not freed ourselves."[80]

Foucault considered that one of the most fundamental consequences of pastoral power was that it gave rise to an "immense institutional network",[81] thus helping to shape a specific notion of individuality and subjectivity. According to his views, pastoral power produced an "individualization" that was linked to a "game of dissection" through which

[74] Ibid., 387.
[75] *Birth of Biopolitics*, 186.
[76] *Security, Territory, Population*, 122.
[77] *Birth of Biopolitics*, 318.
[78] Ibid.
[79] *Security, Territory, Population*, 154.
[80] Ibid., 148.
[81] Ibid., 164.

people were led to scrutinize their own actions, thoughts, dreams and desires by evaluating their "merits and faults at each moment"; a sort of individualization through "analytical identification".[82] Such a form of individualization was also independent from the position occupied by someone in the social structure, while the result of someone's "self's mastery of self" was dependent on a "whole network of servitude that involves the general servitude of everyone with regard to everyone", besides the "exclusion of the self, of the ego, and of egoism as the central, nuclear form of the individual."[83] This second aspect of the individualization process boosted by pastoral power was thus designed by Foucault under the title of "individualization by subjection (*assujettissement*)."[84] Finally, this new form of individualization was also conquered "through the production of an internal, secret, and hidden truth," a process for which Foucault invented a new terminology, that of "subjectivation (*subjectivation*)".[85] Thus, he concluded that the "history of the pastorate" and its many Christian institutions was coetaneous to the "entire history of procedures of human individualization in the West", therefore involving a whole "history of the subject."[86]

By complexifying the history of the subject and its individualization process through the notion of "subjectivation", Foucault stressed the importance of truth discourses in the constitution of subjectivity. After having discussed how different sorts of scientific knowledge had been central to the constitution of modern subjects, he then emphasized the importance of the active adhesion of the subject to truth discourses in general in the process of his/her own fashioning. In the case of pastoral power, subjectivation implied the active and positive engagement of the subject in the annulation of the self by means of the production and extraction of a hidden, internal truth through a continuous conscience examination under the guidance of a religious leader, namely, the pastor. However, Foucault did not restrict his understanding of subjectivation exclusively to his discussion of the pastorate. As Frédéric Gros has observed, the notion of subjectivation allowed Foucault to emphasize the connections between the study of "discourses of truth" and their "effect on the government of self and others". [87] In a word, the notion of forms of subjectivation helped him to fully articulate his analyses of power structures with his discussions of truth discourses in the process of the constitution of historic subjects. Correspondingly, the notion of "subjectivation" opened the path to Foucault's investigation of historic ways of becoming a subject through one's own active engagement with truth discourses, whether scientific or unscientific.

It was also during that lecture course that Foucault introduced the notion of counter-conduct, with which he complexified his previous genealogic understanding about the

[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Frédéric Gros, "Course Context," in Michel Foucault, *The Courage of the Truth. The Government of Self and Others* (2011), 346.

intrinsic relation between power and resistance. In fact, once power strategies begun to be conceived of as within the reach of the notion of governmentality, Foucault also started thinking of resistance in terms of counter-conducts. After examining some terminological possibilities such as "revolt," "disobedience," "insubordination" and "dissidence,"[88] Foucault chose "counter-conduct" as the best option since it had the "advantage of allowing reference to the active sense of the word "conduct"—counter-conduct in the sense of struggle against the processes implemented for conducting others".[89] According to him, "by using the word counter-conduct (…) we can no doubt analyze the components in the way in which someone actually acts in the very general field of politics or in the very general field of power relations".[90]

Until then, Foucault used to think about power relations according to a military model, relying on "the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them". [91] Accordingly, resistance was also understood exclusively in confrontational terms and as never extrinsic to power: "Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power."[92] The notion of government as conduction of conducts, including counter-conducts as its correlative, allowed Foucault to refine and deepen his previous thinking about the relationship between power and resistance, opening the gate for important transformations in his thinking. Thus, in 1982, Foucault affirmed that

> The exercise of power consists in guiding the possibility of conduct and putting in order the possible outcome. Basically power is less a confrontation between two adversaries or the linking of one to the other than a question of government. (…) To govern (…) is to structure the possible field of actions of others."[93]

A most interesting and innovative corollary to this new way of conceiving the relations between power and resistance was the introduction of freedom; a notion that was not explicitly addressed by Foucault during his published works from the 1970s. Accordingly, he then affirmed that, "Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only in so far as they are free." [94] In other words, power is exerted over "individual or collective subjects who are faced with a field of possibilities in which several ways of behaving, several reactions and diverse comportments may be realized", [95] while other ones will be subjected to interdictions or disallowed. Of course, Foucault did not think of the relation

[88] *Security, Territory, Population*, 195-201.
[89] Ibid., 201.
[90] Ibid., 202.
[91] *History of Sexuality. An Introduction*, 83.
[92] Ibid., 86.
[93] Foucault, "Subject and Power," 220-221.
[94] Ibid., 221.
[95] Ibid.

between freedom and power as if they were "mutually exclusive", since he believed that they entertained a much more complex interaction:

> In this game freedom may well appear as the condition for the exercise of power (at the same time its precondition, since freedom must exist for power to be exerted, and also its permanent support, since without the possibility of recalcitrance, power would be equivalent to a physical determination.) The relationship between power and freedom's refusal to submit cannot therefore be separated.[96]

According to our interpretation, Foucault was only able to arrive at this late conception, which allowed him to affirm the freedom of those subjects who resist power relations, after having reflected on the importance of critique. In a 1978 conference, *Qu'est-ce que la critique?,* Foucault famously defined it as a "certain way of thinking, saying, and acting, a certain relationship to what exists, to what we know, and to what we do, a relationship to society and culture, a relationship to others as well, that we could call, let's say, a critical attitude."[97] It was through this broad and general definition of critique that Foucault disentangled it from the theoretical framework according to which it should offer epistemological or moral criteria to prevent the risks and mistakes that haunt political engagement. This Foucauldian refusal of a strictly epistemological and/or moral understanding of critique was manifested in his definition of the critical attitude as the "art"[98] by which one confronts the processes of governmentalization by which modern subjects have become subjected. Thus, critique was seen by Foucault as a "political and moral attitude (…). I would call this quite simply the art of not being governed, or again the art of not being governed like this and at this price", or "the art of not being governed quite so much."[99]

A central topic of his thinking from then on, Foucault conceived of critique as a reflected way of conducting oneself – as a willful attitude that confronts the present reality in the broadest possible sense. If critique is an attitude and an art through which governmentalization techniques and truth discourses that seek to guide the conduct of populations are called into question, then it makes sense to understand counter-conduct movements as inscribed within the tradition of popular struggles that contest and criticize political authoritarianism and violent, exclusive hegemonic social norms. The critical attitude that characterizes counter-conducts does not imply an absolute refusal of all forms of government but the rejection of certain specific ways of being led and governed, putting into question the historical ways through which the subject has been subjected by governing powers and their correlative truth discourses:

> If governmentalization is a movement that subjugates individuals through the reality of a social practice with mechanisms of power that claim to be based on truth, well, I would say that critique is the movement that enables the subject to

[96] Ibid.
[97] Michel Foucault, *"What is Critique?"*, Kindle edition, 20.
[98] Ibid., 24.
[99] Ibid.

> take up the right to question truth on its effects of power and to question power about its discourses of truth.[100]

Foucault did not formulate a general theory of critique with which to ascribe it to certain social movements while rejecting it for others. It was more important to affirm that critique should be understood as an attitude of "voluntary insubordination (*l'inservitude volontaire*), of considered indocility (*l'indocilité réfléchie*)."[101] It is worth observing that insubordination and indocility are the very opposite to what might be called an uncritical acceptance of power relations and truth discourses that have fashioned modern subjectivity through disciplinary individualizing process, as well as by means of the modern state's processes of individualization through totalization.[102] Note, also, Foucault's use of two important words, rather new to his lexicon so far: "voluntary" and "considered". If the critical attitude tries to suspend certain "combined effects of power and truth", then it is also necessary that the critical subject deliberately assumes it as a personal "decision", [103] one that should not be arbitrary or merely circumstantial, since it implies a "permanent and definitive will" encompassing "an experience in the full sense of the word."[104] Under the scope of modern governmentalization processes that produced modern subjects on the basis of statal and non-statal governing strategies, Foucault considered critique to embrace "the function of desubjectification in the play of what might, in a word, be called the politics of truth."[105]

Foucault never explained in detail what he meant by such a process of critical desubjectification, but it can be argued that he had in mind the many historic ways through which modern subjects have engaged in the work of reframing themselves by questioning the power relations and the truth discourses that bind us to specific identities and subjectivities. Thus, critique operates processes of "desubjectification" by means of which individuals or collectivities interrogate, question and confront truth discourses and governmentality practices that have associated us with pre-formed individualities or certain specific social identities. In other words, critique is inherent to ethical-political struggles which aim to transform oneself and others while addressing and confronting the fissures of the reality in which we live. The introduction of critique in Foucault's thought opened a space of reflexivity previously non-existent in his thinking, and it also

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[100] *"What is Critique?,"* 26.

[101] Ibid.

[102] "Subject and power," 214.

[103] *"What is Critique?,"* 195.

[104] Ibid.

[105] *"What is Critique?,"* 26. In their comprehensive approach to the notion of critique throughout Foucault's work, Daniele Lorenzini and Tuomo Tiisala have pointed out that "the politics of truth is not, for him, a way of getting rid of truth and truth-telling altogether." In fact, they argue that "parrhesia illustrates how truth-telling can openly challenge the authority of a given rationality of governing." See, "The architectonic of Foucault's critique," *European Journal of Philosophy* 1-16 (2023), 7. According to their interpretation of the complex role of critique in Foucault's work, "truth-telling can play two contrastive roles—exemplified by avowal and parrhesia—which map onto critique's double movement: in the first case, truth-telling (as avowal) is a target of critique, whereas in the second case, truth-telling (as parrhesia) is one of the methods that critique uses, one of the forms it takes." Ibid., 3.

framed the way he reflected on ethical-political movements of the 1970s and 1980s, such as the gay and feminist movements, among others. Of course, critique as the instance that opens a reflective movement through which the self becomes the focus of self-questioning, self-transformation and self-government is not yet clearly established in that 1978 conference. However, such a reflexive turn to oneself is already evident when Foucault, while interrogating Kant's text on the Enlightenment, proposed a question that would pervade his thinking right to the end:

> What am I, this I, who belongs to this humanity, perhaps to this fringe, to this moment, to this instance of humanity that is subject to the power of truth in general and truths in particular? The primary characteristic of this historico-philosophical practice, if you like, involves desubjectifying the philosophical question by calling on historical content and liberating historical content by examining the effects of power as it affects the truth from which it is supposed to arise.[106]

Foucault's conception of critique as a "virtue in general"[107] or as the art of reflected disobedience and considered indocility requires that the subject actively puts oneself at the vortex of one's historic existence with others. The critical attitude requires that one interrogates the present situation in which one belongs together with others and demands the courage not to blindly obey and abide to hegemonic power relations and their correlative truth discourses. As argued by Philippe Sabot, "Foucault points towards another type of relationship between power, truth and the subject insofar as it involves placing in the subject a disposition to act and criticize" in order to "change the conditions in which power is led to produce discourses of truth and truth is led to become authority."[108] When associated with the notion of critique, resistance or counter-conduct movements should be understood as a set of voluntary and reflected practices of freedom – as exercises and critical experiences devoted to self-transformation and the transformation of others. Such a claim was clearly posited in 1982 when Foucault famously stated that

> Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are, but to refuse what we are. We have to imagine and to build up what we could be to get rid of this kind of political 'double bind', which is the simultaneous individualization and totalization of modern power structures. The conclusion would be that the political, ethical, social, philosophical problem of our days is not to try to liberate the individual from the state, and from the state's institutions, but to liberate us both from the state and the type of individualization that is linked to the state. We have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries.[109]

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[106] *"What is Critique?,"* 37.
[107] *"What is Critique?,"* 21.
[108] Philippe Sabot, "Avec Foucault, penser la 'critique'," (2012). Accessed January 18, 2024. My translation.
[109] "Subject and Power," 216.

At this point, we could question once again whether Foucault can be labeled a neoliberal simply because he did not decry it. Such a claim is tantamount to misconceiving Foucault's understanding of the way critique operates. He did not think that critique was "about saying that things are not good the way they are. It consists of seeing on what types of evidence, familiarities, acquired and unreflected (*non réfléchis*) modes of thought the practices that we accept are based upon."[110]

THE LEGACY OF FOUCAULT'S ANALYSIS OF NEOLIBERALISM

To close this text, we briefly take into consideration Foucault's analysis of crucial neoliberal tenets such as "*homo oeconomicus*," the ordoliberal notion of "enterprise society" (*société d'entreprise*), the Chicago School's theory of "human capital" and its assumption of competitive behaviors, oriented by the economic market, as the intelligibility grid to non-economic social conducts. Those notions help to explain why neoliberalism has become successful in obtaining its governmental subjectification effects on the lives of the population worldwide. Those are the Foucauldian insights that have been adopted and developed by many contemporary critics of the present neoliberal order, together with the very notion of governmentality.[111] In fact, although Foucault could not have anticipated neoliberalism's major political and economic damages, he was able to foresee many of its social features that have now become globally widespread, such as the forwarding of the "enterprise" as a generalized social form and the generalization of the market's economic rationality as *the* rationality subjacent to many non-economic social behaviors, fostering productivity and competitiveness as their intelligibility grid.

A major aspect of Foucault's analysis of ordo-neoliberalism stresses that this is a governing practice characterized by deep state interventions in society to grant the social, political and economic conditions under which "competitive mechanisms can play a regulatory role at every moment" so that the "market" becomes not only "possible" but assumes its role "of general regulator, of principle of political rationality".[112] According to this, a society fully regulated by the market rationality is not specifically oriented towards the uniformity of the production of commodities to be consumed, and this is why Foucault considered a neoliberal society to be not so much a society of consumers or a spectacle society but, more importantly, a society driven by "mechanisms of competition".[113] In other words, "an enterprise society" is that in which the economic agent, the *homo oeconomicus*, is seen as "the man of enterprise and production." [114] Thus, what characterizes

[110] Michel Foucault, "Est-il donc important de penser?," in *Dits et Écrits*, vol. IV (1994), 180. My translation.
[111] Regarding the importance of Foucault's notion of governmentality in the work of contemporary critics of neoliberalism, see Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval, *The New Way of the World: On Neoliberal Society* (2013) and Wendy Brown, *Edgework. Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics* (2005). According to Brown, Foucault's notion of governmentality is "useful" because "it apprehends the extent to which rationality governs without recourse to overt rule—or, more precisely, the manner in which it governs through norms and rules rather than rule." Ibid., 145.
[112] *Birth of Biopolitics*, 146.
[113] Ibid., 147.
[114] Ibid.

the neoliberal governing strategy that has now become prevalent in all "capitalist countries"[115] is the "multiplication of the 'enterprise' form within the social body".[116] In this sense, Foucault conceived that what effectively matters under neoliberal governmentality is to render "the market, competition, and so the enterprise, into what could be called the formative power of society."[117]

In agreement with classic liberals, neoliberal theoreticians understood human beings as *homo oeconomicus*, that is, as economic agents who respond to the stimulus of the exchange market. The novelty and specificity of neoliberal governmentality lies in the articulation of the liberal understanding of human beings as *homo oeconomicus* with the economic theory of human capital. In the context of an enterprise society, neoliberals conceive of *homo oeconomicus* as a self-entrepreneur in the sense that he/she becomes responsible for producing his/her own income and capital, "a capital that we will call human capital inasmuch as the ability-machine of which it is the income cannot be separated from the human individual who is its bearer."[118] Under such economic conditions, Foucault came to the point of speculating about the political and economic roles that biogenetics is about to assume "as soon as a society poses itself the problem of the improvement of its human capital in general (…)."[119] According to him, it was "inevitable that the problem of control, screening, and the improvement of the human capital of individuals" should become an urgent issue worldwide. Foucault also pointed out that under the neoliberal demand for people to constantly find ways to acquire and refine human capital during their lives, education would be transformed into "educational investments",[120] thus fostering its commodification.

Thus, under neoliberalism, human beings are understood as economic agents who need to continually improve and add value to their own professional skills, abilities and lifestyles to remain competitive and thus worthy of existing. This is precisely why and how they become neoliberal subjects, that is, subjected to competitive patterns of conduct in their everyday life. Foucault noticed that when the specific economic behavior of *homo oeconomicus* is socially taken as the "grid of intelligibility" that gives meaning to other sorts of non-economic, social behavior, "we reach the point at which maybe the object of economic analysis should be identified with any purposeful conduct which involves (…) a strategic choice of means, ways, and instruments (…)."[121] Foucault then acutely pointed out the political risks implied by this "generalization of the economic object to any conduct which employs limited means to one end among others".[122] By following this train of thought, Foucault concluded that when the "economic behavior" of *homo oeconomicus* becomes the "grid of intelligibility" to all sorts of non-economic behaviors, the major political consequence is that "the individual becomes governmentalizable, that power gets a

[115] Ibid., 149.
[116] Ibid., 148.
[117] Ibid.
[118] Ibid., 226.
[119] Ibid., 228.
[120] Ibid., 230.
[121] Ibid., 268-269.
[122] Ibid., 268.

hold on him".[123] In other words, by invading "domains that are not immediately and directly economic",[124] neoliberalism reaches its major political effects since "the person who accepts reality or who responds systematically to modifications in the variables of the environment appears precisely as someone manageable".[125] In short, "*Homo oeconomicus* is someone who is eminently governable"[126] from the moment they commit their own non-economic behaviors to an economic normativity that becomes more and more expanded to the whole of social life.

By investigating the Chicago neoliberal school, Foucault understood how the economic market had finally become an instrument of governmentalization and regulation of the lives of the population. By proposing such a thesis, Foucault offered important clues as to how life, politics and economics have become intertwined in the contemporary world, thus providing a substantial theoretical basis for many contemporary analysts of neoliberalism. In fact, neoliberal impacts on everyday life have become massive since its competitive patterns, oriented by the logic of the economic market, have been assumed as a socially formative power to which people voluntarily surrender in flexible subjectification processes, thereby freely submitting themselves to the principles and practices of self-entrepreneurship. Thus, Foucault helps us to consider how neoliberal governmentality strategies are agile, decentered and subtle in the sense that they engage those upon whom they are exerted. In other words, they produce their power effects by taking into consideration the subject's adherence to a framework of economic patterns which encourage conducts and behaviors guided by competition, productivity, and the transformation of oneself into an enterprise whose survival depends on one continuously improving one's own qualities and abilities. By further developing Foucault's notion of governmentality as a "political rationality",[127] Dardot and Laval have asserted that neoliberalism currently informs "the way we live, feel and think," being "nothing more, nor less, than the *form of our existence*, the way in which we are led to conduct ourselves, to relate to others and to ourselves."[128]

Although Foucault's analysis of neoliberalism did not explore the connections between neoliberal governing strategies and new forms of democratic impotence, we consider him to have established the basic assumptions upon which contemporary political thinkers have addressed precisely that issue. In fact, Foucault's understanding of neoliberal tenets such as the conception of the economic agent as self-entrepreneurial, as well as his understanding of the neoliberal market as a decisive site for subjectification processes, illuminate why neoliberalism has become a transnational axis that further contributes to the weakening of contemporary democracy. Accordingly, many contemporary critics have stressed that under neoliberalism, a wide-ranging administrative mutation has been introduced across the world, affecting the rules of public management and the meaning of private individual behaviors. In fact, to continuously add value to one's own human

[123] Ibid., 252.
[124] Ibid., 268.
[125] Ibid., 270.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Dardot and Laval, *New Way of the World*, 9.
[128] *New Way of the World*, 8.

capital, one needs to adapt to and adopt competitiveness and performance as key behavioral patterns if one does not want to become disposable or socially irrelevant. As Dardot and Laval have pointed out, "The internalization of performance norms, constant self-monitoring to comply with the indicators, and competition with others – such are the ingredients of the 'revolution in mentalities' that the 'modernizers' want to effect."[129] This is a social and political process summarized by Wendy Brown as follows: "Economization replaces a political lexicon with a market lexicon. Governance replaces a political lexicon with a management lexicon."[130]

Furthermore, based on Foucault's analysis of neoliberalism, one could ask: what happens to those who refuse to conduct themselves according to parameters of competition and performance? Even more, what happens to all those who are not even capable of becoming self-entrepreneurs due to infrastructural deficits provoked precisely by neoliberal deregulations of their rights and the weakening of their political associations? In fact, those social groups who do not match the market's competitive criteria end up having their lives made superfluous and meaningless, a condition that further exposes them to the risks of precariousness and death.[131] Neoliberalism is a set of governmentality strategies that disqualify, segregate and deplete all those who oppose or who fail to adapt to its competitive precepts. Following the idea that under neoliberalism *homo oeconomicus* is responsible for his/her own earnings, many contemporary analysts have stressed that individuals are deemed responsible for their own social destinies. This, in turn, opens the gate to processes of de-politicization and isolation complemented by a tendency to moralize and individualize what in fact is a matter of political analysis and collective political struggles. Thus, the economic effects of neoliberalism upon the lives of people also have important political and psychological consequences. According to Judith Butler,

> the more one complies with the demand for 'responsibility' to become self-reliant, the more socially isolated one becomes and the more precarious one feels; and the more supporting social structures fall away for 'economic' reasons, the more isolated one feels in one's sense of heightened anxiety and 'moral failure'."[132]

Or, in Wendy Brown's formulation, the political rationality of neoliberalism tends to "produce citizens as individual entrepreneurs and consumers whose moral autonomy is measured by their capacity for 'self-care' (…)."[133] This subjective and psychological change is accompanied by a radical depoliticizing which affects the status of the political citizen, who is then transformed into a mere consumer of public and private services – a process described by Brown as the "vanquishing of *homo politicus* by *homo oeconomicus*, with its hostility towards politics, with its economization of the terms of liberal democracy, and with its displacement of liberal democracy legal values and public deliberation

[129] *New Way of the World*, 272.
[130] Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos. Neoliberalism Stealth Revolution* (2015), 207.
[131] These ideas are further developed in André Duarte, *Pandemic and Crisis of Democracy: Biopolitics, Neoliberalism, and Necropolitics in Bolsonaro's Brazil* (2023).
[132] Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (2015), 15.
[133] Wendy Brown, "American nightmare: neoliberalism, neoconservatism, and de-democratization," *Political Theory* 34:6 (2006), 694.

with governance and new management."[134] Dardot and Laval follow the same path when they argue that "the priority given to the dimension of efficiency and financial return eliminates any conception of justice from the public space other than that of the equivalence between what tax-payers have personally paid and what they have personally received."[135]

In other words, the neoliberal subject disregards collective political responsibility for the common world and only demands goods for which they have paid. At the same time, the entrepreneurial subject is someone who readily submits to aggressive conditions of competitiveness, uncertainty, risk and fear to maintain his/her own social status. While no one is forced to become a neoliberal self-entrepreneurial subject, this supposedly free adhesion to neoliberalism happens in a social context of constant fear and uncertainty regarding the near future, increasing de-politicization and generalized de-democratization processes.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it seems rather misleading to suppose that Foucault would have favored neoliberalism simply because he did not anticipate and condemn its major political and economic consequences. Besides, as we have seen, in Foucauldian terms, to propose a critique is not tantamount to a plain and loud denunciation of any sort of power relation. What interested Foucault was problematizing different forms of governmentality and not sponsoring any sort of political or economic project, much less to teach people how to act or think to resist certain power relations and their correlative truth discourses. Besides, Foucault never intended to present *the* truth about neoliberalism. In fact, in 1977 he suggested that people should not "use thought to ground a political practice in Truth; nor political action to discredit, as mere speculation, a line of thought." [136] Much to the contrary, he urged people to "use political practice as an intensifier of thought, and analysis as a multiplier of the forms and domains for the intervention of political action."[137]

Thus, when he affirmed that under liberalism the economic market becomes a new "site of veridiction",[138] he was performing a political critique that consisted in "determining under what conditions and with what effects a veridiction is exercised."[139] Therefore, it makes no sense to affirm that Foucault had enforced the neoliberal creed according to which there could be no alternative to the market, as Zamora stated.[140] What Foucault did was to understand the constitution of a certain regime of truth associated with a specific

[134] Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 207.
[135] Dardot and Laval, *New Way of the World*, 275.
[136] Michel Foucault, "Preface," to *Anti-Oedipus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia,* Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1983), xiv.
[137] Ibid.
[138] *Birth of Biopolitics*, 32.
[139] Ibid., 36.
[140] CSC interviews Daniel Zamora, 2.

"governmental practice",[141] exposing its preconditions and thus its specific forms of operation. In this sense, by analytically presenting neoliberalism as a new form of governmentality based on certain economic truth discourses, Foucault offered conceptual instruments to its critique, both in the sense of elucidating its basic pre-conditions and presuppositions, as well as in the sense of giving people some hints as to how not to become easy prey to such a governing strategy. Foucault was a critical thinker in the sense that he consciously engaged in the "task of analyzing, elucidating, making visible, and thereby intensifying the struggles that take place around power, the strategies of adversaries within relations of power, the tactics employed, and the sources of resistance (…)."[142]

Those who consider that Foucault proposed an uncritical account of neoliberalism, or even a veiled eulogy of it, should ask themselves why is it that most of the best contemporary critical analysts of neoliberalism have borrowed so much from his own theoretical intuitions? In fact, had Foucault embraced neoliberalism, he would have been a rather strange neoliberal given that in his last seminar at the *Collège de France* he came to discuss certain trans-historic actualizations of Antique cynicism, establishing parallels between them and many rebellious attitudes against hegemonic powers and social conventions in modernity.[143] Would it not be more suitable to describe Foucault's intellectual and political attitude as committed to "an art of living" that confronts "all forms of fascism, whether already present or impending"; one that incites people not to become "enamored of power"?[144]

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[141] Ibid., 37.

[142] Michel Foucault, "La philosophie analitique du pouvoir," in *Dits et Écrits*, vol. III (1994), 540. My translation.

[143] Foucault, *Courage of Truth*, 183.

[144] Foucault, "Preface" to *Anti-Oedipus*, xiv.

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