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ARTICLE

From Counter-Conduct to Critical Attitude:
Michel Foucault and the Art of Not Being Governed Quite So Much

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ABSTRACT: In this article I reconstruct the philosophical conditions for the emergence of the notion of counter-conduct within the framework of Michel Foucault's study of governmentality, and I explore the reasons for its disappearance after 1978. In particular, I argue that the concept of conduct becomes crucial for Foucault in order to redefine governmental power relations as specific ways to conduct the conduct of individuals: it is initially within this context that, in *Security, Territory, Population*, he rethinks the problem of resistance in terms of counter-conduct. However, a few months later, in *What is Critique?*, Foucault (implicitly) replaces the notion of counter-conduct with that of critical attitude, defined as the particular form that counter-conduct takes in modern times. This notion allows him to highlight the role played by the *will* (to be or not to be governed *like that*) in resistance to governmental strategies. But since the notion of counter-conduct is conceptually wider than that of critical attitude, I suggest in conclusion that it could be worth reactivating it as a "historical category which, in various forms and with diverse objectives, runs through the whole of Western history."

Keywords: counter-conduct, critical attitude, governmentality, will, resistance

In this article[1] I reconstruct the philosophical conditions for the emergence of the notion of counter-conduct in *Security, Territory, Population*,[2] and the reasons for its disappearance in Michel Foucault's work after 1978. First of all, I show that the notion of conduct becomes crucial, within the framework of Foucault's study of governmentality, because of its intrinsic ambiguity: the individual can be "conducted" by an external force, but s/he is also able to "conduct" him/herself. However, according to Foucault, governmental mechanisms of power rely on the fact that the individual *accepts* being conducted thusly, since by definition we speak of government (instead of constraint, domination, and so on) if and only if the individual is

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[1] I would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers from *Foucault Studies* for their valuable comments which helped to improve this article.

[2] Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-1978*, edited by Michel Senellart, and translated by Graham Burchell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

free to choose to be governed or not to be governed like that. To govern someone means, in fact, to structure his/her field of freedom—his/her field of possible actions. Hence, the notion of conduct is fundamental for Foucault in order to redefine (governmental) power relations as specific ways to conduct the conduct of individuals, and it is precisely in this context that he rethinks the problem of resistance in terms of counter-conduct. But whereas the notion of conduct remains at the heart of Foucault's work until the end of his life, the correlative notion of counter-conduct quickly disappears.

To explore the reasons for this disappearance, I suggest we should take into account the strong link existing between Foucault's 1978 lectures at the Collège de France and the conference *What is Critique?* that he gave in May 1978 at the Société française de Philosophie.[3] In particular, I argue that Foucault introduces (implicitly but very clearly) in the latter the concept of critical attitude as a—or better *the*—form that counter-conduct takes in modern societies, realizing at the same time the necessity to raise the question of the *will* (to be or not to be governed *like that*) in order to rethink resistance within the framework of governmental strategies. Thus, if in *Security, Territory, Population* Foucault does not take into account the role played by the will in pastoral counter-conducts, he explicitly addresses this problem two years later in his lectures at the Collège de France *On the Government of the Living*, although from a slightly different point of view.

Therefore, starting from *What is Critique?*, Foucault seems to replace the notion of counter-conduct with the notion of critical attitude, which allows him to highlight the *voluntary* aspect of resistance to governmental power relations. However, since the notion of counter-conduct is conceptually wider than that of critical attitude, I suggest in conclusion that it could be worth reactivating it as a "historical category which, in various forms and with diverse objectives, runs through the whole of Western history."[4]

Conduct, counter-conduct, governmentality

The notion of counter-conduct, as the correlative of that of conduct, emerges in Foucault's work during the first months of 1978, when he begins analyzing the strategies, mechanisms, and practices of governmentality. In this context, however, what Foucault considers philosophically crucial is above all the notion of conduct, which remains at the center of his interests until the end of his life.[5] Starting from 1978, in fact, Foucault never ceases to explore the problem of government in its multiple dimensions. His most significant definition (or *re*definition) of the concept of government is probably to be found in his 1980 conferences *About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self*, in which Foucault argues that government is "the contact point, where the way individuals are driven by others is tied to the way they

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[3] Michel Foucault, "Qu'est-ce que la critique?," in Michel Foucault (auth.), Henri-Paul Fruchaud and Daniele Lorenzini (eds.), *Qu'est-ce que la critique? suivi de La culture de soi* (Paris: Vrin, 2015), 33-70.

[4] Michel Foucault, *The Courage of Truth: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1983-1984*, edited by Frédéric Gros, translated by Graham Burchell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 174.

[5] See for instance the third part of the Introduction to Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: Volume 2 of The History of Sexuality*, translated by Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990).

conduct themselves."[6] The notion of counter-conduct is thus characterized from the beginning by a certain "theoretical dependence" on the notion of conduct, and although Foucault originally constructs it as a very interesting and rich philosophical concept,[7] he never credits it with an *autonomous* conceptual status.

Foucault introduces the strictly complementary notions of conduct and counter-conduct during the 1st March 1978 lecture of *Security, Territory, Population*. Thanks to these notions, as Arnold Davidson has convincingly shown, it becomes possible to take into account the essential link between ethics and politics,[8] and in particular to highlight the strategic role played by the relationship of oneself to oneself within the framework of the government of human beings as well as, *a fortiori*, in the possibility to resist it. Foucault defines the notion of conduct as "one of the fundamental elements introduced into Western society by the Christian pastorate," and translates, by this word, what the Greek Fathers called "economy of souls [*oikonomia psuchōn*]," that is to say the set of techniques and procedures which characterize pastorate as a specific art of governing human beings. The notion of conduct seems particularly appropriate to Foucault because of its intrinsic ambiguity: conduct refers, indeed, to "the activity of conducting [*conduire*], of conduction [*la conduction*]," but also and at the same time to "the way in which one conducts oneself [*se conduit*], lets oneself be conducted [*se laisse conduire*], is conducted [*est conduit*], and finally, in which one behaves [*se comporter*] as an effect of a form of conduct [*une conduite*] as the action of conducting or of conduction [*conduction*]."[9] Hence, the concept of conduct has a threefold meaning: to conduct [*conduire*] someone; to be conducted [*être conduit*] by someone, or better, to let oneself be conducted [*se laisser conduire*]; to conduct oneself [*se conduire*]. As we can see, the notion of conduct covers the entire field that goes from politics to ethics.

In his article *The Subject and Power*, originally published in English in 1982, Foucault uses again the notion of conduct, but he does not apply it only to pastoral power; instead, he presents it as a possible conceptual key to understand what "power" actually consists in:

> [The exercise of power] is a set of actions brought to bear upon possible actions; it operates on the field of possibilities in which the behavior of the acting subjects is inscribed: it incites, it induces, it diverts, it makes easier or more difficult, it broadens or restricts, it makes more or less probable; in the extreme it constrains or forbids absolutely; it is nevertheless always a way of action upon an acting subject or acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of action. A set of actions upon other actions.[10]

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[6] Michel Foucault, *About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self: Lectures at Dartmouth College, 1980*, edited by Henri-Paul Fruchaud and Daniele Lorenzini (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), 25-26.

[7] See Arnold I. Davidson, "In Praise of Counter-Conduct," *History of the Human Sciences*, vol. 24, no. 4 (2011), 25-41.

[8] Ibid., 26, 28.

[9] Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 192-193.

[10] Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," translated by Leslie Sawyer, *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 8, no. 4 (Summer 1982), 789; translation modified.

Consequently, to exercise power means to try to *conduct the conduct* of another (or other) human being(s), i.e. to try to govern him/her (or them), and the word "government" refers here specifically to "the way in which the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed," or better, to the attempt to "act upon the possibilities of action of other people," to "structure the possible field of action of others." This new definition of government, obtained through a reflection on the concept of conduct and its "equivocal nature," allows Foucault to emphasize that freedom of individuals constitutes "the condition for the exercise of power," or better, of this specific form of power called "government": government can only be exercised on free subjects, and only as long as they remain free, that is to say as long as they are faced with "a field of possibilities in which several ways of behaving [*conduites*], several reactions and diverse comportments, may be realized."[11]

Thus, the complex dynamics that structure the government of human beings can be described as a *permanent tension* between the three dimensions cited above—to conduct someone, to (let oneself) be conducted, to conduct oneself—where the linchpin role is of course played by the "middle" element. Between the governmental mechanisms of power trying to conduct the individual in a specific way, and the possibility the individual has to conduct him/herself in a (relatively) autonomous way, the field of his/her freedom is defined and structured by his/her acceptance or refusal to be conducted *by this particular mechanism*, to let him/herself be conducted *in this specific way*. Therefore, according to Foucault, freedom is not a metaphysical concept: on the contrary, the exercise of freedom is always punctual and relative to a certain given configuration of power relations. However, or better, as a consequence, freedom possesses a non-negligible force of *insoumission*:

> The relationship between power and freedom's refusal to submit [*insoumission*] cannot, therefore, be separated. The crucial problem of power is not that of voluntary servitude (how could we seek to be slaves?): at the very heart of the power relationship, and constantly provoking it, are the recalcitrance [*rétivité*] of the will and the intransigence [*intransitivité*] of freedom.[12]

How should we term this *rétivité* of the will and this *intransitivité* of freedom? In other words, how should we term the individual's refusal to let him/herself be conducted in this or that specific way? In *Security, Territory, Population* Foucault answers these questions by forging the notion of counter-conduct,[13] and he gives it a first historical content through the analysis of five counter-conducts that have been elaborated in reaction to Christian pastorate. It is worth noting that Foucault is not interested here in the "great external blockages that the Catholic and Christian pastorate came up against," but rather in the "points of resistance," in the "forms of attack and counter-attack that appeared *within* the field of the pastorate." In other words, Foucault's aim is to highlight a series of "specific revolts of conduct," where the term "specific" is crucial: these antipastoral struggles were not global revolts or revolutions, they

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[11] Ibid., 789-790; translation modified.
[12] Ibid., 790.
[13] Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 201.

were not radical forms of refusal contesting the fact of government itself—the fact of being governed *tout court*—but movements whose objective, within the field of pastorate, was "a different form of conduct [*une autre conduite*]." These people wanted "to be conducted differently [*autrement*], by other leaders [*conducteurs*] and other shepherds, towards other objectives and other forms of salvation, and through other procedures and other methods."[14]

Foucault's insistence on the *otherness* that characterizes these counter-conducts is not accidental: resistance, in fact, never arises in a vacuum but is always relative *to* something or someone—resistance always aims at changing, modifying, transforming a specific situation, in order for the individual to be conducted (or to conduct him/herself) *autrement*. This is why, in *Security, Territory, Population*, Foucault eventually decides to put aside the expression "revolt of conduct," which he considers "both too precise and too strong to designate much more diffuse and subdued forms of resistance," as well as the terms "disobedience" (although "the problem of obedience is in fact at the center of all this"), "insubordination," and "dissidence."[15] Foucault chooses instead to speak of "counter-conduct," since this term allows him to emphasize the active sense of the word "conduct" and, at the same time, to avoid the risk of "substantification" or "sacralization:" the core of a counter-conduct, in fact, is the struggle in order to claim and obtain an *other* conduct, in order for the individual to be conducted (or to conduct him/herself) *autrement*. Therefore, a counter-conduct always implies, on the one side, a governmental mechanism of power trying to impose on a group of individuals a specific form of conduct (which is the target of resistance, of struggles) and, on the other side, a refusal expressed by the individuals who can no longer accept being conducted *like that* and want to conduct themselves *differently*.

Hence, it is clear that Foucault, in 1978, forges the concept of counter-conduct (also) with the objective of giving the notion of resistance a "positive," "productive" meaning, and not at all a simply "negative" or "reactive" one, as some of his analyses of the first half of the seventies seemed to suggest—although Foucault always tried to avoid every misunderstanding on this point. In the fourth chapter of *The Will to Know*, for instance, Foucault writes:

> 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. […] [The] existence [of power relationships] depends on a multiplicity of points of resistance: these play the role of adversary, target, support, or handle in power relations. These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network.[16]

During the second half of the 1st March 1978 lecture at the Collège de France, Foucault analyzes five main forms of counter-conduct—asceticism, communities, mysticism, the return to Scripture, and eschatological beliefs—all of which tried to redistribute, reverse, nullify, and

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[14] Ibid., 194-195; translation modified.

[15] Ibid., 200-201.

[16] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, translated by Robert Hurley (New York, Pantheon Books, 1978), 95.

partially or totally discredit pastoral power as well as its governmental strategies.[17] For present purposes, it is particularly worth noting that these counter-conducts were not *external* to Christianity: they were rather five *border*-elements, "which have been continually re-utilized, re-implanted, and taken up again in one or another direction." In brief, these "tactical elements" have been mobilized in favor or against pastoral government, which in turn has repeatedly tried to "re-utilize them and re-insert them in its own system."[18] Nevertheless, the fundamental and common feature of the *antipastoral use* of these tactical elements consists in fighting against the principle of obedience to a shepherd, in contesting the very fact of being conducted through the modalities prescribed by the Catholic Church. And it would be easy to show that all of these forms of counter-conduct aim at restructuring the relationship of oneself to oneself, since the attempt to be conducted (or to conduct oneself) *autrement* necessarily entails the refusal of the specific form of subjectivity that Christian spiritual direction (*direction de conscience*) and, more generally, pastoral government constitute and impose on individuals.[19] Thus, in the Medieval antipastoral use of these five tactical elements, within the field of the Christian pastorate, we always find the same refusal to bend to the principle of pure obedience, together with the attempt to construct an *other* form of subjectivity, to give the relationship of oneself to oneself an *other* structure.

However, as we have seen, the notion of counter-conduct is explicitly constructed and presented by Foucault as a conceptual tool whose field of application, both from a theoretical and a historical point of view, is very broad, since it does not apply exclusively to the antipastoral struggles of the Middle Ages.

Critical attitude and the will not to be governed like that
Why does Foucault abandon the notion of counter-conduct after having given it such a detailed and philosophically rich description in *Security, Territory, Population*? Taking into account the conference *What is Critique?*, delivered by Foucault on 27 May 1978 at the Société française de Philosophie, I would like to suggest that Foucault (implicitly) replaces this notion with that of critical attitude, realizing at the same time that it is crucial to emphasize the role played by the *will* (to be or not to be governed *like that*) in resistance to governmental mechanisms of power.

What is Critique? is the first great Foucauldian elaboration of the theme of critique as an *attitude* which is "specific to modern civilization."[20] But what Foucault calls, in this conference, "critical attitude" is actually nothing else than one—or better *the*—form that counter-conduct takes in modern societies.[21] According to him, critical attitude emerged in the fifteenth-

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[17] Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 204.

[18] Ibid., 214-215.

[19] See on this point Daniele Lorenzini, *Éthique et politique de soi: Foucault, Hadot, Cavell et les techniques de l'ordinaire* (Paris: Vrin, 2015), 66-68.

[20] Foucault, "Qu'est-ce que la critique?," 34.

[21] On the contrary, it is not possible to consider counter-conduct as a specific (Medieval) form taken by critical attitude, because Foucault is very clear in tying the concept of critical attitude (and of critique *tout*

sixteenth centuries, when it is possible to observe a "veritable explosion of the art of governing human beings."[22] This art of governing, of course, had been elaborated over many centuries by the Catholic Church in the form of pastoral power:

> [E]ach individual, whatever his age or status, from the beginning to the end of his life and in his every action [*jusque dans le détail de ses actions*], had to be governed and had to let himself be governed, that is to say directed towards his salvation, by someone to whom he was bound by a total, meticulous, detailed relationship of obedience.[23]

Consequently, this art of governing human beings was, for a long time, connected to relatively limited practices; but starting from the fifteenth century it came to be secularized, i.e. displaced in relation to its (originally) religious center, thus beginning its great expansion in civil society. At the same time, it proliferated into a variety of areas: the government of children, of poor and beggars, the government of a family, of a house, of armies and cities, the government of States, and also the government of one's own body and mind. Multiplication of the arts of governing and the institutions of government; "governmentalization of the *res publica*" and emergence of the "*raison d'État*."[24] However, since the pastoral art of governing was contested by a series of specific counter-conducts which exploited the possibility—always (at least in theory) left open—to refuse to be conducted *like that* and to experiment with *other* forms of conduct and self-conduct, we should analogously expect to find some forms of counter-conduct reacting to the "secular" art of governing human beings.

Indeed, in *What is Critique?*, Foucault analyzes the emergence of a particular form of counter-conduct trying to short circuit the modern arts of governing, and calls it "critical attitude." It is remarkable that the crucial feature of this critical attitude is exactly the same we encountered at the heart of Medieval counter-conducts: not "how not to be governed *at all*," but "how not to be governed *like that*, by that, in the name of those principles, with such and such an objective in mind and by means of such procedures."[25]

> In the face of and as counterparty, or rather, as both partner and adversary to the arts of governing, as an act of defiance, as a challenge, as a way of limiting these arts of governing and sizing them up, transforming them, of finding a way to escape from them or, in any case, a way to displace them, as an essential reticence, but also and by the same token as a line of development of the arts of governing, there would have been something born in Europe at that time, a kind of general cultural form, both a political and a moral attitude, a way of thinking, etc., and which I would very simply call the art of not being governed, or better, the art of not being governed like that and at that cost. I would therefore propose, as

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court) to the "great process of [Western] society's governmentalization," thus explicitly excluding the Middle Ages. See ibid., 41.

[22] Ibid., 36.

[23] Ibid., 35.

[24] Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 236-237.

[25] Foucault, "Qu'est-ce que la critique?," 37. See Judith Butler, "Critique, Dissent, Disciplinarity," *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 35, no. 4 (2009), 791-792 and Daniele Lorenzini and Arnold I. Davidson, "Introduction," in Foucault, *Qu'est-ce que la critique? suivi de La culture de soi*, 17.

a very first definition of critique, this general characterization: the art of not being governed quite so much.[26]

At the core of this art, Foucault explains, there is "the will not to be governed thusly, like that, by these people, at this cost"[27]—but how should we interpret this will? It is worth noting that it did not play any (explicit) role in Foucault's analysis of pastoral counter-conducts.

During the 22 February 1978 lecture of *Security, Territory, Population*, within the framework of his analysis of the Christian pastorate, Foucault closely examines the practice of spiritual direction; he thus raises the problem of the disciple's obedience and links it to the question of the will. If the Greek citizen "basically does not let himself be directed, and is only prepared to be directed by two things," i.e. law and persuasion, and if—as a consequence—"the general category of obedience does not exist in the Greeks," in Christian spiritual direction, on the contrary, we find what Foucault calls "the instance of pure obedience," that is to say an obedient attitude which contains in itself its *raison d'être*, which is an end in itself.[28] This "pure" obedience is characterized by three main features.

First of all, it does not take the form of a relationship of submission to a law or to a rational principle (as it was the case in antiquity), but that of a "relationship of submission of one individual to another"—a strictly individual relationship which covers every aspect and detail of the disciple's daily life, playing the role of *the* essential principle of Christian obedience. The disciple has to show, during the entire course of his/her life, a complete and permanent "subordination to someone because he is someone."[29]

Secondly, this relationship of submission to another, and to his will, is not finalized, or better, it has its objective in itself: "One obeys in order to be obedient, in order to arrive at a state of obedience." This is what Christians call "humility," consisting—Foucault argues—in "the definitive and complete renunciation of one's own will." The aim of obedience, for Christians, "is the mortification of one's will; it is to act so that one's will, as one's own will, is dead, that is to say, so that there is no other will but not to have any will." On the contrary, in ancient Greece, the individual, at a given moment of his life, submitted to the will of someone else always in order to arrive at a particular result (health, virtue, truth, happiness), and once

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[26] Foucault, "Qu'est-ce que la critique?," 37. Unsurprisingly, Foucault argues that the first historical "anchoring point" of the critical attitude is precisely one of the counter-conducts he already discussed in *Security, Territory, Population*, namely the "return to Scripture" (ibid., 37-38). Moreover, during the debate, Foucault claims that "the history of the critical attitude, as it unfolds specifically in the West and in the modern Western world since the fifteenth-sixteenth centuries, must have its origin in the religious struggles and spiritual attitudes prevalent during the second half of the Middle Ages" (ibid., 60), and he refers to mysticism as "one of the first great forms of revolt in the West" (ibid., 65).

[27] Ibid., 65.

[28] Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 173-174; translation modified. See also Michel Foucault, "Sexualité et pouvoir" and "*Omnes et singulatim*: vers une critique de la raison politique," in Michel Foucault (auth.), Daniel Defert and François Ewald (eds.), *Dits et écrits II, 1976-1988* (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), 563-564 and 964-965.

[29] Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 175.

such an objective realized, the relationship of submission ceased, since the individual had already acquired a certain degree of self-mastery.[30]

Finally, in the Christian structure of obedience, the master himself does not command because he *wants* to do so (the good director, the good shepherd is humble and would prefer not to play the role of the master):[31] he commands only because he has been *ordered* to command, and since "his refusal would be the assertion of a particular will, he must gave up his refusal; he must obey, and command." Therefore, Christian spiritual direction is structured as a "generalized field of obedience" in which "even the points where there is mastery are still effects of obedience." And Foucault concludes that we can see here the emergence of a fundamental problem, that of the self, because pastoral relationships of obedience imply "a mode of individualization that not only does not take place by way of affirmation of the self, but one that entails destruction of the self."[32]

Two years later, during the 12 March 1980 lecture of *On the Government of the Living*, Foucault analyzes again the problem of obedience in Christian spiritual direction, but in doing so he introduces some new ideas that are crucial. On the one hand, he insists on the disciple's *freedom*, presenting it as a necessary condition for the practice of direction. In fact, the point of application of pastoral power, of its techniques trying to govern the everyday life of human beings in its meanest details, is precisely the field that is left *free* from both political constraint and legal obligation:

> [I]n direction an individual submits to and leaves to another a whole series of decisions of a private kind in the sense that they normally, usually, and statutorily fall outside the domains of political constraint and legal obligation. In the domain where political constraint and legal obligation do not apply, direction requires one to rely on the will of the other. Where one is free as an individual, one leaves the decision to another person.[33]

On the other hand, Foucault argues that this submission of one's own will to the will of the other does not consist in a "transfer of sovereignty," because in Christian spiritual direction "there is no renunciation of will by the individual."[34] Even if it was already implicit in *Security, Territory, Population* that, in order "to act so that one's will, as one's own will, is dead, that is to say so that there is no other will but not to have any will,"[35] the disciple must *want* to "suppress" his/her own will, must *want* not to have any will, it is only in 1980 that Foucault explicitly claims that Christian spiritual direction requires, as a *sine qua non* condition, the *positive exercise* of the disciple's will. Indeed, in order for the master to govern him/her, to

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[30] Ibid., 177-178.

[31] See on this point Jacques Dalarun, *Gouverner c'est servir: Essai de démocratie médiévale* (Paris: Alma, 2012), 19-32.

[32] Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 179-180. See also Foucault, "*Omnes et singulatim*: vers une critique de la raison politique," 966.

[33] Michel Foucault, *On the Government of the Living: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1979-1980*, edited by Michel Senellart, translated by Graham Burchell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 229.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 178.

conduct his/her conduct, the disciple's will must remain intact, since it is essential for the good functioning of the relationship of direction that the disciple *wants* his/her will to be entirely submitted to that of his/her master, who is supposed to tell him/her in every circumstance what s/he *must* will:

> I refer myself to the other's will as the principle of my own will, *but I must myself will this other's will*. […] [In direction] there is someone who guides my will, who wants my will to want this or that. And I do not cede my own will, I continue to will, I continue to will to the end, *but to will in every detail and at every moment what the other wants me to will*.[36]

Consequently, the two wills—the master's and the disciple's—*coexist*, they are always present and intact, but the latter is completely submitted to the former and wants at every moment what the other wants. The link which ties disciple and master is thus free and voluntary, and the direction itself "will last, function, and unfold only insofar as the one directed still wants to be directed," because s/he is "always free to cease wanting to be directed." This "game of full freedom, in the acceptance of the bond of direction," is crucial: Christian spiritual direction does not rely fundamentally on constraint, threat or sanction.[37] The structure of obedience with its three features—*subditio* ("I want what the other wills"), *patientia* ("I want not to will anything different from the other"), and *humilitas* ("I do not want to will")—constitutes of course the condition, substratum, and effect of Christian spiritual direction,[38] but we should not consider it as a perfectly oiled "subjugating machine." Its force lies in the fact that it constantly rests upon the individuals' (free) will to be conducted; but this is also its weak spot, because the "I want" which is essential for the good functioning of pastoral government (and governmentality in general) can never be abolished. Therefore, it can always, at least in principle, shift and become an "I do not want anymore."

In other words, the art of governing human beings is neither all-powerful nor constantly kept in check. Of course, it has been and still is extremely efficient, and its strength derives precisely (and paradoxically) from the fact that it does not impose itself upon individuals through constraint or threat. On the contrary, pastoral power—the matrix of modern and contemporary governmental strategies—functions through "absolutely specific modes of individualization," which entail a part of subjection [*assujettissement*], linked to individuals' obedience and to "a whole network of servitude that involves the general servitude of everyone with regard to everyone and, at the same time, the exclusion of the self, of the ego, and of egoism as the central, nuclear form of the individual," but also a part of *subjectivation*. Pastoral power, in particular through the practice of spiritual direction, builds a specific subject, i.e. a specific form of the relationship of oneself to oneself characterized by "the production of an internal, secret, and hidden truth."[39]

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[36] Foucault, *On the Government of the Living*, 229-230; emphasis added.

[37] Ibid., 230.

[38] Ibid., 273.

[39] Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 184.

This truth is the central feature defining Christian subjectivity, and it constitutes the lever on which governmental techniques rest in order to operate and be effective. Hence, pastoral power is able to present to individuals the necessity of an integral direction of their everyday life not as a dynamics aiming at subjection (although subjection is indeed one of its effects), but as a process of subjectivation allowing one to discover his/her own secret truth and to establish an adequate relationship to him/herself, thus carrying on the path towards beatitude and eternal salvation. However, as we have seen, in this process subjectivation is essentially linked to subjection—they are the two sides of the same coin—and such a dynamics always implies that the freedom of the governed remains intact:

> Basically, the formula of direction is this: I freely obey what you will for me, I freely obey what you will that I will so that in this way I may establish a certain relationship to myself. And as a result, if we call subjectivation the formation of a definite relationship of oneself to oneself, then we can say that direction is a technique that consists in binding two wills in such a way that they are always free in relation to each other, in binding them in such a way that one wills what the other wills, for the purpose of subjectivation, that is to say access to a certain relationship of oneself to oneself.[40]

In brief, the pastoral art of governing human beings can function only thanks to the freedom of individuals: it does not deprive them of their will, it rather incites them, pushes them to enter into a process of subjectivation whose objective is to build subjects who are *voluntarily* subjugated [*assujettis*]—subjects who *want* what the other wills, who *want* not to will anything different from the other, and who *want* not to will.

Counter-conduct as a trans-historical category
It is, at first, through the notions of critique and critical attitude that Foucault explicitly highlights the crucial role played by the individual's will within the framework of governmental mechanisms of power. He abandons the concept of counter-conduct in order to emphasize the importance, in every practice of resistance, of the exercise of a *counter-will*—in this respect, unsurprisingly, the central notion he uses in his work of the eighties to redefine resistance is "subjectivation." In fact, in order to break the (governmental) relationship of obedience, the individual must withdraw his/her consent to be conducted *like that*. To do so, as we have seen, s/he has to contest and detach from the form of subjectivity that these specific governmental techniques aim at constituting and imposing on him/her; in other words, s/he has to work on the relationship of him/herself to him/herself, trying to transform it and to cease willing what the other wants him/her to will, that is to say trying to build an *other* subjectivity.

Thus, in *What is Critique?*, resistance is conceived as an *attitude*, "both political and moral," and Foucault clearly states that "the core [*foyer*] of critique is basically made of the bundle of relationships that tie one to the other, or one to the two others, power, truth, and the subject." Indeed, if governmentalization is "this movement through which individuals are

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[40] Foucault, *On the Government of the Living*, 231-232; translation modified.

subjugated [*assujettis*] in the reality of a social practice through mechanisms of power that invoke a truth," critique, symmetrically, "is the movement by which the subject gives himself the right to question truth on its effects of power and to question power on its discourses of truth." Therefore, critique is "the art of voluntary insubordination, that of reflected intractability [*indocilité*]," whose fundamental objective is "the desubjugation [*désassujettissement*] in the context [*jeu*] of what we could call, in a word, the politics of truth."[41] This is why, in Foucault, ethics—defined as the constitution of a certain relationship of oneself to oneself—takes on a crucial *political* value.[42]

But contesting the form of subjectivity that is imposed on individuals in order to build an *other* subjectivity is not an easy task. In fact, if the concrete functioning of governmental mechanisms of power rests on the freedom of individuals, it is also essential to governmentality to produce discourses that "neutralize" this freedom, thus giving them the impression that there is no real choice to be made. If you want to be saved, you *must* will to be conducted *like that* by your spiritual director;[43] if you want to take advantage of the fruits of capitalism, you *must* will to submit your individual freedom to the freedom of the market;[44] and so on. The different forms of governmental power have indeed in common one crucial feature: they can operate exclusively on the basis of an original consent ("I want") which has to be reiterated at every moment by individuals, but they constantly re-inscribe it within the framework of a "You must" aiming at convincing them that this consent is the only choice they have if they wish to achieve salvation, happiness, well-being, and freedom itself.

Therefore, a typically Kantian schema is at work here: the only will which is *actually* free is the one that takes the form of the law, thus wanting *universally* everything it wants. Far from being the *sine qua non* condition of the exercise of the will, freedom is its result, since we are truly free if and only if our will takes the (universal) form of the law. But there could also be applied a Freudian schema: you do not know what you *really* want, it is me and only me (your therapist) who can help you to discover it, thus giving you the chance to be free and happy.

> *Question*: Should we not distinguish between conscious will and unconscious will? I may choose to submit, to accept a power: can one speak of domination in that case? One may also say to me: "Even if you do not choose, it is good for you, you want it in fact, and I know it." In such a case can one speak of domination?
> *Michel Foucault*: Well, I do not know what an unconscious will is. The subject of will wants what it wants, and as soon as you introduce a split that consists in saying: "You do not

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[41] Foucault, "Qu'est-ce que la critique?," 39.

[42] See Daniele Lorenzini, "Ethics as Politics: Foucault, Hadot, Cavell and the Critique of Our Present," in Sophie Fuggle, Yari Lanci, and Martina Tazzioli (eds.), *Foucault and the History of Our Present* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 223-235.

[43] Foucault, "Sexualité et pouvoir," 562-563.

[44] Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979*, edited by Michel Senellart, translated by Graham Burchell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 63-64.

> know what you want. I am going to tell you what you want," it is clear that this is one of the fundamental means for exercising power.[45]

As a consequence, the possibility to say "I do not want" (to be governed, directed, conducted *like that*), in other words the possibility to withdraw one's own consent to be governed *in this specific way*, is "masked" from the beginning or presented as inaccessible. This is why, in *What is Critique?*, opposing the Kant of *What is Enlightenment?* to the Kant of the *Critiques*,[46] and insisting on a notion of resistance to governmental strategies which does not take the form of a "fundamental anarchism," but consists instead in "the will not to be governed thusly, like that, by these people, at this cost,"[47] Foucault's objective is clearly to *unmask* this governmental "trap," thus giving us the chance to *see* it and to exercise a *counter-will*—that is to say, a practice of freedom.

Besides, we should not interpret this "will" not to be governed thusly in the light of a traditional philosophical conception of the will, just like we should not give the word "freedom" its current meaning. Will and freedom are not, in Foucault, metaphysical or juridical concepts, but rather *tactical* concepts. The will not to be governed *like that* has nothing to do with the exercise of a specific human "faculty," linked to a certain idea of law, rationality, and autonomy of the individual.[48] And the freedom to withdraw one's own consent to be governed *like that* is not a fundamental human right nor the empty dream of a place without power relations. Hence, instead of "will," we should perhaps speak of decision, courage or effort,[49] and instead of "freedom," as Foucault himself suggests, we should rather speak of practices of freedom, because it is always the *singularity* and *specificity* of a given situation, of a certain actual configuration of power relations, which confers a *singular* and *specific* form to the effort and the practices of freedom aiming at giving rise to an *other* conduct.

The "passage" from counter-conduct to critical attitude is thus only the first step Foucault takes into a far wider project which consists in rethinking resistance as an ethico-political task essentially centered on the effort by the individual to practice and experiment with different modes of subjectivation. However, to conclude, it should be noted that, within such a framework, both the concept of counter-conduct and that of critical attitude can still

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[45] Michel Foucault, "Interview with Michel Foucault," in Foucault, *About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self*, 134.

[46] See Lorenzini and Davidson, "Introduction," 13-15.

[47] Foucault, "Qu'est-ce que la critique?," 65.

[48] During the debate following his conference at the Société française de Philosophie, Foucault claims that, "since this problem of will is a problem that Western philosophy has always treated with infinite precaution and difficulties," he has himself "tried to avoid it as much as possible," but eventually admits that it is crucial for his purposes. However, in order to carry on this "work in progress," it is clear that Foucault's objective is to detach himself from the traditional (metaphysical, naturalistic, juridical) concept of the will (ibid., 66).

[49] "[I]t is no longer a matter of saying: given the bond tying me voluntarily to the truth, what can I say about power? But: given my *will*, *decision*, and *effort* to break the bond that binds me to power, what then is the situation with regard to the subject of knowledge and the truth?" (Foucault, *On the Government of the Living*, 77; translation modified, emphasis added).

play a fundamental role. As we have seen, these are not exactly interchangeable: on the contrary, they give rise to two different historical and philosophical enterprises.

On the one side, critical attitude, which emerged for the first time in the fifteenth-sixteenth centuries as a specific form of resistance to governmental mechanisms of power, gives rise to a *genealogical* analysis which, nevertheless, should not simply refer to Medieval antipastoral struggles (as Foucault seems to suggest in 1978), but has to be pushed far back into the past. Foucault's analysis of *parrēsia* in Greco-Roman antiquity is indeed one piece of such a genealogy. During the last lecture of *The Government of Self and Others*, Foucault explicitly argues that "Kant's text on the *Aufklärung* is a certain way for philosophy […] to become aware of problems which were traditionally problems of *parrēsia* in antiquity;"[50] and a few months later, at the University of California, Berkeley, he claims even more clearly that, "in analyzing this notion of *parrhesia*," his aim is to "outline the genealogy of what we could call the critical attitude in our society."[51]

On the other side, the concept of counter-conduct could give rise to an enterprise that Foucault never undertook systematically, but which it is possible to recognize in many "fragments" of his work—from his study of the Cynics' scandalous behavior[52] to the attention he draws on the great episodes of convulsions in the body of the possessed during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries,[53] from his interest in the "insurrection of the hysterics" against psychiatric power in the nineteenth century[54] to his appreciation of the feminist and gay movements in the eighties.[55] Taking inspiration from his idea of a "trans-historical Cynicism," we shall define this enterprise in terms of an analysis of counter-conduct as a "historical category which, in various forms and with diverse objectives, runs through the whole of Western society."[56] It is precisely in its capacity to open the conceptual space for such an analysis that lies the essential philosophical, ethical, and political value of the notion of counter-conduct today.

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[50] Michel Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1982-1983*, edited by Frédéric Gros, translated by Graham Burchell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 350.

[51] Michel Foucault, *Discours et vérité précédé de La parrêsia*, edited by Henri-Paul Fruchaud and Daniele Lorenzini (Paris: Vrin, 2016), 103.

[52] See Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, 254-255 and *passim*.

[53] See Michel Foucault, *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1974-1975*, edited by Valerio Marchetti and Antonella Salomoni, translated by Graham Burchell (London-New York: Verso, 2003), 201-227. See on this point Mark D. Jordan, *Convulsing Bodies: Religion and Resistance in Foucault* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014).

[54] See Michel Foucault, *Psychiatric Power: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1973-1974*, edited by Jacques Lagrange, translated by Graham Burchell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 253-254 and *passim*.

[55] See Davidson, "In Praise of Counter-Conduct," 32-34.

[56] Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, 174.

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