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Daring the Truth: Foucault, Parrhesia and the Genealogy of Critique

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Abstract
This paper draws attention to Foucault's genealogy *of* critique. In a series of inquiries, Foucault traced the origins and trajectories of critical practices from the ancient tradition of parrhesia to the enlightenment and the (neo)liberal critique of the state. The paper will elucidate the insights of this history and argue that Foucault's turn to the genealogy of critique also changed the valence of his theoretical assumptions. Foucault developed a more affirmative practice of genealogy that not only discredits truth claims by tracing them back to their inglorious origins. Rather, he presents a politics of truth as a complex interaction of (governmental) power-knowledge and critique that questions the power effects of truth and rationality. This genealogy of critique contributes to current problematizations of critique by thinkers like Boltanski, Latour and Rancière in highlighting the role of epistemological and technical critique of social rationalization and political reason.

Keywords
critique, Foucault, genealogy, governmentality, neoliberalism, rationality, truth

Introduction

In his lecture course 'Society Must Be Defended' from 1976, Michel Foucault alludes to an increasing 'criticizability of things, institutions, practices, and discourses' (Foucault, 2003b: 6) catalysed by the various social movements emerging in the aftermath of the revolts of 1968: the new wave of feminism, gay and lesbian movements, struggles against psychiatry, prison and medicine, anti-authority struggles, etc. These local 'dispersed and discontinuous offensives' (Foucault, 2003b: 5)

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expanded the scope of critique by rendering hitherto hidden forms of power visible. But they also manifested the limits of certain and by that time dominant modes of criticism. Especially the 'global' theories of Marxism and psychoanalysis inhibited these local struggles more than they helped them to articulate their desires and concerns (Foucault, 2003b: 6). Instead, Foucault argued, genealogy, understood as a 'coupling together of scholarly erudition and local memories', could function as a new 'knowledge of struggles' (Foucault, 2003b: 8), a new form of critique.

Foucault's problem of whether the dominant scholarly critique *of* culture and society is out of sync with the practices of critique *in* culture and society persisted and even intensified. The sociology of critique (Boltanski and Thevenot, 2006; Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005; Boltanski, 2011) as well as various other problematizations of critique (Latour, 1988, 2003, 2004, 2010; Rancière, 2003, 2009) originating in France in the 1980s[1] are now widely and hotly discussed in debates on critical theory internationally. These interventions clearly differ in intent, scope and methodological approach. Nevertheless, some recurrent themes can be identified. The critique of critique objects to the now dominant forms of social and cultural criticism for their denunciative mode of critique. Traditional forms of criticism inhibit the 'critical capacities' (Boltanski and Thevenot, 1999) of people by subjecting them to an assessment of their 'objective' function in society rather than taking seriously their own objections to their role in society (Boltanski, 2011; Rancière, 2003; Celikates, 2006). Classical modes of critique tend to be reductionist by explaining beliefs and truth claims by reference to hidden interests, unconscious drives or pervasive socio-cultural structures (Latour, 2004). But the postmodern erosion of these founding explanantia only evokes nihilism if the debunking of beliefs and the deconstruction of reality is no longer supplemented by the construction of new beliefs and realities (Latour, 2003, 2004). While some argue that critique has 'run out of steam' (Latour, 2004), others (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005; Hardt and Negri, 2000) argue that deconstructivist critique functioned as an engine for the post-modernization of capitalism after it literally almost ran out of steam after the oil crisis in 1973.

The most prominent voices in this debate (Boltanski, 2011; Latour, 2004; Rancière, 2003) have singled out Pierre Bourdieu's critical sociology as representative of a mistaken self-understanding of critique. Foucault's style of genealogical criticism is markedly different from 'Bourdieu's Pascalian overview (*surplomb*) of others' irremediable illusion' (Rabinow, 2009: 28). Nonetheless, there are at least certain gestures in Foucault's critique of power/knowledge, as well as certain ways to understand and pick up Foucault's critique, that are bound to cause unease among Foucauldian scholars considering the recent attacks on the pathologies of critical reason. After all, what could be more

denunciatory than maintaining that our own subjectivities, desires, and political projects are nothing more than the effect of 'disciplinary power' (Foucault, 1995: 30) or the apparatus of sexuality (Foucault, 1978: 159)? Can Foucault escape the charge of reductionism when he traces truth claims back to a transhistorical 'will to power'? Isn't genealogy a variation of de/constructivist criticism, and Foucault another 'intellectual who destroys evidence' (Foucault in Miller, 1993: 189) without adding anything to reality? And, last but not least, isn't there an elective affinity of sorts between Foucault's critique of global, totalizing forms of political reason and neoliberal critique of the state?

Although most Foucauldians loosely identify with the critical project, the above-mentioned concerns are present in post-Foucauldian scholarship. Some scholars express dissatisfaction with traditional forms of 'socio-critique' (Rabinow and Rose, 2003; Rose, 2007; Rabinow, 2009). Some combine a Foucauldian approach with the sociology of critique or an anthropology of moral justification (Fassin, 2011), and others make critical practices part of their accounts of modes of governing (Barry, 2001: 175–96; Collier, 2011). Additionally, an immense body of literature (to name just a few: Butler, 2002; Biebricher, 2008; Rauning, 2008; Lemke, 2011) shows how Foucault avoids the pitfalls of objectivistic as well as normative styles of critique. Foucault's critique goes beyond normative approaches in critical theory, such as the Frankfurt School (Horkheimer, 1972; Habermas, 1996), by practising critique genealogically (Visker, 1995; Owen, 1995; Saar, 2007; Koopman, 2013). Genealogy is a historically informed mode of critique that does not judge the present in terms of a universal moral framework. Instead, it illuminates the historical contingency of the present and thereby discloses possibilities for changing it. Genealogy does not ask 'what is' just to proclaim 'what should be'. It poses another question: how did that what is come into being, and how can it become otherwise. 'And this critique will be genealogical in the sense that it will [...] separate out, from the contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think' (Foucault, 1984: 46).

In this paper, I attempt to go one step further by elucidating the stakes, the insights and the consequences of Foucault's 'genealogy of the critical attitude' (Foucault, 2001: 170ff.). Instead of once again presenting genealogy *as* critique, I want to draw attention to Foucault's genealogy *of* critique. Foucault's genealogy of critique was something he pursued in the last five or six years of his life in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In contrast to Foucault's own mode of critique, his genealogy of critique has so far attracted little scholarly attention (for an exception see Boland, 2013). This may be because it is scattered among many different shorter texts, talks and lectures, some of which were not published in English until recently (Foucault, 1984, 1997, 2001, 2003a, 2008, 2011, 2012). I will argue that reference to Foucault's genealogy *of* critique

makes it possible to defend Foucault against suspicions about his mode of critique, and also that his historical investigation into the origins and developments of the critical attitude presents a vital contribution to the current problematizations of critique.

Genealogy is not only a means of exercising critique, but also a way to reflect on critique. It can serve as a critique of critique that is not conducted in an abstract manner in determining the universal conditions of possibility of critique. Instead it excavates its conditions of emergence, existence and becoming. It does not seek to determine and fix critique once and for all but to change and renew it. That's why Foucault's working through of the history of critique decisively altered his own mode of exercising critique. He took the critical capacities of thinking seriously, and developed a much more affirmative take on the politics of truth than is commonly recognized.

However, taking critical practices seriously also involves problematizing criticism by showing the dangers associated with forms of critique being recuperated in governmental rationalities and by pointing out problems that arise if critical tropes become inflated (Foucault, 2008: 187). The sheer amount of historical material Foucault excavated in his genealogy itself makes a vital contribution to the current problematizations of critique, since apart from some very notable exceptions from conceptual historians (Koselleck, 1988; Röttgers, 1982), historical accounts of critique are scarce. Additionally, by pointing out the significance of the critique of knowledge and rationality, Foucault opens new avenues for a historically sensitive inquiry into modes of criticism.

My reconstruction of Foucault's genealogy of critique follows the chronology of the critical practices Foucault discusses. I will first turn to what, according to Foucault, is the origin of the critical attitude: the Greek practice of frank speech, *parrhesia*. Here, I will highlight the connection between Foucault's work on political rationality and his work on antiquity as it appears through the lens of the genealogy of critique (1). After that I will show how the critical attitude emerged in modernity as the 'art of not being governed quite so much' (Foucault, 1997: 45), as both a partner and adversary of the arts of governing men (2). I will argue that the history of governmentality is not just the history of the inner transformation of governmental rationalities, but a double movement between the process of governmentalization and the critique of political reason. Foucault exemplifies this intricate movement between critique that limits and spurs governmental technologies by recourse to the (neo)liberal critique of government (3). Finally, I will show how Foucault's own understanding and practice of critique differs both from the tradition of critique he analysed in his genealogy of critique – including the neoliberal critique of state knowledge – and from current problematizations of critique (4).

Critique Enters the Stage: From the Dramatics of Parrhesia to the Ethos of Modernity

In the concluding remarks of his 1983 Berkeley lectures 'Discourse and Truth' on the concept of parrhesia, Foucault characterized his endeavour as a 'genealogy of the critical attitude' (Foucault, 2001: 170ff.). The history of parrhesia seems to be the self-evident starting-point of a search for a genealogy of critique in Foucault. However, what Foucault is doing in his last lectures at the beginning of the 1980s (2001, 2011, 2012) by tracing the origins, problematizations and mutations of the notion of parrhesia is not a linear history of critique. Rather, the lectures on parrhesia present a 'prelude' (Foucault, 2007: 239) to the history of critique. The 'critical attitude' is the 'ethos of modernity' (Foucault, 1984). Therefore it seems that, by definition, it can only emerge in modernity. But the modern ethos – as Foucault understands it (1984: 39) – is not a general habitus of all people encapsulated in the modern age. It is a reflective disposition towards the present as a fleeting now that opens up to an unknown future. It follows that critique and parrhesia are not reducible to their historical contexts of emergence, because it is the very activity that transcends the socio-historical situation. The critical attitude is neither specific to a certain historical time (the modern age) nor to a certain geographical region (the West). Frederic Gros rightly speaks of a 'meta-historical attitude' (Gros, 2011: 397), one that is not reducible but also not indifferent to historical circumstances. It is only in relation to concrete historical situations and specific problems that critique gains traction.

Thus the genealogy of critique remains of the utmost importance if we want to understand the significance of critique. But it is also crucial to recognize how the meaning of genealogy is altered when the genealogy of critique is at stake. Here, history cannot provide the master frame to explain the emergence of the practice of critique or even to discredit it by tracing it back to its origins (Foucault, 2003c). Rather, the genealogy of critique is the genealogy of the very practice that made this genealogy possible in the first place. The genealogy of critique is an affirmative genealogy. It is both a systematic argument about the general features of the critical attitude and a historical account of the modulations of this attitude in relation to the historical situation in which it becomes actualized. I will first unravel the systematic component of the argument and then sketch the twisted path of the critical attitude

Foucault describes his analysis of parrhesia, in contrast to American discourse pragmatics, as a '"dramatics" of discourse' (Foucault, 2011: 68), and introduces parrhesia with the help of a dramatic scene: 'I think that in a way this is an exemplary scene of *parrēsia*: a man stands up to a tyrant and tells him the truth' (Foucault, 2011: 50), 'stands up, speaks, tells the truth to a tyrant, and risks his life' (Foucault, 2011: 61). I argue

that this is the 'matrix scene of *parrēsia*' (Foucault, 2011: 50), not because it is typical, but because as an extreme 'limit-situation' (Foucault, 2011: 61), that is, through its very singularity, it highlights three basic, generalizable features of the critical attitude.

First of all, the scene exemplifies that an authentic act of parrhesia has no institutional or legal basis. The truth-speaker takes a right that he doesn't have, just as modern critique cannot resort to a universal guarantee that grounds and legitimizes the right to criticize. '[C]ritique is the movement by which *the subject gives himself the right* to question truth on its effects of power' (Foucault, 1997: 47; emphasis added) Critique in this sense is always a form of reflective 'insolence' (Foucault, 1997: 47; 2012: 165; Stoler, 1995: 196). Parrhesia is thus not a performative speech act, in which an institutional setting grants an utterance the power to have codified effects. '*Parrēsia* does not produce a codified effect; it opens up an unspecified risk' (Foucault, 2011: 62).

This risk – and this is the *second* general feature of critical activity – does not necessarily imply that your life is at risk due to a vengeful tyrant. What is pertinent is that in the critical situation, something important is at stake that insistently concerns the truth-speaker. The truth of his or her speech – the *third* feature – is most profoundly grounded in or through his or her courage (see Foucault, 2011: 66). This is again a theme that figures centrally in both the Kantian '*sapere aude!*' and in the ancient problematization of parrhesia as 'courage to truth'. By voicing a truth that may 'entail costly consequences' (Foucault, 2011: 56), the truth-speaker proves the truth through his or her very act and not only by reference to logical arguments or objective evidence. This 'veridicity' (Foucault, 2011: 66) is manifested and validated through this trial of courage. The question that sums up the dramatics of truth-speaking is not the schoolmasterly 'What are your reasons?' but the tyrannical 'How dare you?'

Choosing this scene as the 'meta-historical matrix' for the critical attitude is a veritable *coup de théâtre* vis-à-vis the understanding of critique in the liberal tradition. Liberals and republicans often depict the paradigmatic locus of critique in the civil salon societies of the 17th and 18th centuries or in the public sphere in Western democratic societies (Habermas, 1991). For a certain liberal tradition, critique needs to be legally and institutionally grounded in universal human rights of equality and freedom of speech instead of involving an asymmetrical relation between tyrant and subject. The liberal 'Reign of Critique' (Bayle), the salon or the republic of letters, is a politically neutralized space where everything can be put on the table but nothing is really at stake. Finally, liberals maintain that critique is grounded in universal reason and not in an affective disposition (courage). Foucault did not reject this understanding of critique because he was against human rights, equality, free speech, the republic of letters and reason – quite the contrary. But by

changing and disrupting the taken-for-granted scenery of critique he maintained that critique is more than idle playfulness or reasoning for reason's sake.

Foucault's work on antiquity is often understood as a turn to questions of ethics and the subject. But his genealogy of frank speech shows that he was also deeply concerned with political practices in antiquity. These considerations resonate in significant ways with his work on political rationality and government from the late '70s. In a few bold moments, Foucault (2011: 69ff., 339–55; 2001: 169–73) tells a fascinating story about the intricate historical trajectory of frank speech by showing how elements of parrhesia have been inserted in modern games of truth, actualizing different and conflicting facets of truth-speaking. Foucault stresses the flexibility and the constant transformations of the 'parrhesiastic function' (2011: 348). He tracks down a series of mutations concerning the key 'focal point' (Foucault, 2011: 348) of parrhesia in antiquity that already foreshadow its changing destiny in modernity.

The practice of parrhesia started as the public exercise of free speech in the Greek *polis* playing an important part in the political life of the ancient democracy. Truth-speaking took place in 'the Assembly, courts, and all those decision making sites' (Foucault, 2011: 340). Another political function of parrhesia was the counselling of the prince (Foucault, 2011: 69), a practice still charged with the critical force and the potential risks of speaking truth to power up front. Without abandoning these political functions of parrhesia, an ethical practice of parrhesia developed (Foucault, 2011: 341ff.). The ethical problem of truth became a major concern for Greek philosophers from Socrates to the Cynics. While the Socratic tradition deployed parrhesia to *tell* the truth of the *psyche*, the soul, the Cynics wanted to *express* the truth by the exercise of a way of life stripped bare of all unnecessary features and obligations of civilization (Foucault, 2012: 157–74).

After the end of classical antiquity and with the rise of Christianity in the West, new ethical as well as political practices of truth-speaking emerged that would eventually inscribe the truth-speaking exercise in modern dispositives of power-knowledge. The ethical and philosophical practice of speaking the truth slowly degenerated into the Christian games of truth with the paradigmatic truth-speaking exercise of the confession. '[P]hilosophy's great parrhesiastic function was [. . .] transferred [. . .] from the philosophical focal point to [. . .] the Christian pastoral' (Foucault, 2011: 348, see also Gros, 2011: 378). On the political axis of parrhesia, the political practice of parrhesia was transferred to the figure of the minister who was supposed to advise the political sovereign, in the context of the *raison d'état* that emerged in the 16th century in Europe (Foucault, 2011: 70). This new ethical-political double-bind of modern truth games is what Foucault described as the genealogical core of

modern governmentality targeting both the individual soul and the whole political body, *omnes et singulatim* (Foucault, 2003a).

It is precisely this new regime of truth that is now also a regime of power embodied by the minister and the pastor, who appropriated the truth-speaking capacity from the political citizen and the philosopher in Greek antiquity, that evokes the new movement of critique as 'the art of not being governed like that' in the 18th century. Foucault argues that this movement is recuperating parrhesiastic motives and its core ethos (Foucault, 2011: 70). 'Kant's text on the *Aufklärung* is a certain way for philosophy, through the critique of the *Aufklärung*, to become aware of problems which were traditionally problems of *parrēsia* in antiquity, which will re-emerge in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries' (Foucault, 2011: 350). However, since speaking the truth became an exercise *of* rather than a challenge *to* power in modernity, the critical attitude had to reinvent itself. It no longer speaks truth to power but scrutinizes powerful truths: it becomes critique in the modern sense of the term. Critical philosophy in the 18th century is a reappropriation of frank speech directed against the dominant governmental recuperation of parrhesia by the pastoral and the modern state.

Critical Encounters: The Governmental Will to Power and the Will Not to Be Governed

Against the backdrop of the genealogy of parrhesia, it becomes obvious that the history of political rationality is not only the history of the articulation of power/knowledge in the particular case of the state but also a more profound account of how the intricate relation between power and knowledge emerged historically. Foucault transcends the more refined understanding of power/knowledge from the mid-1970s by historicizing the alignment of truth and governing others.[2] In the pastorate and *raison d'état* tradition, speaking the truth is no longer a weapon against power, but becomes an instrument for control and domination. This is of course not the first time that knowledge is endowed with institutional effects of power, and not the first occasion on which power is invested in knowledge. However, with the rise of modern governmentality the relation became more interlocked and intense. The government of populations and individual souls becomes saturated with the production of truth, and truth is equipped with power. A threshold is crossed and the exercise of power and the production of truth start to reinforce each other.

The genealogy of governmentality is also the genealogy of the fatal encounter of truth and power that Foucault could no longer take for granted. It is the genealogy of how the 'will to know' (Foucault, 2013) became intimately coupled with the will to power. Foucault argues that

philosophy was not only instrumentalized by power, but effectively replaced by the art of governing men.

> Saint Gregory Nazianzen was the first to define this art of governing men by the pastorate as the *technē technon, epistemē epistemon*, the 'art of arts', the 'science of sciences'. [. . .] [W]ell before the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, what took over from philosophy in the Christian West was not another philosophy, and it was not even theology; it was the pastorate. It was this game of the government that was reflected for fifteen centuries as the science par excellence, the art of all arts, the knowledge (*savoir*) of all knowledges (*saviors*). (Foucault, 2007: 201ff.)

Since power evokes resistance that is neither reducible nor exterior to power (Foucault, 1978: 95), a new historical movement emerged that challenged the recent amalgamation of knowledge and power in the art of governing men: critique. The critical movement problematizes the power effects of knowledge. The will to power that operates as a will to know is confronted by the 'will not to be governed' constituting itself as a critique of knowledge. This explains the prominent status of Kant in the genealogy of critique. Not only did Kant regard the pastor – in German *Seelsorger* (Kant, 1968: 53), literally meaning the person who takes care (*Sorge*) of the soul (*Seele*) – as an impediment to enlightenment. More generally, in Kant, reason becomes a theme and problem for itself. Confronted with the experience of reason's growing power, Kant poses the question of the legitimate uses of reason. Foucault's fascinating story about the emergence of governmental reason has intriguing implications for our understanding of the history of philosophy. Modern philosophy did not reinvent itself as critical epistemology with Kant and Descartes (Foucault, 2011: 349ff.) because of an epochal *Seinsvergessenheit*, as Heidegger would have it, but because it reacted to the new 'knowledge of all knowledges', the art of governing, with a new *epistemē epistemon*: critical epistemology.

However, Foucault was not only interested in critique as part of the history of philosophy. Kant is only one representative of a broader critical movement in the West that developed in the 15th and 16th centuries (Foucault, 1997: 42). Foucault's history of critique in modernity covers some important stages of the critical movement that are similarly emphasized in conceptual histories of critique (Koselleck, 1988: 98–128; Röttgers, 1982). He identifies an early form of resistance to pastoral power in the 'insurrection of conduct' (Foucault, 2007: 196), which was still cast in religious terms. By contrast, the emergence of critique marks the beginning of a secular opposition to the pastoral regime of truth and power. The authority of the church was disputed by philological critique that challenged the monopoly of scholastic philosophy

over the right interpretation of the biblical texts (Röttgers, 1982: 653) by 'raising the very simple question: were the Scriptures true?' (Foucault, 1997: 45ff.).

Pierre Bayle was one of the most important early figures in the critical movement (Foucault, 1997: 46). He extended philological critique to a wider spectrum of themes with his *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (Röttgers, 1982: 656). Bayle also identified a privileged site for critical activity: the republic of letters as *La règne de la critique*, where equals are able to discuss freely without being constrained by clerical and worldly authorities (Koselleck, 1988: 107). At this historical moment the heresy of critique and the 'heresy of the *politiques*' (Foucault, 2007: 448) – the thinkers of the *raison d'état* – were still united in their opposition to the power of the pastorate and their regime of veridiction that short-circuited truth with revelation (Koselleck, 1988: 106ff.). But with the increasing importance of the doctrine of *raison d'état* and with the rise of the absolutist police state, the scene changed. Critique became a critique of the state, a 'critique of political reason' (Foucault, 2003a). It targeted a form of rationality that for the first time in history discovered an autonomous and artificial realm of political action in the state: the *Polizeywissenschaft* that later became political science. Both Koselleck and Foucault show that, historically, critique constituted itself not as a political force but as an anti-political discourse. But while Koselleck (1988: 113) concentrates on a moral critique of political reason, Foucault focuses on the economic 'critique of the police state' (Foucault, 2007: 286) and its impact on the history of governmentality. For Foucault, the (neo)liberal critique of political reason serves as the prime example to elucidate both the morphology of critique confronting the reason of the state as well as the destiny of a critique that is always already implicated in the history of what it criticizes: modern modes of governing.

Governmentality as Double Movement: (Neo)liberalism as Critique of Political Reason

Foucault's turn to critique and enlightenment has been interpreted as corresponding to his turn to ethics and the subject (Butler, 2002). But in the light of the longer genealogy of critique, it becomes obvious that it is especially in relation to his history of political rationalities that the question of critique arises for Foucault. This complicates the usual understanding of the history of governmentality. It is not 'an endogenous history of power that develops on the basis of itself in a sort of paranoiac and narcissistic madness' (Foucault, 2007: 282), but rather a 'double movement' of governmentalization and critique.

> [I]f governmentalization is indeed this movement through which individuals are subjugated in the reality of the social practice

> through mechanisms of power that adhere to a truth, well, then! I will say that critique is the movement by which the subject gives himself the right to question truth on its effects of power and question power on its discourses of truth. (Foucault, 1997: 47)

But critique is not only one part of the double movement, it is also a 'double agent' (Roy, 2010: 191–208). Critique is 'both a partner and adversary to the arts of governing, [. . .] a way to displace them, with a basic distrust, but also [. . .] a line of development of the arts of governing' (Foucault, 1997: 44ff.). The double movement thus does not take place on an already charted territory – as in Polanyi (1957) – but alters the topology of government.

This double role is what fascinates Foucault (2008) in his account of liberalism and neoliberalism. Liberalism is not just a discourse to rationalize government, but 'constitutes – and this is the reason for both its polymorphism and its recurrences – a tool for the criticism of reality: criticism of a previous governmentality from which one is trying to get free; of a present governmentality that one is trying to reform and rationalize by scaling it down' (Foucault, 2008: 319ff.). Like more affirmative intellectual histories of liberal thinkers (Rothschild, 2001), Foucault shows that 18th-century economic liberalism is a crucial part of the enlightenment. The Scottish Enlightenment (Smith and Hume) is characterized by a disposition (Rothschild, 2001: 16) that entails scepticism about the capabilities and pretences of knowledge (especially by the state), paired with faith in the nature of markets. The structural similarities between Kant's critical project and the critical assessment of government by the 18th-century liberals (Röttgers, 1982: 662) are no coincidence. While Kant asks questions about the legitimate uses of reasoning in his three critiques, the liberals problematize the use of political reason in the governing of modern societies. They highlight the limits of governmental reason in the face of the complexity of market relations. Smith's notion of the invisible hand was not intended to make a substantial claim about the providential nature of markets (Rothschild, 2001: 116–56; Tellmann, 2009), but rather stressed the opaqueness and complexity of market relations:

> [P]olitical economy is able to present itself as a critique of governmental reason. I am using 'critique' here in the specific, philosophical sense of the term. Kant too, [. . .] had to tell man that he cannot know the totality of the world. Well, some decades earlier, political economy had told the sovereign: Not even you can know the totality of the economic process. There is no sovereign in economics. (Foucault, 2008: 302)

The idea that the market itself is the only relevant 'site of veridiction' (Foucault, 2008: 32) in economic issues is at the core of the *epistemological critique* of liberalism. According to the early liberals, governmental *savoir faire* should withdraw from the attempt to regulate economic relations in favour of the principle of *laissez faire*.

Often the epistemological critique of state knowledge is accompanied by a critique of state intervention. In a curious reversal of the invisible hand argument that private vices may turn out to be public virtues, 18th-century economic thinkers maintained that when the government intervenes in markets it is very likely that it either achieves nothing at all or, even worse, the opposite of what was intended (see Hirschman, 1991, for an insightful discussion of these themes). Foucault discusses this critique (2007: 51–71) with regard to the Physiocrats' opposition to the governmental regulation of the corn trade. The Physiocrats argued that '[r]egulation is not only harmful, even worse it is pointless' (Foucault, 2007: 284; see on the same issue Rothschild, 2001: 72–86). Arguments concerning the unintended or adverse consequences of government action can be characterized as the *technical critique* of liberalism. Technical critique is the name Max Weber gave to his analysis of distortions or 'perversities' in the relation of 'means' and 'ends' (see Weber, 1949; for an insightful characterization of neoliberal state critique as technical see Collier, 2011: 177). But the (neo)liberal technical critique is not just a call for more efficiency. It is 'far more radical than a test of optimization. It [government] should not only question itself about the best (or least costly) means for achieving effects, but also about the possibility and even legitimacy of its project for achieving effects' (Foucault, 2008: 319). Understood in this way, technical critique is to the practical dimension of government (its know-how) what epistemological critique is to its cognitive dimension (its know-that). Both forms of critique point out the necessary and legitimate limits of governmental rationality and are thus closely related.

These liberal critiques demand a profound 'redistribution [. . .] of the governmental reason' (Foucault, 2008: 311) amounting to an 'art of government according to the rationality of economic agents' (Foucault, 2008: 313). The only decisions that are both relevant and legitimate according to the liberal critique are the ones made by individual economic actors themselves. By letting the *homo oeconomicus* decide what to buy and what to sell, the natural balance of markets will be maintained. But – more importantly – the freedom of the subject is ensured. Preserving individual freedom is the quintessential normative *telos* of the liberal critique.

Following Foucault's insightful, but fragmentary, observations about liberal thought, I argue that the project of liberal critique of government in the 18th century comprises three elements: the epistemological critique concerning the necessary limits of governmental knowledge of the

market, the technical critique denouncing the perverse effects of government interventions, and the normative insistence on the irreducibility of the decisions made by economic subjects. This schema corresponds to the three focal points of Foucault's historical analytics (knowledge, power, and the subject). This does not, of course, exhaust the 'polymorphous' modes of liberal criticism. Nevertheless, it shows that it is possible to depict neoliberalism as a 'recurrence' of liberal critique. Foucault was aware that neoliberalism was connected to certain epistemological movements at the beginning of the 20th century. He specifically mentions the influence of 'neo-Kantian philosophy, Husserl's phenomenology, and Max Weber's sociology' (Foucault, 2008: 322). This renaissance of epistemological critique was partly a reaction to the dominance of social critique and Marxist theories at that time (Asad, 2009: 51). However, arguably the most interesting and relevant epistemological and technical critics within the heterogeneous 'thought collective' (Mirowski and Plehwe, 2009; Dean, 2014) of neoliberalism are not among the thinkers that Foucault paid the most attention to in his lectures, concerned mainly with the German ordoliberals and the theories of human capital by Gary Becker. A few scholars have recently drawn attention to the knowledge politics and the epistemology of neoliberal thinkers (Mirowski and Plehwe, 2009; Collier, 2011; Davies and McGoey, 2012; Gane, 2014a, 2014b). Mirowski even argues that 'what holds neoliberals together first and foremost is a set of *epistemic* commitments' (2009: 417).

Especially the Austrians Ludwig von Mises and F.A. Hayek crafted a neoliberal epistemology crucially inspired by neo-Kantian philosophy (Gane, 2014a: 3, 5, 11) and Max Weber's methodology (Gane, 2012). Mises and Hayek advanced 'an epistemological critique of many of the rationalist principles of neoclassical economics' (Gane, 2014b: 5). Hayek in particular challenged the naturalistic self-misunderstanding of economic theories which synthesized economic processes into a knowable and objectively assessable thing – the economy – thereby rendering it governable by an interventionist state. Similar to Smith's critique of the economic sovereign, Hayek's epistemology demands a 'redistribution' of the governmental knowledge. His critique of the 'pretence of knowledge' (Hayek, 1989) calls for a different 'use of knowledge in society' (Hayek, 1945). Economic decisions should only rely on the tacit knowledge of local market participants and not on the global knowledge of economic experts. For Hayek, the market was not a knowable or predictable entity but rather a 'marvel' (see Gane, 2014b: 17) in being able to process and distribute the locally-generated economic information – understood as decisions to buy or sell – in the form of prices.

The technical critique voiced by neoliberal thinkers like George Stigler and James Buchanan put forth a critical analysis of state failure that tried to highlight the perversity and futility of the welfare state (Collier, 2011: 173–201; Hirschmann, 1991: 27–35, 60–70). Stigler and Buchanan both

in their own ways argued that welfare state provisions or public works most of the time do not help their proclaimed recipients – poor and vulnerable parts of the population. Instead they subsidize the middle class and often even spur irresponsible behaviour. Among the assumed perverse effects of the welfare state depicted by neoliberals are the ways the subject of welfarism becomes dependent and the loss of freedom in welfare state societies (on Hayek's critique of the welfare state see Hirschmann, 1991: 110–16; see also Cruikshank, 1999). The welfare state is seen as not only futile but also dangerous in undermining what neoliberals still regard as the fundamental normative *telos* of politics: securing the freedom of the individual.

However, the punchline of Foucault's treatment of (neo)liberalism resides in the emphasis on its ambivalence 'as a regulative schema of governmental practice and as a sometimes radical oppositional theme' (Foucault, 2008: 320). Liberalism functions both as a critique and as a (re)programming of government (Collier, 2011: 19). Over the course of the 19th century, liberal critique began to shape developments in governmentality. What was seen as an ultimate limit to knowledge became the very object of political economy at the turn of the 19th century (Foucault, 2002: 272–87; 2007: 106–10). Political economy rendered the deeds of the invisible hand visible as laws of the market. It thereby helped to constitute the market as a target of governmental intervention.

The ambivalent role of (neo)liberal critique stems from the fact that many (neo)liberals have quite literally been double agents embodying the ambivalence of the (neo)liberal project. The case of Hayek, who criticized the British welfare government during the Second World War and later consulted the Pinochet regime in Chile, is probably the most infamous example. But there is also a recurrent historical pattern responsible for the dialectics of liberal economic enlightenment. (Neo)liberalism often set out as a critique that tried to limit governmental action. But the very act of showing the 'limits' of the market necessarily highlights possible new objects of government. More than once, the limit became the new frontier of government. Critique alters and shapes the topology of government in often unforeseen ways (Folkers, 2014: 100; Collier, 2014: 287).

During at least the last decade neoliberalism served as one of the prime objects of critique in social science scholarship. But what is the critical purchase of analysing neoliberals as critical subjects? It is neither about denouncing nor about celebrating neoliberalism, but about a conceptually and heuristically more elaborate analysis of neoliberalism and modern forms of government. Emphasizing the epistemological dimension of (neo)liberal critique suggests that the crucial question for neoliberalism of 'where to draw the line on the role of the state in the economy' (Peck, 2008: 26) always entails a reflection on the limits of knowledge and rational action. This commitment connects

(neo)liberalism to the critical epistemological tradition of modern thought since Kant. More generally, acknowledging the role of critique in the history of political rationality can promote a different understanding of governmentality. By including critique in the history of governmentality, Foucault makes it clear that governmental rationality does not just unfold out of administrative knowledge but is irritated, criticized and thereby inflected by critical discourses beyond the state. Finally, Foucault famously asserted that oppositional practices could be mobilized as a methodological tool by 'using resistance as a chemical catalyst so as to bring to light power relations' (Foucault, 1982: 211). Studying critique serves a similar purpose. It elucidates the problem space of modern political rationalities, the shifting and interlaced terrain upon which our political judgements, beliefs and desires are located.

Critique beyond Limitation: What Difference Does Foucault's Critique Make?

Foucault's genealogy of critique illuminates a critical tradition concerned with the social use of reason and the power effects of knowledge. Accordingly, Foucault's analytics of power/knowledge are also a part of the critical tradition he excavated. Where does that leave Foucault's own critique? What difference does Foucault's critique make in relation to the criticism of government by the (neo)liberals, the longer history of critique from Kant to Marx and the current problematizations of critique?

A growing discourse identifies parallels between Foucault's critique of power/knowledge and the (neo)liberal critique of government (Reitz, 2003; Becker et al., 2012). This resonates with a more general suspicion that there is an elective affinity between poststructuralist theories and post-Fordist capitalism or 'neoliberalism' (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005; Hardt and Negri, 2009). Some of the themes of Foucault's critique of modern reason are indeed similar to the neoliberal critique of the 'use of knowledge in society' (Hayek, 1945). Foucault's critique of modern epistemology has rightly been characterized as a critique of 'epistemic sovereignty' (Rouse, 1996): the panoptic gaze characteristic of a totalizing 'state philosophy' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 361–74). This position is very close to the liberal rejection of the 'economic sovereign' and sympathy for local and dispersed forms of knowledge. Thus, certain similarities between Foucault and aspects of (neo)liberal thought are undeniable.[3] However, the particular mode of reflecting on critique via genealogy is what makes Foucault's take on critique unique, what distinguishes his style *of* and his reflection *on* critique from both neoliberalism and most of the critical tradition in Western modernity.

Foucault's genealogy of critique is not a first order epistemological critique of the limits of knowledge or the limits of

governmental intervention. It is a second order observation that is able to see what escapes the view of the critics he analysed. He observes the effects this critique has on what it criticizes. Foucault's history of the double movement of governmentalization and critique lays bare the blind spot of epistemological and technical critique that imagines itself as setting up clear boundaries for the exercise of political reason. But when critique alters the topology of the governmental map, drawing a definite limit line on a presumably given terrain becomes futile in the long run. Instead of the delimiting attitude of the formal universalistic critical tradition, including the (neo)liberal critique trying to limit the excess of government, Foucault called for a 'limit-attitude' that moves 'beyond the outside-inside alternative' but is 'at the frontiers' (Foucault, 1984: 45). This limit attitude is topological, following the complex foldings of the historical-political landscape (on topological motives in Foucault see Deleuze, 1988: 94–123; Collier, 2009). Foucault observes the ironies of a practice that tends to highlight as an object of government what it tried to protect from governmental grasp. Critique cannot demarcate a given territory, because it is an operator of deterritorialization. It leaves its marks in time and therefore cannot control the destiny of its interventions, because it is not yet clear how, who and what connects to it.

Such a genealogical reflection on the blind spots of critique can also be applied to one's own critical discourse. This is no call for a precautionary principle to the exercise of critique because it might have unwanted effects, nor is it a call for a utilitarian calculus towards critique as if one could predict all of its consequences before it is uttered. What a critical intervention will turn out to be is impossible to know in advance, because it changes the field of forces in which it is inserted. The genealogy of critique cannot eliminate the dangers associated with critical practices, but allows critical thinking to pause and take time to establish a distance to its own practice, in order to observe how the critical observation operates and to renew critical thinking in light of this observation. In fact, I want to suggest that this is what Foucault did when he pointed out the surprising proximity of anarchist and neoliberal 'state phobia' and cautioned his listeners against the inflationary tendency of state critique (2008: 187ff.). I argue that both Foucault's project of analysing forms of government 'beyond the state' and his project of a genealogy of critique are in part a reaction to this 'inflationary critical currency' (Foucault, 2008: 187). He put the critique of government to a historical test to transform and renew it.

By identifying this blind spot of critique and suggesting that the genealogy of critique is the way Foucault grapples with this problem, it becomes possible to recursively situate this genealogy in the longer history of critique. What sets Foucault apart from much of the criticism he analysed is that he shifted the attention of theoretical self-reflections of critique from the question of the foundation of critique as a judgment

of reality to scrutiny of the contingent effects of critique as an event *in* reality. Neither Foucault nor the contemporary sociologists of critique were the first to self-reflect on the critical activity they were conducting. It is a general characteristic of the critical attitude to ask about the place, meaning and effects of one's own critical discourse. Foucault rather opaquely calls this a 'sagittal relationship, or, if you like, a vertical relationship of the discourse to its own present reality' (Foucault, 2011: 14).

Kant performed a self-reflective turn in the history of critical thinking. He maintained that critique must not only be directed against the state or religion but also towards its own activity. According to Kant (1998: 100ff.), 'everything must be submitted' to critique. But he limited the critique of critique to a universalistic consideration of its metaphysical foundations. Only in the 19th century did critique become aware of the consequences of critique, now understood as a socio-historical practice (Röttgers, 1982: 671). The left Hegelians, most notably Marx, recognized that critique was a doing that is doing something and not just a judgement on the doings of others. 'The weapon of criticism [. . .] becomes a material force once it seizes the masses' (Marx, 1977: 137).

But Marx's conception of critique was still caught up in 19th-century philosophy of history supposing a definite historical teleology. This teleological thinking prevented Marx from fully acknowledging the contingent effects of critical practices. Conceptualizing critique as an event giving way to contingent effects demands a radicalized notion of temporality associated with critique. Like Koselleck (1988, 2004), Foucault showed that the critical ethos goes hand in hand with the new temporal attitude of modernity (Foucault, 1984: 33ff.; 2011: 26–8).[4] Critique establishes a transformative relation to its own present on behalf of a future that is qualitatively different from the ephemeral, fleeting now. The critical gaze is directed at the 'horizon of expectations' and not at the 'space of experience' (Koselleck, 2004: 255–75). Critique turns 'the future into a maelstrom that sucked out the present from under the feet of the critic' (Koselleck, 1988: 109). When the critical attitude is a disposition towards a fleeting present that opens up to an unknown indeterminate future, then reflecting on critique must entail taking into account the contingent effects of critique as an event in history and not searching for a refuge in universal foundations or teleological assumptions.

Accordingly, Foucault is arguing for a critique that 'would proceed not as an investigation into legitimacy, but as something I would call an examination of "*eventualization*"' (Foucault, 1997: 59), which also entails the examination of the *eventualization* of critique – the coming into being and the becoming of critique. Critique is not just a reflection that leaves what it reflects upon unaltered, but a diffraction (Haraway, 1997: 273; Barad, 2007: 73–94) that changes what is put under critical scrutiny. What is required is not just a formal critique of the conditions of possibility of reason but an 'autological' (Luhmann, 1990: 9) analysis of

knowledge that recognizes that the (critical) observer is part of what she observes. Foucault transcends the formal epistemological critique of knowledge towards a 'historical ontology' (Foucault, 1984: 45). As historical ontology, Foucault's critique also goes beyond post-foundationalism that deconstructs the foundations of critique and rationality but fails to account for its effects.

This level of reflection on critique bears similarities to the pragmatist sociologies of critique. Both regard critique as a 'thing of this world' (Boland, 2013). The decisive question is then no longer: is the critique legitimate and well founded, or how can we deconstruct critique's seemingly universal foundations, but: what does critique do, or has critique run out of steam? Thus, the genealogy of critique contributes to and expands the current problematizations of critique. Not only does Foucault offer one of the few historical accounts of the emergence and transformations of the practice of critique. A focus on epistemological and technical critique can also broaden the scope of current sociologies of critique that have mostly focused on 'moral justifications' (Boltanski and Thevenot, 2006; Fassin, 2011), or artistic and social critique (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005). Moreover, Foucault's deep genealogy of (neo)liberalism as a critique of governmental reason shows how the transformation of the 'spirit of capitalism' is also due to the neoliberal critique of the 'uses of knowledge in society'. Neoliberalism is itself a form of critique and does not only recuperate anti-capitalistic critiques to mobilize them for a renewal of capitalism, as Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) and Hardt and Negri (2009) argue. And the potential for a historical sociology of the critique of rationality is by no means exhausted with the analysis of (neo)liberalism as critique, considering for example the influential ecological critique of technology and big science, the feminist critique of male rationality, and the postcolonial critique of Western rationality.

This is the point of intersection between a Foucaultian and a Latourian approach to critique. Both are interested in technical controversies and epistemological critique as vital political and ontological forces. But apart from these similarities their view on the role and the significance of critique in modernity differs sharply. According to Latour, critique obtained its momentum or 'steam' from the 'difference of potential between the world of delusion and the world of reality' (Latour, 2010: 475) to which human reason and critique provide access. When critique departs from its foundations in human rationality and the 'real' world of facts it necessarily runs out of steam, loses its ground and therefore its traction.

Foucault gives this fairly traditional view of critique a decisive twist. Critique is not only the weapon of enlightenment, modernity and reason against superstitions and primitive beliefs, but also a highly self-reflexive endeavour that entails the constant questioning of the grounds on

which it can be exercised. Critique is not only a means to expand knowledge, rationality and the belief in facts, but also a means to question or limit the power of reason. 'One of the Enlightenment's tasks was to multiply reason's political powers. But the men of the nineteenth century soon started wondering whether reason wasn't getting too powerful in our societies' (Foucault, 2003a: 180). Through critique modernity becomes reflexive.

These conflicting philosophical views are connected to different research agendas. Latour (2004) tries to show how a particular matter of fact becomes a matter of concern in the 'critical situation' of technoscientific controversies. Instead, according to my interpretation of Foucault's genealogy, epistemological and technical critique of political reason and socio-technical forms of rationalization entails more than a controversy about particular matters of concern. Foucault envisions critique as a meta-critical intervention questioning whether certain matters should be a concern for science, technological manipulation and state intervention at all. What should enter in a game of truth and how – according to what mode of veridiction (i.e. bureaucratic rationality or distributed market information) – should this game be organized? These questions are at the core of the game Foucault calls 'the politics of truth' (1997: 47).

Conclusion

Academic reflection on critical discourse is always related to critical practices in society. It is enabled by, reflects on, and reacts to these practices. That holds especially true for Foucault, who developed his approach to the question of critique while being involved in and concerned with various political projects – Vietnamese boat people, eastern European dissidents, the revolt against the shah in Iran, etc. – in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Accordingly, he emphasized the close relationship between 'the high Kantian enterprise and the little polemical professional activities that are called critique' (Foucault, 1997: 42), between abstract theoretical problems and concrete political concerns. His definition of critique as the art of 'not to be governed *like that*' (Foucault, 1997: 44) still captures and sometimes directly inspires some of the political desires and objectives of the contemporary wave of protest movements around the globe. But such a close relationship makes a rigorous reflection on critique all the more necessary. Has academic critique lost touch with critical practices? How can we discover disagreeable proximities between seemingly distant forms of critique? And how can we reckon with the unintended and potentially dangerous effects of criticism?

I argue that the genealogy of critique, as outlined in this paper, offers a fine tool for such a reflection. Talal Asad has pointed out the difficulties of such an endeavour when he remarked: 'Neither the concept nor the

practice of critique has a simple history, and that genealogy has yet to be written' (2009: 48). What I have presented here as the genealogy of critique in Foucault does not, of course, exhaust such a project. However, I believe that Foucault's take on this project is more than a starting point for a genealogy of critique. This concerns the historical trajectory of critique that Foucault sketched: from parrhesia in antiquity to the European enlightenment in its French (Bayle), German (Kant) and Scottish (Hume and Smith) varieties to neoliberalism and the diverse critical theories of technocratic and bureaucratic rationalization. The unique Foucaultian perspective that emphasizes how critique is implicated and complicates the history of power–knowledge is particularly illuminating. It thereby supplements existing problematizations of critique in decisive ways. It adds a historical dimension to the critique of critique and it stresses the socio-political significance of epistemic and technical critique in modernity that is often overlooked.

Taking account of Foucault's genealogy of critique sheds new light on his late work. It can ward off the suspicion that Foucault might be a denunciatory, destructive critic. Foucault does not treat the people he analyses as judgemental dopes. Beginning with the turn to critique in Foucault's work at the end of the 1970s, he started to include critical voices and critical thinkers in his genealogies of truth and government. That is not to say that Foucault's genealogies *of* critique no longer serve *as* critique, but only that the relation between critical genealogy and critique in the genealogies becomes more complex. Foucault analyses problematizations and thereby reproblematizes them. He does not just insert contingency in a total structure of power and knowledge, but rather illuminates the cracks in the historical situation that are there already. He does not reduce the politics of truth to a transhistorical will to power, but shows how powerful knowledge is criticized by the will not to be governed. That is why Foucault no longer just tries to deconstruct truth because it is a veil for the exercise of power, but develops a more affirmative relation to truth in its ambivalence as a weapon of power and as something that can be directed against power. The genealogy *of* critique does not replace genealogy *as* critique, but changes its valence from a purely deconstructive to a more positive endeavour. The genealogist of critique can see that the great renunciation of critique from right to left (Koselleck, 1988; Sloterdijk, 1987; Luhmann, 1991; Latour, 2004, 2010; Hardt, 2011) is not only paradoxical because 'it proclaims the obsolescence of the [critical paradigm] only to reproduce its mechanism' (Rancière, 2003: 30). It is also historically part of the critical tradition that makes critique an object of its criticism. Instead of repeating the tradition of critique by 'critically' denouncing it, the genealogy of critique alters it by 'critically' affirming it. When genealogy discovers the critical attitude it cannot seek to deconstruct it, because it encounters its very own disposition. This disposition remains unaltered.

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Notes

1. Luc Boltanski sketches the historical trajectory of the sociology of critique in a recent interview (Boltanski, 2012: 6, 7) as well as in his *On Critique* (2011: 23). He credits both Rancière and Latour (Boltanski, 2012: 3, 5) for their influence on the *Groupe de sociologie politique et morale*. This group, mostly comprised of former students of Pierre Bourdieu, performed the turn from critical sociology to the pragmatist sociology of critique. As I will show in this paper, Foucault performed a similar turn to the genealogy of critique at roughly the same time in the late 1970s and early 1980s until his death in 1984. However, he is curiously absent from stories about the development of the sociology of critique in France.
2. There are of course earlier evidences that Foucault wanted to historicize the coupling of the will to power to the will to know (Foucault, 1978; 2013). However, as I will explicate in the following, the argument implicit in the genealogy of critique is both wider in scope and more complex. It highlights a general modulation of political rationality in modernity, in the course of which knowledge and power have become almost identical. And, more importantly, it stresses that critique always already questioned this block of power-knowledge.
3. Foucault himself pointed out another similarity between neoliberal critique and a critical theory of rationalization. According to Foucault, both the ordoliberal Freiburg School (the German variety of neoliberalism) and the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory respond to 'Max Weber's problem' (Foucault, 2008: 105): the irrational rationality of capitalism and modernity (for a qualification of this claim regarding the ordoliberals see Gane, 2012).
4. Many scholars have pointed out the similarities between Foucault and Koselleck regarding their view of temporality and historicity in modernity (see for recent examples: Edwards, 2006: 441, Roitman, 2014: 33–5). However, as Gordon (1986: 82) has pointed out, Foucault did not regard modernity 'as an epoch, but an attitude' or ethos. This ethos is not *in* time and history, but temporalizes history. It is therefore a 'meta-historical attitude' (Gros, 2011: 397). Keeping in mind this difference between ethos and epoch helps to ward off the suspicion expressed by Talal Asad that for Foucault critique can only be modern, Western and secular (2009: 47). As I argue in this paper the critical attitude, though Foucault calls it the 'modern' attitude, is not exclusively modern or Western (for a similar view in response to Asad see: Butler, 2009: 113).

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