Received: 6 October 2022 | Revised: 23 December 2022 | Accepted: 29 April 2023

DOI: 10.1111/ejop.12877

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

European Journal of Philosophy

The architectonic of Foucault's critique

Daniele Lorenzini[1] | Tuomo Tiisala[2]

[1]Department of Philosophy, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA

[2]Center for Post-Kantian Philosophy, University of Potsdam, Potsdam, Germany

Correspondence
Tuomo Tiisala, Center for Post-Kantian Philosophy, Universität Potsdam, Am Neuen Palais 10, Haus 11, 14469 Potsdam, Germany.
Email: tuomo.tiisala@icloud.com

Abstract

This paper presents a new interpretation of Michel Foucault's critical project. It is well known that Foucault's genealogical critique does not focus on issues of justification, but instead tackles "aspectival captivity," that is, apparently inevitable limits of thought that constrain the subject's freedom but that, in fact, can be transformed. However, it has not been recognized that, according to Foucault, critique can proceed along two distinct paths. In a key passage of "What Is Critique?," Foucault states that critique is tasked with questioning truth about its effects of power and with questioning power about its discourses of truth. We show that this "double movement" organizes Foucault's critical project as a whole, giving it a significantly wider scope and a more complex structure than has been previously acknowledged. At the heart of the above-mentioned bifurcation lies an apparent tension between two contrastive roles Foucault assigns to truth-telling in the context of critique: on the one hand, truth-telling (as avowal) is a target of critique; on the other, truth-telling (as *parrhesia*) is one of critique's methods. We argue that combining these two dimensions in a unified account is crucial for understanding and re-evaluating Foucault's critical project as a whole. By showing that truth-telling remains an essential element of Foucauldian critique, this paper also rectifies some influential misinterpretations according to which Foucault's critical project seeks to eliminate truth from the picture.

This is an open access article under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs License, which permits use and distribution in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, the use is non-commercial and no modifications or adaptations are made.
© 2023 The Authors. *European Journal of Philosophy* published by John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

14680378, 2024, 1, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ejop.12877 by CochraneAustria, Wiley Online Library on [24/11/2024]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

1 | INTRODUCTION

Foucault's critical project remains extremely influential for contemporary critical theory broadly construed (see, e.g., Butler, 1997; Hoy, 2004; Saar, 2007; Allen, 2008; Koopman, 2013; Allen, 2016; Harcourt, 2020; Vogelmann, 2022). Therefore, it may seem surprising to suggest that Foucault's critical project has not been adequately understood. Yet this is what we argue in this paper. Our main goal is to identify and explain the architectonic of critique that connects Foucault's later work on *parrhesia*—that is, roughly, courageous and risky truth-telling—with his analyses of power/knowledge relations that focus on delinquency and sexuality. Not merely a demanding exegetical exercise, this task is philosophically relevant because, as we will show, it problematizes the received view of the role that truth and truth-telling play in Foucault's overarching critical project. Against prominent readings according to which Foucault either reduces truth to power relations or seeks to eliminate a concern for truth from ethics, we advance a novel account according to which truth and truth-telling are essential and remain indispensable throughout the process of critique. As a result, Foucault's infamous expression "politics of truth" also becomes newly intelligible without compromising the importance of truth—or, to be precise, of attempts to speak truly—in his broader philosophical project.[1]

To prevent confusion, it is important to recall Owen's (2002) helpful distinction between ideology critique and genealogical critique. While both are directed to freeing us from captivity, that is, "self-imposed, non-physical constraint on our capacity for self-government," Owen notes that they tackle two distinct types of captivity: ideology critique aims to free us from "ideological captivity," that is, false consciousness, while genealogical critique aims to free us from "aspectival captivity," that is, captivity to a picture or perspective, or what Owen also calls "restricted consciousness" (p. 216). As Owen goes on to explain, "a picture or perspective refers, in Foucault's terms, to a way of conceptualizing the real" and, importantly, it "govern[s] what is intelligibly up for grabs as true-or-false," that is, what statements of beliefs are truth-apt, not whether they are true or false (p. 217). Thus, whereas ideological captivity is tied to the falsity of the beliefs held by the agent, aspectival captivity is "independent" of the truth or falsity of her beliefs (p. 217): the point of genealogical critique is to enable the subject to "think differently" (Foucault, 1985, p. 8), not to think truly.[2] Along these lines, Owen's argument goes a long way in explaining how Foucault's critical project should be distinguished from a traditional understanding of ideology critique.[3] However, it leaves several questions unanswered, especially when it comes to the complexity of Foucault's understanding of truth and truth-telling in the context of critique.

That complexity is strikingly evident in a key passage of Foucault's 1978 lecture "What Is Critique?," where he claims that critique can proceed along two different paths. Foucault famously characterizes the function of critique as the desubjugation of the subject (*désassujettissement*) within what he calls the "politics of truth" (2015, p. 39). Here "desubjugation" should be understood as a way out of aspectival captivity. The complexity that has not been appreciated in the literature, however, including Owen's illuminating article, is due to Foucault's claim that such a way out can take two different paths: the subject can give herself the right to question truth about its effects of power and/or the right to question power about its discourses of truth (p. 39). Even though this is one of Foucault's most famous quotes, and indeed the quote reproduced on the back cover of *The Politics of Truth* (2007), no one to our knowledge has so far attempted to explain the significance of this "double movement" of critique, nor the two distinct forms taken by the relations between truth, power, and the subject in Foucault's critical project as a whole.

The puzzle can be formulated as a question: How can the aspiration to speak the truth function both as an essential tool of power and as a key practice of resistance? What is at stake here is the interpretation of Foucault's overarching philosophical project—or, at least, of the form it takes from his first lecture course at the Collège de France, in 1970–71, to the end of his life. The puzzle concerns the role Foucault assigns to truth—or better, to the practice of truth-telling—in the antagonism between government and resistance, and his clear suggestion that truth-telling can play a role on both sides. To our knowledge, however, there is no mention of this option in the secondary literature, where the importance of the passage in question is widely acknowledged while its details remain unexplained.[4]

Commentators tend to agree that Foucault successfully argues against the received view that telling the truth invariably sets one free. Foucault demonstrates that avowals, that is, statements one sincerely makes about oneself, play a pivotal role in the exercise of the type of power that transforms individuals into subjects (1982, p. 781). The quest for knowledge, including self-knowledge, is crucial for this power to get hold of individuals and govern them, for instance, as subjects of normal/abnormal sexuality. This type of power is able to function only through individualization: it "imposes a law of truth on [the individual] which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him" (p. 781).[5] In this context, the role of avowal is to articulate truth-claims that attach the speaker to a given identity. Against this background, however, the emergence of *parrhesia* as a central topic in Foucault's later work appears puzzling. *Parrhesia* is the activity of speaking the truth when doing so carries a significant risk to the speaker. This risk depends both on the topic of her speech and on her audience. Specifically, Foucault is interested in *parrhesia* as a type of speech act that carries a potential to undermine the authority of its addressee, and thereby to disrupt the relations of power that rely on that authority (Lorenzini, 2015). Thus, speaking the truth functions, in this case, as a tactic of resistance against power, and *parrhesia* seems to reintroduce in Foucault's work the idea of a strong connection between truth-telling and freedom—one that his genealogies of avowal, by contrast, thoroughly problematize.

In this paper, we solve the puzzle by explaining how truth-telling can play two contrastive roles—exemplified by avowal and *parrhesia*—which map onto critique's double movement: in the first case, truth-telling (as avowal) is a target of critique, whereas in the second case, truth-telling (as *parrhesia*) is one of the methods that critique uses, one of the forms it takes. A detailed examination of these two approaches, and of the relation between them, is crucial for coming to grips with the complexity of Foucault's conception of critique. By offering such an examination, this paper newly connects Foucault's analyses of avowal and *parrhesia* as two essential branches of the same critical project. We thus seek to bring into view the full complexity of the structure of critique as Foucault understands it, namely as a practice concerned with the subject's desubjugation of herself.

2 | THE ELIMINATIVIST AND REDUCTIONIST READINGS

To begin with, we want to reject two well-known accounts of the role of truth and truth-telling in Foucault's critical project: what we call the *eliminativist* reading and the *reductionist* reading, respectively. The former has its supporters even among the most astute readers of Foucault (see, e.g., Davidson, 2001; Hacking, 2002; Harcourt, 2020), who conceive Foucauldian critique as a way of decoupling ethics, understood as self-governing, from the question of truth and the practice of truth-telling altogether. For instance, Ian Hacking attributes to Foucault the "suggestion to separate our ethics, our lives, from our science, our knowledge. At present, rhetoric about good life is almost always based on some claim to know the truth about desire, about vitamins, about humanity, or about society. But there are no such truths to know" (2002, p. 119).[6] In the same spirit, Arnold Davidson's (1994, 2001) analyses of Foucault's ethical writings focus almost exclusively on *askesis*, the ethical work, thus bypassing the source of the *telos* one pursues by means of such work and, relatedly, the role of truth—as opposed to other values—in the determination of the *telos* itself.

We might think that Davidson and Hacking only intend to separate ethics from *scientific* truths, thereby carving out a space for moral truths as the actual basis of self-governing. It is indeed possible that this is their project—but, in any case, their approach ends up acknowledging only one of the two paths Foucault mentions in "What Is Critique?," that which consists in questioning truth about its effects of power. Consequently, by emphasizing that truth-claims have effects of power on the individuals who utter them, and that power cannot be exercised without a regulated production of truth-claims, scholars have argued that Foucault's aim is to eliminate truth and truth-telling from the picture. Two main consequences follow: on the one hand, this reading of Foucault's critical project, often against its proponents' own intentions, has fueled accusations of reductionism (of truth to power) or relativism (see, e.g., Taylor, 1986; Bouveresse, 2016; Fricker, 2017); on the other, it has made extremely difficult to reconcile Foucault's analyses of *parrhesia*, or courageous and risky truth-telling, with his problematizations of avowal and his

14680378, 2024, 1, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ejop.12877 by CochraneAustria, Wiley Online Library on [24/11/2024]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

critical project as a whole, even though Foucault explicitly frames the former as a "genealogy of critique" (2019, p. 63) that investigates the emergence of the critical attitude in the West. In short, according to the eliminativist reading, Foucault's politics of truth simply aims to decouple governing from truth-telling, both in the governing of oneself and in the governing of others. Moreover, besides the difficulty to square this reading with Foucault's work on *parrhesia*, we should not overlook his characterization of the self's work on itself as "a diligent transformation, a slow and arduous modification *by means of a constant concern for the truth*" (1996, p. 461; trans. mod.; emphasis added).

The eliminativist and reductionist readings are distinct. The former eliminates from critique the concern for truth, but it does not maintain, as the latter does, that truth and falsity are determined, according to Foucault, by relations of power. Yet the reductionist reading is fueled by the apparent unimportance of truth and truth-telling suggested by the eliminativist reading. The expression "politics of truth," then, seems to epitomize what is ultimately unacceptable in Foucault's (perhaps otherwise insightful) analyses: his alleged inability or unwillingness to differentiate truth and power, and thus his (explicit or implicit) commitment to reductionism and, consequently, relativism. From this perspective, Foucault's politics of truth would simply amount to the idea that truth-claims are nothing more than power moves within a battlefield, or in other words that relations of power determine whether a given claim is true or false.

However, if truth just were power, the very notion of a politics of truth would lose its point: if there is nothing specific in truth and truth-telling that sets them apart from other ways in which power functions, why should we even speak of a politics of truth? This expression has heuristic value only if the epistemic and political dimensions can be meaningfully distinguished from each other, and enjoy at least relative autonomy vis-à-vis one another. In fact, Foucault does not argue that reason or knowledge just is power when he undertakes to analyze the networks of dependence and overlap between relations of power and discourses of truth. On the contrary, his inquiry into the relations between power and knowledge presupposes that they are not identical: "If they were identical, I would not have to study them and I would be spared a lot of fatigue as a result. The very fact that I pose the question of their relation proves clearly that I do not identify them" (1998, p. 455).

3 | TRUTH-TELLING IN THE CONTEXT OF CRITIQUE

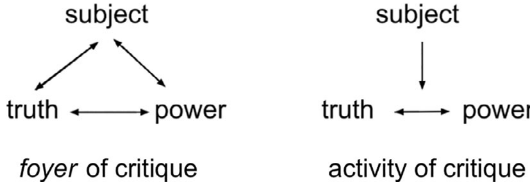
This brief survey is enough to motivate the quest for an alternate reading that acknowledges truth as one of the three distinguishable but interconnected elements—power, truth, and the subject—whose reciprocal relations critique interrogates. In "What Is Critique?," Foucault's way of characterizing critique within the politics of truth points clearly in this direction:

> [W]e can see that the site [*foyer*] of critique is essentially the network of relations that tie power, truth, and the subject to each other, or each of them to the other two. And if governmentalization is indeed this movement by which individuals are subjugated [*assujettir*] in the very reality of a social practice by mechanisms of power which invoke a given truth, well, I would say that critique is the movement by which the subject gives herself the right to question truth about its effects of power and power about its discourses of truth. Critique will be the art of voluntary inservitude, that of reflected indocility. Critique would essentially have as its function the desubjugation of the subject [*désassujettissement*] in the play of what could be called, in a word, the politics of truth. (2015, p. 39; our translation)[7]

In this crucial passage, Foucault makes clear that he is interested in the relations that link these three elements or "poles"—power, truth, and the subject—and that he is not suggesting any reduction of one of them to the other(s). Furthermore, he characterizes the increasing focus in modernity on the question of how to govern people (what he calls "governmentalization") as the attempt to subjugate individuals through power mechanisms that justify

14680378, 2024, 1, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ejop.12877 by CochraneAustria, Wiley Online Library on [24/11/2024]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

themselves on the basis of specific truth-claims, drawn for instance from political economy (2009, pp. 106–109) and, starting in the 19th century, from medicine and psychiatry (1978, pp. 53–73). This is clearly not the same as arguing that power and truth just are the same thing. As Foucault explains in the manuscript of his 1978 lecture, "critique consists in the attitude of questioning the government of human beings understood as the set of combined effects [*effets conjugués*] of truth and power, and this in the form of a combat which, starting from an individual decision, sets for itself the objective of a collective salvation [*salut d'ensemble*]" (2015, p. 40n; our translation). Is Foucault thereby claiming that the subject is somewhat external to, or that she can step outside of, the network of power/knowledge relations that nevertheless constitute her? What is the status of the *subject of critique*? This question will be addressed in more detail below. Yet it is important to note immediately that Foucault is not suggesting that the subject of critique is external to or can step outside of the space of the politics of truth: the subject is constituted as such—she is "*assujetti*" in both senses of the term: *subject of* and *subject to*—within a network of power/knowledge relations, and critique can only originate from her *positionality* as the decision to question such relations that leads to the act of problematizing their combined effects of truth and power.[8] Therefore, it is important to notice that, while the first sentence in the above-cited passage suggests that the relations between power, truth, and the subject can be represented in the form of a triangle—and indeed the "site [*foyer*] of critique" does consist in the reciprocal relations between power, truth, and the subject—the characterization Foucault offers of critique makes it clear that the latter is the activity through which the subject questions the mutual relations between power and truth. We can represent this graphically as follows:



Within this triangular set up, then, Foucault characterizes critique as the double movement through which the subject gives herself the right to question truth about its effects of power and the right to question power about its discourses of truth. In doing so, Foucault summarizes almost his entire philosophical project in a couple of sentences. No doubt this explains why the passage is quoted so often. But for the same reason, we contend, it is usually considered as somewhat self-explanatory, and no one seems to have fully understood it; or at least, attempts to carefully interpret this key passage are strikingly absent from the literature.[9] A successful interpretation of it would have to go beyond explaining the relationship between the two more general "movements" Foucault contrasts here: the movement of governmentalization that subjugates individuals to being conducted according to a particular rationality; and, conversely, the movement of critique that desubjugates individuals thereby promoting resistance, that is, alternate forms of conduct. Readers and scholars of Foucault already know that, in his view, critique operates by untying the network of relations between power, truth, and the subject that governing, by contrast, patiently ties together and tends to congeal (2015). Instead, what requires attention is Foucault's claim that critique itself can proceed in two different ways that are, in a sense, contrary to each other—in other words, that there is a double movement of questioning that characterizes critique itself within the politics of truth.

4 | CRITICAL QUESTIONING

What exactly does this activity of questioning consist in? To begin with, it is crucial not to overlook Foucault's remarks according to which the activity of critique, as he understands it, is "archaeological in its method" and "genealogical in its design" (1984, p. 46). In short, this means that critique interrogates the constitution of a given network

14680378, 2024, 1, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ejop.12877 by CochraneAustria, Wiley Online Library on [24/11/2024]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

of knowledge and power (archaeology), which also gives rise to a specific type of subjectivity, in order to destabilize it (genealogy; 2015, pp. 51–56).[10] In the face of that triangle of interdependence, the activity of critique is thus more than a merely diagnostic enterprise. Its genealogical aim is to open up possibilities that otherwise, without such critical intervention, would have remained hidden due to the way in which a given system of thought is constituted (Lorenzini, 2020; Tiisala, 2017). This process of enlarging the scope of possibility is connected with the aim of desubjugation that Foucault highlights in the passage from "What Is Critique?": as the "art of voluntary inservitude [and] reflected indocility," critique enables subjects to call into question a given rationality of governing, as well as the form of subjectivity it constitutes and relies on. And such questioning, Foucault notes, can proceed in two ways. One might call into question a given discourse of truth because of its effects of power. But one might just as well call into question a given rationality of governing because of the discourse(s) of truth it relies on.

Thus, Foucault's guiding idea is that the very form of subjectivity is at stake in the activity of questioning. One may study the relations between power and knowledge in any constellation of social practices, but that is not critique, in Foucault's sense, unless the subject is implicated. In "What Is Enlightenment?," Foucault emphasizes this aspect of his view by characterizing critique as "a historical ontology of ourselves" whose aim is to bring into relief, from the contingency of our historical constitution as subjects, the possibility of becoming different subjects (1984, p. 45). In other words, critique is for him always meant to enable desubjugation. Thus, when Foucault claims that critique aims to test whether the limits that are given to us as necessary and unavoidable are, in fact, contingent and modifiable (p. 45), the limits in question are always also limits of subjectivity.

By identifying within the activity of critique both an archaeological and a genealogical dimension, Foucault suggests that critique calls into question a given system of thought, not by scrutinizing its justification (2015, pp. 51–53), but instead by uncovering its constitution (archaeology) and by destabilizing it in the field of social practices (genealogy).[11] Accordingly, we contend that the nature of the obstacle critique interrogates concerns modality. The need for, and the difficulty of, critique arise from the way in which the structure of social practices confers the status of obviousness to patterns of reasoning and modes of acting that are nonetheless contingent. Because we are constituted as subjects in these practices, the sense of who we are and what we can become tends to be congealed into obviousness. As Tuomo Tiisala (2017) has noted, Foucault characterizes this obstacle as "the present limits of the necessary" (1984, p. 43; trans. mod.). Consequently, we can see that the aim of Foucauldian critique is to "possibilize," that is, to expand the current scope of possibilities for thought and action available to the subjects (Lorenzini, 2020). This is how, in practice, critique enables desubjugation.

To sharpen Foucault's focus on the constitution and destabilization of a system of thought, it may be helpful to consider two familiar types of questioning that Foucault's characterization of critique excludes. First, the subject can question truth in terms of truth. In other words, one can always scrutinize the justification for a given truth-claim by examining whether it is, in fact, true. If Foucault never mentions this possibility, it is not because he denies it, but because he considers it to be of no particular critical significance. Needless to say, I can ask whether or not I really am homosexual or heterosexual, for instance. As we have seen, however, Foucault's critical project is archaeological in its method: instead of the justification for particular truth-claims about sexual identity, Foucault (1978, 1997) argues that we should study the preconditions that motivate and enable a line of inquiry into human sexuality as a topic of psychopathology in the first place. And as Foucault puts it in the second volume of his *History of Sexuality* (1985, pp. 11–12), while archaeology thereby uncovers the implicit conceptual form of a given system of thought, genealogy aims to destabilize it by tracing its formation in the field of social practices. Tracing how and why a set of enabling conditions for a given system of thought coalesced in history means tracing a genealogy of the "will to know" it embodies.[12] For instance, Foucault's *History of Sexuality* seeks to call into question the will to know that constitutes individuals into subjects of sexuality to be governed in terms of the opposition between the normal and the pathological. Crucially, the will to know, in contrast to any particular truth-claim, cannot be questioned in terms of truth, since it has no propositional content: it is not truth-apt. Therefore, if the will to know is to be questioned at all, it must be questioned in terms of something other than truth.

14680378, 2024, 1, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ejop.12877 by CochraneAustria, Wiley Online Library on [24/11/2024]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

Second, the subject can question power in terms of power. This kind of questioning is built into Foucault's analytic of power as *resistance*. As he repeatedly emphasizes, resistance is not external to power relations but, on the contrary, a constitutive element of the relations of force agents deploy in the field of action (1978, pp. 95–96). Tactics and strategies used to affect the actions of others—that is, "to conduct their conduct" (2014b, p. 12)—presuppose a normative assessment as to the impropriety of how the targeted subjects currently conduct themselves: something about their conduct deviates from what it ought to be, according to those who undertake to change it. In this sense, as Georges Canguilhem (1991, p. 243) puts it, the abnormal is existentially prior to the normal, which comes into being only through a project of normalization that actively aims to establish new norms in the field of action. Yet, to be resistance, action must intentionally reject given norms of conduct. In other words, resistance needs an object, and in this respect, as Foucault notes, it is always a "counter-conduct" (2009, pp. 201–202). On the one hand, only in response to attempts by others to conduct my conduct can my actions count as resistance. On the other, it is only insofar that I resist such attempts that others have a reason to keep exercising power over me. Therefore, following Canguilhem's remark that "[t]he normal is not a static or peaceful, but a dynamic and polemical concept" (1991, p. 239), Foucault concludes that an agonistic dynamic is constitutive of power relations:

> The power relation and freedom's refusal to submit [*insoumission de la liberté*] cannot therefore be separated. […] At the very heart of the power relation, and constantly "provoking" it, are the recalcitrance [*rétivité*] of the will and the intransigence of freedom. Rather than speaking of an essential "antagonism," it would be better to speak of an "agonism"—of a relation that is at the same time one of mutual incitement and of struggle; less of a face-to-face confrontation that paralyzes both sides than of a permanent provocation. (1982, p. 790; trans. mod.)

Consequently, Foucault argues that the tactics and strategies of power that shape the political landscape in any given society coalesce around a series of local struggles where these agonistic dynamics play out. As a result, politics should be conceived as the continuation of war by other means, rather than the other way round (2003, p. 15).

The resistance that provokes these struggles in the field of action, then, is nothing but the activity of questioning power in terms of power. While resistance is essentially intentional, however, it need not be theoretically sophisticated or even based on any reasoning. It is enough that one rejects the conduct that a given relation of power seeks to establish. In the end, as Foucault repeatedly suggests (especially in connection with his own political activism), the recalcitrance of the will might be simply based on the perception of the intolerable (2021a). "*This* is intolerable!" suffices to motivate action that is resistance or counter-conduct: an intentional attempt to not conduct oneself as others try to make one do. Thus, engaging in counter-conduct, too, is a way of exercising power: by means of resisting a given relation of power one aims to make those who put it in play renounce their attempt.

Foucault's understanding of critique is clearly distinct from the two options we have just considered. The activity of critique is not to be identified with resistance within a given set of power relations. Nor does it amount to scrutinizing whether given statements are true or false. It is crucial, however, to appreciate that critique in no way denies these two options and their ethico-political relevance. But critique operates on a different level that Foucault considers more fundamental because it is where the practice of making truth-claims and the practice of governing the conduct of others (and of oneself) intersect. This is the level of rule-governed practices that constitute a given system of thought but escape the discursive awareness of the thinking subjects (Tiisala, 2017). At this level, critique—always including both archaeological and genealogical dimensions—interrogates the interdependence of two kinds of practices, namely practices of making truth-claims and practices of governing people's conduct, with a focus on the formation of subjectivity. Because the dependence is reciprocal, there are two paths along which critique can proceed: questioning truth about its effects of power and questioning power about its discourse of truth. Now that we have delineated the architectonic of Foucault's critique, let us locate its two distinctive paths in Foucault's own work, one after the other.

14680378, 2024, 1, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ejop.12877 by CochraneAustria, Wiley Online Library on [24/11/2024]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

5 | QUESTIONING TRUTH ABOUT ITS EFFECTS OF POWER

The first movement of critique, through which the subject gives herself the right to question truth about its effects of power, is paradigmatically exemplified by Foucault's analyses of the practice of avowal, or truth-telling about oneself. As Foucault argues in *Discipline and Punish*, power produces both "domains of objects and rituals of truth" (1995, p. 194), and as a consequence each society is characterized by a "general politics of truth," that is, by a multiplicity of discourses that it "harbors and causes to function as true," and by a multiplicity of "techniques and procedures which are valorized for obtaining truth" (1977, p. 13). These discourses of truth can of course take many different forms—examination, classification, demographics, statistics, and so on—but Foucault is especially interested in a specific kind of speech act, that is, in the practice of avowal, from the different historical forms taken by Christian confession to the use of confessional practices in non-religious domains such as psychology, criminology, law, or psychoanalysis. Indeed, in *On the Government of the Living*, Foucault claims that, in our society, "power cannot be exercised without truth having to manifest itself, and manifest itself in the form of subjectivity" (2014b, p. 75). Consequently, his main aim is to study the "government of human beings through the manifestation of truth in the form of subjectivity" (p. 80)—a formula that clearly corresponds to his 1978 definition of the "site [*foyer*] of critique" as the set of reciprocal relations between power, truth, and the subject. How does critique operate within this framework, which is the site of the "politics of truth," and more specifically in relation to the injunction to tell the truth about ourselves?

Foucault's interest in the history of avowal dates back to at least *Abnormal* and the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, where he famously refers to confession (*aveu*) as "one of the West's most highly valued techniques for producing truth" (1978, p. 59), and to the "obligation to confess" as something that is now "so deeply ingrained in us that we no longer perceive it as the effect of a power that constrains us" (p. 60). As we mentioned above, Foucault's genealogy of avowal aims to question the longstanding myth that where there is power, there cannot be truth, and that (telling the) truth will always set one free. In all its different historical forms, from the ancient Christian practices of *exomologesis* and *exagoreusis* to the modern extension of confessional practices into the fields of medicine, psychiatry, pedagogy, sexology, or criminology, it is clear that, for Foucault, the obligation to tell the truth about oneself is one of the main mechanisms through which power operates and takes effect, thus transforming individuals into subjects. Avowal is therefore the main target of the first movement of critique as Foucault characterizes it in 1978 and practices it in his own work.

This movement of critique takes a genealogical form with an unequivocally problematizing character.[13] Foucault criticizes the idea that telling the truth about oneself is a way for the subject to attain freedom by emphasizing the links between this aspect of the will to know and a series of power mechanisms that rely on it. For instance, in the context of religious confession, the subject is asked to tell the truth about herself in order for the pastoral operations of power to take effect; or, in more mundane contexts, when the subject tells the truth about her sexual desire, she opens the door to a variety of mechanisms of power (medical, psychiatric, juridical) to get hold of her conduct (Foucault, 2014c). Foucault thereby wants to make the following problem salient for us once more:

> [W]hy and how does the exercise of power in our society, the exercise of power as government of human beings, demand not only acts of obedience and submission, but truth acts in which individuals who are subjects in the power relationship are also subjects as actors, spectator witnesses, or objects in manifestation of truth procedures? (2014b, p. 82)

In other words, not only do Foucault's genealogies of avowal aim to reject the idea that telling the truth about oneself is unquestionably an instrument in the service of one's liberation, but they also construe the practice of avowal (and its consequences in terms of subjection) as an *ethico-political problem*. Indeed, Foucault's analyses of the different historical forms taken by avowal in our society result in the discovery of four main features of avowal as a specific speech act (2014c, pp. 15–17):

14680378, 2024, 1, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ejop.12877 by CochraneAustria, Wiley Online Library on [24/11/2024]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

- avowal always has a "cost of enunciation," for it consists in "passing from the untold to the told, given that the untold had a precise meaning, a particular motive, a great value";
- avowal entails a personal engagement, because it "implies that he who speaks commits himself to be what he affirms himself to be," that is, it binds the speaker to the truth he utters;
- avowal unfolds within a power relation, since it "enables the exercise of [a] power relation over the one who avows," who thereby "places himself in a relationship of dependence with regard to another";
- avowal produces a transformation of the speaker, who is qualified "differently with regard to what he says," because for instance by saying "I am mad," he alters his relationship to his own madness and becomes subject to the medical or psychiatric regime of truth—thus opening up for himself the possibility of being cured.

Once again, it is clear that the reductionist reading of Foucault's politics of truth misses the mark. Here, far from arguing that truth just is power, Foucault examines the ethico-political conditions and the effects of a will to know that takes the form of telling the truth about oneself. In short, Foucault's genealogical critique targets avowals in order, first, to criticize the idea that telling the truth about oneself necessarily entails some kind of liberation, and second, to problematize the apparently obvious and therefore unquestionable link between truth-claims about oneself and one's submission to a given governmental mechanism (or a regime of truth) that relies on such claims—in other words, to problematize the "therefore" that links the "it is true" (that I am *X*) to the "I submit" (i.e., I accept to be conducted thus and so on that basis) (2014b, pp. 96–97).

Notwithstanding Foucault's focus on avowal, and while avowal plays a key role as the type of speech act by which the subject accepts her subordination to a given rationality of governing, it is important to note that discourses of truth that involve no avowal also have significant effects of power. For that to be the case it suffices that individuals are constituted as objects of knowledge in some particular way that also underwrites a specific rationality of governing. As sinners, potential perverts, and *homines oeconomici*, respectively, individuals partake in three distinct modes of experience, each with its specific conceptual form and historical articulation in the field of social practices, where the aims of governing, too, are differentiated accordingly. The role of avowal is to produce knowledge about a given individual, so that techniques of power can be adjusted to her unique situation. But no avowal is needed in the case of the neoliberal rationality of governing, for instance, because it relies on a theory of human nature as *homo oeconomicus* (Foucault, 2008; cf. Tiisala 2021). What enables the rationality of governing to get hold of subjects in this case is independent of their individuality—in sharp contrast to pastoral power in its Christian and biopolitical iterations. Yet, even when a rationality of governing requires knowledge about the individuals it targets, the conceptual space that defines different ways of being a person is theoretically constituted independently of the practice of avowal. It is because of a given psychiatric theory of sexuality, for instance, that the obligation to avow one's sexual desire comes to play a key role in the governing of sexual conduct in terms of the normal and the pathological.

6 | QUESTIONING POWER ABOUT ITS DISCOURSES OF TRUTH

The second movement of critique, through which the subject gives herself the right to question power about its discourses of truth, also features prominently in Foucault's work, namely in his analyses of *parrhesia*, or courageous and risky truth-telling. This second dimension of critique is not to be conceived in opposition to the first, however, but as a way of complementing it. In 1983, Foucault claims that his analyses of the notion and practice of *parrhesia* in ancient Greece and Rome are a contribution to "the genealogy of what we could call the critical attitude in our society" (2019, p. 63).[14] A genealogy of critique, therefore, as a way of emphasizing that critique itself is not to be construed as a supra-historical activity, but one that is historically situated and has undergone many transformations in the past 2,500 years. This genealogy, while vindicating the value of critique, does not aim to discover critique's eternal "core" or essence, as vindicatory genealogies typically do with their objects (see, e.g., Craig, 1990; Williams, 2002; Fricker, 2007). Foucault's nominalist commitments (1978, p. 93; 1991, p. 86) make it impossible for

14680378, 2024, 1, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ejop.12877 by CochraneAustria, Wiley Online Library on [24/11/2024]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

him to vindicate critique in *this* sense.[15] Therefore, it is controversial in what restricted sense exactly, if any, Foucault could be vindicating *parrhesia* as an early expression of the critical attitude he identifies as the ethos of the Enlightenment.[16] Our topic, however, is not how to characterize Foucault's genealogy of critique, nor how to define its relationship with Foucault's critical project and its genealogical aim.[17] Instead, we are concerned with Foucault's claim that critique entails a double movement and, from this perspective, the topic of *parrhesia* is of particular interest because it illustrates the second half of this movement, namely the possibility of questioning power about its discourses of truth.

But what is *parrhesia* exactly? Leaving aside its varying historical meanings, it is clear that Foucault construes *parrhesia*, philosophically, as a mode of telling the truth which, instead of being the target of critique, constitutes a method for practicing critique—one of the forms that critique itself can take.[18] *Parrhesia* is for the subject a way of contesting a given configuration of power relations by "speaking truth to power," thus opposing power's discourse of truth from the perspective of the subject's own positionality.[19] Foucault's analysis of the different historical forms taken by *parrhesia* in antiquity, much as his study of avowal, thus leads to the discovery of a series of features of *parrhesia* as a specific kind of speech act—avowal's mirror image.

Generally speaking, an utterance is parrhesiastic whenever it is addressed to someone who has a cause to feel questioned by it in her way of thinking, acting, and living. In other words, *parrhesia* always expresses criticism. Consequently, *parrhesia* always takes place in circumstances such that it may entail costly consequences for the speaker: Foucault repeatedly talks about the opening of a space of "unspecified risk" for the parrhesiastic speaker (2010, p. 62), who undertakes to tell the truth "at an unspecified price," which may be as high as her own death, but which minimally entails the risk of breaking the relationship she has with her interlocutor(s) (p. 56). Thus, parrhesiastic utterance always presupposes courage on the part of the speaker, because the latter makes use of *parrhesia* voluntarily and fully aware of the risks it entails (p. 66). Importantly, this puts the parrhesiast in a peculiar position of vulnerability: her practice of truth-telling is structurally "non-hegemonic," and in its paradigmatic form, *parrhesia* is a critical discourse addressed to the powerful (a god, an emperor, a king, etc.), or at any rate to someone who can exert power over the speaker—minimally, by breaking their mutual relationship and, maximally, by threatening, firing, imprisoning, hurting, or even killing her.[20]

In a sense, *parrhesia* is therefore construed by Foucault as the anti- or the counter-avowal:

- *parrhesia* too has a cost of enunciation, yet the latter consists not in the difficult act of revealing a hidden or shameful truth, but in the risk that the speaker takes when speaking the truth to someone who may feel questioned by it;
- *parrhesia* too entails a personal engagement, because the speaker makes clear that she is saying what she actually thinks, and that she is willing to take a risk to say it—thus binding herself to the truth she utters,
- but in a way that, instead of placing the speaker in a relationship of dependence with regard to her interlocutor(s), places her in a confrontational, bellicose relationship with them; hence, *parrhesia* too unfolds within a power relation, but one that is characterized by inservitude and indocility, since parrhesiastic utterances operate as a critical force directed at the speaker's interlocutor(s), not as a discourse that enables power to subjugate her;
- finally, *parrhesia* too produces a transformation of the speaker, but one that does not consist in self-renunciation or self-sacrifice, nor in becoming subject to a given governmental mechanism—on the contrary, *parrhesia* transforms the speaker into (or reinforces her status as) a *subject of* critique.

But in what sense, one might ask, is *parrhesia* a practice of *truth-telling*? Foucault chooses to translate *parrhesia* as "speaking the truth" while being aware that the Greek term, in its etymology, does not contain any explicit reference to truth (2019, pp. 39–40). Literally, *parrhesia* means "to say everything," and it originally indicates "the freedom of the private [Athenian] citizen to say what he believes, in the way he wishes, and against whom he wants" (Scarpat, 1964, p. 29). The notion of truth, however, is clearly part of *parrhesia*'s semantic horizon, in the same way it

14680378, 2024, 1, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ejop.12877 by CochraneAustria, Wiley Online Library on [24/11/2024]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

is for avowal: Ineke Sluiter and Ralph Rosen argue that *parrhesia* "always involves frankness and the full disclosure of one's thoughts," and that consequently the parrhesiast "must necessarily believe in the truth of what he is saying, or at least in the fact that to the best of his knowledge what he is saying is true" (2004, pp. 6–7). This conclusion is consistent with Foucault's own use of the term: according to him, *parrhesia* is a mode of telling the truth because the parrhesiast believes in what she says, and furthermore, through the verbal act of *parrhesia*, she binds herself to her utterances and to the truth she believes they manifest.

Of course, this applies to avowal as well—in other words, both speech acts entail a sincerity condition. However, sincerity is a necessary but not sufficient condition for a speech act to count as avowal or *parrhesia*: for instance, telling my partner "I feel tired today" does not normally constitute an instance of either, even though I am being sincere in uttering that sentence. The parrhesiast is not merely sincere, because in addition to believing what she says, she chooses to engage in a risky and courageous practice of truth-telling that may entail costly consequences for her, and she thereby shows her interlocutor(s) that what she thinks and says corresponds to what she is:

> I must be myself, the exact way I am, in what I say; I must myself be implicated in what I say, and what I affirm must show me really true to what I affirm. […] I do not content myself with telling you what I judge to be true. I tell this truth only inasmuch as it is in actual fact what I am myself; I am implicated in the truth of what I say. (2019, pp. 31–32)

> On the one hand, the subject in *parrhesia* says: This is the truth. She says that she really thinks this truth, and in this she binds herself to the statement and to its content. But she also makes a pact in saying: I am the person who has spoken this truth; I therefore bind myself to the act of stating it and take on the risk of all its consequences. (2010, pp. 64–65)

Thus, *parrhesia* can be plausibly construed as a form of truth-telling, and in a sense even as a peculiar form of truth-telling about oneself—one that, however, is radically different from avowal. The parrhesiast is implicated in what she says not only because she believes it is true, but because, on the one hand, she is willing to accept an undefined risk in order to tell this truth and, on the other, her own way of thinking, behaving, and living bears witness of the "harmony" that exists between what she thinks, what she says, and her own conduct. To be more precise, parrhesiastic utterance does something more than just manifesting the harmony that exists between the speaker's words and her way of living: it reinforces this harmony through the risky event of the utterance itself, and hence has "rebound effects" on the speaker, since "in producing the event of the utterance the subject modifies, or affirms, or anyway determines and clarifies her mode of being insofar as she speaks" (2010, p. 68). In other words, parrhesiastic utterance relies on, expresses, and contributes to the (re)creation of the speaker's subjectivity. While the speaker who avows a certain truth about herself thereby accepts to be subjected to a given power/knowledge apparatus, by using *parrhesia* the speaker resists the rationality of governing that attempts to conduct her conduct and, if successful, she desubjugates herself.

Unsurprisingly, Foucault defines *parrhesia* as an ethics, "the ethics of truth-telling, in its risky and free act" (2010, p. 66), making it clear once more that a reductionist reading of his critical project radically misses the point: Foucault addresses truth-telling as an activity that takes place within a complex network of power relations, and that can function both as an intensifier and as a disruptor of those relations. Indeed, if avowal is one of the main techniques through which individuals are governed and subjugated, *parrhesia* is a practice of truth-telling through which the subject gives herself the right to question and oppose the exercise of power over her, thereby also short-circuiting the underlying discourse of truth. As Foucault concludes, "*parrhesia* refers to the dangerous game of telling the truth in the political and ethical field" (2021b, p. 173), thus embodying a crucial aspect of critique as he characterizes it in his 1978 lecture: the "art of not being governed quite so much [*tellement gouverné*]" (2015, p. 37; our translation).

14680378, 2024, 1, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ejop.12877 by CochraneAustria, Wiley Online Library on [24/11/2024]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

7 | CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have shown that Foucault's critical project, which aims at the desubjugation of the subject within the politics of truth, is richer, more complex, and more systematic than has so far been acknowledged. We have argued that it consists in the double movement through which the subject questions truth about its effects of power and power about its discourses of truth, and we have shown that this double movement characterizes Foucault's own way of addressing the activity of truth-telling either as a target of critique (in the case of avowal) or as a method of critique itself (in the case of *parrhesia*). While thereby making the case that his analyses of *parrhesia*, often discounted in the literature as an enigmatic "parenthesis," are a crucial element of his critical project, we have also dissipated the main concerns surrounding Foucault's supposed reductionism: the politics of truth is not, for him, a way of getting rid of truth and truth-telling altogether. Of course, this can only be considered a first step in the more ambitious project of clarifying Foucault's understanding of the complex relations between truth, power, ethics, and politics, the importance of which for contemporary critical theory broadly construed we hope can now be better appreciated.

Yet our interpretation of Foucauldian critique has at least partially clarified what Foucault means by "the politics of truth." Against a widespread misconception, we have argued that his intention is not to denounce the value of truth or truth-telling altogether. Because Foucault claims that the central political question, for him, is "the political, economic, institutional regime of the production of truth," it has appeared to many that he thereby wishes to oppose the quest for truth *as such*. In the same context, however, Foucault specifies that the essential political problem is "that of ascertaining the possibility of constituting a *new* politics of truth" (1977, p. 14; trans. mod.; emphasis added). The double movement of critique we have described in this paper, then, assumes its full political significance as soon as we understand it as indicating two distinct paths for transforming the given constellation of practices wherein a rationality of governing people is grounded in a particular set of truth-claims. On the one hand, *parrhesia* illustrates how truth-telling can openly challenge the authority of a given rationality of governing; the case of avowal, on the other hand, shows that people can have non-epistemic reasons to resist the quest for truth, at least when it aims to classify them and thereby subjugates them to a particular rationality of governing. We can see now why in both cases "it is not a question of a battle 'in favor' of truth," or against it, "but of a battle about the status of truth and the economic and political role it plays" in organizing the constellation of practices through which people are governed by others and govern themselves (Foucault, 1977, p. 14; trans. mod.). Even though critique is meant to facilitate the desubjugation of the subject, Foucault's aim is therefore not to sever self-governing from truth and truth-telling. On the contrary, as we mentioned above, Foucault characterizes the process of attaining (at least a certain degree of) self-governing as "a diligent transformation, a slow and arduous modification by means of a constant concern for the truth" (1996, p. 461; trans. mod.). While current readings of Foucault's critical project are generally unable to make sense of this claim, we hope this paper will make it for the first time fully intelligible.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This paper is dedicated to the memory of Ian Hacking (1936–2023). We were saddened by the news of Hacking's death during the final revisions of this paper, and we would like to take this opportunity to express our deepest gratitude and admiration for his work, which has profoundly influenced our understanding of Foucault and remains for us a powerful source of philosophical inspiration. In addition, we are grateful to Verena Erlenbusch-Anderson, David Halperin, Colin Koopman, Johanna Oksala, Sabina Vaccarino Bremner, Frieder Vogelmann, and two anonymous reviewers from *European Journal of Philosophy* for their valuable feedback on earlier versions of this paper. Open Access funding was enabled and organized by Projekt DEAL.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data availability is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study.

14680378, 2024, 1, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ejop.12877 by CochraneAustria, Wiley Online Library on [24/11/2024]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

ORCID

Daniele Lorenzini https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8794-9419
Tuomo Tiisala https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0463-5540

ENDNOTES

[1] However, a detailed interpretation and evaluation of the "politics of truth," as Foucault understands it, remains a task for future research.

[2] In light of Owen's distinction, it is plain to see that Fraser's (1981) criticism of Foucault's work as "empirically insightful" but "normatively confused" makes sense only in the context of ideology critique. The same applies to Habermas (1990). Both fail to appreciate that Foucault's critique addresses aspectival captivity.

[3] For an account of ideology critique in the traditional sense, see Geuss, 1981. Recent work on ideology and epistemic injustice, however, enriches and complicates the conceptual landscape in ways that often combine ideology critique with the issue of aspectival captivity (see, e.g., Haslanger, 2012), or identify new problems altogether (see, e.g., Anderson, 2017).

[4] Of course, we are not claiming to be the first to emphasize the positive role that truth-telling as *parrhesia* plays in Foucault's "politics of truth," and in his critical project as a whole (see, e.g., Vogelmann, 2012; Luxon, 2013; Dyrberg, 2014; Folkers, 2016; Hoppe, 2019; Lorenzini, 2023; Halperin, n.d.). What we are claiming is that, to our knowledge, no one has so far offered an interpretation of Foucault's analyses of *parrhesia*, and of his genealogies of avowal, in light of the double movement of critique Foucault talks about in "What Is Critique?" Doing so, we argue, is crucial to shed light on the contrastive roles Foucault assigns to truth-telling in the context of critique, thereby offering a unified account of his critical project.

[5] A detailed study of what Foucault means by "a law truth" constitutes a topic in its own right (see Foucault, 2014b, pp. 94–97).

[6] We are not suggesting that it is Hacking's own view to severe ethics as self-governing from a concern for truth, even though Hacking's work on the looping effects of human kinds appears to address the role of truth in self-governing only from the perspective of resistance. See, e.g., Hacking, 2007.

[7] "[O]n voit que le foyer de la critique, c'est essentiellement le faisceau de rapports qui noue l'un à l'autre, ou l'un aux deux autres, le pouvoir, la vérité et le sujet. Et si la gouvernementalization, c'est bien ce mouvement par lequel il s'agissait dans la réalité même d'une pratique sociale d'assujettir les individus par des mécanismes de pouvoir qui se réclament d'une vérité, eh bien, je dirais que la critique, c'est le mouvement par lequel le sujet se donne le droit d'interroger la vérité sur ses effets de pouvoir et le pouvoir sur ses discours de vérité; la critique, ce sera l'art de l'inservitude volontaire, celui de l'indocilité réfléchie. La critique aurait essentiellement pour fonction le désassujettissement dans le jeu de ce qu'on pourrait appeler, d'un mot, la politique de la vérité."

[8] Because the subject of critique is herself (at least partly) constituted by the power/knowledge relations she criticizes, the activity of critique is in a sense always *reflexive*. On this point, see Vaccarino Bremner, 2020.

[9] Including in the recent critical edition of Foucault's lecture (2015).

[10] For the argument that the critique of *constitution* should be construed as a distinct guiding thread in critical theory, in contrast to ideology critique, on the one hand, and immanent social critique, on the other, see Säynäjoki and Tiisala (2023).

[11] Foucault repeatedly emphasizes that agency is informed by thought and, therefore, a system of thought always includes a determinate field of action. For instance, "thought is understood as the very form of action—as action insofar as it implies the play of true and false, the acceptance or refusal of rules, the relation to oneself and others" (1997, p. 201).

[12] Foucault introduces the expression "will to know" in his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France in December 1970 (Foucault, 1971, p. 16), and devotes his first lecture course precisely to this topic (2014a).

[13] On Foucauldian genealogy as a problematizing endeavor, see Koopman, 2013 and Allen, 2016.

[14] On this point, see also Halperin n.d.

[15] On Foucault's nominalism, see Flynn, 2005, chap. 2; Vogelmann, 2017.

[16] In the eyes of those—including within the Critical Theory tradition—who would want to unveil critique's supra-historical essence, Foucault's genealogy of critique has a problematizing function (Boland, 2014; Folkers, 2016). Thus understood, in addition to emphasizing that critique itself is a historically situated activity that does not have any universal "core" (but might have a constant "form"), Foucault's genealogy of critique aims to show that the question "What is critique?" has already been formulated in the past—for instance concerning the relations between *parrhesia* and democratic institutions in fourth-century Athens (2019, pp. 111–15, 123–32), or by Kant in the 18th century (2010, pp. 7–21, 25–39, 292–93)—

14680378, 2024, 1, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ejop.12877 by CochraneAustria, Wiley Online Library on [24/11/2024]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

thus inciting us to ask it (and thereby to problematize critique) once again as Foucault himself does in "What Is Critique?" and "What Is Enlightenment?." Yet Lorenzini (2020) argues that the genealogy of critique also adds a further dimension to Foucault's critical project: by showing how critique has been practiced and the forms resistance has taken in the past, it opens up the possibility of *concretely practicing* critique in the present as well.

[17] On this point, see Lorenzini, 2023.

[18] In bracketing the historical dimension of the practice of *parrhesia* and elaborating a philosophical definition of it as a specific family of speech acts, we deliberately go beyond a mere exegesis of Foucault's genealogical project, which remains for the most part focused on the historicity of truth and truth-telling (both as *parrhesia* and as avowal). However, the multiple historical forms of *parrhesia* that Foucault analyzes do share some fundamental features, as Foucault himself makes it clear in *Discourse and Truth*, where he offers a definition of the "general meaning" of *parrhesia* in the "positive sense of the word": *parrhesia*, he claims, is "a certain verbal activity in which the speaker has a specific relation to truth through frankness, a certain relation to himself through danger, a certain relation to law through freedom and duty, and a certain relation to other people through critique (self-critique or critique of other people)" (2019, pp. 45–46). In what follows, we draw partly from this definition to elaborate a philosophical characterization of *parrhesia* as a critical practice. Yet we are not suggesting a *teleological* reading of Foucault's philosophical trajectory: *parrhesia* is just one of the many forms that critique can take, albeit a particularly relevant one for us because it corresponds to the second movement of critique that Foucault mentions in "What Is Critique?". In other words, we are not emphasizing the importance of *parrhesia* to align Foucault's critical project with his biography ("What comes at the end *should* be the key to understanding everything else!"), but for strictly conceptual reasons. For a detailed analysis of Foucault's project of a history of truth and his genealogies of truth-telling, see Lorenzini, 2023.

[19] Once again, it is important to notice that *parrhesia* took many different forms in antiquity, for instance within the philosophical practice of spiritual direction, or as a virtue that a good political counselor should possess. However, it is clear that Foucault is first and foremost interested in the critical function of *parrhesia*. Hence, in *On the Government of Self and Others*, after describing a scene in which Dion uses *parrhesia* in front of Dionysius, the tyrant of Syracuse, Foucault claims that this scene is "an exemplary scene of *parrhesia*: a man stands up to a tyrant and tells him the truth" (2010, p. 50).

[20] Contemporary examples of *parrhesia* can be found, for instance, in the framework of the #MeToo movement (Taylor, 2020).

REFERENCES

Allen, A. (2008). *The politics of our selves: Power, autonomy, and gender in contemporary critical theory*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Allen, A. (2016). *The end of progress: Decolonizing the normative foundations of critical theory*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Anderson, L. (2017). Epistemic injustice and the philosophy of race. In I. J. Kidd, J. Medina, & G. Pohlhaus, Jr. (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of epistemic injustice* (pp. 138–148). New York: Routledge.

Boland, T. (2014). Critique is a thing of this world: Towards a genealogy of critique. *History of the Human Sciences*, *27*(1), 108–123.

Bouveresse, J. (2016). *Nietzsche contre Foucault: Sur la vérité, la connaissance et le pouvoir*. Marseille: Agone.

Butler, J. (1997). *The psychic life of power: Theories in subjection*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Canguilhem, G. (1991). *The normal and the pathological* [1943/1966]. Translated by C. W. Fawcett & R. S. Cohen. New York: Zone Books.

Craig, E. (1990). *Knowledge and the state of nature: An essay in conceptual synthesis*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Davidson, A. I. (1994). Ethics as ascetics: Foucault, the history of ethics, and ancient thought. In G. Gutting (Ed.), *The Cambridge companion to Foucault* (pp. 115–140). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Davidson, A. I. (2001). *The emergence of sexuality: Historical epistemology and the formation of concepts*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Dyrberg, T. B. (2014). *Foucault on the politics of parrhesia*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Flynn, T. (2005). *Sartre, Foucault, and historical reason: A poststructuralist mapping of history* (Vol. 2). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Folkers, A. (2016). Daring the truth: Foucault, parrhesia, and the genealogy of critique. *Theory, Culture & Society*, *33*(1), 3–28.

Foucault, M. (1971). *L'ordre du discours: Leçon inaugurale au Collège de France prononcée le 2 décembre 1970*. Paris: Gallimard.

Foucault, M. (1977). The political function of the intellectual [1976], translated by C Gordon. *Radical Philosophy*, *17*, 12–14.

Foucault, M. (1978). *The history of sexuality, volume 1: An introduction* [1976]. Translated by R. Hurley. New York: Pantheon Books.

Foucault, M. (1982). The subject and power. *Critical Inquiry*, *8*(4), 777–795.

14680378, 2024, 1, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ejop.12877 by CochraneAustria, Wiley Online Library on [24/11/2024]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

Foucault, M. (1984). What is enlightenment? In P. Rabinow (Ed.), *The Foucault reader*. Translated by C. Porter (pp. 32–50). New York: Pantheon Books.
Foucault, M. (1985). *The use of pleasure: Volume 2 of the history of sexuality* [1984]. Translated by R. Hurley. New York: Vintage Books.
Foucault, M. (1991). Questions of method [1980]. In G. Burchell, C. Gordon, & P. Miller (Eds.), *The Foucault effect: Studies in governmentality* (pp. 73–86). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Foucault, M. (1995). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison* [1975]. Translated by A. Sheridan. New York: Vintage Books.
Foucault, M. (1996). The concern for truth [1984]. In S. Lotringer (Ed.), *Foucault live (interviews, 1961–84)*. Translated by L. Hochroth & J. Johnston (pp. 455–464). New York: Semiotext(e).
Foucault, M. (1997). Preface to *The history of sexuality*, volume 2 [1984]. In P. Rabinow (Ed.), *Ethics: Subjectivity and truth: Essential works of Foucault (1954–84)*, Vol. 1. Translated by R. Hurley et al. (pp. 199–205). New York: New Press.
Foucault, M. (1998). Structuralism and post-structuralism [1983]. In J. D. Faubion (Ed.), *Aesthetics, method, and epistemology: Essential works of Foucault (1954–84)*, Vol. 2. Translated by R. Hurley et al. (pp. 433–458). New York: New Press.
Foucault, M. (2003). *"Society must be defended": Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–76*. Edited by M. Bertani, & A. Fontana, translated by D. Macey. New York: Picador.
Foucault, M. (2007). *The politics of truth*. Edited by S. Lotringer, translated by L. Hochroth & C. Porter. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e).
Foucault, M. (2008). *The birth of biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–79*. Edited by M. Senellart, translated by G. Burchell. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
Foucault, M. (2009). *Security, territory, population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–78*. Edited by M. Senellart, translated by G. Burchell. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
Foucault, M. (2010). *The government of self and others: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1982–83*. Edited by F. Gros, translated by G. Burchell. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
Foucault, M. (2014a). *Lectures on the will to know: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1970–71*. Edited by D. Defert, translated by G. Burchell. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
Foucault, M. (2014b). *On the government of the living: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1979–80*. Edited by M. Senellart, translated by G. Burchell. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
Foucault, M. (2014c). *Wrong-doing, truth-telling: The function of avowal in justice* [1981]. Edited by F. Brion & B. E. Harcourt, translated by S. W. Sawyer. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Foucault, M. (2015). Qu'est-ce que la critique? [1978]. In H.-P. Fruchaud & D. Lorenzini (Eds.), *Qu'est-ce que la critique? suivi de La culture de soi* (pp. 33–70). Paris: Vrin.
Foucault, M. (2019). *Discourse and truth* [1983]. Edited by H.-P. Fruchaud, D. Lorenzini, & N. Luxon. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Foucault, M. (2021a). *Intolerable: Writings from Michel Foucault and the Prisons Information Group (1970–80)*. Edited by K. Thompson & P. Zurn, translated by P. Zurn & E. Beranek. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
Foucault, M. (2021b). *Speaking the truth about oneself: Lectures at Victoria University, Toronto, 1982*. Edited by H.-P. Fruchaud, D. Lorenzini, & D. L. Wyche. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Fraser, N. (1981). Foucault on modern power: Empirical insights and normative confusions. *Praxis International*, *3*, 272–287.
Fricker, M. (2007). *Epistemic injustice: Power and the ethics of knowing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Fricker, M. (2017). Evolving concepts of epistemic injustice. In I. J. Kidd, J. Medina, & G. Pohlhaus, Jr. (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of epistemic injustice* (pp. 53–60). New York: Routledge.
Geuss, R. (1981). *The idea of a critical theory: Habermas and the Frankfurt school*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Habermas, J. (1990). *The philosophical discourse of modernity: Twelve lectures* [1985]. Translated by F. Lawrence. Cambridge: Polity Press.
Hacking, I. (2002). Self-Improvement [1984]. In *Historical ontology* (pp. 115–120). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Hacking, I. (2007). Kinds of people: Moving targets. *Proceedings of the British Academy*, *151*, 285–318.
Halperin, D. M. (n.d.) Foucault's Queer Critique. In M. Sanchez (Ed.), *The Routledge companion to queer literary studies*. New York: Routledge. Forthcoming.
Harcourt, B. E. (2020). *Critique and praxis: A radical critical philosophy of illusions, values, and action*. New York: Columbia University Press.
Haslanger, S. (2012). Ideology, generics, and common ground. In *Resisting reality: Social construction and social critique* (pp. 446–477). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Hoppe, K. (2019). Wahrsprechen und Bezeugen: Politik der Wahrheit nach Michel Foucault und Donna Haraway. In O. Marchart & R. Martinsen (Eds.), *Foucault und das Politische: Transdisziplinäre Impulse für die Politische Theorie der Gegenwart* (pp. 161–183). Wiesbaden: Springer VS.
Hoy, D. C. (2004). *Critical resistance: From poststructuralism to post-critique*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

14680378, 2024, 1, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ejop.12877 by CochraneAustria, Wiley Online Library on [24/11/2024]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

Koopman, C. (2013). *Genealogy as critique: Foucault and the problems of modernity*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
Lorenzini, D. (2015). Performative, passionate, and parrhesiastic utterance: On Cavell, Foucault, and truth as an ethical force. *Critical Inquiry*, *41*(2), 254–268.
Lorenzini, D. (2020). On possibilising genealogy. *Inquiry*. https://doi.org/10.1080/0020174X.2020.1712227
Lorenzini, D. (2023). *The force of truth: Critique, genealogy, and truth-telling in Michel Foucault*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Luxon, N. (2013). *Crisis of authority: Politics, trust, and truth-telling in Freud and Foucault*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Owen, D. (2002). Criticism and captivity: On genealogy and critical theory. *European Journal of Philosophy*, *10*(2), 216–230.
Saar, M. (2007). *Genealogie als Kritik: Geschichte und Theorie des Subjekts nach Nietzsche und Foucault*. Frankfurt am Main: Campus.
Säynäjoki, S., & Tiisala, T. (2023). Revisable a priori as a political problem: Critique of constitution in critical theory. *Journal of Social and Political Philosophy*, *2*(2), 138–157.
Scarpat, G. (1964). *Parrhesia: Storia del termine e delle sue traduzioni in latino*. Brescia: Paideia.
Sluiter, I., & Rosen, R. M. (2004). General introduction. In I. Sluiter & R. M. Rosen (Eds.), *Free speech in classical antiquity* (pp. 1–19). Leiden: Brill.
Taylor, C. (1986). Foucault on freedom and truth. In D. C. Hoy (Ed.), *Foucault: A Critical Reader* (pp. 69–102). Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
Taylor, D. (2020). *Sexual violence and humiliation: A Foucauldian-feminist perspective*. New York: Routledge.
Tiisala, T. (2017). Overcoming "the present limits of the necessary": Foucault's conception of a critique. *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, *55*(S1), 7–24.
Tiisala, T. (2021). Foucault, neoliberalism, and equality. *Critical Inquiry*, *48*(1), 23–44.
Vaccarino Bremner, S. (2020). Anthropology as critique: Foucault, Kant, and the Metacritical tradition. *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, *28*(2), 336–358.
Vogelmann, F. (2012). Foucaults parrhesia: Philosophie als Politik der Wahrheit. In P. Gehring & A. Gelhard (Eds.), *Parrhesia: Foucaults letzte Vorlesungen—Philosophisch, Philologisch, Politisch* (pp. 203–229). Zürich: Diaphanes.
Vogelmann, F. (2017). Critique as a practice of Prefigurative emancipation. *Distinktion: Journal of Social Theory*, *18*(2), 196–214.
Vogelmann, F. (2022). *Die Wirksamkeit des Wissens: Eine Politische Epistemologie*. Berlin: Suhrkamp.
Williams, B. (2002). *Truth and truthfulness: An essay in genealogy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

How to cite this article: Lorenzini, D., & Tiisala, T. (2024). The architectonic of Foucault's critique. *European Journal of Philosophy*, *32*(1), 114–129. https://doi.org/10.1111/ejop.12877

14680378, 2024, 1, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ejop.12877 by CochraneAustria, Wiley Online Library on [24/11/2024]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License