Pushing Humanitarian Thought

From Adam Smith to Michel Foucault to the Volunteer Tourist

Carlos Mauricio Palacios Obregon

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Statement of Originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

Carlos Mauricio Palacios Obregon
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Ethics Approval

This research project was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Arts, Macquarie University, on the 1st of July, 2010.

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Abstract

The thesis explores how, when one poses the humanitarian question as a problem that permeates a whole horizon of coexistence, the question of "intervention" goes from being a matter of urgently doing what is right amidst a critical juncture to a matter of carefully assessing the logistical needs that weigh upon the humanitarian project due to the always potential existence of its skeptics. The critical value of the skeptic, in this sense, is not just liberal, Socratic or relativist. It is not just a dialogical resource to make humanist discourse non-imposing, internally coherent or culturally unbiased. Rather, it is a strategic requirement for a moral sensibility seeking to integrate the entirety of humanity that its solutions work even among skeptics. Humanitarian thought will always need to push itself further to be able to reach and involve the skeptic in a circuit of collaboration.

The thesis considers three important cleavages in the historical development of this larger frame of problematization: that of classical liberalism with an emphasis on Adam Smith, that of twentieth-century anti-humanism with a focus on Michel Foucault, and that of post-social solidarity with a particular interest in the case of volunteer tourism. My argument is that these can all be treated as limit exercises or humanitarian tests that can shed light on a strategically-minded mode of inquiry and, more generally, on the historical possibility of a "skeptical radicalism." The point of this exploration is to elucidate the determinant role that skepticism has played and could continue to play in humanitarian thought – a role that in general is difficult to conceive or simply differentiate from a merely cynical post-radicalism, even for its sympathizers. This interpretation is achieved through, first, a constructive genealogical departure from the very figure that has come to represent the modern roots of the radical and the political, Jean-Jacques Rousseau; second, a sustained humanitarian debate with the account of liberal modernity that has authoritatively

destabilized the foundational role of the humanist problematization, governmentality studies; and, third, a "meta-ethnography" or collaborative empirical reflection on perhaps the most salient manifestation in our days of the de-socialization of progressivist intervention, long-term volunteer travel.

By adopting a large, if empirically informed, theoretical scope, the thesis seeks to offer conclusions that can be insightful for post-neoliberal humanist work. First of all, it reinterprets the biopolitical impetus of modern liberalism as a multi-perspectival rather than aperspectival approach to the population. It is in an effort to anticipate the rebuttal of everyone's inner skeptic that biopolitical solutions resort to "technical opacity," a mode that does make them theoretically sound, but at the same time untestable post-implementation and, hence, prone to derailment and side-effects. On the other hand, the thesis recasts the movement of negative critique that has dominated in neoliberal times as still a work-in-progress. Such a critique's Foucauldian strategy (resigning oneself to perpetual reform, liberal flaws, political dissensus) is incomplete to the extent that it entrusts the responsibility for progress to the disruptive potential of freedom. It lacks a "cultural strategics" to recognize the historical and sociological variability of relationships of freedom and of their value as interventions. Finally, the thesis grants that those contemporary humanitarian practices that are mediated by the market and lack a macro ambition, like fair trade or volunteer tourism, still hold a potential for incremental global change. Yet, while this potential can be conceptualized along the lines of symbiosis, it is bound to constantly risk effacement due to its constitutive "moral exposure." Ultimately, through these insights, the humanitarian affect that has come to permeate the work of intervention in neoliberal life acquires a more layered tonality, revealing itself as a rather fertile ground for political reflection rather than as a fatalist sign of depoliticization and complicity.

Introduction

We have become used to thinking that the humanitarian sentiment is the pinnacle of moral embodiment when, in reality, it has been the most determinant source of skepticism in the modern era. At the heart of the modern humanitarian subject there has long been an inner skeptic, a skeptic who questions the limits of the human capacity to successfully intervene in society. Without the historical appearance of this pragmatic conscience or unshakable "skepticism," the characteristic compulsion for intervention and radicalism that takes over any humanitarian would have never become strategic and gone past the threshold of its simply unrealistic moralism. As everyone has probably had to realize at some point in a frustrating conversation, the skeptical position, on its own, without any underlying impetus, is not very productive. It represents an eternal questioning of anything and everything without any real regard for the refinement of thought or finessing of practice. As Judith Butler once put it, the archetypical skeptic can only persist in taking "pleasure [from] forcing others to witness their contradictions" until he "encounters another like himself" (1997:45). When, on the contrary, it is strict humanitarian thinkers who have adopted or at least considered the skeptical position out of their profound interest in making their thought socially effective, one can begin to speak, as I show in this thesis, of a "skeptical radicalism," of a humanitarianism that is so radical and invested in transforming society that it does anything to circumvent its own moral bias and become sociologically viable.

Foucault captured well the skepticism of a radical humanitarian when he stated, in his renown essay "What is Enlightenment," that while "humanism" is just a Western theme and not even one with a set content, judgment or value:

> we must not conclude that everything that has ever been linked with humanism is to be rejected, but that the humanistic thematic is in itself *too supple*, too diverse, too inconsistent to serve as an axis for reflection (2007a:111, emphasis added).

The moderns have a supple ethos. Nothing certain can be derived from it, Foucault was right. In principle, our humanitarian sense is a strongly felt reaction toward the world at large, not a set formula or agreed form of rationality. What critical political theorists have until this day overlooked, including one as historically minded as Foucault, is that from a very early stage that suppleness was recognized, that it became almost the anti-foundational foundation for the liberal classics that would come to define our social and political thought, from Jean-Jacques Rousseau to Adam Smith, Immanuel Kant and even Émile Durkheim. Liberal modernity was guided, from its very inception, by the suspicion that there would always be humanitarian skeptics, that a species morality, on its own, would never become realistic enough to be able to persuade every individual. For a peculiar sensibility like humanitarianism to have any effect in the actual organization of reality, it was clear, at least for some of the first and most influential theorists of society, that the skeptical mindset had to be taken into consideration. Morality had to morph into strategy.

By this point in our history, we can see that the humanitarian ethos is in fact capable of spreading widely around the globe – even if, as proven by the recent votes and populist surge in countries like England, the U.S., France, Switzerland and

Australia, we also know that exclusionary sentiments have a way of coming back to haunt already globalized societies. Nonetheless, while humanitarian skeptics will without a doubt continue to challenge radical thought to become more strategic, there is now a certain skepticism, springing from this same ethos, that could become equally determinant for the shaping of our future sociality. There has been a considerable, albeit far from total, inversion of critical conditions that in this century pushes us to come to grips, not just with our inner "humanitarian skeptic," but with a brewing and perhaps more deeply sensed "skeptical humanitarian."

A political climate that can be broadly referred to as "neoliberal" has intensified in recent decades the need for social intervention. By fostering societies with a global awareness, detached states, privatized responsibilities, and greater inequalities, neoliberalism has produced formidable conditions for the humanitarian impulse to thrive in – even if it is for the wrong reasons, even if its sole purpose is to save the model of the market at the expense of a nurturing civil society. At any rate, by promoting such a movement of responsibilization among the citizenry of every nation within its reach, neoliberal governance has at the same time managed to invoke the skepticism of the everyday humanitarian, who, with each giving gesture, cannot avoid to notice the pervasive influence that monetary questions are having on the nonprofit or so-called "third" sector. Everywhere, citizens are increasingly overburdened with urgent calls to conscientious expenditure appealing to their inner selves through multiple advertising avenues, from products requesting a top up for a charitable cause, to discounts at university on a "volunteering" package. There is a latent impulse to be compassionate but never emerging without a certain white noise in the background, a sense of distortion fed by the market-like feel of the neoliberal affective transaction.

Globally, radical thought is thus being challenged to integrate into its ideal calculations the potential rebuttal of a second kind of skeptic. It is only that this is not a skeptic that can be believed to mistrust humanitarianism as such, but one that rather becomes skeptical by virtue of her very desire to be humanitarian. Unlike humanitarian skeptics, who are simply pessimistic and rather stubborn, skeptical humanitarians present no opposition. They agree with this ethos. They just reach such a point of disbelief as part of the endless economic circuit ruling today's humanity that they at some point decide to start intervening as it pleases them. The growing appeal of practices like "volunteer tourism" can be explained, I believe, in these terms; not as a demonstration of the reach of neoliberal complicity – as though neoliberals were not humanitarians in their own way – but as the sign of a new kind of skepticism sprouting in neoliberal conditions, one that is promiscuous yet, for the same reason, prolific in its initiative rather than reticent to even act on the problem.

More generally, this thesis is about making the case that a "skeptical radicalism" is realizable, that it can in fact advance in the strict task it hopes to achieve and is not bound to fall into the philosophical and practical stillness that archetypically characterizes the skeptic. A skeptical radicalism is about being prepared to accept that our solutions, no matter how sophisticated or mundane, will always be less than ideal, and that we therefore need to reflect, with the help of the skeptical position, upon the internal limitations of any humanitarian strategy. Moral skepticism has had and could continue to have a great value for the humanitarian project of modernity. Seeing an ethical vision from the standpoint of its frustrated volunteers, pessimistic onlookers or unconvinced outsiders is intrinsically a helpful resource to ground "utopia" and orientate practice. This is how an over-optimistic narrative like humanitarianism historically became a realistic endeavour. And there is an

opportunity now, with the rise of a humanitarian marketplace, to grasp and test firsthand this open-minded disposition that I argue was integral to, if not necessarily "founding of," the biopolitical impulse of modern liberal governmentality.[1] For now, however, before this measured progressivism can be reconstituted from the depths of Western political thought and applied to our own circumstances, I will need to question first, in this introduction, the preconceptions that currently dominate our take (at least in academia) on moral skepticism. Broadly, two opposite critical approaches can be found on the moral skeptic among contemporary – post-Foucault – radicals. Both are narrow in their own way.

Welfarist critique

Among the normative ruins left by the historicist and deconstructive waves of post-structural thought, one can find a steady stream of social critique that suspects any practice of intervention that is not evidently "welfarist." The moral skeptic appears in this critical horizon as the suspect Other who refuses to be "political" enough and bet on the possibility of a universal system with immediate guarantees for the satisfaction of rights. The market-mediated humanitarianisms that have come to populate the domain of the social in recent years are from this perspective inherently polemic. Although there have been important academic efforts to reconcile the growing entanglement of private and public interests with welfarist social movements, calling for the conceptualization of a "human economy" that is "two-sided" (Hart, Laville and Cattani 2010:4-5), an overall suspecting gaze continues to be palpable. Social-economic initiatives that are ambivalently hybrid do not seem to be trustworthy, as is the case with volunteer *tourism, corporate* social responsibility, ethical *consumption*, social *entrepreneurship*, *venture* philanthropy, *brand* aid, social *enterprise,* nonprofit *internships* and community service *learning,* among many others.

Like with any human project, it is no doubt possible to question these initiatives on the basis of the multiple issues that may arise during their formalization and implementation (see e.g. De Neve et al 2008). But what is interesting from the perspective of this research is the particular range of concerns that is likely to emerge when such practices are considered at face value. These are practices that just for their ambivalence incite suspicion. Indeed, when situated in this shady spectrum of the social, international volunteering can become "the new colonialism" (see Palacios 2010); community service, an experience for resume building or "a smokescreen for the ranking of individuals" (Heath 2007:92); social entrepreneurship, a "Trojan" discourse for market colonization (see Kenny 2002:297); community-based tourism, "a neoliberal economic opportunity for the development sector … masked by ethics" (Baptista 2012:648); social responsibility, a matter of "image manipulation" (Stiglitz 2006: 199, cited in Browne 2009:28); corporate donations, a way of "accepting the status quo" (Richey and Ponte 2011:16); alternative market choices, "empty moralising" (Butcher 2003:97); fair trade options, a chance for the consumer's own "absolution" (see Schmelzer 2010:234) – the list is endless.

At the source of their polemical force, there is what economic anthropologist James Carrier (2008) would call a "signalling" problem. Departing from the idea common in economics that the market is a signalling device, Carrier stresses that "the signal sent by the purchaser may express the buyer's preferences, but it does not necessarily communicate them" (p.33). Although he is actually seeking to contribute to the polemic surrounding ethical consumption, his insight elucidates a broader analytical problem. While many of these polemical initiatives may be indeed conceived by its practitioners as modalities of humanitarian intervention, the fact

that they are ambivalent means that the signal or message they are transmitting to what would be in this case the "human" economy is bound to be unclear. To understand the ethics that shaped one's choice, others would "need to know the reason for my choice, which is," as Carrier emphasizes, "not part of the signal" (p.33). In a human economy, the "signals" may be much louder and explicit – companies, to name the most obvious case, are never shy in making their good works known – yet one cannot say that for being vocal these signals are more transparent or convincing. Thus, even if "signalling" is not something that exactly applies beyond a strictly market economy, it does help to explain why so many concerns are bound to arise when there is ambivalence, leaving these initiatives in a permanent state that could be called of "moral exposure."

Ambivalent practices do not foster vociferous outrage or contempt as much as wariness and, for the most part, silent suspicion. They create what Erica Bornstein (2012) has for example called – in a more geographically restrictive, but similar giving context to the one I will be using as my main example, namely, that of youth volunteer travel – a "disquieting gift" effect. They point, in general, to a phenomenon of moral exposure that welfarist social critics have not sufficiently recognized. The commonality among these initiatives is that they do not seem to be good enough at being one thing or another, which is always to say that they are not good enough at being moral. Whether these latent concerns emerge in random everyday conversations, systematic academic arguments, sensationalist news articles or in the head of those very practitioners who are attempting to deal with their supple ethos, the problem is that social-economic practices like "volunteer tourism" do not offer the kind of moral satisfaction that we are used to demand – they are unavoidably "exposed" in this sense.

In principle, I personally agree with authors like Bornstein, who says that the fact that humanitarian experiences like those of a volunteer tourist are ad hoc and disquieting does not render them "regressive" or "invalid" (2012:18, 174). But I also do not think that there is any self-evident reason that could be invoked to justify them in recognizable moral terms. The challenge that their moral exposure creates is precisely that we must come to grips with them in a way that is not essentially moral. On the one hand, judging them from a welfarist standpoint would be to make obstacles out of them, misunderstand their nature as ethical practices that are approaching in their own way complex questions of social justice and coexistence, and blindly discard any potential benefits that may come from their very exposure. On the other, the point is not that what they do can just be taken to instantly be morally acceptable. Even skeptical humanitarians find the exposure of their own practice troubling at times. The task of inquiry in this context is rather to find a way of pondering the value of skeptical interventions that, without being moralistic, is still able to address the concerns of those who suspect them from a distance or feel personally frustrated because of them.

Anti-foundational critique

For those who have fully embraced the anti-humanism of Foucault, the moral skeptic, no matter how jarring or polemic, would have to appear instead as someone who helps to maintain the horizon of "politics" open and prevent a state of discursive or more material domination. This critical perspective would strangely lead us, with its uncompromising humanist restraint, to the plain and untested conclusion that skeptical humanitarians are instantly desirable to the extent that they destabilize established norms and, by doing so, forestall excesses of power.

Foucault apprehended the modern ethos as the radical project of intervention we have inherited from the Enlightenment prompting us to imagine the present "otherwise than it is" (2007a:108). But what he added is that this radicalism could only really translate into a project of "critique." "Modernity" was an attitude that, unfortunately, in spite of its own "desperate eagerness" (p.108), could not go beyond the point of being critical due to the suppleness of its humanism. Foucault's reaction was particularly extreme because, as many other philosophers of his time, he was inspired by the twentieth-century recurring event of totalitarianism or what he called at some point "diseases of power" (1982:209). He was shocked by the fact that "there was a time when … the Stalinists themselves said they were humanists" (2007a:111) and by the possibility, which he himself theorized, that Nazism could just have been "the paroxysmal development" of a "'biopolitics' of the human race" that "is in fact inscribed in the workings of all States" (2003b:243-260). From this historical gloom, Foucault understandably resolved that a radicalism inspired by ideas of "humanity" was to be avoided. Against the grain of his own passionate involvement in a series of political struggles (see Dean and Villadsen 2016:47-60), he felt forced to conclude that humanism can always translate into dangerous political rationalizations and, sadly, "can be used to any end whatever" (1984:374). Only an attitude of vigilance towards all those forms of intervention that seek to enhance us by objectifying the human subject in terms of its healthiness, sanity, sociability, productivity, and the like, could help to disconnect "the growth of capabilities" from "the intensification of power relations" (2007a:116).

Foucault pushes the radicalism of the moderns too close to its skeptical pole. He contracts too swiftly the human scope of solvability, dismissing how the very anti-humanism of his critique-oriented position may just be one of the serious and

sensible answers that, in all its complexity, a humanitarian radicalism awaits. He narrows down to an excessively restrictive point the strategic room of the humanitarian, assuming in a rather sweeping way that, no matter what the conditions of the present are, we can at most commit to a never-ending practice of anti-foundational criticism.[2]

We find ourselves in a strange historical moment where we have a set of social conditions that is no longer marked by political radicalism as much as homogeneized along the lines of ethical and economic competition. The state has opened its bureaucratic gates to a plurality of private interventions, to a whole range of ambivalent voluntarisms. We have to live, for better or for worse, with a model of governance whose aim is to create overly responsible and entrepreneurial subjects whose vital goal and purpose of existence is to continuously scramble for resources whether for social or other life projects. As a by-product of this "ethico-politics," as Nikolas Rose (1999) famously called it, there are countless ways citizens can now incorporate a humanist ethical sensibility into their lives and lifestyles and, noticeably, however they choose to intervene, it currently matters much less whether what they do seems conscious, altruistic, social, political or public enough. They can simply choose to do it through means like shopping (buying, say, fair trade products), tourism (adding a volunteering leg to their trip), investment (directing savings towards a social enterprise), entrepreneurship (applying business skills to a social problem), education (taking a class that includes community service) or training (gaining work experience in a non-profit). Given the hegemonic hold of this humanitarian "suppleness" or social-economic ambiguity on contemporary life – that one should not confuse with the hegemonic hold of neoliberalism per se, which is why I only refer here to the present "neoliberal conditions" – it is no longer

possible to uphold the notion that our modern humanistic tendencies are intrinsically prone to an excessive politicization.[3]

Like a sort of satiric nightmare, neoliberal life is proving to us, by letting us be thoroughly engulfed by the market, that the radicalism lying within the modern humanitarian does not always risk becoming monstrous, that what makes us "radical" and allows us to anticipate within our modern being the possibility of progressive transformation does not have to make us, after all, moralistic or politically rigid. And yet, while the freedom granted by such skeptical practices in these conditions is indeed qualifiable as "critical," in the sense Foucault imagined, it does not satisfy the hopes that post-Foucauldian thinkers might have had about a disruptive anti-humanism that is desubjectifying. The present circumstances are momentous precisely because they offer us the opportunity to question and delve deeper into what it means to be a skeptical radical, beyond any blanket critical guideline like "everything is dangerous" (Foucault 1997:256).

Critique as a problem of "strategics"

One can approach skeptical humanitarian practice, as it is surfacing in neoliberal conditions, without either having to blindly champion its free expression of skepticism for being in some sense critical, or having to outright denounce it for polemically endowing individuals with too much ethical freedom. Instead, one can develop a more nuanced inquiry to assess both the potential value and strategic limitations of certain initiatives that at a certain historical juncture our culture has developed and which may be characterizable, in general, without any normative inflection, as "skeptical practices of freedom." Elaborating on a Foucauldian cue, I will refer to the central problem of this nuanced inquiry as one of "strategics."

Unlike welfarist or anti-foundational critics, who generally assume that they are being strategic by encouraging others to become more political or by encouraging society to play more the game of politics, to start from the problem of strategics is to embrace the open and inquisitive approach of a skeptical radicalism towards the political and assume that the question of humanitarian effectivity cannot be foreclosed but rather always requires a situated inquiry.[4]

In this thesis, I do not advance as much as simply trace the development of this mode of inquiry by following the architecture of a certain transhistorical debate that allows me to extend an already existing and evolving rationale to its natural conclusion. To unfold this critical mode, more than theoretical work is needed, for the very point it ultimately makes is precisely that the content of what could be qualified as a "collaborative intervention" cannot be provided in advance. Knowing what sort of practice will produce transformative effects in society that are conducive to a humanitarian state of coexistence is, in essence, an empirical question. But the reason is not that we will always have to wait until any such practice has been fully implemented and rolled out. If that were the case, there would be little point in even asking the question of strategy. We would be thoroughly blindfolded from the start. The reason will rather have to do with the fact that every time our culture has tried to formulate in the abstract what a collaborative intervention looks like it has run into problems of objectivity. A humanitarian project always wants a universal reach, but the only way of being rigorous with its skeptics is to consider them in all their phenomenological substance and variability.

From this angle of strategics, all one can really take as departure for a contemporary inquiry is the observation that, currently, all those democratic citizens who are in an advantageous position to be humanitarian are enjoying a certain boundlessness or latitude in regards to embodied norms and political discourse. They are being enticed, by any means necessary, into an affective economy. Unlike early humanitarians like, for instance, the subversive encyclopedist Dennis Diderot, who ended up being persecuted by an absolutist regime, the volunteers of neoliberalism have, in this sense, an extreme freedom to intervene. Yet, in spite of an unprecedented accessibility to socially invested practice, the economic disparities in the globe are such that whether they are convinced or are capable of convincing others of the value of a humanitarian ethos is largely beside the point.[5] In the presence of a conspicuously inefficient, practically omnipresent, and ultimately ungovernable market, the heartfelt humanitarian can also be the most skeptic.

Being aware of a constitutive inefficiency while simultaneously overwhelmed by an abundance of solutions creates a distinct kind of skepticism. Contemporary humanitarians may find themselves with an extensive and diverse set of options, but, at times, none of these avenues may seem to be realistic or promising enough to deal with the size and complexity of the problem. The perception of failure, however, should not be assumed to simply lead to paralysis or inaction. It can arguably lead just as much to accentuate their inner skeptic's freedom of intervention. When all existing solutions are considered to be inefficient (in relation to the ultimate goal of fair coexistence): first, the value of any humanitarian choice is relativized – until a given solution proves to be effective, the horizon of intervention remains open, none of the available methods is guaranteed to be better than any other. Second, one's own particular judgment gains validity or at least is granted a

certain weight, since, after all, it is equally placed in the realm of the possible – one's own decision as to what can constitute an "intervention," given the critical circumstances, is as tentative as any other. And finally, third, the power of persuasion that the already existing humanitarian institutions and imaginaries have over the conduct of the ethical subject is loosened – the skeptical practitioner who knows that in neoliberal conditions (i) all humanitarian solutions are relative and (ii) her own understanding of social change is plausible instantly acquires a substantial freedom; namely, a moral liberty or normative flexibility in the practice of intervention.

To capture the unique phenomenology of this skeptical practice of freedom, I gathered the insights of a number of returned volunteer tourists. Their kind of hybrid experience signals well the significant expansion that the practice of liberal intervention has enjoyed during the last few decades. In general, this is a highly mobile, and, if not assuredly selfless, at the very least hands-on young adult, typically the offspring of an Anglo-speaking nation like Australia, who spends from a few weeks to over a year working for a community organization away from home. As unwaged workers that have to justify the value of their activities, as alternative travelers that have to work for their enjoyment, and as foreign volunteers that have to venture out in search of a niche for their emotional investment, volunteer tourists substantially represent the sort of ethical disorientation that is starting to permeate a transnational neoliberal culture.

Their reflections were not "gathered" as much as collaboratively produced through a close mode of engagement I call "meta-ethnography." A meta-ethnography touches on the experiences and perceptions of others through their

own self-directed reflexive writing – in this particular case through sustained blogging in a shared online platform – allowing them to embrace themselves the ethnographic mindset that usually belongs to the researcher doing "fieldwork" of curious and unstructured exploration.[6] But, as part of an inquiry into strategics that wants to be grounded in the skeptical mindset, the reasoning behind such a "meta" collection of "ethnographic" pieces lies much closer to Foucault's rationale than to that of an ethnographer, whose regime of knowledge, at least in anthropology, has come to demonstrate empirical needs of almost unfulfillable proportions (Comaroff and Comaroff 2003; Bunzl 2008; Comaroff 2010; Dean 2015b). One can trace Foucault's empirical needs to an imperative he set for his research the day he started lecturing at the *Collège de France*: "never lose sight of the reference of a concrete example that may serve as a testing ground for the analysis" (1997:7). In the following pages, rather than doing ethnography or starting from the rawness of an "out there" through any field materials, I will be gathering evidence of thought from equally tentative sources, as classical liberals and volunteer tourists are, to make sense of the peculiar present we recognize as our reality.[7]

An architecture of liberalism

The general form this inquiry will describe is an "architecture" or thinly sketched historical trajectory outlining how the most recent developments in liberal intervention fit within the foundational schematics of modernity and relate in some way to the very first strategies of humanitarian thought. In this architecture, skeptical humanitarians will stand side-by-side the liberal modes of intervention we are most familiar with, from the collective mobilization of human rights to the state direction of economic policy to the private management of relief work. And its narrative background will be the account of liberalism provided by governmentality

studies, which has a comparable breadth and, at least in the case of Foucault's courses (2007b; 2008), similarly connects in broad strokes the birth of social intervention with the consolidation of a neoliberal climate.[8]

For a long time, post-Foucauldian theorists across the disciplines have been attempting to affirm a radical search for a consistent future beyond the mere resistance of what is (see e.g. Cruikshank 1999; Rose 1999; Dean 2007; Povinelli 2011; Escobar 2012; Gupta 2012, among countless others). But while Foucault encouraged future researchers to undertake this more constructive search, for instance, by raising the possibility of an analytical level concerned, as I mentioned, with historical practices of intervention or "strategics" (2007a:65), the critical equation of bracketing out any humanist radicalism and exhaustively detecting power effects remains intact to the extent that there has not been sufficient argument to modify it (c.f. Bevir 2002; Behrent 2015). Foucault's genealogies and post-Foucauldian histories of the present in general do prove, in and of themselves, that a critical reaction to one's social conditions does not need to be imposing or morally authoritarian, that one can be skeptically radical. But they just do not allow the analyst to appreciate the coherence of a skeptical radicalism within our modernity. Foucault for example recognized in Kant the modern pioneer of both a transcendental humanism (2002:371) and an anti-foundational criticism (2011:20-21). And yet, he left the implications of such a tension – which he stressed was not paradoxical (2007a:104) – painfully unresolved.

This dissertation does not provide, by any means, an exhaustive historical account of liberalism. My appreciation of post-structural accounts and classical liberal texts stems from an ethnographic interest in grasping the unique character of certain disquieting initiatives rather than from an archivist's fascination with

building a thorough genealogy. It is an investigation that was originally conceived within the extremely flexible academic environment only a research centre can provide, which also explains why, with a background in anthropology, I did not pursue a classic ethnographic method either, moving much closer to a historical sociology. While I comment and elaborate on some of the founding authors of modern liberalism, particularly on Rousseau and Adam Smith, the interpretations that I put forward should not be read as the result of a systematizing effort in intellectual history. A strict selection of classical works was not made in advance, even if I did always apply a minimal principle of reasonable saturation to any hypothesis. Rather, I found myself exploring deeper and deeper the historical roots of a problem-space that I came to recognize as that of a skeptical humanitarianism, but that, without this exploratory attitude, I would not have been able to delineate or even identify. Fortunately, I found some reassurance in the work of others like Carlo Ginzburg, who recognizes in Diderot, as I do in Chapter 1, the origin of a historically innovative form of problematizing the skeptic, one that, while traceable to Hume and, as he argues, even to Aristotle in raw form, is only truly developed by Diderot, "pushed to an extreme" (1994:50). While I will argue that others – most immediately, Rousseau – were able to take even further this original line of questioning, it is definitely Diderot who first decided to push skeptical thought in a humanitarian direction.

Liberalism will only be relevant in its most general sense, as what has become in the last two centuries a revolutionary way of thinking about politics and coexistence based on the freedom of the individual. To act in the name of freedom is to act against arbitrary limits, which makes it difficult – although certainly not impossible – to exclude certain people from the reach of one's claims. At least in principle,

liberalism can be accepted to be historically unique in the way it aspires to universality, having both a global scale of justice or moral inclination towards "an equality of liberty" (Berlin 2002:172) and what could be rather called a "minimalist philosophical anthropology" which assumes that it is in the nature of all human beings to be free (Mehta 1997:63, 79).

Beyond these general remarks, the contours of liberalism are rather uncertain. To this day, even those working from within the discipline of political science debate "if liberalism is distinct enough to be identifiable" (Ryan 2012:23). Some, like Wendy Brown, have been able to make of it an object of focused criticism by simply treating it as an "unsystematic and porous" doctrine (1995:141). Still, given the broader orientation of this research, I prefer to follow the footsteps of those like Pierre Rosanvallon and Foucault himself who have approached it instead as a "problematic field" (Rosanvallon 2006:155) or "characteristic way of posing problems" (Dean 2010a:62) without a doctrinal unity. This seems to be an accurate way of grasping an ethos of intervention that spans so many generations and that has been punctuated by events as diverse as the grand transatlantic revolutions, the birth of political economy and the social sciences, welfare states, and two economic globalizations (see Friedman 2004).

From this perspective, what becomes difficult to ascertain is the "locus of problematization" that is most relevant to liberalism. Both Foucault and Rosanvallon suggest that Adam Smith – or, more precisely, his understanding of the economic subject based on an "invisible hand" – signals that ungraspable threshold or moment of consolidation for liberal thought. For the latter, it is because this economic mechanism is "the sign of a more profound aspiration for a civil society immediate

to itself—one that would be entirely self-regulated" (Rosanvallon 2006:148). While for the former, it is because this is the "type of subject who precisely enabled an art of government to be determined according to the principle of [efficient power and economic rule]" (Foucault 2008:271; see Palacios in press). The emergence of skeptical humanitarian practices, I contend, puts into question this kind of methodological decision, of taking either the market or the state as the locus of liberal problematization. Instead, Rousseau appears as someone who is better able to relate our contemporary concerns with the very beginnings of the modern liberal era. His implicit understanding of the humanitarian self points to an enduring liberal problematization with a more encompassing scope.[9] The argument will not be that there is a certain natural reaction that any human body has when it witnesses an intolerable suffering. Rather, the argument consists in recognizing the humanitarian sensibility as a culturally defined problem-space – not that much different to "the state" or "the market" – around which a whole family of problems acquire a meaningful status.[10]

About the chapters

The elaboration of "strategics" as a tenable mode of inquiry will advance through a series of demonstrations, as it were, establishing how modern social critics have in fact developed and could indeed continue to develop a skeptical radicalism. These demonstrations are presented in the form of five "double chapters" that, with their wider coverage, seek to reward the reader with an ambitious finding at every stage. In addition to the chapters, there are two small sections dedicated to methodological matters, one after this introduction on the innovative character of meta-ethnography and another one on the different possible forms of historicizing liberalism before the last chapter.

Chapter 1 introduces skeptical humanitarianism through a rather philosophical demonstration of "freedom" for the benefit of a Foucauldian critical tradition. Not having the option of freedom and assuming that all that exists are relationships of power makes an inquiry, by default, a fully skeptical one, one that does not treat our modern radicalism as something truly realizable. Once freedom becomes an ontological possibility, the pessimism that has led contemporary social critique to think in terms of a politics of suspicion can be put aside and the political can be more objectively problematized – still in historicist terms – as a rather logistical matter of strategics.

Chapter 2 offers a more historical demonstration, of interest to any social critic, of what could be said is the modern ethical "open-mindedness." It explains the emergence of skeptical humanitarians as the realization of a virtual possibility contained as immanent potential in the thought of the past, suggesting how our early humanitarian thought, far from naive, was skeptically radical. By studying up close some of the most classical texts of liberalism like *Perpetual peace* and *The social contract*, this chapter re-opens our way of thinking to a humanist radicalism that is not stuck in a divide between foundationalism and anti-foundationalism.

Chapter 3 demonstrates, rather empirically this time, that what welfarist critics would call "agency" is still feasible in neoliberal society. There is currently a source of pessimism about our radicalism coming from the idea that any expression of community or humanitarian care ultimately furthers the privatization of welfare and makes us complicit with a regime driven by the market. This chapter shows that it is possible to do something radical with one's skepticism (like one's fear of complicity) or, better, that doing something (like volunteering) skeptically can be radical.

Chapter 4 theoretically demonstrates that an "alternative" is plausible, elaborating upon the Foucauldian historicization of neoliberalism and, in particular, its reading of Adam Smith. More broadly, the chapter pinpoints the reason our modern radicalism has evinced an authoritarian potential by placing biopolitics in a comparative perspective with an alternative way of solving things. But since this alternative way works through skeptical practices, the implication is precisely that we cannot embrace whatever opens up as an "alternative" but that, rather, we need to examine the strategic limitations of both power and freedom.

Chapter 5 finally demonstrates through largely conceptual work that the radical question of "intervention" is posable in the strict terms of an inquiry into strategics without the need of ethics. After having found a series of openings for this critical mode of inquiry in the previous four chapters, this chapter sets itself the task of articulating the strategic logic of skeptical humanitarians in all its imperfection and potentiality. A rather Arendtian depiction of relations of freedom and Deleuzian conceptualization of symbiosis set the stage for the Conclusion to reflect upon the prospects of a skeptical radicalism in a post-neoliberal horizon along the lines of "symbio-politics."

Notes on Meta-ethnography

Volunteer tourism is not usually treated by researchers with the kind of broad scope I adopt here, mostly because, inside tourism studies, their intention has been to open up a new academic niche (e.g. Wearing 2001) while, outside of these, the aim has been to differentiate it from more virtuous forms of volunteering (e.g. McGloin and Georgeou 2016). One exception can be found in the work of Nancy McGehee, who defines volunteer tourism as "utilizing discretionary time and income to travel out of the sphere of regular activity to assist others in need" (McGehee and Santos 2005: 760 cited in McGehee 2012:84). Within this seemingly straightforward definition, I believe one can fit a whole array of volunteer initiatives with essentially similar preoccupations and moral exposure.

Whether Australian citizens or residents, since my research was conducted from Sydney, what made the volunteer tourists I worked with methodologically valuable is the very ambiguity and flexibility that surrounds their humanitarian practice. They may have come from a wide range of perspectives – there were those who hadn't thought much about the quandaries of social intervention and had simply been in desperate need of a gap year or interesting vacation, as well as those who were extremely critical and politicized and one day had decided to dedicate a portion of their life to help a particular cause and nurture their humanity. The kinds of projects they joined, domestically and abroad, may have also differed

considerably – from collective programs organized and micromanaged by a university, to individual ventures discovered randomly during trips and wanderings, and from fully paid plans purchased through a tour operator, to slightly remunerated placements sponsored by government aid bodies. But, at any rate, these were all humanitarians that struggled with the meaningfulness of their practice, for, in a more or less obvious way, they had not just been volunteering. They had also been taking advantage of a globally interconnected and uneven society – for their own travels, consumption, personal or professional development – and they knew that what they had been doing could very well have no lasting impact, yet the experience still seemed attractive and rewarding enough on its own to seem justifiable.

It is the depth of those ambiguous field experiences what makes them a privileged departure for the exploration of an emerging, seemingly suspect, and definitely polemic ethos distinctive of neoliberal times. Their close and lengthy engagement with a number of blurry and treacherous ethical lines means that they had the experiential knowledge as much as the personal predisposition needed to take a substantial amount of time to think and blog about the fine points of their challenging position. Thanks to this methodological reason, and not any other, they could serve as an illuminating example of a broader, heterogeneous way of solving things. Their ideas, memories and commentaries are not supposed to *demonstrate* how this skeptical humanitarianism works in every case. Their role can only be to *illustrate* a way of solving things that does not produce a defined cultural community, regime of practice, or social personae.[11]

To study these experiences, I opted for a research design with a home base or "meta-site" where ex-volunteers like these ones, with extremely singular trajectories, could meet for an open dialogue. Unlike a "field site" where volunteers would be bound by institutional ties and communal obligations, a "meta" site is achieved through an artificial aggregation of perspectives, removing volunteer tourists from the immediacy of their placements while placing them in a public forum with enough room to elaborate on their own impressions. In a number of disciplines, including anthropology, the interest in volunteer tourists has been growing and the similarity with ethnographers has not escaped their attention. But the use of the analogy has usually been restricted to pedagogic purposes, to increase reflexivity of some kind (see e.g. Malkki 2015:12; Koleth 2014:273; Beck 2001; Himley 2004; Graburn 2002:32; Wearing and Grabowski 2011:200; Vrasti 2013:18; Keene and Colligan 2004:6; Singh 2005; Sanday and Jannowitz 2004:66). Conversely, a meta-ethnography considers how, methodologically, departing from the possibility of ethnographer-like subjects poses a radical demand. Lacking a cohesive social context of its own, it is a method that, as suggested in the Introduction, can only acquire meaningfulness in the context of a larger historical architecture. The researcher, in this case, can no longer assume that there is a culture or cohort just waiting to be observed as a coherent object of study.

As already two decades ago Ulf Hannerz brought to the attention of qualitative social researchers, the consequence of transnational connections becoming an important part of the process of self-formation was that the classic option of participant-observation provided by a "field site" could now simply be implausible at times, since "one human being may turn out to construct a cultural repertoire which in its entirety is like nobody else's" (1996:37-38). Anthropologists, in

particular, have been trying to redefine the research subject along these lines. They have been suggesting ways of including in their ethnographies the unique observational standpoint that individuals can have as a result of their mobility within a globalized cultural landscape. Research participants have been reconceptualized, for example, as "second-order observers" instead of solely "first-order observers" (Rabinow 2008:66), as "coproducers of theory" rather than just "research assistants" (Rappaport 2008:86), and even as "para-ethnographers" with their own audiences and cultural analyses beyond simple "research collaborators" (Holmes and Marcus 2008:85-86). But, in spite of these increasingly radical moves, none of their suggestions has taken Hannerz's insight seriously enough. The question that is brought into relief by a subject like the volunteer tourist is whether a cultural immersion is the best method to approach a mode of experience that itself depends on deep and unrepeatable encounters with difference in varying geographic locations and through unpredictable scenarios.

Instead of still attempting to capture this global experience ethnographically, say, as a deterritorialized bundle of cultural reproduction such as an "ethnoscape" (Appadurai 1996) or a "place-making project" (Tsing 2000), the empirical methodology adopted in this research is based on the idea that volunteer tourism practices cannot be approached without the mediation of the practitioner. As a methodology, "meta-ethnography" leads to take the analogy with ethnographic fieldwork to what could be said is its natural conclusion. In order to explore and understand the experience of ethnographers, one would not want to observe them while they are themselves observing. Doing so might have advantages for the learning and teaching of the craft (Burawoy 1991, ch. 14), but it would miss most of the internal process of reflection that the ethnographer has to go through before she

herself is able to give shape and meaning to her own observations. It would not be such a good idea to simply observe them when they are back at home either, since very little of their field experience would be manifested or expressed through verbal means. As a long time ago anthropologists realized, most of what an ethnographer does is write (see Geertz 1973; Clifford and Marcus 1986). And, therefore, it is only sensible that when the experiences of our research subjects acquire many of the characteristics of fieldwork, becoming "unobservable" themselves, we should make them write as well (c.f. Graburn 2002).

The shift of perspective consists, in this case, of no longer seeing them as "ethnographic participants" who belong to a given, already formed "culture" or "society," but rather as "participant-ethnographers" who have a meaningful perception of their own thanks to their particular experiences in "the field." Such a perception, following this line of thought, would be in need of systematic exploration. Raw insights, of the kind an ethnographer cultivates, would be waiting to be inspected, articulated, and developed. While writing and reflexivity already tend to be part of their intercultural journeys – through private journaling, social media, institutional reporting – I intensified this component of the volunteer experience through a collaborative project of public blogging or "group weblog," as it has sometimes been called (e.g. Downey and Gray 2012). The concept of online blogging is such – a small piece of original material for media consumption that attracts busy readers with a captivating title – that its contributors are prompted to advance a concise point and organize their many inklings and stories around a specific problem. It is an increasingly familiar tool that offers a useful platform to simulate the post-fieldwork transition of academic ethnographers, motivating

focused writing by leading the individual to direct her attention to the generation of a public text.[12]

While based on autonomous writing about one's intimate perceptions, meta-ethnography is not a method that resembles the confessional techniques of "hermeneutics" that Foucault criticized and described as characteristic of modern introspection, in which the subject treats itself as suspect in relation to a universal – religious, legal, scientific – source of truth (see e.g. Foucault 2014). The point of writing "like an ethnographer," inspired by a certain field experience, is not to produce a scrupulous examination of the self looking for, say, one's breaches of intercultural conduct in relation to stereotyping attitudes like elitism, classism, ethnocentrism or racism. The point is much more related to the kind of self-writing that Foucault identified in Antiquity, that which leads to a self-constitution or mastery of the self (see Taylor 2009:197-99). A thoroughly open-ended act of blogging in a collaborative environment is suited for a work of crafting thoughts in line with one's own careful determination of "truth," if you will (see Arendt 2005:19) – which is in fact, contemporary anthropologists would say, how ethnographers have always made sense of their fieldwork (see Wagner 1981).[13]

To a great extent, then, meta-ethnography removes the suspicious outlook towards the humanitarian sense of young travelers and volunteers that is often found among researchers (see e.g. Simpson 2004; Raymond and Hall 2008; Vrasti 2013; McGloin and Georgeou 2016). While the effectivity of their mode of intervention is taken here to be an open question, the rather patronizing premise that the analyst knows best is at the very least bracketed. Their perception of the world and understanding of social justice are not subjected to any "elicitation methods"

(Boellstorff 2008:68). The gaze of the judgmental pedagogue awaiting to hear an unacceptable answer is replaced by the classic openness of the ethnographic gaze.

An online blog, like a meta-ethnography, could proceed in many different ways. In this case, to potentialize the ethnographic process of the volunteer tourist, the recruitment and induction of the bloggers were as flexible and open-ended as possible so as to facilitate a seamless appropriation of the participant-ethnographer role. An open call was made to returned volunteers in Sydney who simply felt the need to "make sense of their experience," with 20 participants committing to the initiative in total. And during the four-month project, very few pointers were given, beyond a general introductory presentation about the practice of ethnography and a few suggestive questions for those who did not know where to start. In general, there was no thematic cohesion whatsoever, and the shared goal was just to allow their own interests, concerns, observations, and realizations to drive their writing.

The result of this sampling method was a diverse group with volunteer experiences in a variety of institutional settings, from short-term tour packages to medium-term community-service-learning programs to long-term NGO internships to even sustained and indefinite backpacking. The average length of volunteering in the group was 4 months, with placements ranging from 18 months to 4 weeks – although a few of them had done this more than once. Most of them had worked in Latin American or South Asian countries, a few in a Pacific Island, and one in South Africa. Only 6 of them were men, only 4 of the participants were above 25 years of age, and, at the time of the research, the majority was finishing an undergraduate degree.

Continuing with the ethnographic analogy, I must finally stress another aspect in which the project had an important collaborative dimension. Ethnographers not only write – they do not make sense of their experience in complete isolation. They also receive at least occasional feedback from their peers, who may well have radically different beliefs and theories about the world, yet are in an advantageous position to think about and feed back into one another's conclusions, having gone themselves through a similar process of shock, engagement, and introspection. An online blog was able to act as a virtual site of encounter and productive dialogue, permitting all the participants (including 3 of them that were not based in Sydney) to contribute to a continuing thread of thoughts, while commenting on each other's entries through the "comments" section that follows each post or through hyperlinks in their own posts. It was, again, a suitable structure to encourage a reflexive exercise that, without appearing disconnected, still could remain autonomous.

In the end, the blog produced overall 122 posts and 137 comments, the latter mostly coming from within the group, although there were also a few from other readers, of which there was a significant amount as one can sense from the over 15,000 external views the blog received during its short lifespan. While most of the participants had the chance to interact with each other through a Facebook group and a few organized meetings, the blog was the place that really allowed them to give each other feedback and become witness to the personal insights of one another. To bring the project to a conclusion, everyone received a hard copy of a compilation that we called and prepared as their "final reflections." All the posts and materials produced by the project can still be accessed in the following web address: https://ethnosense.wordpress.com.

Towards the end of the project, I did perform a small number of follow-up interviews with some of the participants, but the format was largely unstructured and open-ended. The idea was to explore more deeply some of the insights they had expressed through their blogging. In general, however, I found that once they had put their thoughts into writing, the structure they had given to their posts guided closely what they had to say about their experiences. In a way, everything they really needed to communicate had gone into the composition of those posts, and, beyond that, there was not much more left to say.

Chapter 1 | AFTER AN OLD POLITICS OF SUSPICION:

Pushing social thought even beyond Foucault

A longstanding, yet not entirely recognized assumption that has permeated humanitarian thought has been the idea that social justice will be achieved when everyone is convinced that being humanitarian is the right thing to do. This assumption is at least particular in that its moral philosophy has to be erected upon an attitude of suspicion. It cannot work, that is, without turning the skeptical citizen into a rather villainous figure. One of the first to explore this way of thinking was Denis Diderot (1992[1755]), who as co-editor of the pioneering *Encyclopédie* was, in many ways, at the epicenter of the revolutionary transition that led to a liberal modernity. Any free citizen who disregards the humanitarian ethos, he suggested in one of his most influential entries, is "either insane or morally evil by design" (p.19).

Diderot's entry was not on "humanitarianism" as such – the idea was in its infancy at the time (see e.g. Calhoun 2010). It was on the much more dominant moral concept of the day, "Natural right." Writing in the mid-eighteenth century in the context of a still monarchic France, Diderot even starts by justifying himself, feeling that he needs to explain why it is important to dedicate an entry to "an expression used so frequently that there is scarcely anyone who is not convinced in his own mind that he knows just what it means" (1992:17). The extremely critical claim he advances, considering his immediate context, is that "humanity" should be accepted

by any "reasonable man" as the natural principle to determine the question of "what is right?" And to convince his readers that a humanitarian justice is naturally right, he invokes the skeptical figure – an "impassioned man" who, although wishing "to be just and by his justice to ward off the ascription of 'evil,'" still has no problem with acting on his mundane passions, suspecting that everyone in the end is free to do the same. "Who, among you, on the verge of death", the skeptical interlocutor is imagined to object, "would not buy back his life at the expense of the majority of the human race, if he could be sure to do so with impunity and in secret?"[14] The reasoning Diderot offers in turn, whether relevant enough and practicable or not, is that, indeed, "private wills are suspect … But the general will [of mankind] is always good" (pp.17-20).

This kind of skeptic who rejects, disregards or at the very least doubts the value of using a humanitarian sense on a regular basis has dominated much of the political imagination of Western culture, if through much less dramatic, though equally evocative figures such as the "passive" or "apathetic" citizen. But, now, we find that the contemporary social conditions are producing a certain historical bifurcation, that an inverted kind of interlocutor has become equally relevant, namely, the *skeptical humanitarian*. Although Diderot's conservative skeptic continues to capture most of the critical imagination, our world has not remained the same and at least at times calls for a mode of "positive critique" (see Blencowe 2012). From online giving marketplaces to customizable placements in volunteer work, a popular humanitarian industry has appeared – with the push of post-welfarist governments, of course – making it hard to conceive of voluntary engagement as something other than a highly marketable product. It would be redundant to try to convince the contemporary skeptic that a cosmopolitan conscience is "natural" or "right" in the

way Diderot once did. It is precisely as an "ethos" that humanitarianism has come to be integrated into globalized consciences, that is, as a certain type of sensibility and implicit understanding of justice which is self-evident, self-justified. What this emerging skeptical figure problematizes is not whether it is worth it to contribute and aspire to a humanitarian future. Rather, its defining problem is whether there actually is a strategy of intervention that can be trusted to bring that ethos into practice.

Before the intense globalization that had been heralded by neoliberal discourse had yet taken place in the 1990s, there were those like Richard Rorty who envisioned the possibility of a human rights culture being sustained by a "liberal ironist." This pragmatic individual, he imagined, would be able to act in practice as a humanitarian while still remaining fully aware of the "contingency of his or her own most central beliefs and desires" (1989:xv). Three decades later, such a post-foundational "liberal utopia" (p.xv), as Rorty himself characterized it, has become in a way more tenable, but, in another, much more problematic. An author like Lilie Chouliaraki (2013) can today be critical of our contemporary humanitarianism as a whole for encouraging, precisely, what she calls an "ironic spectator." Online appeals, celebrity campaigns and the growing "commercialized genres" of humanitarianism, oriented to "the NGO brand," she states, are reducing engagement to "the private choice of a Western consumer" and ultimately replacing "an ethos of long-term commitment with a closer-to-life altruism of the everyday," that is, with a "self-indulgent narcissism" (pp.195, 5, 194, 180, 73). The humanitarian marketplace promoted by neoliberalism has, in other words, fostered an ironic disposition among humanitarians who may well be ready to face the bare suppleness of their ethos, but who, for that same reason, are seen to offend the humanist sensibility of less

skeptical others. In the present circumstances, many of those who could be said to belong to a "human rights culture" are ready to question the strategic value of even the most self-conscious giving practice.

The skepticism I seek to explore among contemporary humanitarians is, therefore, still quite polemic. But it is not, to the peace of mind of Diderot, that there are some of them who are in reality conservative, anti-humanitarian. The contemporary skeptic is simply a subject that is able to take some liberties with the technical side of its own ethos. It operates under conditions that are propitious for a personalized and rather abstruse humanitarian experience.[15] Given its openness in relation to existing humanitarian reasonings and expectations, this cannot be a skeptical subject with predictable objections, like Diderot's. What characterizes this new interlocutor, instead, are its unexpected choices, cynical lapses, ambivalent contributions, and what one could call its "creative" or morally exposed judgment.

Part I. The Skeptical Practice of Freedom

"Volunteer tourism" is a particularly ambivalent hybrid and, for that same reason, an intensely debated initiative in today's public sphere. But neither this nor any other expression of what we have called "moral exposure" will define in this research a field of moral concerns as such. While a condition of exposure can be said to lead to such concerns, the role this concept plays here is not normative but purely analytic. Moral exposure will be treated as a functional property of these interventions, as their very "principle of operativity," as I elaborate in Chapter 4. In this chapter, the challenge will rather be to demonstrate that a phenomenon of moral exposure does not need to be seen as a lack of harmony in motives or moral sentiments among people, as Adam Smith would have it. For him, the judgment of conduct "must always bear some secret reference … to what, we imagine, ought to be the judgment of others" (2004:128-29). By contrast, moral exposure can be seen as a symptom of what Arendt might have wanted to call "creative judgment," for that is the kind of judgment that a skeptical scenario demands. Unlike prejudice or "prejudgment," she said, judgment is needed "when we are confronted with something … for which there are no standards at our disposal" (2005:102). To understand this exposed mode of ethical experience and grasp it in all its ontological positivity, we must orient ourselves towards a skeptical scenario and define the principles that would make our inquiry a strategic rather than moral one.[16]

Beyond theoretical reasons, I chose the "the skeptical practice of freedom" as the guiding concept for this inquiry in an attempt to evoke the strangely courageous gestures of all of those who, in the absence of persuasive visions of human collaboration, still decide to do something with their neoliberal freedom and act,

even if it is in a minimal, convenient and almost effortless way, on their humanitarian sense. This peculiar kind of courage, however, cannot be automatically praised, but this is a discussion that will have to wait until the last chapter. What is important to establish from the beginning is the way this notion, precisely, contains within itself the very transition from *ethics* to *strategics*, from an analytical emphasis on "what is right (or constitutes the decidedly right conduct)?" to one on "what is intervention (or constitutes an effective intervention practice)?" – "intervention" in the sense of that which creates a meaningful or qualitative difference and not simply of that which interrupts, disrupts, or gets in the middle of something. To elaborate on this composite notion, I would like to start by focusing in this first part of the chapter on four historical figures that have an import in the liberal transition it represents and consolidates: Thomas Hobbes (even when the idea of freedom as a practice would have made little sense to him), Diderot and Rousseau (in spite of their rather suspecting attitude towards a skeptical freedom) and especially Foucault (who usually dismissed the possibility of an absolutely skeptical practice).[17]

Based on a number of insights obtained from this first broad sketch of our modern humanitarian architecture, the second part then reflects on the conditions of possibility for a "strategic" analysis, offering a way of guiding our modern radicalism towards a thoughtful consideration of the skeptical orientation. This reflection ends with a summary note on what could be called "post-Foucauldian humanitarian inquiry."

1.i.a. From "ethics" to "strategics"

Before touching on any particular thinker, it is important to briefly address the question of why the uncoupling of "ethics" from "strategics" can be theoretically arranged in the form of a historical architecture by adopting the genealogical departure of governmentality studies. Foucault finds the origins of governmentality precisely at a moment in history that was being uniquely defined by "ethics." He speaks of the crisis of conscience and exacerbation of "needs of conduct" (2007b:231) that distinctly appeared during the sixteenth century, following a series of religious struggles that would eventually lead to the Reformation and Counter-reformation. This is an event Foucault situates, somewhat paradoxically, at least from the lens of his own anti-humanism, at the root of both the modern critical attitude (Foucault 2007a:69) and the biopolitical nation-state (2007b:355).

Broadly speaking, the direction of conduct, whether that of oneself or others, would have remained unproblematic for a long time in the Middle Ages; moral selfhood being unquestionably constituted in the terms established by the Christian church. One cannot say that, during that time, experience would have been organized around the problem of "ethics," since, precisely, what was ethical and what was not, or at least the kind of authority one needed to resort to in order to make out of oneself an ethical being, was firmly known. Rather, ethics became an object of thought the moment the direction of children, households, citizens, souls and every other domain of life that used to be thoroughly codified by a Christian pastorate was no longer self-evident. The sixteenth century may not have invented "ethics" as a problem. Foucault in fact would go on to map its more elaborate origins in Antiquity and, as one would expect, much of this renaissant ethical thinking was

organized through ancient themes like Stoicism (see Dean 2010a:102-06). Still, the resurgence and explosion of ethics as a distinct way of problematizing experience would have come to mark this era, breaking forth in a culture that had long been absorbed by a theocentric game of truth and pastoral reading of life.

The rather simple definition of ethics that Foucault would come to provide during his late studies on Ancient Greece becomes particularly meaningful in this light. Ethics can be said to be in general, from the viewpoint of a historicized ontology, "the considered [*réfléchie*] practice of freedom" (1997:xxv, translated by Rabinow). The reason is not that one can assume that those who do not reflect enough on their actions are prone to be "unethical" – as one could infer, for example, from following an Arendtian reading of Socratic ethics, which leads to recognize the banality behind evil, its mere thoughtlessness (see e.g. Arendt 2003). Rather, this definition is graspable when one recognizes that it is possible to live in a society in which one's freedom does not need to be problematized – as the case of the Christian pastorate so patently demonstrates, with its demand of "pure obedience" and generalized subordination of conscience (Foucault 2007b:174-183). Foucault's conception of ethics does not seem to refer us to the dangers that stem from a lack of thought, but to the consideration that thinking is not always directed at the practice of freedom (see Foucault 1997:283-86; 2014:145-48). As in the case of Christianity, one's practice of freedom may well be oriented at something, like salvation, whose "actual production … eludes one's grasp; it is entirely in God's hands" (Foucault 2007b:173).

There is a term that Foucault uses during his actual genealogy of modern liberalism which is perhaps more historically adequate to apprehend what I mean by

"ethics." He only brings it up in the context of the eighteenth century, when individuals come to be understood as "subjects of interest" who, having an "absolutely subjective will" (2008:273), cannot be governed by allusion to a transcendental sovereignty, truth, right or contract and, hence, he states, create the problem of how to make them "governmentable" (2008:294-95). One could extend the scope of the latter term to encompass the larger ethical problematization that appears since the sixteenth century, when, according to Albert Hirschman (1997), it was one's passions rather than one's interests that first appeared troubling. Foucault did not specify the kind of subject that was taking shape during the crisis of the Christian pastorate (such as a "passionate subject"). He rather traced the kinds of questions that were being articulated around this time on "how to be governed" (2007b:89) and "how not to be governed *like that*" (2007a:44, original emphasis). But if there were so many needs of conduct, one could say, it is because, minimally, the conception of what could be called in general terms a "skeptical subject" surfaced in the horizon of Western thought – particularly through a demonization of Hobbes (see e.g. Thielemann 1952) – a conception that, only by being there, lodged in the immediacy of its imaginary, made everyone in this culture feel susceptible to its skepticism. The conduct of conduct, whether for the head of a family, an owner of land, a spiritual counsellor or the prince of a territory, would have appeared as a question of "ethics" to the extent that there was an aspiration to become "governmentable" again – indubitably guidable towards the right conduct, in spite of one's own interests and passions.

Alongside this ethical questioning, however, emerges another concern, one to which Foucault seems to dedicate all of his attention, without ever treating it, in the end, as an autonomous problem. The "conduct of conducts" (Foucault 2000:341)

contains not only the problem of how to be ethical in the absence of self-evident moral principles – of spiritual "governmentability" – but also that of how to be strategic in order to achieve that desirable conduct in oneself and others. For Foucault there is no discontinuity between these problems, even though he erects his genealogy of state governmentality upon a 1555 text where Guillaume de La Perrière states that: "government is the right disposition of things arranged so as to lead to a suitable end" (2007b:96). In these few words, as Foucault meticulously reveals, La Perrière grasps with clarity the problem of intervention as a strategic challenge, being concerned not with the immediate programmed desire for a certain technology – or "with imposing a law on men" – but with the way that technology must be mindful – "employing tactics rather than laws" – of how its effects take on a different shape – or demand "arranging things" – in accordance to the specific nature of its targeted terrain of application – for not every end is going to be "suitable" (p.99). Nevertheless, in spite of such a strategic foundation, it is this same notion of government that Foucault departs from to eventually define the power relation in pastoral terms as the "conduct" of "conduct" (p.193).

For our purposes here, "the conduct of conduct" is an analytically unhelpful composite. For there is a strategic problematic that is definable on its own, in terms of its concern with the sociological needs posed by the existence of the skeptic, which one can trace, independently, back to the same original moment when the ethical concern with conduct was first heightened in our culture. Exploring the question of strategy at a distance of the question of power is not entirely foreign to Foucault's work. As Paul Rabinow has commented, starting from the mid-1970s, he progressively moved from a view of strategy centered on a frame of power relations to strategy seen as a "frame of systematicity" (2003:52-54). At any rate, only through

the proposed disentanglement from "ethics" can the idea of "strategics" that Foucault himself proposed at a late stage eventually find a resolution in this inquiry (see Chapter 5).

1.i.b. An increasingly strategic moralism

The natural skeptic. Long before Diderot, Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1998[1651]) had already placed the problem of moral skepticism at the heart of the debate on justice and coexistence. In Hobbes's scheme, individuals in a "state of nature" are hypothesized to be in perpetual war with one another because of their freedom. But war is not something that they desire. Hobbes does not imagine a kind of rebellious skeptic that confronts the powerful by assuming that all collective arrangements of sovereignty are based on the victory and privilege of some over others, as Foucault (2003b) in some way will come to embrace. While all of such individuals aspire to peace, Hobbes stresses, they are bound to remain impervious to morals until the day a covenant is made, laws are drafted and sanctions are truly believed to be enforceable (1998:87). For, in his view, when everyone is free, what is most urgent to each individual is the goal of self-preservation – it is "a condition of war of every one against every one" (p.86). A discourse structured under the premise of a "state of nature" is thus what allows him to present a world apparently ruled by skeptical practices of freedom.

On closer inspection, however, what the Hobbesian individual does cannot be said to be a "skeptical practice" as such. To be skeptical, one would have to doubt some of the solutions or norms of coexistence that already exist in a society, but Hobbes's point is more that all norms, regardless of what one thinks about them,

simply lose validity in the absence of a "Leviathan" or powerful body politic – "the desires, and other passions, are in themselves no sin. No more are the actions, that proceed from those passions, till they know a law that forbids them" (p.85). A dangerous or individualistic passion cannot possibly contravene a normative order if that order has not yet materialized. In such an anarchic state, Hobbes even finds that harming others is an actual "right" granted by nature (p.87).

Such an understanding of natural right follows from a particular conception of freedom, one that is rather instinctive and linear, in which: "of the voluntary acts of every man, the object is some *good to himself*" (p.88, original emphasis). Thus, while he speaks of a liberal condition in which "every one is governed by his own reason" (p.86), it is a freedom that turns out to be more a matter of passion than reason, inevitably resulting in a wild condition of competition and war. The deliberative component of freedom is in the end as simple as that of "irrational, and inanimate creatures" (p.139), to the point that he can affirm that "beasts also deliberate" (p.40). Liberty is therefore not "skeptical" in this case. It is not even necessary to call it a "practice," for it encompasses everything that can in fact be practiced. Liberty is simply "the absence of external impediments" (p.86) and, as such, it has no ethical variations. It is amoral, not immoral – how it is actually practiced has no importance for Hobbes. Its very existence is what he finds problematic.

If anything, it is Hobbes himself, and not the free animal he concocts, who approaches the problem of coexistence from an ethically skeptical angle. The "impassioned man," as Diderot later calls him, may seem to be skeptical of morals, but it is not by choice and hence not really a condition of skepticism. By nature, he is just not designed to respond to morality. Only force or the threat thereof can curtail

its impulses. What is found in Hobbes, then, is a view of human nature achieved from a skeptical position, and, by extension, a first solid step in the displacement from a strictly moral mode of inquiry. Hobbes's intention was to reaffirm the need of binding norms but, to do so, he resorted to a skeptical analysis in which morality had no effectivity in itself. He sought to justify the existence of sovereign laws and strong states from a strategic point of view, and, by doing so, he managed to capture a skeptical perception that would become defining of Western political thought. As Hirschman puts it, "a feeling arose in the Renaissance and became firm conviction during the seventeenth century that moralizing philosophy and religious precept could no longer be trusted with restraining the destructive passions of men" (1997:14-15). The civil and religious wars that at least since the sixteenth century had been provoking a crisis and rearrangement of authority between states, feudal lords, sovereigns and the church found, in this sense, a point of condensation in Hobbes.

The ethical skeptic. A century later, Diderot would imagine a free individual who, instead of being naturally skeptical, is naturally ethical; yet that, by virtue of its ethical capacities, could now be considered to be truly skeptical on occasion – if not of all morals, at least in regards to the ethical position adopted by certain others who find a more "reasonable" morality.

Whereas for Hobbes, liberty simply means not having external impediments to one's desires, for Diderot it necessarily connotes engaging in an ethically invested practice. As he writes at the beginning of his influential encyclopaedic entry, it is because we have a free will that there can be "calculated good" and "calculated evil." Without it, "there could be no moral good or evil, no justice or injustice" (1992:18). Hobbes had deduced the exact opposite from a state of liberty: "To this

war of every man against every man, this also is consequent; that nothing can be unjust," for, "where no law, no injustice" (Hobbes 1998:85). But for Diderot ethical deliberation becomes rather the natural result of having a free will. Trying to mark this contrast, he for example stresses the importance of establishing "firmly in our minds the reality not merely of free will but of liberty" (p.18), implying that voluntary acts are intrinsically susceptible to moral problematization.

Diderot structures his article, as discussed earlier, upon an imaginary dialogue with what he calls in a rather Hobbesian fashion a "violent interlocutor" (p.19) or an "impassioned man" (p.18). But the very decision of starting such a dialogue is telling of the critical modification Diderot incorporates into the understanding of a skeptical practitioner of freedom (see Thielemann 1952). Before proceeding with the dialogue, he feels the need to warn that "in all things we must exercise our reason, because man is not just an animal but an animal which thinks" (p.19). And, in congruence with this warning, he finds that the intellectual challenge should be to at least try to convince the skeptic "before smothering him" (p.19). Diderot is then far from skeptical in the sense Hobbes himself had to be to deploy a less moralistic mode of inquiry. His hyper-rationalist project actually consists in demonstrating, as though by mathematical calculation, what it is to be a moral person – a project he tries to fulfil, as we saw, by invoking an incontestable principle of "humanity."

In reality, what Diderot does is in fact extend the skepticism Hobbes only applied to the problem of coexistence to the problem of morality in general. For, while the Diderotian skeptic may exhibit a misguided judgment, he or she is still accepted to be an ethical being who requires a justification from those who find themselves in the higher moral ground. Thus, rather than a simple question of "what is ethical,"

the problem at stake is "what is more ethical," which implies that there must be an external criterion to compare the moral rationales of Diderot and the skeptic. A criterion like "the general will of mankind" is not useful to Diderot because it is more ethical – since that is what the criterion itself is trying to prove – but, we would have to say, because it is more "strategic" for a fair coexistence.

The reasonable skeptic. Rousseau in a way complements Diderot but takes things much further – which is probably why they were close friends for a while and then begun to clash with one another. Rousseau would reinforce Diderot's claim that the free individual is not skeptical by nature, yet, while deepening the claim that we all essentially are ethical beings, he goes on to add that there is no "natural right" or self-evident criterion that can prove in advance which effectively is the most moral position.

Diderot, as a good representative of the Enlightenment, suggested that legal and moral questions were tied to the rational nature of human beings. To this claim, however, Hobbes had implicitly replied when he wrote that "justice, and injustice are none of the faculties neither of the body, nor mind. If they were, they might be in a man that were alone in the world" (Hobbes 1998:85). Rousseau, on the other hand, adopting a rhetorical style closer to Hobbes, particularly in his *Discourse on inequality* (1923[1755]), would come to consider this polemic and address it in his own way: "men in a state of nature, having no moral relations or determinate obligations one with another, could not be either good or bad, virtuous or vicious" (p.195). Although Rousseau seems here to accept that individuals in a "state of nature" have no sense of morality, the justification behind it actually defies Hobbes. For it is not due to freedom or the lack of restrictions and laws that morality is absent. Rousseau's point

is rather that human beings only have to form the most basic of social relations, like needing or helping each other, for morality to have a bearing on their actions (pp.213-15). Thus, although thinking alone does not make an individual susceptible to "ethics" or "justice" – pace Diderot – neither can freedom (in the sense of the nonexistence of laws) be said to make an individual amoral or "skeptical" – pace Hobbes.

Notwithstanding the anti-Hobbesianism he shares with Diderot, the distance Rousseau takes from a strictly rationalist view of ethics is significant in terms of the shift towards strategics I am trying to describe. In a controversial draft of *The social contract* (1994[1762]), Rousseau would refute the idea that a humanitarian principle is somehow more natural or rational than any other moral criterion (see Chapter 2). Essentially, he disagrees with Diderot's suggestion that the "general will" should be "evident to anyone who uses his reason" (Diderot 1992:21). And, as a consequence, Rousseau will find himself granting Diderot's skeptical interlocutor more than a minimal validity. He will resolve to grant this antagonist the benefit of the doubt – well, at least temporarily, until the day when humanitarians can "show him," Rousseau writes, a "society better constituted" with "justice and happiness amicably combined" (1994:175).

Knowing that rationalistic or naturalistic arguments cannot disprove the skeptic, Rousseau's sensible decision is thus to encourage the humanitarian by saying, "let our violent debater himself judge the outcome" (p.175). The problem for Rousseau is, to this extent, not that the moral question of coexistence is complicated by a certain skepticism (like it was for Diderot), but that the valid point raised by the skeptic forces us to accept that coexistence is not really a moral question. If

humanitarians will not be proven right until their solutions are effectively found to be feasible, it means that the relevant inquiry is not even one into ethics, into what is most ethical, but rather one into strategics, into what is possible to change in practice. With Rousseau, coexistence is rendered a thoroughly strategic question.

The strategic skeptic. Two centuries later, Foucault would take this kind of Rousseauian insight to its natural conclusion. Rousseau, in spite of acknowledging the validity of a skeptical point of view and the irrelevance of a moral inquiry, still felt he had to work under the assumption that there was a division between those who were suspect and those who were in a clear moral position. After all, the suspicious figure of the skeptic was itself the justification for an inquiry on coexistence.[18] Foucault, on the other hand, although in a completely different context, would find it possible to work without taking sides or assuming a strong moral position. In fact, he manages to embrace the skeptical subject to the point of rendering it resolutely non-suspect – even though, in the end, this will come at the cost of reinscribing within the purely strategic domain a more subtle ethical divide.

In one of his last interviews on "The ethics of the concern for self as a practice of freedom" (1997[1984]), Foucault describes the relation that exists between freedom and ethics. "What is morality," he says to the interviewer, "if not the practice of freedom, the conscious (*réfléchie*) practice of freedom? … Freedom is the ontological condition of ethics. But ethics is the considered form that freedom takes when it is informed by reflection" (p.284). This is a very similar conception to the one found in Diderot's work (see Faubion 2011:36-37), only that, like Rousseau, Foucault deduces an inevitable relativity out of such free moral reflexivity rather than an idealistic aspiration to truth and "reason." The free individual can become an ethical subject in

many different ways. "It is precisely," he asserts, "the historical constitutions of these various forms of the subject in relation to the games of truth which interests me" (p.291). Foucault, as can be sensed from this assertion, which almost amounts to a short manifesto, not simply follows but radicalizes the conclusion once drawn by Rousseau.

Despite reacting against a reason-based politics of suspicion, Rousseau's critical inspiration still came from antagonizing the well-off in his aristocratic society, especially "the bourgeois" who, in his eyes, demonstrated an insincere and rather hypocritical consideration for the poor and the oppressed (Bloom 1997:146-47). By comparison, the historical context of Foucault practically encouraged a skepticism towards any sense of moral arrogance. His critical referent was fascism, of course, but also political rationalities like Stalinism, whose violence, it could more legitimately be said, aspired to create a fair coexistence (see Foucault 1982:209). Thus, knowing the dangerous path any rationalization of morality could lead to, Foucault was in the position to accept a conception of ethics that did not imply a ready-made partition between suspects and non-suspects.

While being highly critical of inequality like Rousseau, Foucault refused to assume that relationships of power corrupt something like a natural compassion, or any other moral standard for that matter, for that would be to determine the question of "what is right" and hence deny the historicity of moral thought itself. "Power is not evil. Power is games of strategy" (1997:298), he said at some point during the mentioned interview; games played in a moral field where there may always be "other reasonable options" (p.296). The "skeptic" for him cannot be the one who threatens the morality required for coexistence. Instead, coexistence is

conceived as the effect of multiple strategies and power dynamics in which morality comes to insert itself in unpredictable ways.

Out of a reasonable free individual like Diderot's and a tragic unequal society like Rousseau's, Foucault ultimately concludes that we are all skeptics, even if some more than others. Society was for Rousseau something tragic because, "from the moment one man began to stand in need of the help of another … slavery and misery were soon seen to germinate" (1923:214-15). Without having to refer to a "state of nature," Foucault similarly assumes that human coexistence is defined by relations of need, obligation, and dependency. "In human relationships," he explained that same day to his interviewers, "power is always present: I mean a relationship in which one person tries to control the conduct of the other" (p.291). The difference is that for Foucault there is an upside to this tragedy: "if there are relations of power in every social field, this is because there is freedom everywhere" (p.292). This upside is made possible by his confidence in the Diderotian idea that we are all reasonable. For this quality not only means, as it did for Diderot, that human beings can be persuaded with reasons – or, in starker terms, "conducted" by the rationality of others – but it also means that everyone is free to react, reflect on, and, if necessary, resist any given attempt at directing their conduct.

"Power relations are possible only insofar as the subjects are free" (p.292) is the premise Foucault openly uses to approach the problem of coexistence. The free individual assumed in this case is perhaps not a "natural" skeptic, but it is definitely one susceptible to skepticism, one for whom being "free to intervene" seems to be a generalized ontological condition. Power, whether it is a perceived boundary for conduct or an immediate threat of force, is characterized for expecting a certain

reaction from the individual. Yet, in their condition of freedom, individuals can choose to be skeptical, do something unexpected, and alter a pressure situation in some way. As Foucault put it that day, "if there were no possibility of resistance (of violent resistance, flight, deception, strategies capable of reversing the situation), there would be no power relations at all" (p.292, see also Dean 2009). Thus, it is not that, as Hobbes once imagined, we all are natural skeptics because we have no inner sense of morality, no real capacity for deliberation, and no interests besides self-preservation. It is rather that being skeptical is always a potential alternative precisely because we all can strive to be ethical, reflect on our own about what is right, and choose between at least a few options of conduct and forms of existence – even in the worst of cases like slavery, Foucault elaborated, "a power can be exercised over the other only insofar as the other still has the option of killing himself, of leaping out the window, or of killing the other person" (1997:292).[19]

In this way, Foucault completely changes the perception of the skeptic, presenting it as a critical mode of being that can be expected from any thoughtful individual and from any social position. By doing this, he manages to reject the moral mode of inquiry altogether for attempting to reify a division between "ethical" and "suspicious" subjects. At the same time, however, it is noticeable that he finds a certain comfort in the idea that we are all free to intervene. From approaching coexistence strategically, only in terms of power relations, Foucault ends up deducing that what we need is a strategy "that will allow us to play these games of power with as little domination as possible." "I believe that this is, in fact," he says toward the end of the interview, "the hinge point of ethical concerns" (pp.298-99). Two years earlier, in the famous afterword where he sought to justify "why study power?," he had already stated that, "what we need is a new economy of power

relations – the word economy being used in its theoretical and practical sense" (1982:210). Foucault's emphasis on the balance of power in social relations has, in this sense, an ethical significance. The skeptic is not only acceptable, but also desirable. While skeptics may not be assumed in this case to be less, or more, moral than others, they are definitely assumed to be more strategic. They constitute a sort of "ethical hinge" to the extent that they are thought to be a latent source of resistance to the excess of power.

1.i.c. The architecture of a skeptical humanitarianism

The skeptical humanitarian is not exactly the free individual that any of these four authors had in mind. But it is one that becomes recognizable when situated in relation to this reconstructed line of predecessors. Having them in the background makes it possible to appreciate that the mode of inquiry this contemporary interlocutor demands has to be even more strategic than theirs. For while in the end the last one, Foucault, managed to avoid a centuries-old politics of suspicion based on the fear of the skeptic or morally dubious Other, it is also true that, in the same stroke, he inaugurated a politics of suspicion based on the fear that one or others may not be being skeptical enough. Even his power-oriented mode of inquiry exclusively concerned with the strategic needs of coexistence reached, so to speak, a "moralistic" point.[20]

Foucault perhaps revealed best what Judith Butler dares to call his "strong normative commitments" (2002:214) through a lecture called "What is critique?" (2007a), the aim of which was to explore the idea of the "critical attitude as virtue in

general" (p.43). The lecture takes the modern notion of critique to be, not the result of an autonomous phenomenon, but a "line of development of the arts of governing" (p.45). From the moment the authority of the Christian pastoral reached a crisis and the questions of how to govern and be governed became a widespread social concern, one can "identify a perpetual question," he suggests, "which would be: 'how not to be governed *like that* … not like that, not for that, not by them'" (p.44, original emphasis).

Philosophically, it is Kant who for him comes to articulate this critical attitude when he says: "Have courage to use your own reason" (2007:29). This is a critical attitude that has nothing to do with a moral position. Its "virtue" is not related with any specific morality. Rather, it lies in the kind of relation this attitude establishes between the self and the moral authorities that come to demand obedience from the self. As Foucault would reiterate a few years later, in an extended analysis of Kant's choice of words, "I don't think that Kant is setting his sights on moral faults here, but actually on a sort of deficit in the relationship of autonomy to oneself" (2011:33). Critique marks, in short, the virtuous relation that can exist between self and power as the one in which an attitude of suspicion is maintained toward any injunction regardless of its moral authority or political rationality. It is "the art of not being governed like that" (p.45), "of reflected intractability" (p.47).

As we can see, Foucault's politics of suspicion is not directed at anyone specifically. It does not reify the moral distance between two fixed groupings of people. Instead, it refers to an attitude of suspicion that emphasizes the imminence of power, one that perhaps borders on "paranoia" (see Chapter 3; c.f. Felski 2011:218-19). For it makes out of virtue, as Butler puts it, not a matter "of complying

with or conforming norms" but, "more radically, [of maintaining] a critical relation to those norms" (2002:215). To be virtuous, free individuals must be not so much moral as critical, persistently suspecting that they may be either abusing or witnessing an excess of power. If it is true that power is an unavoidable axis of all social relations, Foucault infers, coexistence can only be guaranteed by every individual becoming this attentive, "whatever the scenario" (2000:373). Thus, anyone can become a potential suspect or, in his celebrated words, "everything is dangerous" (1997:256). Colin Gordon concludes along these lines that Foucault's work ultimately constitutes, "in a way that is characteristic and perhaps paradigmatic of its time, an exercise in extending our capacity for suspicion, or at least for vigilance and doubt" (2000:xvii).

A contemporary individual like the skeptical humanitarian calls, conversely, for something other than a politics of suspicion. These are rather pragmatic skeptics, endemic to the angst-ridden social-economic tension of neoliberal life, skeptics that may require a more thoroughly strategic inquiry. To start with, we are dealing with skeptical practices that, as said earlier, are already convinced of following a certain general ethos, which therefore makes an inquiry into "virtue" redundant at least from their self-perspective. Likewise, there is neither a need to introduce an extraneous moral argument that could serve as a standard to check whether they enact it or not, since the humanitarian sensibility that is relevant to these practices is not only already inscribed within them, but is also shared by "us," the inquirers. Thus, as an interlocutor, the skeptical humanitarian invites a questioning of its effectivity and strategic value – rather than a praise or a lament about its virtuousness or moral value.

Such an interlocutor provides a possible resolution to the move from ethics to strategics that Western culture initiated through classical thinkers like Hobbes, and that I have been trying to capture here through the notion of a "skeptical practice of freedom." It is the idea that there are some individuals in society who choose to be morally skeptical what historically has inspired a project of coexistence achieved through strategic rather than moralizing means. But, notably, the skeptic has never been just morally skeptical. It has always been a moral skeptic whose skepticism is in some way morally charged. Thus, what has made the figure of "the skeptic" relevant has been, depending on who we refer back to, its selfish, not-so-rational, misguided or even, on the positive side, strategic nature. The skeptical humanitarian, by contrast, enacts a kind of moral skepticism that is neither evidently immoral nor immediately "virtuous" and strategic – a moral skepticism that, in other words, is nothing less and nothing more than skeptical.

Useful skeptics. "The skeptic" may have been the point of departure for a number of authors who have been interested in finding a suitable strategy for the fair organization of humanity. Yet, the insight that I think must be drawn from the architecture of this historical debate, at least as it was briefly sketched above, is that it is not enough for an inquiry that wants to be strategic to depart from a figure that is in one way or another perceived to be "skeptical." The skeptic, it seems, must fulfil certain minimal conditions to be able to be considered an actual embodied expression of "moral skepticism" and, hence, justify the search for a mode of intervention that does not depend on the self-evidence of a given morality.

(i) Hobbes started by suggesting a moral skeptic that had been made so by nature. To this proposition, Diderot would eventually reply that if we all are

thinking beings, then we cannot be seen as destined by nature to be unethical. Everyone has the basic capacities for ethical deliberation. And, in stressing this point, Diderot would be implicitly drafting the first condition for skepticism: *it must be intentional*. An amoral skeptic is not really a skeptic.

(ii) Diderot then came to redefine the skeptic as someone who lacks the reasons that are needed to grasp the "true" morality, that is, the morality that he supposes can be based on truth and achieved through reason. To this proposal, Rousseau in turn responded that the humanitarian will which Diderot finds to be so reasonable cannot be proven to be more rational than the skeptic's Hobbesian attitude. This rebuttal has an important implication as well. If the rationale of the skeptics can be considered to be just as valid, it means that their so-called "skepticism" is, in reality, a biased label or perception attained from a different moral standpoint. Rousseau, one could say, was in this way adding that a second requirement for skepticism is that *it must not be relative*.

(iii) Rousseau would subsequently put forward another kind of skeptic, one whose common sense cannot be demonstrated to be wrong, irrational or unreasonable, but that can at least remain suspect until a feasible humanitarian strategy is found. When Foucault's work appears, it implicitly challenges this version of the skeptic, for, unlike Rousseau, he does not just refute Diderot's idea that there is one true rationality for the understanding of morality. His work advanced the more far-reaching argument that, not only are there endless possible rationalities, but also none of them can be fully trusted with the task of coexistence. The dangers of power will always be imminent and, in any case, individuals will always have a certain freedom to intervene. Foucault thus rejects the kind of

"foreclosure of freedom" that Rousseau pursues and anticipates (see Chapter 2) – the way he decides to hold on to the possibility of a "global and radical" humanitarian project (Foucault 1997:316). It is true that we will always be free to aspire to a better form of coexistence. And yet, it cannot be assumed that an eventual solution will be unanimously and eternally considered to be the most strategic for humanity. Accordingly, the third condition for skepticism is that *it must not be derived from a teleological argument* – that one can hope to change things does not mean that one can violently turn the majority of one's contemporaries into suspects.

(iv) Although centuries apart, Foucault's version of the skeptic would appear in response to all those projects of modernity that in a Rousseauian fashion came to derive their suspicions from one or other utopian solution. Embracing the argument that there is no such a thing as a non-suspicious rationality for the organization of coexistence, Foucault postulates a peculiar kind of skeptic, a skeptic that does not have to be suspected and that does not come to compete with an alternative morality of its own. His skeptic is only "critical," which means that it is a mode of reflection that can be experienced by anyone within the bounds of a normative framework. But, as maintained earlier, the weightier reason this skeptic is not to be suspected is that Foucault finds it to be actually strategic. By rehabilitating the figure of the skeptic in this way, I think Foucault brings the move from ethics to strategics to a sudden stop.

A strategic inquiry is supposed to be justified by the existence of certain individuals for whom a moral argument has become ineffective to integrate them into the dynamics of coexistence. In Foucault's scheme, however, the "skeptical" individual becomes the agent of coexistence itself. The critical practices of this

skeptic are thought to foster social relationships in which power comes to operate with a "minimum of domination." And while this may be a sound principle that many may want to follow, inspired and developed, no doubt, from a strategic way of thinking, it is at the same time one that does away with the very need of a strategic inquiry. Moral skepticism, defined this way, becomes unproblematic.[21] In fact, if the aim is to encourage others to take up this strategic role, the inquiry that is relevant would have to be an ethical one, because, after all, the problem at stake would become how to demonstrate and illustrate that this form of action, which is not exactly moral, is in the large scheme of things "right." In later chapters, I offer possible reasons for why Foucault's somewhat moralistic principle of intervention can be counterproductive in neoliberal conditions and strategically lacking in general. But, at any rate, his conception of the skeptic can be said to reveal a fourth condition for skepticism; namely, that *it must be polemic* – which is not to say that it has to be suspicious. It just cannot be evidently desirable – otherwise, a strategic inquiry would hardly be necessary.

Such are, then, the first general lines of a possible "architecture," one that not only sketches the contours of a historical debate, but that by doing so also defines the basic layout of what a practice of freedom requires to be "skeptical." The purpose of an architecture is not to be exhaustive about the positions in a particular debate – strictly speaking, the "skeptical practice of freedom" is not even a notion used by the authors in question. Rather, by using the latter notion as the focal point of analysis, the aim so far has been to elucidate the relevance of a skeptical humanitarian for a strategic inquiry. This could be a privileged skeptic, as it were. Thanks to the current neoliberal conditions, there is a distinct state of injustice in which the skeptical practice of freedom might be able to thrive in, and, by extension, a context where the

problem of strategics might be in itself explorable without having to translate it back into one of ethics.

Part II. Politics in a Historicized Logistical Frame

The critical understanding of liberalism in social and political theory has gone, by now, far beyond the view of freedom that Hobbes or Diderot upheld. Yet, it is still caught in a register of "ethics," to the extent that, in its attempt to recognize and integrate all ethical perspectives, it has produced a reification of politics itself adopting what Rabinow describes, for example, as a "metaposition that begins with a principled affirmation of the inevitable plurality of positions" (2003:6). Foucault's influence, to a certain extent, has led to an even greater pessimism in the understanding of political thought, deepening the assumption that it is not possible to find the right "logistics" for the problem of coexistence and, therefore, that we must continually rebel against any possible logistical schemata, striving for "perpetual contestation" (Dean and Villadsen 2016:142) and "perpetual reform" (Cruikshank 2007:147). But at least since Isaiah Berlin gave his inaugural lecture at Oxford in 1958, critical theorists have shared this idea that: "where ends are agreed, the only questions left are those of means, and these are not political but technical, that is to say, capable of being settled by experts or machines, like arguments between engineers or doctors" (2002:166).

Against the background of this influential interpretation, this chapter has suggested that much of the history of Western political thought can be read in terms of a complex debate on the integration of the skeptic, a debate for which human collaboration does not necessarily depend on a constant balancing act, but can rather be discussed at a deeper logistical level. While, in this case, the "ends agreed" do exist at least in the sense that they are "humanitarian," reaching a resolution is equally difficult, if only around a different type of political problematization. That

different problematization is what I have referred to as "strategics." This part of the chapter reflects on how it is that strategics can point towards a historicist problem that goes beyond the pluralist one of "ethics" without having to fall into an ahistorical question of political philosophy like that of "social coordination" (see e.g. Westphal 2013). I start by making a contrast between a Foucauldian and a post-Foucauldian conception of the skeptic to then specify how that contrast translates into a historicized phenomenology of freedom in the case of skeptical humanitarians.

1.ii.a. A new skeptical scenario

That even Foucault, arguably the most strategically-minded author ever encountered, had to resort in the end to a sort of transhistorical principle to define what a moral coexistence could be is indicative of a certain basic difficulty. An inquiry into coexistence that made absolutely no assumption about what a moral coexistence is – not even, "excessive power is dangerous" – would instantly provoke a line of questioning along the lines of, "what is the point, then, of a strategic inquiry?" The advantage, in our case, is that the skeptical experience in question – and even our conception of the political as a whole – can itself be defined in relation to a recognizable and agreeable ethos in advance.

Nevertheless, it is Foucault's late work on ethics or "the considered practice of freedom" what makes it in any case possible to speak in this thesis of a skeptical humanitarian. Without his critical developments in this area of study, it would be difficult to give a serious treatment to either a "moral skeptic" who can be faithful to a given ethos or to practices of "humanitarian intervention" that do not have to seem

that compassionate. Foucault identified a level of analysis of the moral experience that is wedged between the levels of "prescription" and "behavior." Through the study of different ancient practices, particularly in the domain of sexuality, he evidenced the way the formation of the self as an ethical subject is not reducible to "a series of acts conforming to a rule, a law, or a value," but instead how "there are different ways to 'conduct oneself' morally" (1990:25-30). With this intermediate level, research on ethics can go beyond familiar questions like how moral codes are enforced, or whether rules, self-perception and actual conduct match in practice. Other concerns become equally relevant. The reasons or exemplars that inspire someone to undertake a moral challenge, the element to be improved in oneself or in the world, the form of practice that is chosen or assigned to perform that work of self-formation or intervention, and the kind of person that an ethically invested self seeks or is meant to become can all be crucial intermediate dimensions of the moral experience that can be explored on their own (see Faubion 2011:38-70).

In principle, one could infer that the skeptical scenario that is relevant to this Foucauldian optic would have to be one where there is a skepticism directed at the norm or prescription. Butler for example finds that there is a "critical move" embedded in the proposal that the relation between a subject and a moral system is "neither predictable nor mechanical." She finds the acceptance of such "an interrogatory relation" to be a reference "at least implicitly to the limits of the epistemological horizon within which practices are formed" (2002:217). This inference – of seeing "self-making as part of the broader operation of critique" (2005:17) – seems justified, since in Foucault critique entails a demand for a better norm or, put more philosophically, a will not to be governed like *that*, not to be *this* kind of subject. What Butler evinces is that an ethical subject who has to constantly

negotiate the practical means of its own constitution is a subject that is not moral in advance. It is a subject that "will craft itself in response to an injunction … in the context of an enabling and limiting field of constraint," a subject that has to give an account of itself from time to time and reflect about the reasons behind its own style of self-formation – ultimately, a subject whose "practice of critique then exposes the limits of the historical scheme of things, the epistemological and ontological horizon within which subjects come to be at all" (pp.17-19).

The skeptical scenario inferred by Butler involves an always already frustrated skepticism. An important premise for Foucault, as mentioned earlier, is that power is not an evil. Power, in an abstract sense, is for him something "productive" because it can be seen as the more or less forceful material expression of any given sense of morality. As Butler among many others has explained, "following Foucault, we understand power as *forming* the subject as well, as providing the very conditions of its existence and the trajectory of its desire" (1997:2, original emphasis). This premise about the productivity of power extends to his understanding of ethical practice. At some point, he for example writes how "there is no specific moral action that does not refer to a unified moral conduct" (Foucault 1990:28). But, significantly, what Butler infers is that this premise is extended with a further twist, for he no longer "treats the subject as an 'effect' of discourse" (2005:17), as what power simply "produces." For her, there is a possibility for moral skepticism within the scene of ethical self-formation described by Foucault. It is the possibility of being, precisely, "critical," following the notion of virtuous critique he himself provided (Butler 2002). Nevertheless, the unavoidable problem is that this is, by definition, a frustrating option for a skeptical practice, for it can never be truly skeptical.[22] One can be somewhat critical and aspire to be a different kind of subject, to be governed in

another way, but this Foucauldian self cannot be too serious about its own skepticism, since one cannot simply stop being a "subject" or ruled by a shared sense of morality.[23]

The thesis of a "skeptical humanitarian" points to the possibility of another relevant scenario, one that Foucault may not have fully considered but that is equally made thinkable by his level of analysis. The premise for his ethical studies was, after all, not directed at the norm as such:

> It is often the case that the moral solicitude is strong precisely where there is neither obligation nor prohibition. In other words, the interdiction is one thing, the moral problematization is another (Foucault 1990:10).

There is, in this sense, a conceivable skeptical scenario where the self-questioning involved is not about whether one should follow a norm or obey an "interdiction," but rather about whether there is a reliable avenue to attend to a felt "moral solicitude," about whether one's ethos can be "problematized" in such a way that it seems achievable or *solvable*. In general, for Foucault "the problematization is an 'answer' … an answer given by definite individuals". It is "the original, specific, and singular answer of thought to a certain situation" (2001:172-73).[24] In the context of ethics, one could say that the *moral* problematization is a concern that has nothing to do with obedience, with the extent to which a subject is willing to follow a norm, but that rather has to do with mastery, with "how," with the enactment of an ethos (see Foucault 2004, esp. 317-320). To this extent, we could say that if being critical is to frustratingly demand a better norm which is unknown, then being skeptical (in this alternative sense) is rather to search for a satisfactory way of answering, solving or enacting a familiar ethos.

Humanitarianism is an ethos that has a deep affinity with this kind of claim, for beyond evoking a clear set of norms like intervention criteria (see Edkins 2003:254-55), codes of assistance (Stein 2008:139-141), rights-based standards (see Krause 2014:128-138) or humanity laws (Teitel 2004), it is primarily a radical sensibility that comes to urgently demand from the subject a solution for a vaguely defined state of crisis (see Chapter 2). Thus, the skeptical scene can be marked by the practical reaction of an individual who wants to be ethical at a moment of social crisis. The skeptical humanitarian can be seen as the one who is skeptical of the existing answers, techniques, technologies, solutions or ways of problematizing the practice of humanitarian intervention. In this way, it is possible to recognize, thanks to Foucault's framework, a moral skepticism that, first, stems from the very desire to be faithful to a certain moral sense and, second, that does not have to be an always already frustrated skepticism. One can be fully skeptical – and not just more or less critical – if what one questions is the technological – not epistemological – horizon within which norms are enacted.

Beyond Foucault. The freedom to intervene that Foucault deduced from his analytics of power comes to have a particular salience in this skeptical scenario. There is a noticeable shift in Foucault from the kind of formulation of freedom he provided in *Discipline and Punish* – "The man described for us, whom we are invited to free, is already in himself the effect of a subjection much more profound than himself" (1995:30) – to the one he explores in his later studies located at different junctures in Antiquity. Butler grasps it as an acknowledgment of "inventiveness." How the self will craft itself "is a challenge, if not an open question" (2005:18). Foucault indeed starts to speak of a self that approaches itself in the way an artist or craftsman does, considering itself as an "oeuvre" or an aesthetic work of some kind

(e.g. 1990:10; 2001:166). But even then, he must maintain the limits set by his founding premise, by his analytical departure from a productive power. During that late interview examined earlier, he reasserts the moderate scope of his claims, that is, the humble reach of a "practice of freedom:"

> if I am now interested in how the subject constitutes itself in an active fashion through practices of the self, these practices are nevertheless not something invented by the individual himself. They are models that he finds in his culture and are proposed, suggested, *imposed upon him by his culture* (1997:291, emphasis added).

A Foucauldian subject is free to the extent that it can have a critical attitude towards any mode of being found in its culture. Its skepticism consists in having the capacity to "form and reform those reasons" that "can come to bear on the question of obedience" (Butler 2002:218). But no matter how crafty that subject is, how experimental its practices seem, or how inventive its reasoning becomes, the way this subject problematizes its existence as an ethical being will invariably correspond to a certain model of morality that has been "imposed upon him by his culture."[25] If everyone has a certain freedom to intervene, it is only because one can be more or *less* obedient, proximate or rather distant to the expectations and understandings that already exist in regards to social conduct.

By contrast, in our new skeptical scenario the individual can be considered to be fully free to intervene. It is not that this skeptic can invent moral solutions and ethical practices *ex nihilo.* From a historicist outlook, it would be hard to fault Foucault's insight that all "modes of subjectivation" and "formative practices" will always appear to be, as Butler comments, "already more or less in operation and underway" (2002:226). Truly "inventing" a practice of the self would entail coming

up with a different conception of oneself as an ethical being and, therefore, with an original answer for the question of "what is right?" In this sense, freedom is necessarily contained to a range of variation in a spectrum of self-evidence or "obedience". What can make an ethical practice absolutely free is rather the kind of skepticism that is directed at the problem of strategics.

If all the solutions that currently exist for the realization of one's ethos are put into question, it means that no matter what practice of the self is in the end produced, that practice will be able to be considered the product of an autonomous reflection, simply because of the fact that there is no one obvious answer. When there is a clear sense of ethical urgency but it is uncertain how individuals can effectively act on it, anything they do will be an articulation of reasons as to "what actually constitutes intervention?" Their ethical practices will be acts of freedom to the extent that they cannot be deduced from the norm. They are practices of the self achieved and performed in spite of a lack of confidence in the cultural resources that exist to address the moral problematization at hand. Thus, one cannot say in this case that such practices are "imposed upon individuals by their culture." These skeptical individuals have a freedom to intervene in a full sense, for there is nothing telling them what a correct intervention is or what will in fact make out of them the ethical beings they want to be. This is a freedom that Foucault may not have elaborated on, but it is one that, as we have seen, can be inferred from his own premises on ethics.[26] And, more important, it is a freedom that makes it possible to conceive of a humanitarian who does not have to seem humanitarian – in this skeptical scenario, the reasons for an ethical practice belong first and foremost to the self, and are intelligible mostly, if not only, from that perspective.

In this reconceptualization of "the freedom to intervene" lies the possibility of a post-Foucaldian renovation for the strategic mode of inquiry. While Foucault deduced this kind of freedom from a philosophical understanding of human relations strictly dependent on the lens of power, the same freedom – to be able to reflect, react, and reverse a critical situation – is now conceivable on its own. It is approachable as an experience in itself: as the historically circumscribed attitude of ethically invested individuals who come to react skeptically towards their frustrating cultural conditions. In other words, it is neither a freedom that can be easily generalized or transposed to other contexts, nor a theoretical derivation or residual of power. A scenario like the one of the skeptical humanitarian does not need to be defined by how the free individual responds to an embodied authority or a perceived boundary as such. It is a moral scene that can be defined in its positivity, where the ethical challenge is in the domain of problematization or "solvability" rather than in the one of obedience or "resistance" per se. Reducing freedom in this instance to an epiphenomenon of power would be to deny the level of ethical analysis Foucault himself identified.

At this point of our discussion, it becomes possible to pinpoint why the problem of coexistence can be coherently approached, from a historicist point of view, as a matter of "strategics" through this skeptic. Thanks to the above reconceptualization of the Foucauldian freedom, the humanitarian skepticism can be seen as an "experience" or event with a phenomenological specificity – rather than as a more or less attenuated expression of a critical dimension that would be intrinsic to all social relationships (see Foucault 1982:217-18). While Foucault may have said about the "critical attitude" that it "would have been something born in Europe" (2007a:45), the skepticism that he envisioned was far from an experience or "regime of practice"

(see Foucault 2000:225). In a lecture where he elaborates on the historical development of this attitude, he explores better words for it like "dissidence," which he quickly discards because of its potential "substantification," as in the variant "dissident." Instead, he chooses the notion of "counter-conduct" precisely because "it makes it possible to pick out the dimension or component of counter-conduct that may well be found in fact in delinquents, mad people, and patients" (2007b:202). The fact that a humanitarian skepticism does contain a phenomenological substance or amounts to a certain "substantification," that it constitutes an actual ethical experience, means that something like the "skeptical practice of freedom" has enough consistency in this case to be studied as such.

The reason is not only that it would be a skeptical experience rather susceptible to empirical investigation, but also that, because of it, it would fulfil the minimal conditions for it to be a strategically relevant skepticism. As a substantive practice of freedom, this could not be simply a construct attained from the theories, biases, utopias or strategies of others. It would be, that is to say, a skepticism that is real, concrete: necessarily intentional and non-relative. And, also, it would be neither teleologically nor strategically derived. On the one hand, the point of their skepticism is precisely that, despite the calculation that goes into any attempt at social intervention, it is no longer possible to envision a reliable telos. On the other, the fact is that, in spite of their affinity or at least measured engagement with an ethos like humanitarianism, these skeptics can become rather idiosyncratic in their ethical practice, which means that they will often find themselves involved in one or other polemic that puts their strategic value into question.

1.ii.b. The freedom of being exposed

A mobile, passing, removable subject like the volunteer tourist can be said to be largely "free" from the normative expectations attached to the volunteer figure – usually based on the criterion of "sociability" as will be discussed in Chapter 5 – if not always in the public sphere, at the very least in the realm of its own self-formation and ethical relation to self. As a growing body of literature on "acts of citizenship" contends, the current post-Westphalian conditions have entangled as well as disentangled in many uncertain and complex ways the webs of rights, obligations and responsibilities that existed within the confines of each nation-state, making it difficult to know these days what being a citizen means anymore or, in more practical terms, what acts of citizenship "are worth cultivating" (Isin 2008:15-19). While I do not believe that the critical value of this new or latent ethico-political freedom can be reduced to a matter of "activist citizenship," as Engin Isin – a leading voice in this line of research – proposes, that is, to the ways such transnational citizens could get to demand new rights or make new claims of justice (2008:38-39; 2012:148), I do find the attention that this literature pays to the creativity of these acts illuminating, its interest in their "freedom to call something into being which did not exist before, which was not given" (Arendt 1961:151 cited in Isin 2012:116). Up to this point in the chapter, the freedom to intervene of skeptical humanitarians has been grasped from a certain distance, mediated by philosophical and historical observations. But to apprehend the peculiar character of this skeptical practice of freedom, its phenomenological substance now requires some exploration.

Following Henri Bergson's notion of creativity, Melanie White (2008) offers a succinct account of the "act of citizenship" (for the benefit of a post-Westphalian

readership). Its creative impulse, she suggests, is one that can only come out of "a genuine encounter that poses the problem of how to act" (p.46). This encounter takes the form of "emotional experiences that rattle the very depths of one's being," for such experiences create an "opening" in habitual activity (p.52), the possibility to go beyond obligatory reactions and social pressures, and to stop being "oriented to calculable outcomes of action" (p.46). The figure of "the mystic" captures the aspiration to such openness, for "the mystic helps us to 'see' that we must leap without explicit direction, without knowing where we will end up" (p.53). To become truly creative, then, a citizen "must leap with uncertainty" and "explore forms of expression whose outcomes are not always already calculated in advance" (p.54). In spite of being a brief, abstract and historically decontextualized account, White's Bergsonian reading of creative citizenship introduces us to the empirical possibility of leaving norms and habits of thought behind. The skeptical turn of a volunteer tourist can be comfortably placed in such a scene:

> Guilty pleasures
>
> …So when you walk past someone begging for money and you tell yourself you don't have enough to spare it's no wonder the guilt sets in. Some argue that it's wrong to give money to people on the street as it encourages dependency. Even the organisation I worked for promoted this idea. At first I agreed with them and what first shocked me, I soon became desensitised to.
>
> A defining moment for me was when I walked straight past a man with no legs dragging himself along the ground on a skateboard. My sister, who was horrified by this situation, stopped to give him money. At that moment I thought Wow. I think I just lost my humanity? It was then I questioned my theories on poverty. The whole 'give a man a fish and he'll eat for a day; teach a man to fish and you'll feed him for a lifetime' seems a little simplistic (especially when climate change is drying up many of the rivers!) What

> hope did that man have of getting a job? There certainly wasn't enough government support or NGOs to help all of the people in Cambodia. I learnt that there is no perfect way to react to the poverty you see when you're an outsider. What helped ease my guilt was my volunteer work, and interacting with the community. Cambodians are so friendly and always have a smile on their face. I never felt any resentment from them and I always had a great time chatting with them and playing with the kids.
>
> (5th of May, Ethnosense blog)

This short story captures in a vivid manner the disrupting encounter that incites emotional openness and creative dispositions. But, beyond what any philosophical effort could offer, it provides a concrete and detailed explanation of her source of freedom. It is not just an emotional upheaval in general, but a specifically humanitarian sensibility that becomes radicalized – "Wow. I think I just lost my humanity?" – what leads this participant-ethnographer to question everything she had heard and thought about poverty and intervention – "there is no perfect way to react." She opens herself to the embracement of that radicalness the moment she comes to the conclusion that there is no "hope" that the current institutional environment can be effective in Cambodia. Her source of creativity is thus the result of a historically precise skeptical scenario. And, what in White's Bergsonian account surely would not be imaginable, the act that turns out to be creative in this case is that she decides to do more of the same, more of what she was already doing for herself – that is her "guilty pleasure." Her volunteer travel in Cambodia amounts to "leaping with uncertainty," since she precisely resolved that, as an "outsider," any reaction, even a seemingly "normal" reaction, is bound to be an incalculable intervention.

In any event, noticeably creative or not, a skeptical humanitarian practice lacks the instrumental orientation to action that is common to most human practices; and that lack of ends-means intentionality alone makes it inherently creative. This phenomenology of creativity is one that becomes clearer through an Arendtian lens, as Isin (2012, ch. 4) for example contends. Arendt recognizes "the possibility of every human being to initiate a sequence," even in settings that are not favorable to such a "freedom of spontaneity" (2005:126-28). What is creative about this capacity for "action," as she calls it elsewhere, is that it follows none of the sequences that could "be expected from whatever may have happened before" (1998:177-78). Instead, she believes that the "unique distinctness" (p.176) of every human being enables them to take initiative in original ways, not because they can look for new chains of cause and effect – which would still require a calculation, and therefore something potentially based on old ideas and events – but rather because when they embrace a performative activity that is its own end, that is done for its own sake, the full meaning and range of effects of the activity is unpredictable, unknowable until it ends (pp.190-92).

Arendt is, to an extent, historically-minded in that she applies this view of freedom to contexts like the Greek polis and the American revolution. Nevertheless, her account of the creative act still relies heavily on generic reasons like "human plurality" and "natality" (Isin 2012:113) and on a figure that would be essentially common to all human beings: the performing "actor" (Arendt 1978:21), who discloses the "drama" of its own unique story through "the living flux of acting and speaking" (1998:187). Against Bergson's mystic and Arendt's actor, I would like to superimpose a more historically substantial reference to grasp the embodiment of freedom that is specific to a skeptical scenario; namely, the ethnographic figure of

"the fieldworker." I take the fieldworker to be a figure of human creativity and inventiveness, not because a cross-cultural displacement unavoidably breaks with habit, as Bergson would have it, or because going native necessarily involves an improvised performance, as Arendt would emphasize, but rather because making sense of another culture through an individual immersion always entails an unforeseeable process of grounded discovery and personal exploration.

The answers that the fieldworker wants cannot be simply selected or refined through a rational process as though they already existed in some raw form in the acumen of her own culture. There is a trajectory that must be followed, which is uncertain and serendipitous by nature. Through the field experience, according to the Malinowskian ethnographic tradition, answers will always be *found*. "What the fieldworker invents," Roy Wagner for example writes, "is his own understanding," for the meanings "he creates are extensions of his own notions and those of his culture, transformed by his experiences of the field situation" (1981:18). Skeptical humanitarians do not always go through a "field experience," but their search for answers in an open field of intervention does reflect the essential creative trajectory contained in the fieldworker figure. The case of the volunteer tourist arguably offers us the possibility of grasping the core of this experience in its most tangible form:

> Although I didn't really know what I was looking for, I found it in Fiji and the Pacific … I immediately let myself be drawn in, to be warmly embraced in something I didn't know, but something that felt like "home". However I also had another identity that I willingly accepted upon undertaking this journey – that of an Australian volunteer. Not quite an expat, obviously not a local. But somewhere in between, thanks to the volunteer label, which meant we possibly cared a bit more than the expats. It was a label I was happy to wear, because without it I wouldn't have been there. But gee it wore thin, very

quickly … having to deal with the same old conversations about the best places to go to the beach, the best hotels, and the like… I couldn't escape the fact that "Australia" came with the tag of "Australian volunteer". I found myself not playing by the rules, whether they be unspoken social rules or overt volunteer policies…

Yet I was still an outsider, the "other" … I remember having one Fijian activist look me square in the eye and with a mix of the history of anti-colonial struggle and the love of Pacific pride on her breath ask me what I could possibly know about inequality and struggle coming from my privileged white Australian background. Maybe I could only ever be the outsider, face pressed up against the glass looking in, but never to be invited inside. Or maybe the spirit of Pasifika could reside within me, journey with me back to Australia to provide new colour to my "home"?

I was to find out the latter sooner than expected. December 5th, 2006; Fiji's 4th coup. My phone rang, and I thought my friend was calling just to ask me out to lunch. "We have to go to Nadi. We're being evacuated", she said. My head was spinning with a mix of thoughts and emotions – "Why do we have to leave our friends and colleagues?" I wondered. "Ah, my activist friend was right about the privileged white Australian after all. When the going gets tough, the privileged get going. Shit. I will be in Melbourne tomorrow!" Being in Melbourne I felt like an alien. I couldn't look people in the eye. I felt like a book that had been put back on the wrong shelf … I couldn't deal with it. Two weeks after being evacuated I bought a ticket and went back to Fiji. And I will never forget the overwhelming feeling that drenched me when I walked through the front door to where I was staying in Fiji – "I am home".

(6th of Apr, Ethnosense blog)

The story of this blogger is illustrative for the way it combines the ethnographic and the humanitarian. Another culture became for him the very answer to his urge to care. It is an answer that he encountered, not one that he chose as such. He was not sure of what he was "looking for" or what he was moving toward every time he

decided not to "play by the rules." Yet, the skepticism that he progressively generated towards his own position as a Western, white, privileged, transient volunteer culminated in an eventful crisis of meaning, out of which a unique, satisfactory answer finally emerged. The decision to go back to Fiji during a military coup was his interpretation of "intervention." From reading the entire story, one can conclude that such a decision was clearly the product of his own creative judgment, that, as Arendt a long time ago argued, it was achieved in spite of the absence of standards and comparable situations (2005:102; see also Marshall 2010). But, phenomenologically, what is most relevant is that it was made possible by more than "man's ability to make distinctions" (Arendt 2005:102) and recognize a "matter in its particularity" (Marshall 2010:377). Its creative source is traceable to a meandering and staggering process of self-questioning *through* practical experimentation, an attitude of fieldwork, if you will. The experience of a radically free and morally exposed humanitarian appears to be marked, in this way, by the inkling that a solution cannot be simply willed, that, beyond the use of humanitarian ideas, theories and knowledge, "the field" must be played with.

End. Suspectless Inquiry

Foucault approached with skepticism our modern humanitarianism and the multiple technologies of intervention derived from its sweeping optic. From the disciplinary institutions that shape and reform the human body to the population controls that administer and optimize the human species, these technologies could be shown to display a characteristic normalizing power that constantly prejudices the bureaucratic approach to the marginal subject position it itself creates, the position of the skeptic. Most of Foucault's work was dedicated to examine those who could be said to fall in the category of society's skeptics: the mad, the criminal, the abnormal, the incorrigible… all those "dangerous individuals" who started to be seen as an internal threat to society and human coexistence in general from the seventeenth century (see e.g. Foucault 2003a). He sought to capture them from a critical angle detached from the humanist problematic, as became most graspable through his notion of "bio-power" (1998:140; 2003b:258), with which he empirically concreticized the argument that a naturalized vision of humanity is more dangerous and violent than any particular individual.

Following the historical architecture sketched in this chapter, however, Foucault's skepticism and consideration for those who are treated as skeptics no longer appear as being exclusive to him. He may have embraced these suspicious subjects as no one had before, to the point of rejecting all humanist values and championing their counter-conduct as a source of critical problematization driving social change. But what made him skeptical of humanitarian themes of intervention – their "suppleness" – is a concern that has long been recognizable within the broad cultural tradition of liberal modernity. It is a concern whose perceptibility, moreover, has kept growing in strength after his death, during the golden years of neoliberal

politics and rationalities. An increasing number of individuals has been caught in the skeptical position to approach from that very position the practical problems of humanitarianism.

From this enlarged perspective, the opposition that Foucault drew between humanism and criticism starts to seem rather narrow. It appears to be a limited account to schematize the complex and intimate connections that may in reality exist between classical social theorists and the skeptical practice of freedom. In principle, the problem is not that there are some individuals who are suddenly treated as "skeptics" at a given point in time – as Foucault of course had reason to resent – but that for moral skepticism to be treated as a reliable source of political problematization, one's inquiry must not be a suspecting one. The following conclusions can be made about this suspectless mode of inquiry:

1 Its object of research must be self-consciously polemical in the sense that this object must knowingly and decidedly challenge an established normative understanding regarding the social and political organization of society, rather than simply being the subject of moralistic agendas which on their own terms decide who is and who is not a skeptic.

2 The inquiry must share the same normative horizon as "the skeptics," regardless of whether the researcher shares or rejects their skepticism. Thus, this kind of research requires an understanding of ethical life that, beyond norms and values, recognizes the task of creative judgment in ordinary life (see Lambek 2010), at least in certain social scenarios.

3 Analytically, it necessarily departs from the existence of a substantive exercise of skeptical freedom. It is an inquiry that has to look beyond the realm of calculation and governmentality, opening itself to the possibility that social practices and relations which circumvent the direction of conduct can surface within the historical context of a crisis of solvability.

4 In short, it must deploy a logistical questioning of human coexistence. Such a mode of inquiry is not orientated towards "ethics" or the identification of immediately and evidently collaborative practices, but towards "strategics" or the question of collaborative intervention, that is, of which practices can effectively integrate a skeptical subject into a circuit of collaboration. I delve into the history of this form of political problematization in the following chapter.

Chapter 2 | UNBINDING RADICAL AFFECT:

The modern humanitarian self as pure potentiality

The lives of people in poverty are so far removed from the minds of us in the Western world. Sure, we can empathise because it is not fair that people should suffer and an indignant anger is a natural response, but what of it if nothing were practically implemented? We should be compelled to care more and be moved to DO something greater than our feelings and emotions dictate.

—An Australian volunteer who spent 5 weeks in Peru

I see wretched peoples groaning beneath an iron yoke, the human race crushed by a handful of oppressors, a host overwhelmed by misery and starved for bread whose blood and tears the rich man quaffs in peace, and everywhere the strong armed against the weak with the formidable power of the laws … What human bowels would not be stirred by those sad sights; *but it is no longer permitted to be a man and plead the cause of humanity*. Justice and truth must be bent to the interest of the most powerful, that is the rule.

— Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Principles of the right of war*

At least since Rousseau, humanitarian sentiments have shown to have the capacity to leave the self in a radical position. This position does not need to be reduced to a call for violent means or revolution – even if that was the case for some of those inspired by Rousseau, like Robespierre or Marx (see Arendt 2006). The radical potential of a humanitarian sensibility, I would like to suggest, rather comes from an extremely open and undetermined call for intervention. Indeed, what is most radical

about Rousseau's statement in the epigraph ([1755-6]2012:153-54) might not even be his references to inequality, oppression and power in a pre-revolutionary era, but, more so, the groundlessness and infinite depth of his frustration, which he resolves to convey as not being able "to be a man," and, more astonishingly, as "no longer" being "permitted" to "plead the cause of humanity."

Rousseau knew full well that there was little validity to such a historical claim, that humanity had never, before his time, been an actual "cause" (see e.g. Rousseau 1994:174). He was not talking about that idyllic "state of nature" of his either, or at least not literally, since, technically, he did not think that "man" had inhabited that state, only "brutes" (see Rousseau 1923:184). More to the point, there is a patent logical inconsistency in the very idea that "being a man" or "pleading a cause" are things that are primarily done with "permission" – as though humanitarian action were the expression of an existing order rather than a response to it, to its flaws and failures. Rousseau's claim was ostensibly a reproach, but a reproach that had not really progressed from a perception into a tenable accusation. The reproach was towards a whole society that is able to persist without problematizing a blatant existence of precariousness and suffering. It was a reproach, one could say, towards everyone and no one, for not "seeing" there was a problem (see Laqueur 2009:39-41).

Subtly yet provocatively, Rousseau grasps here the self-evidence of the problem that haunts a humanitarian, who cannot help but feel surprised and disappointed by the publicness of a certain manifestation of human suffering. In these few sentences, the humanitarian sensibility reveals its unmeasurable radicalism. It is to feel *as though* the existing "laws" did not "permit" one to acknowledge an evident "misery" as a worthy "cause," *as though* society were organized in such a way as to dismiss, if

not produce, a widespread affliction. Regardless of the reasons that may come to the support of this kind of perception, the humanitarian experience is in principle defined by the radicalism of its impressions.

The humanitarian's problem constitutes an event in that trajectory Foucault often called "the history of thought," the history of the ways "by which one detaches oneself" from a domain of practice "and reflects on it as a problem" (1997:117). And the singularity of this problem is something that I believe becomes clear with Rousseau. At a certain point in the eighteenth century, in ways that we still do not fully comprehend, the European sense of humanity became something more than a moral value, symbol of civility, religious quality or philosophical debate (Asad 2015:396-8). It started to become a "locus of problematization" for liberal thought, that is, a point of reference opening up a whole field of possibilities and concerns rather than something in need of justification.[27] The humanitarian sensibility may have appeared thanks to factors like the expanded "causal perception" of an increasingly commercial and contractual everyday life (Haskell 1985a; 1985b), the growing predominance of moral doctrines insisting on the naturalness of an "irresistible compassion" (Fiering 1976), or the development of new narratives and forms of "aesthetic engagement" with suffering and death (Laqueur 2009). But, beyond the multiple vectors that came to constitute this event, what is rather significant is that with the "humanitarian self" came a new way of problematizing existence that could not resist to pose the question of intervention.

The emergence of a humanitarian self in Western culture radicalized the horizon of its thought. With it came an almost ordinary aspiration to the possibility of "intervention" or qualitative social transformation. The humanitarian perception is

that of a "reproachable" or unjustifiable suffering and, therefore, of crisis rather than exceptional failure.[28] It is a sentiment or sense of urgency stemming from a critical situation that one's society or, simply, society in general has not been able to address, that, by definition, cannot be easily dissipated because it escapes the social arrangements of the present. Whether it is awaken by an abolitionist pamphlet or by starving children seen through a screen, by a cruel war or an unforgiving disaster, the humanitarian self is a sign of rupture, an indication that the existing chains of moral responsibility are poorly designed or at least lacking in extension. By responding to such a thin moral thread as "humanity," compassionate selves inevitably challenge how their worlds are organized.

Hannah Arendt may help to illuminate this proposition, in spite of her well-known criticism of Rousseauian compassion (see e.g. Arendt 2006, ch. 2). She actually stressed the inverse, that the need to justify someone's rights by appealing to "the abstract nakedness of being human and nothing but human" is usually itself the sign that those "minimum rights" have become "unenforceable," that no institution or authority is "willing to guarantee them" (1958:290-302). Still, in the same way one could say, following the logic of her argument, that the very fact that someone feels compelled to address the suffering of a number of others solely on the basis of a common humanity is in itself a telling event, one that signals or warns the world that these others have become "politically irrelevant being[s]" (2006:97).[29] If human rights can be criticized for their loose grip on the conditions of actually existing societies, humanitarian sensibilities can in turn be appreciated for their radical take on any seemingly agreed social reality.

In principle, humanitarianism may be an "impulse" or sentiment involving things like pity, sympathy or compassion, which are feelings that do not necessarily produce a politics or automatically translate into a stable dynamic of collective collaboration (see Bornstein 2009). But the one who feels this humanitarianism and takes it seriously does embody a particular ethos. Today an organization like *Médecins sans Frontières* (MSF) captures it as "a citizen's response to political failure" (Orbinski 1999, cited in Isin 2012:4). A young volunteer tourist expresses it in a way that, as we will see, resonates with a whole genealogy of Western thought when she says that, "we should be compelled to care more and be moved to do something greater than our feelings and emotions dictate." Rousseau articulated it when he expressed (also in the epigraph) how he saw "everywhere the strong armed against the weak with the formidable power of the laws." It is an ethos, in short, that calls for intervention in the substantive sense of the word, an ethos that feels the need for a kind of practice that can redirect *in some way* the course of society. Indeed, "in some way" because there is nothing within the humanitarian sensibility as such that prescribes how that intervention must proceed or how ambitious it should be. It is, in this sense, pure potentiality. It is not necessarily related with "commitment" and the "constitution of groups," as Luc Boltanski (1999:18) synthesizing a long literature on the public sphere captures it, or with "education" and the "progress of sentiments," as Rorty (1993:129) following a philosophical position that goes back to Hume interprets it. To equate the challenge of a humanitarian self with a task of either political or ethical generalization is to introduce a mode of intervention in advance and hence ignore the specificity of humanitarianism as a form of problematization.

Part I. Volunteers in Biopolitics

Rousseau embodies a rupture in the history of Western thought, but not because the solution that he advanced in order to address the humanitarian concern with intervention became the most useful or the most decisive. Adam Smith, as Foucault suggests, provided a much more defining solution for "the history of the public authorities in the West" (2008:43) when he introduced his ideas on the advantages of a social mechanism like the market. Rousseau rather signals what comes before the solution, the moment when a crucial problematization of the modern world reached a point of condensation in European thought.

The rupture that becomes noticeable in Rousseau is not the appreciation of freedom, individuality or independence, for those were liberal values that had been "at work since the fourteenth century" (Rosanvallon 2006:154). What is unique to him, as Allan Bloom once remarked, is that "he radicalizes them," for "in his eyes, the epic battle of his Enlightenment fellows against throne and altar, which had lasted for two centuries, had simply been won" (1997:144). Before the French and American revolutions had even occurred, Rousseau's horizon was already defined by the problem that would come to haunt Adam Smith as well. Smith scholar Fonna Forman-Barzilai refers to this problem as that of finding "a freer, self-regulating method of social coordination that worked without archaic hierarchies" (2009:87). But what I intend to show is that there is a much more specifiable and peculiar style of problematization at stake in these and other pioneering authors of modern liberalism, a style that directly emanates from a humanitarian mode of perception and that only becomes graspable if we focus on Rousseau first.

For Foucault, it is Smith who effectively marked a "politico-epistemological revolution" (Gordon 1991:15). It is the latter's proposal about a natural mechanism that is intrinsic to society what brought about a modern art of government – a form of statecraft fully dedicated to the life, welfare and optimization of a population. As he put it in his series of lectures on liberal governmentality, the naturalistic idea of a spontaneously effective mechanism like "the invisible hand of the market" signalled "the birth of biopolitics" (Foucault 2008). In his lecture course, however, he only focused on the political transformation of "the sovereign," on how a market economy started to challenge royal wisdom by imposing things like an optimal "natural price" (p.31), which even those in the throne had to respect. But he never explored the self-problematization that might have led political economists like Smith, in the first place, down the path to a "biopolitical" revolution. Given his sole focus on "governmental reason" and "state administration" (p.322), Foucault left out the possibility that, at the heart of the biopolitics of liberal thought, there might have been an even more radical premise about human intervention than the one that Smith's free market idea seems to provide.

This is a possibility that I am able to explore here thanks to one of Rousseau's texts known as *The manuscript of Geneva* (1994), which is a draft of *The social contract* with an ambiguous philosophical status. Robert Wokler has somewhat awkwardly called this manuscript a case of "ancient postmodernism," since it puts into question the "abstract foundationalism of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century metaphysics in terms later to be embraced by Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jean-François Lyotard, and their followers" (2001:419). In this part of the chapter, I will suggest that, instead, *The manuscript of Geneva* should be seen as an illuminating case of a humanitarian radicalism that is characteristically modern. From that reading, it will

then become possible to interpret some conventional figures and solutions of modern liberal culture in a different light. Familiar expressions of humanitarianism like the practice of volunteering, the claim of human rights, and cosmopolitanism will appear much less self-evident, while classical liberals like Smith and Immanuel Kant, much more contemporary. The latter is the focus of the second part of the chapter, which concludes with an overview of the renewed understanding that will have been developed as to what can be said to be the challenge peculiar to a humanitarian.

2.i.a. Rousseau's radicalism

Rousseau acknowledged the problematic nature of the humanitarian challenge at a surprisingly early stage of liberal modernity. He may have set the stage through *The social contract* for future political theory, or become influential for all those modes of intervention that would emphasize the need of rights, sovereignty, consensus and statecraft. And yet, a prior achievement is that he may have managed to pinpoint, and largely articulate, the problematization that would have made these and countless other solutions relevant and thinkable.

In his highly popular *Discourse on inequality* (1923[1755]), his first political writing and one of the first of the humanitarian era – historians consider the year 1750 to be the start for widespread reform sentiments of this kind (Haskell 1985a) – Rousseau ended up posing a question when the manuscript was in page proofs that would take him years to process. If inequality and oppression are expected to exist in any society, since – it was his argument – social life necessarily leads individuals to compete for esteem and privilege and hence leave aside their genuine regard for

others, "*what, then, is to be done*? Must societies be totally abolished?" (p.245, emphasis added).[30] In this question, the radical force of a humanitarian sensibility was already palpable, the way it can dislodge moral sense from tradition, urging the self to intervene and exercise its faculty of judgment from a sort of blank slate. Never before had the state of being of the poor been relativized to this extent, put into question in such a forceful and unapologetic way.[31] It is, however, in a chapter draft of that landmark text, *The social contract* (where he would finally offer a thorough answer to his radical question), that he elaborates on the unique challenge that is presented to a humanitarian self.

The point of the chapter, titled "The general society of the human race," was to refute the idea put forward by Dennis Diderot (1992[1755]) in the *Encylopédie* that human beings can naturally form a global or "general" society to satisfy their mutual needs. Diderot's proposal (already reviewed at some length in Chapter 1) was not that all humans could actually live in one big society, but rather that all of them, being part of the same thinking species, inevitably shared one same standard of justice, namely, the "general will." In his view, the general will could be followed by everyone, for it "is in each person a pure expression of the understanding," and therefore it is that which "forms the rule binding the conduct of one individual towards another in the same society … and of that society towards other societies" (p.21). Rousseau shared Diderot's intention, which was evidently humanitarian and anti-Hobbesian in spirit, to the point that he had no problem in appropriating his key term of "general will."[32] In fact, in an entry that appeared on the same volume of the *Encyclopédie*, Rousseau had previously expressed his desire, in a rather Diderotian vein, to find that kind of distinction which is able "to provide the surest and most universal rules of judging … the morality of all human actions" (1994:7).

What he came to disagree with was the way Diderot assumed that the understanding of this will and the drive to follow it could somehow come naturally to the individual, and hence that it could be as general as to include the whole of humanity at once. In posing the "will of the species" (Diderot 1992:21) as what perhaps could be anachronistically called a categorical imperative, Rousseau thought he was confusing the problem with the solution.

Rousseau's chapter critically considers a number of arguments that could support Diderot's position, with the purpose – it could be said retrospectively – of clarifying what the problem of the humanitarian really is. Diderot's suggestion was that the task of the humanitarian is to show "the unjust and impassioned man" that, rationally, everyone is actually supposed to be a humanitarian (1992:18). He thought this destiny should be "evident to anyone who uses his reason," and "whoever chooses not to reason, thereby forfeiting his status as a man, ought to be treated as an unnatural being" (p.21). Rousseau finds this task of enlightening others to be misguided, for it remains "unclear," he writes, articulating with sharpness the main difficulty moderns find in the humanitarian problem, "*how it is that his personal interest requires his submission to the general will*" (1994:173, emphasis added). In response to Diderot's "evident" reasoning, he exhaustively considers all sorts of options: if it is a common sentiment of humanity what is natural to all human beings, the egoistic passions are in any case more powerful (p.171); if it is the sheer capacity to think we all have, it is unlikely that "the majority of men" can master "the art of generalizing ideas" and "deduce principles of conduct from this way of reasoning" (p.174); if it is god's will, it cannot be reliable because "the multitude … will always be given gods as insensate as itself" (p.173); finally, if it is an "interior

voice" that one uses as one's conscience, it is unlikely that this voice is oriented to the general will since, as history has proven, it is culturally shaped:

> …only from the social order already existing among us do we derive the idea of the order that we imagine … from even the slightest research into classical antiquity it will easily be perceived that sound ideas on natural law and the universal fraternity of all men were quite late in developing, and progressed through society so slowly that it was only Christianity that disseminated them adequately (p.174).

After deflating the rationalistic aspirations of Diderot, Rousseau is finally ready to describe the position that he embraces and finds himself in as a result of his humanitarianism. The problem, as he tries to demonstrate with all of these examples, is that there is not such a thing as a natural element in society that is able to spontaneously and effortlessly drive it towards a more inclusive sense of justice. "The gentle voice of nature," Rousseau counters, is not "an infallible guide for us" (p.170). Instead of falling into despair, however, Rousseau closes the chapter with a new kind of "enthusiasm" that leads him to believe that the skeptic or "enemy of the human race" can nevertheless be brought "back to humanity" and "become good, virtuous, and compassionate" (p.175). It is an enthusiasm that appears when he infers that, if the right way of being a humanitarian is not given in advance, neither by nature, nor god, nor reason, nor culture, it means then that the looming question of "what is to be done" is always awaiting a response. The task of the humanitarian cannot be other than to craft an answer:

> Let us endeavour to find the cure for the disease within the disease itself. By new forms of association let us, if we can, correct the faults in the general form of association … Let

> us show him [the skeptic], by perfecting the social art, how to mend the damage done … by this art in its beginnings (p.175).

It is in this way, therefore, by speaking of a "social art," that Rousseau comes to identify the humanitarian self with a radical ethical condition. Against Diderot, who had framed his argument around the idea of a "natural right," Rousseau decides to speak of humanitarianism as an extension of social art, implying that it is a practice that requires crafting, dedication and, most important, demonstration. "Let us show" others, it is what he suggests, that it is indeed possible to have a more humanitarian society, that private and collective interests can in fact be reconciled. Rather than a moral demand, he finds the humanitarian problem to be an essentially practical one. What has to be shown is that it is plausible to invent "new forms of association" with a more global sense of justice, and that the social art that has failed us so far can actually be refined. In this manner, Rousseau recasts what at first seemed to be a ready-made principle of conduct into a radical ethos of freedom. The humanitarian is the one who aspires to a fairer society, knowing that the one that does exist amounts to a "disease." Yet, while the existent social art is insufficient, there is no predetermination as to how that art should be altered either. "Let us endeavour to find the cure for the disease within the disease itself" is all a humanitarian can really say – a conviction that, in reality, is extremely radical in itself, for it leaves it up to the concerned individual to come up with an adequate answer.

2.i.b. The question of strategy

Rather than thinking that humanitarianism is the privilege of those with the right moral reasoning or that it describes a particular way of intervening in society, the words of Rousseau invite us to recognize in this idea an essentially strategic problem. Humanitarianism may always be the expression of a sentiment that aspires to a more universal, less exclusionary kind of justice. But, as Rousseau quickly managed to articulate at the dawn of the humanitarian era, a sense of justice with such an ambitious scale is far from intrinsic to human beings. The humanitarian task cannot be about defending a morality that is supposed to be naturally irresistible, if there is no reason to believe that an aspiration to global justice is in itself a globally justifiable aspiration (Riley 2011). The problem of the humanitarian is much more practical than philosophical. It is the challenge of finding *how*, by what means, method or strategy, it is possible to encourage or, in any case, lead oneself and others to act in such a way that, ultimately, "the general society" becomes more humanitarian.

In effect, part of understanding the humanitarian problem strategically is that one cannot even assume that the solution is in one way or another a matter of sensitization. Both Rorty (1989) and Boltanski (1999), for example, can be said to follow a strategic outlook. One advances an utopia composed of humanitarian individuals who maintain an ironic attitude towards their own principled morality, while the other imagines a politics of pity through the coordination of latent moral sensibilities around topics and causes that already exist. In each proposal there is an explicit acknowledgment of the historically contingent character of humanitarianism, of the fact that it is not a matter of "moral law" (Rorty 1993:129)

but of an "emergent universalism" (Boltanski 1999:xiv). Yet in both thinkers one can still recognize the assumption that the success of the humanitarian project absolutely and only depends on more and more individuals acquiring this sentimental disposition (see e.g. Rorty 1989:xvi; Boltanski 1999:xvi). Although at a long distance from Diderot, this assumption still reproduces an attitude of suspicion towards the non-committed humanitarian, which in itself is a debatable move for any historicist inquiry.

As Mitchell Dean (2007) has argued in this sense, any global projection of cosmopolitan virtues is problematic to the extent that it aspires to impose "the content of a normal frame of life" (p.106) and the "form of comportment of certain elites who become exemplary beings" (p.72). Such an aspiration emerges in Boltanski's project, for example, when he expresses his interest in knowing what "an *acceptable* response to the shocking spectacle of distant suffering" is (1999:xv, emphasis added). Rorty also comes close to this postmodern form of imposition when he suggests that a manipulation of sentiments or sentimental education is what is missing in the world, for "the bad people's problem is that they were not so lucky in the circumstances of their upbringing as we were" (1993:127-28).

It can be said, however, that Rousseau reproduced a politics of suspicion just as much through a contractualist solution (see Chapter 1 and below). His achievement, that is to say, was not that he managed to fully embrace the strategic openness of his humanitarianism. Rather, it is that he managed to articulate what in a Foucauldian terminology can be described as a *historical mode of problematization*: the kind of problem which is "at the root" of the "diverse solutions" provided by a style of thought, or that which "makes them simultaneously possible" (Foucault 1997:118).

As Rousseau articulates it, the problematization that he, no less than Boltanski or Rorty, departs from consists in advancing the collective interests of humanity through a social art that knows, first of all, that there is no natural guide or norm to do this, and that, in addition, as a result of this very knowledge, must be conscious of the fact that human beings have their own individual concerns or "peculiar interests" (see Burchell 1991; Palacios in press).

There is a rather seamless continuity between the problematizing view of such a humanitarian self and the characteristically liberal concern with giving a due consideration and, when possible, priority to the private interests and liberties of the individual in the construction of a fair coexistence. But the reason for this continuity has nothing to do with a sacred respect for freedom.[33] The problem of humanitarian selves, after all, is that they cannot resort to any self-grounding moral argument. Thus, when Rousseau questions the strategy of Diderot by asking, "how it is that his personal interest requires his submission to the general will," he is not superimposing the value of freedom over the value of social justice. He is simply pointing out the absence of an effective mechanism embedded in Diderot's rationalist strategy.

Rousseau would immediately agree with Diderot if he thought that, were he somehow a skeptic, he could be converted by simply reading or hearing about Diderot's exhortations on the rightfulness of humanity as a natural law. Yet, since he cannot find any self-evident reason in this text or elsewhere for his inner skeptic to follow such a general will, he must assume that the humanitarian perception is, in spite of his own common sense, a rather rare sensibility. He must assume that his desire for social change is only a particular ethos or way of judging things, and,

therefore, that human beings do not naturally prioritize collective interests or at least not to the extent of the whole of humanity.[34]

At stake in Rousseau's problematization is another continuity that is just as striking; namely, one with a skeptical humanitarianism. The way he frames the humanitarian problem is one that resonates directly with a future skeptical audience. For what he deduces from a humanitarian sensibility is an ethos of intervention that leaves the self in a state of radical freedom. His reasons for this conclusion are not exactly those of a skeptical humanitarian, and neither Rousseau nor any of his contemporaries can be said to have been this kind of humanitarian. Still, it is undeniable that Rousseau's problem consisted in recognizing that the work of social intervention is fundamentally uncertain, and that conventional solutions are unfortunately insufficient. His conclusion thus seems to be that *all* humanitarians are in fact "free to intervene" or experiment with strategies in accordance to their own judgment.

His problematization had a completely different orientation, though. He was reacting to a tradition of thought that was preoccupied, on the one hand, with an anti-humanitarian skeptic and, on the other, with the foundations of natural right (see Wokler 2012, ch. 6). The challenge he envisioned was therefore quite particular. By questioning the capacity of nature to provide a ready-made solution, Rousseau was indeed affirming that a humanitarian was basically free to intervene. Yet the point of this freedom was to prove to the "Hobbesian" skeptic that, in spite of nature's failure, a humanitarian coexistence could still be feasible. Thus, one cannot really say that the humanitarian, as depicted by Rousseau, has exactly the same freedom of a skeptical humanitarian, whose only concern is to put an ethos into

practice and who does not even have to seem convincing in relation to a suspicious Other. Or, perhaps, it would be better to say that while both have the same freedom, only the latter has the chance to actually embrace it, given a different set of historical circumstances (see Chapter 4); whereas when the humanitarian problem is posed with a suspicious interlocutor in mind, the aspiration is then to do away, once and for all, with any doubts that may exist regarding one's project of social justice. The expectation is to find a solution or mechanism with such a potential for generalization that it can offer a nature-like promise of universality. What is sought in that case is precisely to foreclose the very freedom of intervention that so frantically and unexpectedly has been gained.[35]

2.i.c. The birth of quasi-natural solutions

It would be hard to suggest that someone like Rousseau really had more than one choice. In a pre-liberal era still dominated by monarchic and feudal arrangements, embracing a freedom like that of intervention could not have been something thinkable as a cultural experience – it barely is now, almost two and a half centuries after the ensuing French Revolution. Presumably, the reasonable thing to do in the face of a strongly felt yet unprecedented radicalism was to make sense of the new with certain elements of the past (see Coleman 1994:10). By means of a certain appropriation of the term "biopolitics," I will attempt to capture the way Rousseau and the French revolutionaries dealt at the beginning of modern liberalism with the radical freedom of their humanitarian conscience.

Rousseau, in the process of relieving himself from the burden of nature, became at the same time unashamedly nostalgic about the unquestionable universality nature was able to provide. That is why he writes sentences like the one from the epigraph about how "it is no longer permitted to be a man and plead the cause of humanity." He was choosing to be nostalgic in spite of knowing that such a universal cause had just recently begun to be defended and appreciated. As we saw earlier, he knew that ideas about "the universal fraternity of all men were quite late in developing." In the same draft he also writes, "the happy life of the Golden Age, which went unrecognized by the brutish men of the earliest times and was lost by their more enlightened successors, is a state that has always been foreign to the human race" (1994:171). His references to a "Golden Age" or "state of nature" were merely evocative, products of a vivid romanticism. As he clarified early on, in his *Discourse on inequality*, this was a hypothetical rather than historical state, in which the feeling of compassion could be imagined to have not yet been replaced and overshadowed by the competitive urges of life in society (Rousseau 1923:175-76). Out of this nostalgic reaction would come "the social contract," a quasi-natural replacement to respond to nature's failure and the first expression of what could be called "biopolitics."

It was in one of the first chapters of his landmark contribution that Rousseau may have marked the history of modern thought. For he reveals how, after losing faith in the power of nature to solve human affairs, his level of ambition remained proportional to that of those suffused with that faith. "The clauses of the contract," he writes there, "are so closely determined by the nature of the act that the slightest modification would make them empty and ineffectual; whence it is that, *although they may perhaps never have been formally pronounced, they are the same everywhere*"

(Rousseau 1994:55, emphasis added). Rousseau's ambition was not just to intervene, but to figure out the work of intervention for everyone else (c.f. Bloom 1997:163). One could speak of this text as the birth of a certain "quasi-natural" premise: that it is possible to find a pattern or mechanism of humanitarian collaboration that, while not being provided by or deduced from nature, can still be recognizable and implementable anywhere. In his contractualist answer, this premise translated into a solution with an undeniable simplicity. "Properly understood, the clauses can all be reduced to one alone, namely, the complete transfer of each associate, with all his rights, to the whole community," to "the general will" (Rousseau 1994:55).

Biopolitics, in this study, corresponds to the field of intervention that is opened up by this type of Rousseauian decision, by which the whole plane of human coexistence is overlaid with a simple method of social organization. A "biopolitical" decision, in this sense, is the one that pursues a humanitarian project of social justice by determining the politics of collaboration to the same extent as nature would. This is a decision that does not require a whole philosophical project, for it can be equally made on the ground. In fact, around the same time of Rousseau's writings, abolitionist campaigners had already begun to enact an ambitious strategy of their own by simply trying to convince and sensitize others through pamphlets and captivating imagery about the legitimate suffering of slaves, for example (Laqueur 2009). I will come back to this point once a clearer idea of the stakes that come with such a definition of biopolitics has been obtained.

For an influential author on the subject like Foucault, biopolitics is a much more forceful combination of natural life and politics; what it involved was far from a "decision" or a "quasi-" naturalism. At a certain point, European states started to be

concerned with something besides their own growth and sovereignty. Their aim became "not just to govern, but to improve the conditions of the population, to increase its wealth, its longevity, and its health" (Foucault 2007b:105). But the reason for this liberal turn, he suggests, was rather technical. Sovereigns simply felt forced to change their policies when they were "limited by evidence" (2008:62), that is, when political economy (mainly Adam Smith and the physiocrats) and statistics (on areas like public health and demographic expansion) started to show that the population they were trying to govern had a "logic" of its own, a set of intrinsic and measurable regularities. Thus, it was not that liberalism came up with quasi-natural solutions – like "the general will" – to respond to a new social problematic, but that at some point statecraft had to adapt and become liberal to be able to intervene and govern, with at least some degree of technical accuracy, "the naturalness of society" (Foucault 2007b:349). As he puts it elsewhere, "what we see appearing in the middle of the eighteenth century really is a naturalism much more than a liberalism" (2008:61).

Historiographically, Foucault's account of the birth of biopolitics has certain limitations (see e.g. Walter 2008; Agamben 2011; Dean 2013:71-86; Behrent 2015:381-82; Dean and Villadsen 2016:127-28). But I think even before this level of examination, conceptually, the way he links biopolitics and liberalism leaves out the extent to which late-eighteenth-century and early-nineteenth-century humanitarians actually decided to devise quasi-natural solutions for the practice of social intervention. Starting with Rousseau, we could say that, based on the draft reviewed above, the immediate problem for him in *The social contract* was a radical one. In his seminal lecture on governmentality, Foucault captures Rousseau's problem differently, as an intellectual break in the technical understanding of the activity of

rule, placing emphasis on the encyclopaedic entry he had written on "Political economy" a few years earlier (1994[1755]), before the actual publication of his political treatise in 1762. "Read the two texts," he suggests to the audience decidedly, "and you can see how Rousseau poses the problem of government and of the art of government" (2007b:106). Rousseau, in Foucault's view, "clearly registers this break." He is one of the first authors to articulate the question of biopolitics and take "on the task of defining an art of government." And yet, as he himself goes on to stress, Rousseau does so "without explicit reference to either the physiocrats or statistics, or to the general problem of the population" (2007b:107). Even for Foucault, then, it seems that at least Rousseau was not forced or "limited" by any "evidence" to reckon with the naturalness of society. His proposal for an art of government would have been the result of a much more active decision.

As I later argue in this chapter, Adam Smith and Kant can also be said to have departed from an intentional project of radical problematization. Specifically, however, Foucault's argument was that *sovereigns* were compelled to recognize the processes intrinsic to society *thanks to* the work of political economists. But, in this sense, it would also be hard to sustain that the French revolutionaries who took over the absolute monarchy of Louis XVI adopted a solution like "the general will" in order to deal with the naturalness of society. In their case, one can rather speak of biopolitics as the quasi-natural solution to which a number of humanitarians enthusiastically resorted in order to solve a non-strictly governmental problem.

The humanitarian self as locus. As Wendy Brown recently pointed out, it is noticeable that Foucault's account completely bypasses the kind of "creature who made the French and American Revolutions" (2015:86). Unlike hers, my intention is

not to capture this enduring creature as a "*homo politicus*" or "miniature sovereign" (2015: 97). It is rather to enlarge the Foucauldian interpretation without having to break its premises. I seek to open the liberal subject onto an affective plane of radical sensibility without bracketing out the notion that "the body is the inscribed surface of events," that our political passions are not "immutable, but [rather] every sentiment, particularly the noblest and most disinterested, has a history" (Foucault, 1984: 83, 87).

Although Foucault does not develop the genealogy of modern political liberalism in any detail, deciding to privilege, for analytical reasons, that of economic liberalism, he does advance the thesis that "Rousseau's approach" was "the path taken by the French Revolution" to deal with the problem of a sovereign regime that was suddenly faced with a nascent political economy and hence "limited by respect for the truth" (2008:38-39). Unlike Smith's approach, Rousseau's solution was for him "retroactive, or retroactionary," a continuation of seventeenth-century theories of "natural law" (p.40). Rousseau scholars like Wokler would find such a qualification inaccurate, since Rousseau is precisely the author that leaves behind – most plainly in *The manuscript of Geneva* – all the then known universalist bases and justifications for a natural right, from immutable transcendental laws to narratives of human origin to inevitable chains of causality (2012, ch. 6). Nevertheless, Foucault's point simply seems to be that, however innovatively Rousseau manages to capture the idea of human rights, his rationale still consists in starting from the definition of the "original rights that belong to every individual," to then deduce "the bounds of governmental competence" (2008:39).

Even in this light, though, the logic of Foucault's thesis still seems to be placing things in a questionable or at least confusing order. First of all, instead of "starting from the rights of man" (p.39), Rousseau envisioned the general will as a "formula" for a "political machine" or "form of association" capable of leading individuals to "commit" their "strength and freedom" to particular others without putting in jeopardy their self-preservation (1994:54-58). It may be a formula that can be expressed as a certain distribution of rights, but what is essential to it, what makes possible such a law-oriented style of government and political state, is, as Rousseau stressed, that each participant is willing to use his freedom in a certain way, to "put his person and all his power in common under the supreme direction of the general will" (p.55).

Likewise, conventional accounts of liberalism based on traditional political analysis would instantly rebut the primacy of rights Foucault proposes, since the new authoritative limits for the bounds of a French national sovereignty were first of all made thinkable and acceptable – or their "legitimacy" was established – by a displacement of authority from the absolute monarch to the general will. The general will, Arendt would for example contend, was first of all seen as "the source and the locus of all power," and only then, because of that reason, as "the origin of all laws as well" (2006:148). As an "abstract totality," Rosanvallon would further clarify, the general will became "almost a *technical condition* for the reconstruction of the political order" (Rosanvallon 2006:138, original emphasis). It was the crucial and primary political device, before any natural right or "popular power" appropriable "by any person," that the revolutionaries employed in the *Declaration* (p.139). But even if one does not embrace these more or less traditional analyses and rather prioritizes a governmentality perspective, it is, I believe, readily perceivable that, while the

founding legal text of the revolutionaries is a declaration of universal rights, the "effectivity" of those rights is erected upon a pre-condition with much more specifiable strategic detail (see Patton 2005, esp. 280).

Ostensibly, the problem for the revolutionaries was governmental, for they needed to devise a new way of governing society, a way that did not find its justification in the state itself. Foucault's rather commonsensical explanation for this problem is, as we said, that they first deduced the rights of man from some originary source and then derived from this deduction a new form of actionable sovereignty, a "will-law" (p.41). Foucault typifies their particular solution as "juridical," which it obviously was, but, more important, he presumes it thus to be doubly "deductive" (p.39). From the more radical biopolitical perspective developed here, I would rather be inclined to see the inclusion of the rights of man to the rights of the citizen in the *Declaration* (whose original title as given by the National Assembly in August 1789 precisely reads: "Declaration of the rights of man and of the citizen") as an explicit effort at situating themselves in a broader humanitarian problematic.

The rights of man do not appear to be for the framers of the *Declaration*, directly or indirectly, a solution as such. If one reads Article 2, it states that, "*the aim of all political association* is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man" (emphasis added), which implies, when considered from a strategic angle, that the solution involved is actually the law of any such "political association" – a law which in turn they specify in Article 6 to be "the expression of the general will." Unlike Diderot in the *Encylopédie*, they were clearly evoking the general will of the nation, not that of humanity. This is something that historians of liberalism would quickly confirm (see e.g. Rosanvallon 2006:139), which suggests that, while they did

evoke humanity from the very beginning of the *Declaration* through an exhortation of "the natural, unalienable, and sacred rights of man," it was not as a natural, deducible solution for the challenge of intervention. In fact, by doing so, they were knowingly risking the creation of a politically reckless and culturally unfathomable legal precedent in French legislation that could "lead to law breaking and license" (Maslan 2004:358). Their invocation of certain rights that would be shared by all human beings – something never officially heard before – would have rather been a courageous declaration of the self-evident problem that they thought they and others would or should have in common.[36]

The way the *Declaration* mandates in Article 3 that "the nation is essentially the source of all sovereignty, nor shall any body of men or any individual exercise authority not expressly derived from it" rather seems to follow the Rousseauian clause in all its radicalness: that the general will is a quasi-natural mechanism that a nation has at its disposal, which instantly and faultlessly coordinates the interests or individual wills of all its members, regardless of circumstantial deliberations (Rousseau 1994:66). It is more than likely that after two hundred years of arduous debate, it will remain uncertain the extent to which the revolutionaries were actually following Rousseau (see e.g. Furet 1997; Wokler 2012, ch. 3). But, regardless of how literally they were reading him, their allusion to something like "the nation" as a whole as a source of authority – and, more briefly, to "the general will" in Article 6 – is in itself historically telling. It precisely conveys the modern notion that each population exhibits (when examined with totalizing optics like the statistics provided by current opinion polls) an implicit rationality – or "will" – with an analyzable nature and, in a sense, an "internal and intrinsic mechanics" (Foucault 2008:61).[37] Foucault is right to locate the "revolutionary" approach at the very

epicenter of the birth of biopolitics, but the reason may not be that such a solution was "juridico-deductive" (p.39).

Even to this day, human rights, as Arendt would warn, do not stand for a solution beyond the realm of the democratic state. Even within democratic systems, speaking of "human rights" is to touch on a whole range of claim-making projects, conceptions of universality and understandings of social effectivity, from compassionate paternalisms to highly political interventionisms (Krause 2014:154-167; Feldman and Ticktin 2010:3). If such rights have been crucial for biopolitical strategies with, say, a legal or philosophical need of definite boundaries or principles, it is not necessarily because they represent "the voice of nature" – although they do not have to be imagined to be the opposite either, in their essence, a purely rhetorical resource always deployed in localized struggles over entitlements (c.f. Coombe 2007:285). Appealing to "the universal" can have a validity of its own, even if it is known in advance that its scope may receive further elaboration in the future, simply because, as Butler puts it, "the term gains its meaning for us precisely through the decidedly less-than-universal cultural conditions of its articulation" (1995:129). To accept "the possibility that rights that emerged in one historical context may take on a very different political significance in another context" – as is the case with the *Declaration* – is not to adopt an anti-foundational or externalist position on the question of rights, but rather to recognize, as Paul Patton has emphasized, that "appeals to new rights" are never purely logical or ahistorical, that "new forms of right will always rely upon concepts that may be found within or derived from existing discourses of political or moral right" (2005:272, 284).

Human rights are perhaps best captured as quasi-natural, and not as deductive, for while "they are *binding* on democratic discourse, they always have to be generated (first) in the midst of such discourse." This is what philosopher Albrecht Wellmer calls "the unavoidable practical circle of democratic discourse" (2000:234, original emphasis). Rousseau's larger legacy may be found here, in the domain of participatory democracy rather than juridical statecraft (Wokler 2012:111; see also Brown 1995 ch. 5). Rights could only be for him the result of a social, rather than natural, contract. There were no clauses that could be imposed upon mere subjects based on a higher authority. "To renounce our freedom," even a small portion of it, was in his view "to renounce our character as men, the rights, even the duties, of humanity" (1994:50). In spite of his highly juridical mindset – as can be perceived even in such a liberatory assertion as this one – he could only foresee one agreeable contractual solution, one "clause" that would have universal value to the extent that it would permit the individual to "obey himself alone, and remain as free as before" (p.55).

Thus, if Rousseau opened up the field of biopolitics, it was not so much by rejecting outright all appeals to natural law – a move bold enough on its own, but one that he himself struggled with, excising in the end *The manuscript of Geneva* from *The social contract* – or by "deducing," albeit innovatively, "the limitation of governmentality by way of the constitution of the sovereign" (Foucault 2008:39), as much as by founding the rights of individuals on the collective and immanent use of their radical freedom, which they could at no point delegate; in other words, on their evolving yet universal "general will" (see Wokler 2012, ch.6). As the father of a political liberalism, he would have left Western culture a highly influential quasi-natural solution based on the active constitution of rights. As the pioneer of a

radical-humanitarian problematization, on the other hand, his influence is not direct and cannot really be presupposed. His importance in our historical architecture, as I elaborate after Chapter 4, is rather that of a guiding light for a renewed understanding of the past that owes its verifiable coherence to the fact that it is a contemporary one, done with the benefit of "hindsight" or, in more Deleuzian terms, of having been witness to the actualization of the virtual.

At a certain distance of Foucault, then, the emphasis here is on the ethical rather than just governmental dimension of biopolitics, on the intrinsically political and fortunately enduring form of subjectivity that would have taken shape around the time of Rousseau and that could be referred to as a "humanitarian self." The focus is on the shift in Western conscience towards the demand of ambitious modes of intervention, that is, modes that could be generalizable enough as to be potentially applicable to the whole of humanity and social or sensible enough as to be primarily concerned with the future of the citizen and the population rather than the state, the elite or the sovereign. From this analytical angle, as I will now discuss, biopolitics appears as more than a technical matter. For it acquires an embodied specificity within the field of ethico-political practice; namely, it marks the not-so-radical attitude of seeking a quasi-natural answer for the challenge of intervention in an attempt to resolve the radical uncertainty of a humanitarian conscience.

2.i.d Foreclosing one's freedom

Notwithstanding the intention it describes, whether biopolitics actually constitutes a technically sound strategy to overcome the uncertainty of a humanitarian self is

something in need of investigation (see Chapter 4). In ideal terms at least, the biopolitical tactic consists in apprehending a principle of social organization of such unquestionability that, whether blindly or consciously pursued, it is able to guarantee a fair mode of universal coexistence. But since any biopolitics stems from the desire of a radical self for uncompromising peace of mind, these are strategies that, in practice, whether effective or not, always materialize in a search for a quasi-natural answer, by which humanitarians attempt to abruptly foreclose their judgment and radical freedom.

"The volunteer" is an exemplary figure to examine this foreclosure of freedom. Figuratively, the volunteer is the one who freely decides to participate in a form of unwaged labour whose social meaningfulness is self-evident and publicly recognized (at least within the bounds of a certain community). As such, it is a figure with a peculiar use of freedom, for its willingness to act and intervene is reliant upon a socially shared and almost binding assumption about "what needs to be done" in relation to a certain problem in society. Freedom in this case is still the expression of an autonomous decision, but of one that leads the self to commit to a project, vision or initiative whose value has already been decided. One way of apprehending this kind of decision is by calling it altruistic, for it is undoubtedly an effort at prioritizing the needs of others.[38] Another way, however, can be to say that it is a style of intervention in which an individual's freedom is actively used only to be then quickly foreclosed, in which someone voluntarily decides to substitute moral duty for ethical freedom.

As a constitutive archetype of moral engagement in Western culture, the volunteer figure is a key site of exploration for a study of biopolitics that departs

from the humanitarian self rather than the state. The reason is that the volunteer is an ideal subject of intervention for the modern art of government. I am not referring yet to the claim that neoliberal governments are in the business of creating the kinds of voluntary workers and voluntary citizens that a globalized capitalist-democratic regime demands (see Chapter 3). Rather, I find the volunteer figure to be a telling expression of that mode of intervention that Foucault called "power," defined as "government," and explained as the "conduct of conduct." The Foucauldian understanding of intervention departs, broadly, from two related propositions: first, that it consists "in guiding the possibility of conduct and putting in order the possible outcome," and second, that its "power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free" (1982:221). Volunteering embodies both, although in a counterintuitive way, in a way that applies more to the relation with the self than even with others. For it is a practice that implies a subject's dedicated exercise to an ordered practice of the self, a voluntary adherence to a certain plan of conduct.

Foucault may not have been concerned with the agent of intervention as much as with the dangerous effects an act of intervention could produce. But through these propositions he was doing more than inform the struggle "against the submission of subjectivity" (1982:213). He was shedding light on the "complex strategical situation" in which biopolitical agents find themselves (Foucault 1998:93). Volunteers do not tend to govern in the conventional sense of the term – even if those who govern do tend to be inspired by the volunteer figure. Yet, they still participate in a collective experience that "guides the possibility of conduct," "puts in order the possible outcome," and actively forecloses the freedom of oneself and fellow humanitarians. As committed humanitarians, they may be free to intervene, but once they decide to proceed as volunteers, that freedom disappears and comes to

be replaced by a form of conduct with a specified directive on how to assist and manage oneself and others. The point of a quasi-natural solution is precisely that it helps "to structure the possible field of action" (Foucault 1982:221).

The notion of volunteering can thus be taken to be an exemplary model of what it means to seek a biopolitical solution in practice. It is exemplary not only because it describes rather accurately the predicament of a humanitarian self who seeks to foreclose its own freedom or become "governmentable" again, but also because it captures the reaction that usually accompanies modern reflections and conversations about social intervention. Two of my research participants had a brief discussion that may be relevant to ground this point. The discussion came after one of them had written a post where she said things like: "Aid doesn't work. Giving money and volunteering in foreign countries doesn't solve the world's complex problems. Well, more accurately, aid hasn't accomplished the transformations that many people hoped it would. Look at Africa, for example. I read an article while in university, that decades of aid has not lifted Africa out of poverty. It supports the structures that continue to entrench Africa in a cycle of poverty." The post ends with a reflection on the critical role that active democratic citizenship could have in this scenario. Then, another blogger commented:

> Comment: I agree with all you've said. Money and donations isn't sustainable and not an effective solution to all problems humanity faces.
> But do you agree that working with governments and exercising our democratic rights and responsibilities is the most effective way to uplifting mankind? Will individual governments work to the betterment of the WORLD or to the betterment of themselves, as is the current situation. How then can individual citizens make a worldwide systematic difference without the support of governments and nations?

> Blogger: What do you mean by systematic difference? As in, people taking a systematic approach (step-by-step) to make a difference? Or a systemic difference, whereby people make a difference in the system?
>
> Either way, my answer is: I don't know.
>
> John Ralston Saul points out that we need to…
>
> (26th of Jun, Ethnosense blog)

The reaction that a humanitarian has, even a skeptical humanitarian, when faced with the question of intervention tends to be a biopolitical one. I explore this tendency in the next chapter. At this point, a dialogue with such a familiar ring to it helps us clarify two different things. First, that a figurative treatment of the volunteer is not necessarily related with literal labels or everyday perceptions of volunteering. While these two participant-ethnographers were experienced international volunteers and had been treated and labeled as such in multiple occasions, they themselves seemed to come to the conclusion that volunteering and aid in general is not a sustainable or effective solution. And yet, regardless of this contradiction, what is actually relevant for our purposes is the way their thinking seems to spontaneously gravitate towards the question of how to make a "worldwide systematic difference." This is the questioning that is exemplary of a figure that craves for absolute certainty – for a structured path, a well-ordered practice and a climactic narrative of intervention.[39]

The second reason that makes this dialogue pertinent is that it illustrates how a biopolitical reaction does not have to translate into a kind of Rousseauian project that is dependent on the state. Even "without the support of governments and nations," humanitarians can be concerned with a "systemic" solution or with a "step-by-step" approach. One could think this is just a contemporary concern made

possible by the effects of globalization in the humanitarian imaginary and by the recent initiatives of organizations like MSF – when, in fact, it is an expression of biopolitics that dates back to the first abolitionists. Those involved in antislavery campaigns advanced a "systematic" approach with an ambitious strategy of their own, one which, as Thomas Laqueur has argued, "was not engaged in philosophy but in the crafting of narratives that would convince hearers that owning a person was wrong" (2009:46). He offers as a clear proof of this the sugar boycott, for it sought to induce a humanitarian feeling in the general public by showing them how something as mundane as sugar, consumed every day in the privacy of their own home, made them directly complicit with an entire market that traded in suffering and exploitation.

To determine the exact biopolitical solution that such campaigners were using, a careful study would be needed. It is rare to find strategies of intervention that evolve on the ground expressed in a formulation as clear-cut and explicit as Rousseau's one-clause-contract (see Chapter 5). But since Laqueur's intention was to evidence what he calls Rorty's "sentimentalist thesis," perhaps it is justified to mention the take that Rorty would have probably had on their strategy. For him, the solution at stake here would be the expansion of a historically contingent "human rights culture" (1993:117) – an expansion that in principle does not have to be biopolitical or "systematic" yet that usually becomes engaging thanks to that assumption. Indeed, human rights campaigns become biopolitical the moment one assumes, as at least Rorty does, that to achieve a humanitarian coexistence, an increased "sensitivity to the particular details of the pain and humiliation of the other" (1989:16) through sentimental education "is just what is needed – indeed *all* that is needed" (1993:127, original emphasis). While a rights-based pedagogy with a

humanitarian guide of conduct like “non-cruelty” may be approached with a certain ironic attitude towards its own foundationalism (see Rorty 1989:15), it is still biopolitical if it is coupled with an ambitious strategy of universal sensitization that assures total effectivity.

Part II. Adam Smith and other Classical Volunteers

The distinction at stake in Rousseau's radical problematization is not, as one could gather from my comments on Richard Rorty, the one between "foundationalist" and "anti-foundationalist" humanitarians. If we were to label Diderot a foundationalist for seeking a natural solution, and skeptical humanitarians anti-foundational for embracing their freedom to intervene, then we would be forced to call humanitarians like Rousseau either one or the other, losing in advance the specificity of their rationality. Foucault uses an entirely different distinction. He distinguishes between what he called two "naturalisms," a pastoral one organized by god directly, and a "biopolitical" one that "basically did not exist until" the birth of political economy. "It is society," Foucault says, "as a naturalness specific to man's life in common that the *économistes* ultimately *bring to light* as … a possible domain of analysis, knowledge and intervention" (2007b:349, emphasis added). Against these two possible sets of distinctions, I have superimposed another one in this chapter, one that directs our attention to the radical problem that those "foundationalist" liberal thinkers who decided to "bring to light" a biopolitics of intervention might have had in mind.

This section elaborates on the genealogical interpretation that is at stake in a distinction like "quasi-natural." I clarify first what it is not, deepening the contrast between Rousseau and other authors like Hobbes, Diderot and also Hume, who Ronsanvallon calls "the greatest liberal thinker of the eighteenth century" (2006:154). Then, I sharpen the idea of what effectively makes a humanitarian biopolitical by discussing two "classical volunteers," Kant and Adam Smith. It may sound counterintuitive to treat Smith as a classical volunteer, although he did write a whole

treatise on moral sentiments. Kant may seem more of an obvious choice given his view of morality based on categorical imperatives, yet this is still far from the reason for the above designation. My intention is to focus neither on the economicism of Smith, nor on the transcendentalism of Kant. It is rather to show that these pioneering liberal thinkers share a crucial commonality with Rousseau at the level of problematization.

It was commonplace in the eighteenth century for writers to articulate their ideas about moral conduct in relation to "Nature." But my argument is that, at least in the case of some of the most influential philosophers of liberalism, their solutions were only quasi-natural, and they are best considered as "volunteers in biopolitics." Using secondary sources for the most part – leaning on their authority in regards to such complex writers, if you will – my aim is thus to elaborate on what is meant by "quasi-natural" when applied to the history of social intervention.

2.ii.a. The 'bio' in biopolitics

Hirschman is more useful for this task of differentiation than Foucault, even if both use a similar point of departure – "the needs of conduct" that came with the crisis of pastoral authority in the sixteenth century (Foucault 2007b:231) or the intellectual anxiety that emerged during the Renaissance for "more effective ways of shaping the pattern of human actions than through moralistic exhortation or the threat of damnation" (Hirschman 1997:15). Indeed, Foucault's emphasis on the naturalist break that followed after this critical event – with *raison d'État* in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries – makes it difficult to appreciate the distinction introduced in

this chapter. For Foucault, *raison d'État* was an art of government that managed to find its rationale in "the state itself," without needing to make "reference to a natural order, an order of the world, fundamental laws of nature, or even to a divine order" (2007b:257). Thus, he can argue that the arrival of an art of government like liberalism at the end of the eighteenth century, whose mission becomes to optimize the social, economic and biological processes that are intrinsic to a population, amounts to a reintroduction of nature into political thought – or a "biopolitics."

Hirschman, on the other hand, pays attention to some of the broader ramifications of that same critical event in the sixteenth century, ramifications that Foucault, given his particular interest in technologies of power, intentionally left out in his account – "Obviously, I do not want to talk about all of this…" (Foucault 2007b:232). Hirschman pays attention to all the multiple practical solutions that started to be explored for the "destructive passions" since the seventeenth century, tracing very much the development of what we called in Chapter 1 a strategic mode of inquiry. More important, he emphasizes, unlike Foucault, that such an inquiry advanced through "a detailed and candid dissection of human nature," through a desire to look at "man 'as he really is'" (1997:12-15). In this way, Hirschman can recognize in someone like Hobbes a form of inquiry that thinks *through nature*, even if at the same time it helps an art of government like *raison d'État* build an autonomous rationality and distance itself from theological or cosmological foundations.[40] Hobbes may propose the *Leviathan* as an artificial yet binding covenant, as a solution constructed by human beings among themselves. But what makes him think that such a solution can be effective is still a deduction about their nature: the fact that they all share a countervailing passion, a "Feare of Death" (Hirschman 1997:31). If, inevitably, it is in the nature of individuals to serve their

own passions, nothing can guarantee a peaceful coexistence except a law that with its enforceability appeals to the most powerful of them – "The passion to be reckoned upon, is fear" (Hobbes 1998:94).

For Hirschman, however, an author like Rousseau is just another clear example of this tendency to find solutions by thinking through nature or taking "man as he really is." To prove this, he refers us to the opening of *The social contract*: "*Taking men as they are and the laws as they might be*, I wish to investigate whether a legitimate and certain principle of government can be encountered" (cited in Hirschman 1997:14, emphasis added). Rousseau's words take on a very different meaning after having read the first part of this chapter. He must now be considered in the light of a distinction that sees him as actually going against such a naturalist tendency. For it becomes clear that, rather than aspiring to deduce a solution from the nature or passionate composition of human beings, he is trying to invent a solution that in any case could be applicable to any and every individual, including skeptics, who he thinks will always be immune to such straightforward solutions. His inquiry is therefore only "quasi-natural" – naturalistic in its ambitions, trying to imagine a solution that could apply to entire populations, but not in its reasoning, not trying to find the answer somehow in human nature. Considering Rousseau's methodological openness, what seems then crucial in Rousseau's opening sentence is not "taking men as they are" as much as "and the laws as they *might* be."[41] In his case, to accept "man as he really is" was just to accept that modern individuals have a nature that is too complicated for us to be able to extrapolate an irrefutable answer.[42]

2.ii.b. Hume's realism

Rousseau should not be seen, however, as someone who simply introduced an absolutely new distinction into a culture that, all of a sudden, by virtue of an idea that would have been until then thoroughly unthinkable, were to become liberal. At least since Hume's *A treatise of human nature* published in 1739, there was the idea roaming around European thought that being humanitarian is not something that comes easily to human beings (Ginzburg 1994). As he put it there, "*'tis not contrary to reason* to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger" (1978:416, emphasis added). Hume was the pioneer of a humanitarian radicalism to an important extent, for he was not simply rehearsing the skeptical ontology of Hobbes and others in his tradition like Bernard Mandeville. In Hume's philosophy, as Annette Baier comments, "'the interested passion,' or self-interest, plays an important role, but so does sympathy, and concern for others" (1987:42). The difficulty he articulated, therefore, was actually quite original and suggestive.

For even a self-righteous humanitarian like Diderot – who believed himself to be more rational than any skeptical interlocutor – there was in this Humean idea a recognizable truth about distant suffering. He expresses it in his crude "Letter on the blind, for the use of those who see" published in 1749*:*

> What difference is there to a blind person between a man urinating and a man bleeding to death without speaking? Do we ourselves not cease to feel compassion when distance or the smallness of the object produces the same effect on us as lack of sight does on the blind? Thus do all our virtues depend on our way of apprehending things and on the degree to which external objects affect us! I feel quite sure that were it not for fear of punishment, many people would have fewer qualms at killing a man who was far

> enough away to appear no larger than a swallow than in butchering a steer with their own hands (1966: 17, cited in Ginzburg 1994:51).

Diderot would surely add, if we remember his 1755 entry in the *Encyclopédie,* that disregarding the suffering of distant others is far from the most rational option – that if we follow the innate human capacity of "reason" to its natural result, the conclusion about what is right would have to depend on the general will of mankind and not on one's unreliable feelings of compassion. Still, it is clear that, with some level of despair, Diderot in any case recognizes in Hume's aphorism a minimal truth. Even if it is not the most rational thing to do, it is "not contrary to reason," as Hume says, for someone to be anti-humanitarian. He seems to acknowledge that, in fact, we are all susceptible to moral skepticism, to the extent that we suffer from what Forman-Barzilai (2009) calls "sentimental nearsightedness," a bias of sympathy towards those, including oneself, who are the closest to us in physical, social or cultural terms.

Rousseau's innovation is not entirely his. He simply articulates a style of problematization that had started to emerge among his contemporaries. In any event, Diderot was not there yet. One could say that Rousseau was simply better prepared to accept the consequences of what Hume was saying. While Diderot decides to push the skeptic to become more "reasonable," Rousseau is truly willing to concede that there are compelling reasons to be skeptical, that it is indeed understandable or "not contrary to reason" to prioritize one's interests over "the destruction of the whole world." Rousseau reveals his Humean departure early on through his entry in the *Encyclopédie* on political economy: "It seems as though our feelings of humanity evaporate and weaken as they extend across the earth, as though we cannot be as sensitive to calamities in Tartary or Japan as to those that are

suffered by a European people" (1994:17). Once Rousseau fully embraced this Humean revelation, he was able to stop looking for answers in nature, since, precisely, it did not seem to be in our nature to be humanitarian.

It is difficult to say in which side of this divide Hume actually was. His project was not exactly humanitarian, even if he did value "the sentiment of humanity" (Hume 1978: 601, cited in Baier 1987:43). Humanity as a sentiment had been, without doubt, increasingly valued during the early eighteenth century, at least since the work of Shaftesbury (Fiering 1976:202). Nevertheless, Hume's problem, as Baier comments, is not that of Rousseau or Kant, that "of the coexistence of would-be unrestrained self-assertors," as much as "the problem of contradiction, conflict, and instability in any one person's desires." His orientation is more "intrapersonal" than "interpersonal" (1987:45). Rather than being "humanitarian" in the radical, strategic sense we have captured here, Hume's horizon of problematization seems to be still firmly grounded on the question of morality.

If one examines his solution, however, his position in the history of humanitarian thought becomes more ambivalent. On the one hand, while standing in opposition to the rationalism of Diderot, Hume's solution follows in the end the same kind of strategy. It expects to find in the nature of human beings, this time in their very affections rather than their reason, a way of correcting, redirecting or overcoming any of their highly conflictive passions. Reason for him must only play a minimal role (c.f. Hirschman 1997:25). One must simply use it to recognize the value that custom, tradition and the "social artifice" in which one grew up can have for the development of one's sympathy. Ultimately, Hume suggests that it is this affective

capacity what motivates and allows individuals to resolve their differences of sentiment with each other (Baier 1987:41-42).

On the other hand, in spite of his reliance on things like sentiment, convention and habit, Hume's theory still speaks, then, of a "social artifice." This is a collective construct that is "changeable by human will," and that applies to any culture as long as the rules of the group "do redirect the dangerous destructive workings of self-interest" (p.40). Such a radical conception of sociality suggests that his affective project can be considered to be at least a prototype of a quasi-natural solution, although it would have been, in any case, a rather limited one for humanitarian purposes. It would have been solely concerned with those who find moral progress difficult but who are not skeptical in the first place. As Baier elucidates in this sense, for Hume "a lover of conflict will have no reason, since he will have no motive, to cultivate the moral sentiment, and nor will that man of 'cold insensibility' who is 'unaffected with the images of human happiness or misery'" (1987:41 citing Hume 1975: 225).

2.ii.c. Smith's anti-rigorism

In spite of being Hume's disciple, Adam Smith shares none of his ambivalences. This is something that appears with particular clarity in *The theory of moral sentiments* (2004[1759]), a text he revised many times and worked on for decades – although it can also be detected in his famous, even if slightly less taxing, *The wealth of nations* (1976), the place where he suggested, as is well-known, a market-based solution. In his exacting moral treatise, he addresses the same basic Humean difficulty, invoking the scene of "a man of humanity in Europe" who hears about a catastrophic

earthquake in China and still has less problems sleeping at night than if he lost "his little finger" (2004:157). And to elaborate on this difficulty, he even uses an example related to eyesight, like Diderot, comparing the way spatial distance distorts the real dimension of objects with how social distance affects the observer in proportion to what her interests are in the observed situation (p.156). But, in his case, he fully develops his teacher's aphorism about a sentimental nearsightedness into the kind of problematization we have explored in this chapter:

> When our passive feelings are almost always so sordid and so selfish, *how comes it that our active principles should often be so generous and so noble?* When we are always so much more deeply affected by whatever concerns ourselves, than by whatever concerns other men; what is it which prompts the generous, upon all occasions, and the mean upon many, to sacrifice their own interests to the greater interests of others? It is not the soft power of humanity, it is not that feeble spark of benevolence which Nature has lighted up in the human heart … It is reason, principle, conscience, the inhabitant of the breast, the man within, the great judge and arbiter of our conduct (p.158, emphasis added).

Putting aside his solution for a moment, we can see that Smith poses a problem that is strategic and not simply moral. His inquiry is directed at a mechanism that can lead even "the mean" and those with just a "feeble spark of benevolence" to act in a humanitarian way. And, like in the case of Rousseau, his ambition is universal. He wants to tell everyone how they can and should intervene. Rousseau introduces the social contract solution, if we remember, by saying that, "although [its clauses] may perhaps never have been formally pronounced, they are the same everywhere." Smith follows the same premise here. He speaks, that is, about a latent mechanism – a solution that everyone would be familiar with but that we have not managed to grasp yet. Given our sentimental nearsightedness, what he asks is, "how comes it

that our active principles should often be so generous and so noble?" He does not depart, say, from what a rationally deficient or emotionally conflictive skeptic is doing wrong or from what the nature of human beings ideally prescribes. Rather, he wants to identify that which we all are able to do sometimes or even "often" in order to be humanitarian despite our constitution, despite the fact that we are inclined to be "almost always so sordid and so selfish."

Smith rejected what Forman-Barzilai (2009) considers to be the "rigoristic" point of view, the strict opinion that individuals should strive to be personally concerned with even the most distant of strangers and apply themselves accordingly. This is a crucial commonality he has with Rousseau, who explicitly disapproved of any perfectionist cosmopolitanism.[43] In the crucial draft of *The social contract* reviewed earlier, Rousseau for example talks with disdain of "those so-called cosmopolitans … who boast of their love for all so as to have the right not to love anyone" (1994:174). The reasoning behind this disdain, as he better explains in the *Encyclopédie*, is that "concern and compassion have in some way to be limited and compressed, in order that they should be active" (1994:17). Smith rejected, practically in the same way, the unrealistic aspirations of traditional cosmopolitan philosophies like Stoicism and Neo-augustianism, which sought to "collapse the natural concentric structure of our affections" either "by augmenting beneficence" or "extirpating self-preference" (Forman-Barzilai 2009:120-21). Smith, like Rousseau, was a cosmopolitan at heart who "admired those who exhibited great acts of beneficence, especially toward strangers" (p.128, see also Hill 2010; for Rousseau see Rosenblatt [2008:67] who concludes that he "even offered himself as the 'truest' cosmopolitan of them all"). But both simply departed from the radical idea that we cannot know in advance

how our intersubjective reality is supposed to become humanitarian, considering "that feeble spark of benevolence which Nature has lighted up in the human heart."

Like Rousseau, Smith fully accepts Hume's aphorism and thinks that, even if it is the destiny of this species to be humanitarian, it cannot be assumed that an effective strategy of intervention can be simply deduced from our nature. A solution, even a universal one, needs to be crafted with what we have. This non-naturalistic mode of problematization is what in the above excerpt allows him to describe his solution with such ease and flexibility, using a myriad of terms that only obliquely point at the mechanism he has in mind. He brings together a whole array of elements in human nature – "reason," "principle," "conscience,""the inhabitant of the breast" – precisely because none of them constitutes in itself the solution.[44] Broadly, the solution that he constructs could be called a "faculty." For, in concrete terms, it consists in using one's imagination to put oneself in the shoes of others and judge the social world through the lens of what he calls an "impartial spectator." But, as a mental ability that requires a whole moral treatise to be recognized as an actual human potentiality, available to any individual subject regardless of its culturally acquired skills and socially developed affections, it is still a faculty that overlays what is believed to be our basic makeup in an original, even if somewhat familiar, manner. I discuss this solution at length in Chapter 4.

In *The wealth of nations,* Smith's approach is the same – although he does not start from a faculty this time. The solution that he explores there is, of course, what has come to be known as "the invisible hand of the market," which suggests that economic actors help themselves and society best when they seek to "have some advantage over their neighbours" (1976:457). But, against the common presumption

about this theory, Smith did not actually pose the existence of a *homo œconomicus* to be "primary and unmediated," as a political theorist like Wendy Brown has recently restated it (2015:92). The essentialist conception of *homo œconomicus* only eventually appeared as a result of the caricaturization of writers like John Stuart Mill, who were merely formulating "an abstract hypothetical human subject useful for the purpose of economic analysis" (Hamann 2009:52). Mill even stated in his time, in the plainest of terms, that "no political economist was ever so absurd as to suppose that mankind are really [driven] solely [by] the desire for wealth" (1967: 322 cited in Brown 2015:97-98).

Smith's whole account, about how so many benefits can be derived from a form of coexistence based on the market and its spontaneous division of labor, does start from "a certain propensity in human nature which has in view no such extensive utility; the propensity to truck, barter, and exchange one thing for another." Yet, immediately, he clarifies that "whether this propensity be one of those original principles in human nature" is something that "belongs not to our present subject to inquire." What is important is simply that it is "common to all men" (1976:25). From a propensity that is familiar even if not necessarily natural to everyone, then, Smith sought to craft another non-rigoristic solution for a humanitarian society, presuming that "it is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker" (p.26-7) that such a society can be realized.

2.ii.d. Kant's Enlightenment

Kant, in a similar fashion, at least if one focuses on works like *Perpetual Peace* (1917[1795]) and *What is Enlightenment?* (2007[1784]), can also be shown to have a

crucial commonality with Rousseau's mode problematization (beyond the more direct influence that the latter may have had on him). In principle, this proposition can seem misguided (see e.g. Riley 2011). After all, in the last two centuries, Kant has become the archetype for a foundationalist cosmopolitanism. But, again, "anti-foundational" is a poor characterization of the radical humanitarian.[45] As is relatively well known, Foucault (2007a) has offered a new interpretation on the influence that Kant has had on modern philosophy. Thanks to a great extent to this unorthodox reading, it becomes possible to sustain here that in spite of his teleological conception of universal history, Kant still departed from a radical premise about human intervention.

Kant displays a fierce humanitarianism. His interpretation of the Enlightenment, Foucault for example stresses, is "very much a call for courage" (2007a:48). This is a classical author that insists on the solvability of the humanitarian problem. As Christine Helliwell and Barry Hindess have recently put it, Kant is someone who stubbornly and almost as a matter of faith contends that, "despite the often destructive empirical history of human interaction, we have to believe in the reality of human progress" (2015:31). At the same time, though, the understanding he has of the societies of his time is far from ideal. As many other classical liberals like John Stuart Mill (see Mehta 1997), he departs from a stratified, developmental view of European and non-European societies (Helliwell and Hindess 2015:33). It is for this reason that, while *Perpetual Peace* has often been assumed to contain a programmatic, almost prophetic, statement on the universal realization of democratic systems, it is believed that such a promising statement can only be discerned once his metaphysics of the "human race" and theology of "Nature" are bracketed (pp.33-35). I believe that the opposite, in fact, might be more fruitful, a reading that explores

why, from a patronizing, developmental view of humanity and confident, faithful view of nature, Kant is so cryptic about the actual, ultimate solution to perpetual peace he has in mind.

In a markedly biopolitical vein, the first supplement of *Perpetual peace* is fully dedicated to the question of foreclosure, of what can "guarantee" that a humanitarian coexistence is possible (1917:143). Furthermore, it advances that any solution for perpetual peace must work under important limitations. While "the republican constitution is the only one which is perfectly adapted to the rights of man," he writes, its members would "require to be angels" (pp.152-53). Kant thus evokes a certain anti-rigorism, perhaps even a sentimental myopia, reinforcing a few lines later that the formation of a state of peace is in any case "not insoluble, *even* for a race of devils, granted that they have intelligence" (pp.153-54, emphasis added). Finally, like Smith and Rousseau, he also implies that the solution lies in a latent mechanism that would be universally implementable and that would not depend on morals: "We can see, in states actually existing, although very imperfectly organised, that, in externals, they already approximate very nearly to what the Idea of right prescribes, although the principle of morality is certainly not the cause" (p.154).

Concretely, Kant's thesis is that the solution has to be "a good political constitution." It is this what he thinks can lead to "the good moral condition of a nation" and not the other way around (pp.154-55). The whole text is in fact dedicated to the definitive articles that would be eventually needed for a universal civic society "founded on a federation of free states" (p.128). Yet, what is problematic about this vision of humanity is that Kant ties it to a rather theological account of history in which things happen "whether we will or not" (p.152). While he considers

perpetual peace to be a moral ideal set by human beings themselves as a rational species, he still suggests that the guarantee for the realization of such an ideal is "given by no less a power than the great artist nature" (p.143). And yet, within the context of his own time, this could have been a coherent way of reassuring a free thinking and sentimentally nearsighted readership: by saying that, "such a problem must be capable of solution. For it deals not with the moral reformation of mankind, but only with the mechanism of nature" (p.154).

Despite structuring his discourse in relation to "the mechanism of nature," Kant's solution is arguably just as biopolitical as Smith's. To elaborate on this interpretation, I would like to dwell first on Smith's very own theological terminology. In *The theory of moral sentiments*, Smith frequently refers to things like the "Author of Nature" (2004:101), "the plan of Providence" (p.193), "the immense machine of the universe" (p.278), and of especial significance is his reference to "the œconomy of nature" (p.90). The increasingly influential philosopher Giorgio Agamben (2011) published, not long ago, a thorough investigation into the genealogy of this term "œconomy," in which he concludes that Smith stands at the end of a long line of Christian thought concerned with the question of how god actually governs the world, that is, with the theological disconnect or "separation between being and acting, substance and praxis" (p.53). Within this tradition, he says, Smith "pushes to an extreme" the view of an "immanent order" over that of a "transcendent principle" (p.284). An immanent order, in this theological sense, would be a form of "naturalism" based on "providentialism" (p.284). It means that "God has made the world just as if it were without God and governs it as though it governed itself" (p.286).[46]

What Smith's case demonstrates is that theological discourse can be integrated with a biopolitical strategy if it is assumed that god, in whatever the scheme presented, does not really have the need to intervene. Like Kant, Smith often uses providentialist references to legitimize, reinforce or perhaps only square his conclusions. At some point, to justify his anti-rigoristic cosmopolitanism he for example states that, "the care of the universal happiness of all rational and sensible beings, is the business of God and not of man. To man is allotted a much humbler department" (2004:279). But then, at other times, it becomes rather clear that it is our very sentimental myopia what "seems wisely ordered by Nature" (p.161) to attend to this purportedly divine humanitarian care via non-interventionist or "immanent" methods like the impartial spectator or the invisible hand. It is, he concludes, "that wisdom which … seems to have judged that the interest of the great society of mankind would be best promoted by directing the principal attention of each individual to that particular portion of it, which has most within the sphere both of his abilities and of his understanding" (p.270). As Forman-Barzilai (2009) contends, this may be the most important passage of Smith's work (p.214), for it shows that "he was not starting theistically from God's will to establish our moral sentiments and general rules" (p.115). Smith would have rather sought to discover a way for human beings themselves to advance, even if within the restricted context of the "humbler department" of their local relationships, a solution for the effective care of all sensible beings (hypothetically assigned to them by a providential if immanent "nature") (see pp.131-34).

In Kant's case, the theological narrative is even more teleological, but what is crucial to note is that, in the end, it is equally tied to an immanent, open-ended, and hypothetical understanding of nature.[47] Kant starts the argumentation of the first

supplement by affirming that in nature's "mechanical course is clearly exhibited a predetermined design to make harmony spring from human discord" (1917:143). Yet he immediately clarifies that "this Providence we do not, it is true, perceive in the cunning contrivances of nature; nor can we even conclude from the fact of their existence that it is there" (pp.144-45). His argument rests on the assumption that "the form of things" ultimately relates to a "final cause" or "Higher Wisdom" (p.145). But we "must keep within the limits of possible experience," he warns, "in view of the limitations of human reason" (p.146).

His departure is thus deeply radical, founded, strictly speaking, upon nothing else than human agency, yet the way he structures his discourse can be misleading. Unlike Smith, he makes an emphasis on the problem rather than the answer. For this reason, it would seem at times as though it could actually be expected from nature to offer a concrete solution for perpetual peace. For example, he states from the outset that, "it is our duty to make use of the mechanism of nature for the realisation of that end" (p.146). His point, though, is simply that to achieve a "good organisation of the state" (p.153), we must acknowledge and work with the propensities of human beings, which "may be really antagonistic" and full of "evil sentiments" (p.154).

Notwithstanding the actual point that he wants to make, he frames his inquiry in what for a modern reader definitely is a counterintuitive direction. Instead of resorting to "Providence" to, say, complement or defend an anti-rigoristic solution, he uses a theological formulation to pose what he himself essentially sees as a question of humanitarian strategy – for instance asking, "*what does nature do* in this respect [the design of a perpetual peace] with reference to the end which man's own reason sets before him as a duty?" (pp.151-52, emphasis added); or sustaining that,

"the mechanism of nature, working through the self-seeking propensities of man (which of course counteract one another in their external effects), may be used by reason *as a means of making way for the realisation of her own purpose*, the empire of right" (p.155, emphasis added). Kant would seem to use the very discourse of nature in an attempt to foreclose his radical freedom – that is, to guarantee, to himself and others, rational devils or angels, that his vague outline for a humanitarian solution would work, "not indeed with sufficient certainty to enable us to prophesy the future … but yet clearly enough for practical purposes" (p.157).

But if Kant pays more attention to the formulation of the problem than the answer, it is precisely because his solution ultimately rests on the autonomy of reason. If others are going to contribute to a universal, free, and peaceful coexistence, it has to be, he proposes, out of their own enlightenment. This contingent and radical departure contained in Kant's philosophy of history is precisely what Foucault elucidates through a careful reading of two newspaper articles where Kant dealt with the question of "What is Enlightenment" (Foucault 2007a; 2011). As he put it, this tiny portion of Kant's work "raises in a relatively discrete, almost lateral, way the question of the immanence of teleology to the process of history itself" (2007a:83).

Kant, it becomes clear in these articles, simply could not tell others how to leave their state of immaturity, for the obstacle in the first place was what he called their "self-incurred tutelage" (Kant 2007:29), their condition of dependence on external authorities that perform the labor of understanding for them (Foucault 2011:30). While being generally concerned with an "analytic of truth," Kant would have at the same time departed from an "ontology of the actuality" or "the historical analysis of

the limits that are imposed on us" (Foucault 2007a:95, 118). For even if he believed that the course of history would culminate in a perpetual peace thanks to a potentiality found in human reason, he did not think he could provide the actual solution that would bring about the necessary enlightenment. All he could do is examine the directionality of history from a distance (see Dean 1994:45-47), define what a legitimate use of reason would mean in the enlightened stage (Foucault 2007a:104), and look for a sign that confirms that humanity is effectively moving towards that stage (pp.88-89).

The sign that Kant eventually finds is telling of his immanent teleology. He discovers it in a rather obvious place, the French revolution (c.f. Dean 1994:49). But it is not because the revolution or its declaration of rights will solve, once and for all, the humanitarian problem. The sign that he is looking for is much less epochal and yet more definitive. He finds that the useful sign is actually the enthusiasm that the general public demonstrated towards the revolution, because, even if the revolution were to fail, it had been shown that humanity has a moral predisposition capable of leading it towards a free and peaceful political constitution (Foucault 2007a:91-92). Kant did not think, then, that he could deduce from the history and nature of human beings the exact form of intervention that would be effective. The most he could say is that our proven predisposition towards "maturity" could eventually help solve the humanitarian problem. As Foucault hints from the beginning of his analyses, Kant could only define the enlightenment in "an almost entirely negative way," as "man's way out from his self-incurred tutelage," as a "way out, exit, a movement by which one extricates oneself from something, without saying anything about what one is moving towards" (2007a:99; 2011:26-27).

End. The humanitarian Challenge

"Biopolitics" has been defined and used in many ways in the last few years, particularly in relation to humanitarian theory (e.g. Agamben 1998; Fassin 2011; Redfield 2005; Gupta 2012; Blencowe 2013; Nasir 2017; Tripathy 2017). Here alone, I referred to four different naturalisms that appear when one reads the governmental genealogies of Foucault, Hirschman and Agamben, and that can be clearly distinguished from a certain quasi-naturalism which I also decided to fit within the category of biopolitics. This prolificness and versatility should not be held against the term, though. As with any theoretical construct, the connection that is created between "nature," or "life," and politics through a concept like this one is, in the words of Thomas Lemke, "always and inevitably the result of a selective perspective" (2011a:2). If I decided to deploy it once again in this thesis, it is because I am interested in framing the terms of the debate in relation to the Foucauldian reading of liberalism, which, for good or bad, is fundamentally tied to such an increasingly popular notion. As Foucault wrote in one of his research notes, he was basically "studying liberalism as the general framework of biopolitics" (2008: 22).

What was added to Foucault's technical account of the naturalistic arts of liberal government is a radical element of moral subjectivity that took shape around the mid-eighteenth century, precisely around the time Foucault dates the "birth" of biopolitics. Through a peculiar Rousseauian reading of a number of pioneering authors and initiatives of modern liberalism, it became possible to grasp a locus of problematization other than the state – what can be called, in an oddly traditional fashion, the humanitarian self. This locus can be considered to be and treated as a mode of subjectivity, sensibility or perception, but, at any rate, it is not its label,

shape or content what is of special significance. It is rather the kind of radical challenge that it created for Western culture and its approach to intervention. I think the understanding of this challenge can be delimited with a few premises:

1 The challenge is unique to those with a historically specific and culturally acquired humanitarian sense, which means that no matter how many individuals recognize the value of a cosmopolitan ethos, and how widespread human suffering is, there is no natural or phenomenological resource, no aspect of human embodiment, that can automatically and universally bridge the distance between the problem and the solution (c.f. Turner and Rojek 2001, ch. 7).

2 Any humanitarian solution would depart, in this sense, from a radical freedom to intervene. Even if it appeals to natural law (as in the case of human rights) or certain human propensities (as in the case of Smith and Kant), the point of departure for this challenge is that any solution has to be fabricated by us out of the cultural materials we have at our disposal.

3 As a sense, moreover, humanitarianism could never be reduced to a specific set of practices, solutions, values or even "sensibilities" (c.f. Boltanski 1999). It is a problematizing mode of perception rather than a defined emotion or discursive subject position. As what Massumi (2002) would call an "affective" problem-space, the humanitarian self amounts to "the pressing crowd of incipiencies and tendencies" (p.30) that can be produced by a reproachable situation as unqualified intensity in the sensing body. It is a realm of potential where countless options remain virtual rather than actual; in principle, a moment of

becoming before sense morphs into a discernible range of meaningful expressions and practical possibilities.

4 What makes, then, a practice humanitarian is not necessarily its urgency, pragmatism, commitment, level of ambition or moral narrative. It is simply the question of strategy, the more or less specified way it responds to a perception of crisis and aspires to effect a more or less drastic modification in the present circumstances.

5 The vision of any such strategy is global, yet not specifiable in advance. All humanitarians aspire to a more inclusive state of social justice and are, in this sense, orientated by a principle of universality, but the exact content of what seeking more "humanity" or more "justice" means is always up for grabs (Feldman and Ticktin 2010; Fraser 2008). For some, it may mean, for instance, to help nation-states to cooperate and advance their collective interests, while for others it may entail simply making an effort to care for immediate others in a vulnerable position. That a strategy has a whole species in mind says little about its understanding or approach to the problem of universality.

6 Furthermore, in spite of such open-endedness, the challenge of a humanitarian can be characterized with certainty as being liberal. Its complexity stems from the distinctively modern insight that human beings are not naturally inclined towards a humanitarian mode of coexistence and should be approached as such, as individuals with an autonomy of reason, sentiment, and conscience.

7 And, finally, what is perhaps most radical about this challenge is that it is not even a requirement for an individual to define, publicize and catalogue what he or she is volunteering for or doing as a humanitarian. While most have sought and continue to seek some kind of certainty by foreclosing their freedom of intervention, a few of them – for reasons that I will now start to explore – are starting to engage with their humanitarianism in its most radical condition.

Chapter 3 | INTERVENTION IN A "COMPLICITY" KNOT:

Pinpointing the impasse in everyday development practice

The volunteer tourist – and, for that matter, the volunteer in general – has become an easy target for a politics of suspicion in an era of neoliberal reform. For a long time, the tourist has been seen, of course, as a complicitous character in the inequality of the world, as a careless and insatiable force of cultural consumption that continually expands the commodity chains of an imperialist capitalism (Butcher 2003:100-02). But, in this case, wealthy Westerners are not being questioned in the scholarly literature and elsewhere for their mass consumerist impulses. After all, they are in theory helping to address those very claims by engaging in an ethical version for an alternative tourism. If they are becoming suspect, it is mostly for their newly adopted role as a volunteer of sorts.

Volunteer tourism has been criticized for being a humanitarian initiative which, in that capacity, comes to have dangerously close involvements with the market. The gap year industry, in particular, has been accused of packaging their programs through a simplistic development discourse along with an instrumentalist emphasis on the value of volunteer credentials for future employability (Simpson 2004; 2005; Heath 2007; Butcher and Smith 2010; McGloin and Georgeou 2016). In a similar vein, short-term volunteer tourism has been qualified as "a child of its neoliberal era," with sending organizations excessively preoccupied with selling a "marketable

product" in a competitive niche market (Vodopivec and Jaffe 2011:125). Corporate partnerships for international volunteering have also been critically questioned, for prioritizing the needs of volunteers, decontextualizing issues of social justice, and imagining the global South as a "global playground" (Smith and Laurie 2011:555). Even early advocates, like Stephen Wearing (2001), have started to denounce the increasingly evident commodification and "cooptation of this form of travel by the neoliberal agenda" (Lyons et al 2012:374).

Latent in these claims is a critique of complicity, as it becomes especially palpable in the recent work of Wanda Vrasti (2013), who, following broadly the same arguments, arrives at an even more explicit denunciation. In general, Vrasti stresses similar findings: that the lack of emphasis in the industry on questions of redistribution and social justice renders its "humane neoliberalism … little more than a clever smokescreen" (p.29); how volunteer tourism has become a convenient way of developing the global, affective and entrepreneurial competencies of young Westerners, equipping them with the social and cultural capital that is needed for a flexible and competitive workforce; the way this industry seems designed to advance "a new 'graduated' hierarchy" (p.54) between privileged mobile workers and those "forced to settle for backbreaking jobs and static lives" (p.57). Nonetheless, while departing from familiar concerns, she draws an unequivocal conclusion:

> the effectiveness of volunteer tourism should not be assessed in terms of the goods and services it delivers to the global poor or the emancipatory alternative it presents to liberal modernity, but in terms of how well it helps (re)produce subjects and social relations congruent with the logic of capital … Despite critiquing modern industrial life and idealizing the traditional other, alternative tourism remains complicit with capitalist consumer culture (pp.4, 72-73).

It is difficult to disregard this kind of denunciation, especially in a post-welfarist context of intervention in which inexperienced volunteers and commercial operators often come together to direct and enact the practice of development. It is one that undoubtedly resonates with the critical impulses of a long liberal tradition that likes to find an antagonist to the humanitarian project of modernity. Analytically, however, "complicity" is a problematic proposition, at least as long as it is placed in a register of denunciation. It is a critique that invariably faces the same problem as Diderot: it cannot sustain that its accusation is objective and morally meaningful (see Chapter 1). Like Rousseau, one could always rebut that if there is no guarantee that the current circumstances can be changed, there is equally no objective basis for a politics of suspicion: this might well be the most ethical Western travelers can be (see Chapter 2). Moreover, for someone or something to become an accomplice in this sense, it would have to be proven first that not only the suffering of others is related in a causal way with that agency, but also that it is within the power of that agency to break away from this causal chain.[48]

Luc Boltanski (1999) has explored the theoretical conundrum that these two simultaneous requirements lead to in his book on late-twentieth-century humanitarianism *Distant suffering*. In this book, whose general claim was briefly addressed in the previous chapter, he presents a summary account of this register of denunciation characteristic of the workers' movement and the sociological theory of class exploitation. In broad strokes, the conundrum is that, on the one hand, to assert that certain people are complicit in the suffering of distant others, it is necessary to generalize the accusation to a whole system or social structure (p.73). Only then, one can accuse them for perpetuating an exploitative relation in spite of that not being their evident intention (pp.13-17). But, then, the difficulty is, firstly, that "the bearers

of the structure" may not seem "personally responsible," which undermines the capacity that they may have in "escaping the constraints of the system" and, by extension, the very reason for denunciation (p.75). In Vrasti (2013), this limitation for example appears when she states that, "volunteers cannot be held directly responsible for this inequity" (p.53), "young adults are ultimately also the victims of larger socio-economic transformations" (p.132) or, more pointedly, "we are all complicit" (p.136). Secondly, it is simply not possible, Boltanski elaborates, to fix once and for all the scientific grounds or external vantage point that would validate a generalized accusation directed at a whole structure (1999:74). All-embracing suspicions about such structure like, "its primary goal is to enlist our compliance" (Vrasti 2013:135) or "there is no longer an 'outside' to power" (p.55), lie beyond any empirical or intellectual test.

On the other hand, it would still be possible to justify the denunciatory claim of complicity by assigning this label to specific persons within the system who, for their more or less intentional blindness and lack of awareness, become "agents" of the structure to a lesser or greater extent (Boltanski 1999:75-76). The problem this time, though, is that when one starts targeting specific groups within lengthy and necessarily vague causal chains, it becomes difficult to assure that the claim is not based on a subjective bias filled with rage, resentment or envy of some sort and, ultimately, that the main concern is actually the suffering of others rather than a bottomless "passion for denunciation" (pp.70-72). Such a problem is also relevant to Vrasti who, following a now classic ethnographic tone of self-revelation, explicitly manifests her "almost instinctual aversion to romanticism" of the volunteer traveler kind (p.76), while pointing to her social positioning as a recognizably "intense" and "perpetually maladapted outsider" amidst a simplistically popularized hype about

multiculturalism (p.83). Seductive as it may be, her readily critical stance would thus appear to be conveniently well-positioned within a staunch attack towards the unaware and suddenly complicit ones among who she needs "to encourage a level of theoretical literacy" (p.137).[49] In this way, as Boltanski (1999:76) concludes, complicity in this register is caught between a rather depersonalized accusation that risks dissolving its claims of responsibility, and a more targeted critique that risks losing the authority of its claims – which is intrinsically "unstable" or "controversial" in any case (p.70).

Although with less of a Marxist inflection, this is a critical register that, more broadly, has become increasingly relevant to the study of volunteering in general within the context of the so-called "third sector" (see Villadsen 2008). There has been an influx of scholarly suspicion on the new politically championed role of the volunteer, a critique that, being much more derived from a Foucauldian reading of neoliberalism, places less of an emphasis on commodification than economization at large (Taylor 2007; Lacey and Ilcan 2006; Engel and Georgeou 2011; Ilcan and Basok 2004; Muehlebach 2012; Fleischer 2011; Hyatt 2001; Nihei 2010; Bloom and Kilgore 2003, among others). In a sense, it is less certain, when looking at this body of literature, to what extent these authors are situated in a register of denunciation. But at the same time it becomes clearer that it is the individual volunteer who is at the center of their critique of complicity. This is something that researchers of volunteer tourism like Vrasti, who partially follows Foucault, have also started to convey (see e.g. Koleth 2014; Mostafanezhad 2013a; McGloin and Georgeou 2016; Molz 2017). Beyond the orientation and previsions that a humanitarian industry like volunteer tourism takes, the volunteer working in neoliberal conditions appears to be a subject stuck in a complicitous position.

Part I. Taking Neoliberalism at its Word

It is in relation to the volunteer as a disconcerting political actor of contemporary times that I will start to develop the thesis of a skeptical humanitarianism in this chapter. I do so by depicting a certain impasse of "complicity" in what could be said to be the Foucauldian sense of the term, exploring a number of concerns and frustrations coming from recent practitioners and commentators of humanitarianism and what in general has come to be known as the non-governmental and non-market or "third" sector.

Two things should be stressed in this sense: first, volunteer tourists will appear here in their biopolitical capacity, considered for those moments of ambition when they seek to have all the answers – after all, it is they who are called in this research to help us understand the bifurcation in the humanitarian landscape; and, second, that while they will contribute to reveal an impasse, it is not one that can be generalized to neoliberalism or biopolitics as a whole. The Foucauldian insight is that the liberal art of government is in fact defined by an endless movement of critical self-renewal (Foucault 2008:320). And neoliberalism, in particular, has been found to be, in the face of crisis, "eminently adaptable" (Dean 2012:86). Thus, if there is a neoliberal "impasse" that fosters a skeptical scenario, it is one among humanitarians who are trying to intervene in neoliberal conditions, and not necessarily one among those who could be referred to as "neoliberal humanitarians" – that is, businessmen, economists, bureaucrats or politicians who are involved in the shaping or advancement of neoliberal policies, even if they refute such a label (see Dean 2012). In a way, the challenge is to show that, even if failure is an expected or even "constitutive" feature of biopolitics (Rose and Miller 1992:190; Gordon

1980:250; Lemke 2002:56), among contemporary humanitarians like the volunteer tourist failure does in fact have the capacity to translate into an impasse.

By approaching neoliberalism as one more strategy of humanitarian intervention in the history of liberalism (in the first part of the chapter), my goal is to elucidate (in the second part) how the claim of complicity can become critical and effective without having to renounce the diagnostic ethos that characterizes the Foucauldian tradition.[50] From this angle, the biopolitical subject or "volunteer" can appear as a classical humanitarian figure that is simply caught in a new role within neoliberalism as part of that technology Foucault said is "absolutely correlative" (2008:297) to the market – civil society (c.f. Brown 2015:85-86). Ultimately, thanks to a radical-humanitarian departure, the volunteer tourist can be reconsidered here as more than someone who volunteers to gain some points in "the economy of experience" (Brown, Hesketh and Williams 2003:120); while complicity is able to resurface as a consistent critical theme, but this time placed in a register of failure, where it can appear as a symptom of neoliberal breakdown – or skeptical humanitarianism – rather than success.

3.i.a. Seeing like a government

Borrowing and modifying the title of James Scott's book *Seeing like a state (1998)* allows me here to signal the specific direction of my analysis. It is not about how the neoliberal state has attempted to homogenize the behavior of all its citizens in accordance to the market optic of *homo œconomicus*, as Marxist critics (see e.g. Harvey 2005:3), most readers of Foucault (see e.g. Hamann 2009), and Scott himself (1998:8)

would underline, but rather about how those individuals whose political subjectivity has matured in neoliberal conditions have been increasingly "governmentalized."

Foucault (2007b:108-09) first explained this process of governmentalization as the tendency of the state and its sovereign to prioritize a governmental form of power over a despotic or disciplinary one. However, from the biopolitical perspective developed in the previous chapter, it becomes possible to emphasize the humanitarian dimension of this process and sustain that "governmentalization" is an analysis that can be relevant beyond a problematic of rule. Individual citizens in their "private life" and "voluntary action" can be governmentalized, as Barbara Cruikshank (2007:155) suggests, or, as I put it here, they can one day start "seeing like a government." This possibility would be complementary to Scott's work (see Li 2005:387), since he focuses exclusively on the disciplinary or "high modernist" pretensions of authoritarian states, which by means of abstract simplifications seek to standardize the everyday life and native categories of a population through a sort of "internal colonization" (Scott 1998:82). Thus, instead of inspecting how a governed population starts to embody and resemble the administrative grid used by an authoritarian state to render its field of rule legible, one can explore how citizens become heavily invested in the improvement and well-being of civil society just as a state does when it is governmentalized.

This embodied dimension of neoliberalism has been stressed by governmentality scholars like Rose, if only to conclude that the voluntary practice of "responsible autonomy" and "community" in neoliberalized societies constitutes the very instrument or avenue of a form of rule that prefers to "govern at a distance" (see Miller and Rose 2008). For this post-Foucauldian school, what is striking about

neoliberalism is the way, during the last few decades, its ontological premises have come to permeate the entire political spectrum and, indeed, the whole rationality of rule – both in terms of who the subject of government should be, and what shape or distribution our systems of authority and power must adopt in view of a new, suddenly thinkable, commonsensical target (Rose 1999:139-140). Specifically, they advance that it is the free individual rather than "society" who is now found at the centre of political calculations and desires (Dean 2010a:192-94).

Critical approaches to neoliberalism have often recognized in this redirection a purely negative or deconstructive move, whether it is a tactical *retreat* from the Welfare state, a conservative *return* to a cold market society, or a protective *restoration* of "the power of economic elites," as David Harvey (2005:19) has put it. Governmentality studies have by contrast captured this shift as a "positive" or technically original move and liberal style of government in itself (Barry, Osborne and Rose 1996:11). They suggest that, rather than a simple renovation of classic economic measures of *laissez-faire* – financial deregulation, trade liberalization, labor flexibilization – what fundamentally marks this neoliberal era is a "respecification of the ethics of personhood" (Rose 1996c:60): the reconceptualization of the liberal subject as not simply "individualist" or "collectivist," but rather as an active citizen that, having an array of allegiances, interests and projects of self-formation, can be ethically motivated to achieve the ends of government through its very own self-fulfilment and realization.

Positively defined, then, neoliberalism amounts to the opening of a space of debate and intervention that involves those situated beyond the state in what can be called an "ethopolitics" (Rose 2001:4-5) or "ethico-politics" (Rose 1999:188). The most

evident expression of such a space is the one created by the proliferation, formalization, and professionalization of non-governmental organizations (Lewis 2005:207-09). As Cruikshank comments in this sense, "rather than simply abandoning the willing self to the market" or "privatizing the state, we are witnessing the governmentalization of individual will power in private non-profit enterprises" (2007:156). To what extent this will of the citizen is being "empowered" or rather "moralized" varies depending on where we look – microcredit institutions or faith-based organizations, Third Way policies oriented to the activism of multiple cultural communities or neo-conservative reforms fixated on charity, workfare and traditional values. At any rate, the point is that a governmental optics has spread from the state to the population by more or less calculated and coherent means since the entrance of neoliberalism into modern political thought. From its incipient theorization in the ordoliberal school of the early twentieth century to its first programmatic accomplishments fifty years later in the hands of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, neoliberalism has always been a political rationality oriented to the activation and intensification of a biopolitical subjectivity.

Neoliberalism may not be directly humanitarian. After all, its policies have mostly consisted in destroying the institutions and safety nets that had been put in place to guarantee the equitable provision of welfare within a nation, and in replacing them with competitive mechanisms that are by definition meant to exclude significant segments of the population, segments that then call in turn for disciplinary methods of intervention to make them less "risky" and more "competitive" (Fraser 2008, ch. 7; Dean 2007, ch. 5). Further, one could mention the many anti-democratic agendas it has been put to use, such as Chile's dictatorship

and the structural adjustment policies imposed on Latin America and elsewhere (see Harvey 2005, ch. 1).

Nevertheless, the success of any neoliberal rationality is premised upon the inculcation and cultivation of an ethos that is biopolitical, even if not explicitly and immediately humanitarian. While a cosmopolitan purview can be useful, it is surely not indispensable for the workings of a governmentality that opens most national industries, all domestic consumers and only some tiers of labor to the global economy (Ong 2006). But, strategically, neoliberalism does need citizens to become more responsible within their own spheres of action. It needs them to become considerably more ethical, if not exactly more social. When Margaret Thatcher proclaimed the end of the welfare state with "there is no such thing as society," she did not stop there but immediately continued with a statement of strategy: "*no government can do anything except through people*, and people must look to themselves first. It is our *duty* to look after ourselves, and then to look after our neighbour" (1987: 10, cited in Dean 2010a:177, emphasis added). Neoliberal regimes can be said to rely on the possibility of the governed seeing like a government, on the combined move of expanding and foreclosing the humanitarian problematization across the citizenry of a nation, inciting localized, targeted modes of caring towards the self and relatable others.

3.i.b. A wide biopolitical spectrum

The ethical investments of model neoliberal citizens can be localized or circumscribed in a myriad of more or less ambitious ways. One can just be neighbourly or instead be concerned with a community on the other side of the

planet and still partake in a similar strategy of care. In fact, on the modest side of this biopolitical spectrum, one would find those who simply seek to be "entrepreneurs of themselves," as neoliberal economists first conceived it, managing their time, human capital, environment, family and social relations as aspects of an enterprise that, like any other, needs to constantly plan and calculate between risks, costs and "profits" or achievements (Foucault 2008). The language of enterprise, as Rose and Peter Miller argued in their seminal article at the end of the 1980s, was the central device of "translatability" that enabled Thatcherites and many other neoliberal-minded organizations and authorities during that decade "to accord a new priority to the self-regulating capacities of individuals" (1990:24). It was a language that could manage to align a nation-wide policy goal like "economic growth" with the desires and motivations of every individual citizen. Entrepreneurial subjects interested in their self-fulfilment, as self-driven workers, self-actualized consumers or self-realized managers, became governmentally useful and were made purposefully desirable for the task of maintaining a healthy national economy, a high productivity rate and an expansive chain of consumption (pp.25-27).

A contemporary critic of the Foucauldian account of neoliberalism like Wendy Brown recognizes in this move of responsibilization the opposite of a humanitarian problematic. What she sees is an economic subject that "is so profoundly integrated into and hence subordinated to the supervening goal of macro-economic growth that its own well-being is easily sacrificed to these larger purposes" (2015:83). It may be true that economic growth is not a measure of global economic benefit anymore, that contemporary states have lost confidence in the idea that the competition between nations can produce anything else than a zero-sum result (Hindess 1998). Yet, to say that, "reconciling individual with national or other collective interests is no longer

the contemporary problem understood to be solved by markets" (Brown 2015:84) is to dismiss the Foucauldian diagnosis altogether. On the one hand, this statement brushes off the fact that *homo œconomicus* has never been able to reconcile national and individual interests. It is a force that, as Foucault put it, is inherently "non-local," with "no localization, no territoriality" (2008:301). The true scale of its positive effects can only be global. On the other hand, it is a statement that ignores the other crucial mechanism of interests that, along with the market, Foucault found to be essential to any liberal governmentality and whose usual scale is precisely national; namely, civil society.

Foucault's distinctive argument about liberal thought was that, at the level of governmental technology, "the market" could not serve the sovereignty of a state without being complemented by "civil society" or, what is the same, that an erratic and disruptive economic subject of interest could not be rendered governable without the mediation of a cooperative and localizable *social subject of interest* (Palacios in press). At least since the birth of political economy in the late eighteenth century, liberalism would have had to face a deeply ambivalent economic mechanism that promises a global "convergence of interests" while at the same time posing a threat of "dissociation with regard to the active bonds of compassion, benevolence, love for one's fellows and sense of community" (Foucault 2008:302). Since then, civil society would have displayed, in this way, an intrinsic, inverted correlation with the market. And its utility for any liberal government, Foucault largely contends, would have come from being able to balance this imperiousness of a globalizing and dissociative market, that is, from creating a governable space in which the absolute freedom of an indispensable – even if not always desirable – subject like *homo œconomicus* could become locally manageable (see Dean 2010b).

Like *homo œconomicus*, a social subject of interest would be a subject that is able to generate a collective benefit by means of a "mechanism" or quasi-natural strategy that, like the market, spontaneously synthesizes the interests of everyone involved. I will come back later in this and the following chapter to the question of how liberalism actually approaches what has always been thought to be its main target, the market. But what is most interesting about Foucault's diagnosis is that he recognizes this other "social" mechanism of interests even in the neoliberal style of intervention, a mechanism he considers is one and the same with "civil society." When he makes his famous statement that neoliberals decide to be "constructivist" and artificially create a free market, what he means, in practical terms, is that neoliberalism will give a competitive shape to civil society, for that is what can recreate the theoretical conditions for an ideal market dynamic (2008:120, 145-48).

Empirically, the clearest understanding of a current "social subject of interest" can be found in ethnographies of neoliberal morality and citizenship education like that of Eliasoph in the US (2011) and Andrea Muehlebach in Italy (2012). In Italy, one can now find volunteering explained by catholic politicians in terms like these: "the state is not far away from me, it is *within* me," "the state is made up of the sum of its individuals – *as many individuals as there are in the state.* Which means, in my eyes, that the really important thing is the person, the individual" (Muehlebach 2012:116, original emphasis). Eliasoph finds herself similarly confronted with training programs in which they tell her that volunteer work is driven by "a spirit that moves inside you. *Nobody can see it, but you know is there*." Her reaction is indicative: "Initially feeling inspired by Empowerment Talk's promises, I became more and more equivocal ... everything you do tends to look like a direct expression of your deepest self, your inspirations, your 'gut feelings'" (2011:48, xvi-xvii, original

emphasis). Their findings point to the latent idea in contemporary discourses of civil society and volunteer pedagogy, whether embedded in empowerment talk or catholicized social discourse, that within each citizen there is a spontaneous feeling that connects them with the collectivity, not in spite of, but rather by means of their own individuality, by means of their own "interest."

From this kind of analytical perspective, it becomes possible to fathom that the solidary subjects of civil society can have "interests," just as market subjects would, even if their nature is not to be oriented to economic profit.[51] Foucault qualifies them as rather having "disinterested interests," which, while being in competition with the interests of other civil societies, work to produce, at least for those who adhere to the same community or collectivity, a "summation of *individual satisfactions* within the social bond itself" (2008:300-302, emphasis added). Based on this Foucauldian reading – to return to our initial discussion – the continuing primary role of "economic growth" in neoliberalism does not have to be interpreted as a replacement of "the throne of interest" by "the throne of sacrifice" (Brown 2015:84). Rather, economic growth can be seen as a concrete expression of the "spontaneous synthesis of individuals" that can take place through their social interests (Foucault 2008:300), considering that, as an indicator, economic growth is no longer used to quantify the global benefits produced by the market, as much as to measure the internal development and relative progress of separate nations whose interests are in competition with each other (see Hindess 1998). In this light, what even in common parlance has come to be easily recognized as the "GDP" of a country would be something that is referring us, nowadays, to the "wealth" or standard of living that is produced in conjunction by a distinct collection of "responsibilized" or socially-interested individualities (see Bonefeld 2013a).

What early neoliberal theorists proposed is that an "enterprise society" is conducive, precisely, to this kind of one-by-one social integration (see Bonefeld 2013b). What ordoliberals like Alexander von Rüstow and Wilhelm Röpke suggested, for instance, is that a social fabric made of small enterprise units would form a kind of "moral framework" or *Vitalpolitik* that, given the space for self-government and differentiation it created, would be able to prevent social alienation, fragmentation and, in short, guarantee cooperation in a society regulated by the market (Foucault 2008:148-149, 242-243). And while the more recent Chicago School of neoliberalism was much less explicit about this kind of social synthesis of interests, it did advance a mode of analysis that imagined each entrepreneurial self producing, beyond profit, "his own satisfaction" (p.226) or, as Michel Feher (2009) has specified in psychological terms, her own "self-appreciation."

Foucault's critical contribution to the understanding of this influential school was to elucidate the logic behind their considerably more rounded and encompassing *homo œconomicus*. He managed to show that the liberal tradition had always been susceptible to think of individuals as maximizers of *non-economic* interests, whose other-oriented rationalizations could also add up to an immanent "social" strategy with an integrative effect or "multiplying and beneficial value" (2008:296, 276). Beyond the market vision of competitive enterprises, neoliberals would be targeting socially interested subjects who, by seeking to act on their "impulses of benevolence" and invest in some kind of "psychological profit" (pp.301, 244) – like the satisfaction of being a good parent or a good manager – become strategically important for the cohesion and value that they are individually able to "produce or bring about for the whole" (pp.300-01). As a humanitarian strategy, "civil society"

can be said to become effective through the addition, at a planetary level, of such spontaneously constructed and maintained communities of interest or "wholes."

On the other side of this biopolitical spectrum, one can therefore expect to find those who engage in various forms of community service and volunteering. Neoliberal subjects may usually engage in some way or another with the market during their entrepreneurial endeavors, but at times they may be offered non-market avenues to advance their social interests. Within the economicist imaginary of "enterprising selves," one must include the possibility, that is, of voluntary workers realizing the kind of one-by-one or individual-to-individual spontaneous social synthesis of interests that neoliberalism expects. As Rose reminds us in this sense, what Margaret Thatcher said after being elected in 1979 is precisely that, "*the first principle* of this government … is to reinvigorate not just the economy and industry but the whole body of voluntary associations" (1999:138, emphasis added).

This "first principle", as I will shortly elaborate, has become increasingly integrated into today's transnational neoliberal governmentality. For Foucault, who at the end of the 1970s could already say of this art of government that it "has now become the program of most governments in capitalist countries" (2008:149), the entrepreneur was the characteristic social subject of interest targeted by neoliberalism. Almost four decades later, it is perceivable that the volunteer has been gaining just as much traction at the other end of the spectrum, while still being part of exactly the same strategy of citizen activation. Even the most cosmopolitan volunteers can be considered to be "social subjects of interest." They too *selectively* reinforce the social bond and work for the benefit of a particular civil society. They do so, first, by unavoidably choosing to compete for the welfare of certain

communities or sufferers and not others; and, second, by necessarily following the humanitarian projects and expectations of certain moral authorities and not others.

3.i.c. Governmentality rendered technical

In the sense that has been given to the word from a humanitarian problematic, it is undoubtable that there has been a "governmentalization" of the citizenship during this neoliberal era. Individual citizens around the world are seeing more like a government now than they have ever before. Proof of this is that the last three decades have witnessed a "voluntary turn" in the provision of welfare (Milligan and Conradson 2006) and, more broadly, a "global associational revolution" in terms of civil society organizations (Salamon 2010:68). By the end of the 1990s, to give at least a broad idea of its magnitude, it was estimated in a survey of 36 countries that their voluntary workforce would form the ninth largest country in the world with 140 million volunteers (UNV 2011:20), while, more recently, it was found with a slightly larger sample that non-profit institutions would have come to represent the "nation" with at least the seventh largest GDP in the planet (Salamon 2010:187). In a country like Australia, with a less evident tradition of voluntarism than the UK, the US or Canada (see Oppenheimer 2008), one can see for example a clear increase in the levels of civic engagement, with participation rates almost doubling from 1995 to 2010, when 6.1 million or 36 percent of the adult population were found to be contributing through some form of unwaged labor (VA 2012:7).[52] Many different traditions of mutualism and solidarity would have made possible this state of affairs, but the increased involvement of citizens in the care of populations is undeniable.

Nonetheless, to understand the technical intricacies that have made this biopolitical momentum and what a researcher (Muehlebach 2012:113) calls "avalanche of statistical elaboration" possible, it is still no doubt necessary to consider Foucault's notion of governmentalization as he originally intended it, from a problematic of rule. To some extent, a governmental optics has spread across communities and populations thanks to discourses of subjectivation like "entrepreneurship" or "active citizenship." In this sense, events like the making of 2001 into the United Nations International Year of the Volunteer or 2011, the European Year of Volunteers can be considered strategic, for they clearly help advance a specific way of problematizing the ethical self. But, beyond its influence upon certain normative languages, neoliberalism manages to "render itself technical" (Rose 1996c:41), not through a direct governmentalization of the citizenship as such, but through a governmentalization of the "governmental mechanisms" that come to bear upon the regulation of citizen conduct (Dean 2010a, chs. 8 and 9). Thus, beyond raising awareness or persuading minds, events like the ones just mentioned would be fostering the neoliberal conditions in which biopolitical conduct becomes visible and manageable by: first, inciting powerful authorities like the European Commission or the Australian government to formalize, finance, document, and measure voluntary ethical practices that have usually remained economically informal and statistically unaccountable; and, second, by encouraging in turn all sorts of NGOs and corporations to follow similar standards of performance, reporting methods, terms of calculation, managerial practices, and so on (see UNV 2011:18; Oppenheimer 2008:186-87).

"Governmentalization" takes on a much more technical dimension in this light. It is a term used to emphasize the fact that the activities of rule which make use of

"governmental" technologies of power – those that, instead of imposing laws, adapt their tactics to the spontaneous tendencies and natural needs of the governed – start to be integrated into the activities of organizations and institutions that operate at a certain distance from the state. In this scenario, policy initiatives can still be initiated by states or inter-state organisms like the UN, but the actual sites of authority and rule are increasingly found in community organizations, non-profit institutions and private companies in the form of "governmental mechanisms" that set constant demands of accountability. Neoliberal rationalities aspire, Dean elaborates in this sense, to "a government without a centre, a form of administration in which there is no longer a centrally directing intelligence" (2010a:259). Whether neoliberal authorities are able, or want, to achieve this aspiration without being anti-democratic is a much less certain matter (see Dean 2007; 2012). But, for our purposes here, what is relevant is the way a biopolitics of social subjects of interest becomes operational through the generalization of certain techniques and knowledges of evaluation, monitoring, and surveillance.

As Michael Power has famously argued, there has been an "audit explosion" since the 1980s that has not only increased the rituals of verification across public and private settings, but that has had a considerable influence, beyond the actual ritual, upon all sorts of core organizational activities, slowly molding them in accordance to the imperative of "auditable performance" (2000:114-15). Organizations that are always prepared to be audited do not technically need to be governed. They become "local sites of self-government" thanks to the many "technologies of performance" that traverse their daily activities (Dean 2010a:225). For the most part, these internal governmental mechanisms have taken the shape of financial modes of calculation – results-based planning, contractual cooperation,

efficient allocation, compartmentalized operations, measurable outputs, budget discipline, and targeted evaluations (Rose 1999:146-156).[53] In this way, with the help of expert knowledges like accounting and "the new public management," a neoliberal regime has been able to governmentalize the organizational environment of contemporary societies – which, in turn, has created the optimal conditions for a competitive ethico-politics. Whether as clients or managers, beneficiaries or donors, consumers or campaigners, employees or volunteers, citizens are prompted to act as financial managers of themselves and others, for they live amidst marketized systems that reward those who can calculate best how to advance their social interests. In neoliberalized environments, the wellbeing of populations falls in the hands of individuals who are motivated to see like an economic, and not just caring, government.

In the case of the voluntary or "third" sector, this agenda of accountability can be felt at many different levels. At the level of multilateral cooperation, the agenda is perceptible in the multiple efforts to quantify and "benchmark volunteerism at regional and global levels," as a recent UN report exclusively dedicated to this subject phrased it (UNV 2011:23).[54] At a more transnational level, one could mention the growing interest of research centres and think tanks, from The Brookings Institution to The International Ecotourism Society, in maximizing the impact and efficiency of international volunteering and service (see Sherraden, Lough and McBride 2008; Caprara, Quigley and Rieffel 2009).[55] While, at the national level, it is well known that, particularly since the 1990s, the tendency of governments to partner with NGOs for the delivery of what once were public services has led most voluntary agencies to become, as Suzan Ilcan and Tanya Basok remark for the case of Canada, "service providers" that "are monitored by the state through contracts that

demand scrupulous accountability" (2004:137).[56] In Australia, for example, even the sponsoring of "youth ambassadors" and volunteers for international development has been contractualized. The 2000s was a decade of competitive tendering and increasing governmental demands for volunteer sending agencies, with new reporting systems, performance frameworks, bureaucratic protocols, and overseeing bodies "shaping the environment in which agencies operate" (Engel and Georgeou 2011:305).

3.i.d. An anticlimactic regime of accountability

Many non-state institutions are interested in activating citizens as social subjects of interest beyond a state-driven agenda of service delivery, cost-effectiveness and accountability. The university I am writing from, for example, decided in recent years to expand its community participation program to the entirety of the student body. To graduate, everyone would have to volunteer. During its implementation, this ambition has faced many obstacles and become more modest, but the vision itself is indicative of the kind of attention that community service and participation is receiving at the moment. Many organizations, experts and authorities exhibit in this and other areas what Cruikshank (1999) calls a persistent "will to empower," making use of technologies of active citizenship like voluntary action. As Nina Eliasoph comments in this sense, being an experienced ethnographer of contemporary volunteerism, "participants in these programs often are unsure if they are the givers, the recipients, or both" (2013:100).

An agenda of accountability is carried out by institutions that have their own pedagogic projects, that have a desire of their own to create a responsible

citizenship; it cannot be seen as solely the product of calculated neoliberal programming or state pressure. It is an agenda that has gained traction through many different routes and political demands, fueled by those who have wanted to address the needs of a participatory democracy as well as "the shortcomings of humanitarian assistance" (Stein 2008:126), "corporate governance" (Power 2000:113) and "bureaucracies" (Krause 2014:84), among other areas (see Rose 1999).

But, in general, deliberately contrived or not, it is this agenda of accountability, in any case characteristic of neoliberal rule, what has come to define the conditions in which humanitarian action is mobilized in advanced liberal democracies. The concern with aid effectiveness that used to be the prerogative of states has been passed down to non-state entities, and socialized among volunteers who, due to a widespread institutional governmentalization, must now work in an environment ruled by a "market for projects," as Monika Krause (2014) has recently captured it. For the last two decades, the role of humanitarian organizations has become that of selling projects as if they were a sort of commodity, Krause sustains, offering them to donor agencies and "many different consumers of relief" who are willing to pay for them in order to "receive the symbolic benefits of having helped" (p.60). In an industry in which there are "more financial resources than ever before" (Barnett and Weiss 2008:33), the project has become "the primary unit of fund-raising;" which in turn has caused it to become "the unit of accounting and measurement," and, by extension, "the unit of humanitarian and development work" (Krause 2014:47, 76, 88).

In such a system, in which donor agencies want to evaluate projects, independent institutions, organize them, and voluntary workers, execute them, there is more than

isolated investments of money, time or labour. In reality, there is an increasingly personal investment of care in the success of individual projects. These are conditions of intervention in which questions about efficiency, performance and tangible results tend to become a matter of ethical self-problematization, questions that do not simply stay at the level of a managerial requirement of "accountability." Among the volunteer tourists that joined my research, this was a common preoccupation, as can be perceived in this post:

> In regards to my time volunteering in the Philippines I've often asked myself the question "did I make a difference?" At times the answer has been "yes," at others "no" and, more recently (and perhaps realistically), "sorta." I cannot deny that on a small-scale level, my group certainly made a difference in the lives of those we interacted with on a regular basis. Whether it was teaching computer skills, helping with homework or just hanging out, our time with the children at the Bahay Tuluyan centres was important. In my diary I wrote "I don't think I'm going to have any lasting effect on any of these boys but that's fine. I guess teaching C__ and J__ how to do a bird call using their hands is a big enough achievement."
>
> (16th of May, Ethnosense blog, emphasis added)

While the project this volunteer was part of seemed to be effective in accordance to its own parameters, the resulting thoughts about her experience were still ethically anticlimactic. She had to resign herself to live with low expectations. The paradox of a self-sustaining regime of accountability is that while it demands from all participants to become more considered in relation to their citizen practices, it effects this demand by relaying a constricting, financial-like, grid of intelligibility. Thus, while having learned to see like a government, now aspiring to produce a "lasting effect" in a local population, volunteers like this one are confronted with the "small-

scale level" of the project, where they are left to find at least the resemblance of something tangible or, as this volunteer ironically put it, a "big enough achievement."

A management tool that has been highly influential in creating this governmental optic is the "logframe" or Logical Framework Analysis. In her critical study of the relief organizational context, Krause advances the thesis that this tool, single-handedly, is what has led the whole third sector to work and think in terms of definite "projects" or productive bundles with set timeframes, fixed budgets, and countable outputs (2014, ch. 3). The logframe refers, in concrete terms, to the visualization of a grid that forces planners to connect, via a single project, a series of objectives, activities and results in a seamless and objectively verifiable chain of causes and effects. While received well in the 1980s by development practitioners who wanted more commitment from aid policies and institutions, the logframe has no doubt become one of the main targets for their critique of neoliberalism (see e.g. Eyben 2010). The reason for this disdain is not a rejection of accountability, though, but in fact a deeper embracement than the current neoliberal agenda can offer. As Janice Stein stresses in this sense, in questions of humanitarian accountability, "there is no single construction of effectiveness" (2008:135).

Just for being a regime of "accountability" – one that responds to many political demands, of transparency, autonomy, efficiency – it does not mean that it is a regime that cannot be shortsighted. By encouraging a competitive and sizeable market for projects, neoliberal authorities may have exacerbated the will to empower of countless communitarian and entrepreneurial citizens. But, at the same time, they reorganized the humanitarian industry upon questionable assumptions, such as "the

more NGOs exist the better for civil society," which is a premise that overlooks the way an environment of such fiscal uncertainty and organizational insecurity can easily inhibit cooperative, self-critical and principled behavior (Cooley and Ron 2002); or "the more financially accountable the more effective," which prioritizes a narrow construction of accountability, based on predictable outcomes rather than needs, rights, counterfactuals or research (Stein 2008).

These are flaws with direct consequences for the volunteers themselves well beyond their organizations and the institutional demands and expectations placed on them as the new "welfare workers" (Barnett and Weiss 2008:17). In a way, there have always been fears that too much accountability in a sector that ultimately depends on volunteering and non-profit-oriented efforts can be counterproductive. But the reason has usually been that, when projects become so regimented, the incentive to get involved may decrease. As Stein comments along these lines, "several reports have warned that an emphasis on effective outcomes may lead to a reluctance by humanitarians to act at all" (2008:137-38). The case, as I just suggested, may be much more the inverse. The present regime of accountability in principle has not been fostered in order to micro-manage and control (c.f. Strathern 2000). It has rather served a form of rule that is indirect, that likes to give autonomy (within its set parameters of behavior) and govern at a distance. As a technology of government, this is a form of accountability that actually encourages and activates social subjects of interest. It does so by engaging them in a competitive environment that takes the form of a quasi-market. If there is an inherent risk in this form of rule, it is not that it can drive contributors and difference-makers away, but that it can get them too involved in questions of effectivity. A participant of my research bluntly

asked the following question in our collaborative blog, based on her 9-weeks-long experience as an intern for a local NGO in India:

> Did anyone find that sometimes the work you were doing felt 'useless'?
>
> No... Wait I don't want to say useless really, but — maybe inefficient? (coming from a culture that values efficiency and productivity…) or maybe, a tiny bit of a waste?
>
> (7th of May, Ethnosense blog)

This kind of disappointment is a common finding among volunteer tourists (e.g. Palacios 2010; Vodopivec and Jaffe 2011; Vrasti 2013). In this case, she clearly felt uncomfortable for even suggesting such a criticism. But, as I think is becoming a normal feature of the humanitarian experience, she could not help to be demanding in her expectations of social change. The more NGOs rely on such resources as volunteers, private donations and partnerships with companies, universities and the like, the more they need to foster the idea that recognizable social change is within the reach of individuals (see e.g. Eliasoph 2011; Simpson 2004). And, more broadly, one could say that the more aid work and development practice are structured around doable projects, the more volunteers nurture their expectations of "making a difference" within the spatial and temporal horizon of their placements.

In part, it may be true that disappointment appears among volunteer tourists because there may exist a "disconnect" between volunteer capacities and project goals (Palacios 2010:11), or because their activities may not be "well-structured enough" (Vrasti 2013:3), or because there may even be "corporate interests" in hosting volunteers – along with the donations or funding that comes with them – whether they are needed or not (Vodopivec and Jaffe 2011:125). And yet, the fact is that disappointment can be expected to appear even in the most organized,

monitored and well-intentioned placements. The above blogger went to India through an internship that was carefully organized by her university with the collaboration of "Australia's largest and oldest volunteer sending agency" (Engel and Georgeou 2011:298), and, in the end, she still was left feeling frustrated. There was a blogger in the group who had spent a year working in Vietnam after being selected for a government-sponsored placement – which is probably the most scrutinized type of volunteer placement there can be – and she came, rather breezily and without hesitation, to an equally frustrating conclusion:

> 11 things I learnt as an overseas volunteer:
>
> …
>
> 9. You feel like a hypocrite compared to the local volunteers, who give up so much more than you do.
>
> 10. You don't make as big a difference as you thought you would initially. The complexities and dynamics of the world of aid and the development industry can quickly overcome any individual efforts.
>
> 11. Letting loose at karaoke with a good bunch of [local] friends is a great way to get over the fact that you're not making that much of a difference.
>
> (20th of June, Ethnosense blog, emphasis added)

Again, in this case, one can perceive how the ethical point of culmination promised by a neoliberal biopolitics is replaced by a point of resignation in which all that is left to do is "to get over" the aspiration to actual intervention. To some extent, after any humanitarian practice, all individuals are susceptible to ask themselves whether they could have done more (see e.g. Malkki 2015, ch. 2). But that does not mean that the result of every such practice is invariably an anticlimax. The critical question that volunteer tourists are having trouble with is that of whether they made "that much

of a difference" – which, in the language developed in the previous chapter, amounts to whether or not they contributed their part to a larger, strategic, "quasi-natural" solution. The question of "intervention" becomes here a matter of proportion, of "how much is enough." Yet the problem is that many contemporary humanitarians are finding it increasingly difficult to find a satisfactory answer. No matter how logistically fine-tuned their projects are, who organizes them, and how much time they invest, the resulting perception seems to be the same. Perhaps, as Howard Becker (2013) has suggested, the answer to that question – of how much is enough in contexts of intervention – can only be determined when there is a clear social convention; and the volunteers of neoliberal times, who live and work in transnational contexts, may have simply lost that historical privilege, a sense of proportionality.

Part II. Political Responsibility in a Post-Westphalian World

This part elaborates on what I see as an "impasse" or ethico-political crisis in the field of humanitarian practice. It does so empirically, but also theoretically, by exploring the, in principle, contrary thesis of "neoliberal complicity" that tends to be so often drawn by the readers of Foucault and of post-Foucauldian authors like Dean, Cruikshank, and Rose (see Pick, Holmes and Brueckner 2011; and Marinetto 2003 for two exceptions). The critique of neoliberal complicity is by no means confined to Foucauldian scholarship. It rather shares with other perspectives a broader concern with the depoliticization of poverty or the corrosive idea that poor communities need to assume their needs and difficulties in isolation (see e.g. Mohan 2002). Indeed, by encouraging citizens to solve social problems from the autonomy of the local level, neoliberal governance, with its tactics of devolution, partnerships, benchmarking, decentralization, human capitalization, moral burdening and the like, could be assigning highly political issues of allocation to isolated individuals positioned in a purely administrative sphere, and, worse, then blaming them for any macro-failures (Brown 2015:122-141). Against this familiar, obviously relevant, line of critique, I superimpose another possible one in this chapter, uncoupling the Foucauldian interpretation of neoliberalism from a traditional register of denunciation.

An important referent in the "depoliticization" literature is James Ferguson, who became well-known for his thesis about the international aid industry being an "anti-politics machine" (1990). The language of social "machines" is typical of a strict Foucauldian analytics, as someone like Deleuze (2006:34) would confirm. Yet, it can easily become reduced to an extension of more conventional critical languages when

it is entangled with depoliticizing phenomena.[57] I will start by sustaining that his original argument was in fact firmly placed in the register of failure that Foucault inaugurated in the 1970s through his critique of the "machine-prison" (Foucault 1995:235). This short clarification will be crucial to open up a different reading of contemporary volunteers and, largely, a very different kind of critical claim in relation to the problems of scale that tend to be grouped under the umbrella of "depoliticization."

In principle, a clarification would seem redundant, since Ferguson made quite clear his thoroughly Foucauldian departure. Yet, as his own recent work attests, "depoliticization" offers a platform for denunciation that is hard to resist. In *Global shadows* (2006), for instance, Ferguson points to the depoliticization of poverty that a cartography based on "national sovereignty" can effect for an African context like Lesotho. "None of the impoverished nations of the world," he writes, "are 'sovereign' or 'independent' and nowhere do we find a true 'national economy'" (p.65). He thus becomes critical of the "unquestioned legitimacy" (p.64) that a narrow frame of reference like that of the "nation-state" has enjoyed, suggesting that what Nancy Fraser (2008) would call a "Westphalian framing of justice" serves to *depoliticize* African poverty or *mask* "the wider system of economic relations that is constitutive" of it (Ferguson 2006:65). Ferguson clearly stands, then, at the intersection of two distinct critical registers.

I find problematic the suggestion that the problem of poverty is "depoliticized" when the frame that is used to tackle it leaves out its "real" proportions and political-economic causes. While in most cases that may be true, as any social scientist would agree, it is just not possible for social science, or any other

knowledge for that matter, to determine what its actual "structure" would be (Fraser 2008, ch. 3). Even if one managed to "politicize" poverty in a given context through a dialogical process of debate and fair political contestation, as Fraser for example recommends (2008, ch. 4), there would be no guarantee that the agreed upon scale or political framing would be more effective (c.f. Hickey 2009). Indeed, the critical project of denouncing anyone's complicity for not-so-politicized framings cannot avoid to suggest that one as a critic has a better understanding of social effectivity – even if, as has been and will continue to be stressed in this dissertation, there is no way of grounding that sense of objectivity, morality, and intervention (of being sure that one would in fact be able to convince any skeptic). By sticking instead to a register of failure, I therefore seek to approach the urgent question of social justice in a globalized or "post-Westphalian" cartography without having to invoke the trump card of "depoliticization."

3.ii.a. The register of failure

In the field of development studies, certain influential post-Foucauldian works like Ferguson's *An anti-politics machine* (1990) have inspired quite explicit claims of complicity in relation to contemporary development practitioners such as participatory facilitators and World Bank employees (e.g. Cooke 2004; Kapoor 2005). Yet, while the ensuing debate has been traced back to the Foucauldian framework (e.g. Friedman 2006; Tamas 2007; Brigg 2009), the initial analyses were never couched in such terms. When another well-known pioneer in this area like Arturo Escobar proposed, for example, that a development discourse had "colonized" reality, he was only trying to destabilize the self-evidence of notions like "Third World," and put into question the rationality behind an established

developmentalist apparatus (see Escobar 2012[1995]:xii-iv; c.f. Brigg 2002). In spite of occasional militant comments (e.g. Escobar 2012:217), his analysis was dedicated to interpret development as a "domain of thought and action" that "systematically relates forms of knowledge and techniques of power" (p.10). The point of doing this, he always said, adhering clearly to a Foucauldian tradition, was just to "open up the discursive space" (p.xii) rather than render everyone involved complicit. What happens, one could say, is that the question of "agency" or personal and ethical responsibility predictably follows any Foucauldian analysis, since it always consists in evidencing how normalized and pervasive a certain form of conducting oneself and others has become.

Ferguson (1990), in particular, sought to avoid a facile accusatory angle when he examined an extremely-well-funded rural development project in Lesotho that had evidently failed in reducing poverty just as it had evidently succeeded in depoliticizing the presence of the state in the region. Rather than concluding that the project had been planned with politico-economic interests in mind, he argued that for the multilateral agencies funding the project (the World Bank and the Canadian International Development Agency) the project had indeed been a failure, to the point that they decided to pull out before its completion. Yet, while having failed in relation to its desired outcomes, the project nevertheless had had the side effect or "instrument-effect" (p.255) of expanding the bureaucratic apparatus to the region of Thaba-Tseka. The project had made out of this isolated mountain region an administrative centre, and had therefore rendered its population governable, whether that meant easy access for health officials and postmen, or easy access for control, through a police station, a prison, and even a military base. In the end, his argument was that, considering the "extremely sensitive political operations" (p.256)

that technical projects of this kind ultimately facilitate, they can be suggested to work as an "anti-politics machine."

There is no "conspiratorial tone" in this critique's logic, as Morgan Brigg has for example interpreted (2002:426). It was not a denunciation of power, but a critique in a register of failure. The point of critique in such a register is not just to show that governmental "apparatuses can have effects which serve other purposes" (Brigg 2002:426), but, more pointedly, as Dean stresses, it is to "reveal the immanent disjunction and dissonance between the 'programmer's view' and the logic of practices, their real effects" (2007:83). One should not confuse this element of disjuncture with an ethnographic principle like "the primacy of contingent practice" (Lewis and Mosse 2006:3). Critique in this register rather consists in detecting a certain tendency or regularity that amounts to more than the practical or "messy" moment of an intervention (Gordon 1980:246-255) – what Deleuze at some point called the "immanent cause" that is built-in within a social machine, which is the kind of cause that can only be eventually "distinguished by its effect" (2006:32).

Specifically, claims about such systematic instrument-effects become "critical" to the extent that they show how the rationality of an intervention inadvertently undermines itself (c.f. Lemke 2002:57). In Foucault's famous genealogy of the prison, for example, the critical insight was that it worked as a machine with a "formidable 'efficiency'" in terms of "the fabrication of a delinquency that it [was] supposed to combat" (1995:256, 278). For Ferguson, the insight came, in this sense, when he suggested that the aid industry perhaps continues to be encouraged and supported, in spite of its poor record, "because development projects turn out to have" political uses, and that is enough to attract further funding, even if such a side effect

incidentally translates into ineffective approaches "being replicated again and again" (1990:256). In other words, the critical claim is not that the states investing in international development would be meticulously planning a depoliticization of bureaucratic power – which would be no more than a denunciation, as Brigg (2002:426) rightly suggests. But, rather, the critique would be that this industry (whose approach to poverty Ferguson also describes, in a confusing fashion, as generally "depoliticized" or technical) would be standing on the way of better solutions, and hence prolonging what it is supposed to eradicate by way of obstruction, endlessly "launching an intervention that may have no effect on the poverty" (1990:255-56).[58]

3.ii.b. Complicity as a critical claim

It is from a register of failure that I think complicity as a critical claim can be reexamined. But before elaborating on how, I first want to briefly elaborate on why it is currently relevant to do so. In studies of contemporary volunteers in which Foucault has had, more or less directly, some considerable influence, "complicity" rarely appears as an explicit topic of discussion (see Nihei 2010 for an exception). But it is, nevertheless, often left implied as the critical axis along which a number of arguments acquire relevance, whether seeking to identify effects of control or, conversely, interstices of agency.[59]

Among those trying to identify effects of control are Ilcan and Basok (2004), who stress the way "the voluntary sector has been objectified by public service orientations," having to become "doubly responsible" – not just for the provision of social welfare with very scarce resources and a substantial recruitment of volunteers,

but, in the same stroke, for the moral training of citizens as "responsibilized service providers rather than social justice-oriented advocates" (pp.139, 130, 141). In the current neoliberal climate of Canada, they evidence, even voluntary agencies oriented to issues of social justice are favoring the volunteer with office work experience and client management skills over the one with experience in community-level activism. Anita Lacey and Ilcan (2006) similarly point to how "voluntary labor, despite normative assumptions of altruism, is utilized in this process of market-orientation of NGO activity … increasingly acting, unwittingly, to facilitate advanced liberal programs of social service and welfare withdrawal" (pp.46-47). Susan Hyatt is even more explicit in her Foucauldian-inspired analysis, suggesting that the

> shift from the pathologization of the poor to the vilification of the state … has made possible the complicity of the working and middle classes in the larger project of reducing the role of the public sector in all aspects of contemporary life (2001:208).

By vilifying the state and celebrating active volunteerism neoliberal policies in the US have got "the middle class to pick up some of the slack left by government's virtual abandonement of poor communities" (p.226), but, importantly, Hyatt claims, they have also managed to co-opt the already existing networks of survival and mutuality that poor communities had built. By incorporating community leaders into local-level bureaucracies through voluntary or semi-voluntary positions, communal values and local norms of informal reciprocity have been undermined "toward the end," she concludes, "of creating an extremely low-paid workforce" (p.228).

On the other hand, there have been scholars who have rather emphasized the interstices of agency that the voluntary turn in modern government has left. Marilyn Taylor (2007) has for example explored some of the ways community participants can truly become "active subjects" in government-funded projects. She infers from certain experiences in the UK that a donor-oriented agenda of accountability has not necessarily "recentralized" political control but, in a way, has also encouraged the government "to take communities seriously" (p.308) and "strengthened the hand of allies within the system who want to change" (p.309). Muehlebach (2012) also refers to the political opportunities that neoliberalism has opened up. Through substantial ethnographic research, she portrays leftist volunteers in Italy as "critical-complicit," suggesting that "they are not seamlessly governed, but capable of both acts of appropriation and rejection at once" (p.26). While fearing the state's exploitation of free labor and the legitimation this labor could provide to the withdrawal of public resources, she found that many socialist Italians still embraced the call for volunteering as a renewed vehicle of care for their desires of insubordination towards an economic rationality. Finally, one could mention Friederike Fleischer's argument that youth volunteering in China is more than "a technology of power used to tap into students' enthusiasm as a source of social welfare" (2011:318). Discovering that Chinese students tend to hide their volunteer activities from their parents as well as their future employees, Fleischer deduces that, at least for the students themselves, volunteering "transcends the market-driven, consumer-oriented ideology that the Chinese government propagates" (p.320).

Thus, although in more or less nuanced, explicit, and fatalistic ways, the claim of complicity can be said to generally orientate the critical direction of Foucauldian readers in this area of research. Noticeably, the claim tends to be grounded on a

"welfarist" position, from where it then becomes possible to pinpoint or balance dangers like cooptation, objectification, recentralization or exploitation. This position is, of course, highly agreeable for anyone trained in disciplines such as sociology, geography or anthropology. But it still implies a taking of sides and an old politics of suspicion, even if the intention is not to blame the opportunism of specific neoliberal politicians (c.f. Mowbray 2005:261-62) or the complacency of those who have agreed to work on community development under such conditions (c.f. Gaynor 2011:38-39). What is at stake in these works, beyond, say, a systematic mapping of the voluntary sector as a kind of "shadow state" (see Milligan and Conradson 2006) or of the limitations of using a voluntary solution for all social problems (see e.g. Bloom and Kilgore 2003), is the extent of neoliberal subjection, whether they are inclined to recognize "disciplined subjects" or rather "highly self-reflexive divided agents who found themselves caught within the bind of the historical situation" (Muehlebach 2012:184). Subjection is, of course, a typically Foucauldian theme, one that permeates many other areas of research, especially those touching on aspects of neoliberal life. But in this, as in any other area, such a line of inquiry becomes problematic when what makes it critical is the possibility of denouncing a relation of complicity.

In order to place the claim of complicity in a register of failure, the labor of critique must be completely dislodged from a register of denunciation. Evidencing that a growing number of students, businessmen, socialists or poor people are engaging in different, if sometimes reflective, ways with a "third sector" which has been increasingly shaped by market orientations is doing nothing other than confirm and reassert the success of neoliberalism – or, we could say in the context of this thesis, of a humanitarian governmentality that aspires to activate social subjects of interest through indirect tactics like quasi-markets. Strictly speaking, there may even

be no critical content in research statements of this kind (even if such statements do obviously have critical effects of significant import). For, to an important extent, from a Foucauldian analytics of power we will always be "complicit" with what we may see as an improvable regime of government, and if in that complicity one indeed becomes critical, it simply means that one would like to be "complicit" with something better (see Butler 1997:29-30). Foucault defined critique, precisely, as a perpetual desire not to be governed *like that* (see Chapter 1). Our complicity, rather than being a normative guidepost, is simply a given. Deep or not, it is the very point of departure for the painstakingly descriptive and classical exemplary work of Foucauldian criticism.

Nevertheless, there may still be an instance in which, empirically, the governed can actually become susceptible to the threat of complicity. It is not the moment when they voluntarily accept the sense of responsibility offered by a governmentality like neoliberalism, but, as I will now argue, the moment that doing this becomes a practical impossibility. Complicity can acquire actual critical content and become a Foucauldian object of analysis when it signals the failure of ethico-political subjectivation (or "subjection"); that is, when subjects of government – who are then recognized to have legitimate desires of "development" or "active citizenship" that are not criticizable in themselves (see de Vries 2007, esp. 40) – are unable to fulfil their conscientious (or "internalized") expectations because the existing avenues for collective responsibility are, by design, conducive to an anticlimax.[60]

3.ii.c. A global and disoriented conscience

In the still firmly Westphalian world of the mid-twentieth century, someone like Hannah Arendt could write that, "no *collective* responsibility is involved in the case of the thousand experienced swimmers, lolling at a public beach and letting a man drown in the sea without coming to his help, because they were no collectivity to begin with" (2003:149, original emphasis). While in the same text she suggests that one's political responsibility lies in participating in "the world we share with one another" (p.155), the underlying reason for this inherent collective responsibility, she clarifies, has nothing to do with a universal moral standard, transcultural personal ethics or innate feeling of guilt, but is assumed to stem from the fact that "no man can live without belonging to some community" (p.150) and it is as part of a definite community that we can be "held responsible for what has been done in its name" (p.149).

In our own century, such confidence about the limits of political agency has been shaken by at least two recognizable factors: first, an increased awareness and interaction with decreasingly distant suffering; and, second, a reduced interest and capacity to deal with social problems through the sovereign power of nation-states.[61] Arendt's preconditions for political responsibility – a (i) pre-existing, (ii) common, and (iii) self-evident polity – are no longer sufficient. They are neither sufficient to explain the kind of transnational citizenship that humanitarians may seek to exercise, nor the sort of complications that a post-Westphalian cartography can create for anyone who wishes to embrace a sense of collective responsibility.

It would be misleading and perhaps even irresponsible to suggest that the state-based project of "governing societies" that was inaugurated with the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 is disappearing – as much of the millenarian sociology of the turn of the century to some extent did – considering how much of our security and welfare still depends on and has been made possible thanks to the fragile achievement that is the "territorial state" (Dean 2007). Nevertheless, it has become clear in the last few neoliberal decades that modern nation-states are not autonomous or influential enough to rectify a number of chronic inequalities, and that their sovereignty is being both complemented and undermined by other, in any case underwhelming, political actors. Multilateral organisms like the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization have substantial power to address global matters of justice through, in their case, economic rules, yet they are not accountable to those who are affected by them (Fraser 2008:65); international NGOs, on the other hand, offer new grounds for the distribution of rights, but still make limited claims of citizenship (Ong 2006@215) and tend to be mobile, transient, or "migrant sovereignties" (Pandolfi 2003); while corporations create new market rights that bypass many geopolitical divisions, yet cannot avoid to do so by profiling and excluding low-achievers (Fraser 2008:128) – and, in any case, the benefits that they do produce often come in the form of a "graduated sovereignty" which assigns pastoral care to some and extreme discipline to less-skilled others (Ong 2006:78-79).

Political participation becomes a much more complicated matter in these "post-Westphalian" conditions, that is, when the mapping of politically relevant space can no longer be monopolized by the territorial state (see Appadurai 2003). If even the most knowledgeable and sophisticated theorists of justice have been left, as Fraser admits, in an "awkward position," not knowing how to answer "what is the

pertinent frame within which to reflect on the requirements of justice in a globalizing world?" (2008:37) – how are the much more average, but still politically invested citizens of this century supposed to navigate a cartography in which sovereignty has become a kind of impossible puzzle, with a multiplicity of jumbled pieces or overlapping zones of power assembled upon one same global, horizontal, "transnational" space (see Ong 1999:4; Ferguson and Gupta 2002:994)? The volunteers that joined my research project pointed to this sense of disorientation in many occasions, blogging about what it meant for them to acquire a more global conscience.

> On a humanitarian point of view, the level of poverty, widespread corruption and disease was not something I could express every day whilst in Swaziland – this I feel is easier to voice here in Sydney. There I was living amongst it. Friends and families who I stayed with or constantly engaged with were affected by both poverty and disease – HIV/AIDS. How do you express your feelings of anger, embarrassment of "Western" countries' lack of concern, the luck (as Carlos would put it) that I have without offending them?[62] *What frustrated me the most, and continues to do so, is my helplessness in the matter*. How can I contribute to the betterment of these peoples' lives? I have a money tin sitting in my room with no idea what to do with the collection. I know I want to donate it back to others, but it's petty.
>
> (20th of Jun, Ethnosense blog, emphasis added)

Here one can recognize a level of intensity in his frustration that reaches beyond the ethical to the ethico-political. As recently as 1995, Michael Ignatieff could still critically observe how much of the Western concern for distant suffering was conceived as a matter of moral choice rather than political responsibility, how it remained anchored to the implicit belief, "that if we owe them our pity, we do not

share their fate" (1999:108). Speaking in the context of the 1990s, Ignatieff could confidently affirm that television had become the "privileged modern medium" (p.21) for the universalization of a humanitarian conscience, and that "the army of aid workers and activists who mediate between the zones of our world … remain our moral alibi" (p.8). Only two decades later, there is a considerable, palpable shift. Any individual who has the means and intention to help can decide to cross herself "the zones of our world," or at the very least personalize in many ways her relation of care towards specific distant others. When a remote scene of suffering used to be presented through the TV screen or the newspaper to a basically passive audience, conscientious ordinary citizens had the option of just feeling bad while comforted by the fact that others, the few who could, were doing something about it. But citizens today have become much more governmentalized. They have an increasing accessibility to the practice of intervention. And, in consequence, the character of their concern has suffered an important transformation.

The "humanitarian point of view" that the above blogger adopted did not just leave him with a "bad conscience" (p.5), as Ignatieff at some point puts it. He did not feel he was failing at a basic moral level. In fact, he dedicates the rest of the post to how this experience helped him to renew his Baha'i faith and inspired him even more to "enlighten others." In his moments of intense frustration, what he rather felt was "anger" towards his own people, and "embarrassment" in front of those who became not-so-distant others. His "helplessness" surfaced at a rather political level. In spite of being personally committed – and morally empowered – to give back to others, he still did not know how he could perform an actual "contribution," an intervention with transnational relevance.

The current conditions have the capacity to leave even the least "theoretically literate," as Vrasti would put it, with what I think can be more appropriately called (in comparison to Ignatieff's qualification) a disoriented or "lost conscience." The youngest male in the blog, for example, expressed his sense of dissatisfaction in a simple yet telling way:

> At University, School and Church I always hear statements such as "We are so blessed to live in Australia" but maybe we are just so well off because we keep everything to ourselves and we don't help the less fortunate countries as much as we could.
>
> (Final Reflections compilation)

The uneasiness that returned volunteers like him are left with cannot be explained in strictly ethical terms, as a "bad conscience." When he worries that "we keep everything to ourselves," he is not referring to a vague duty that human beings or religious individuals should be embracing, but to the consequences that life in Australia has for certain others. He is resenting the very organization of social life, the way his home nation has a specific collective responsibility with "less fortunate countries." His perception is not that of a removed spectator who struggles to give his pity an acceptable form when faced with a shocking image of suffering (see Boltanski 1999). Rather, he finds himself resentful of what his own governance systems and authorities project and how they are structured. He, as a political being, as a member of a political community, feels directly implicated in the maintenance of a global injustice.

The political or at least ethico-political obligation that contemporary humanitarians are starting to perceive makes them susceptible to a "lost conscience" because, while they come to realize how immediate, urgent, unexceptional, and

accessible certain social problems are at this point in time, there is, nevertheless, no self-evident answer as to how these more global issues should be approached. One can donate some money, buy a fair trade product, raise awareness or even travel a long distance to collaborate with a completely different culture, and that may still not be enough. Consider what the reflection of a Dutch participant-ethnographer in the project was, after telling a story about his volunteer trip to Guatemala:

> I probably haven't thought about them [Guatemala City's Dump residents] for a year, they got out of sight, but somewhere I know, they are still there. It's the same with all the people I told this story, they will laugh, it probably is a funny story, but what does it say about us? After feeling pity for a minute or five, listening to your story, everybody continues life in the comfort zone of happy ignorance.
>
> (7th of Apr, Ethnosense blog)

This ex-volunteer reproaches the rather casual attitude of those who listen to his stories of encounters with extreme deprivation, just as someone like Ignatieff would have done so in the 1990s. But what is significant is that he expresses his reproach in a way that involves him as the first one in the list – "what does it say about us." He himself appears as someone that needs to be questioned for living in "the comfort zone of happy ignorance." Even his thirst for commitment, and, further, proof of commitment – since, after all, he did get out of his comfort zone to volunteer overseas – are found lacking. Returned volunteers, perhaps like many other humanitarians who currently want to intervene at a transnational level, are ultimately lost in regards to strategy. Regardless of what they do, at home or abroad, they often feel like they are failing to fulfil their "political" or collective responsibility. Having no way to reassure themselves, they suspect their own complicity.

3.ii.d. Whose responsibility?

Complicity in this light, understood as an affliction in the personal domain of "political responsibility" (rather than an accusation in the critical register of denunciation), can be said to be an important source of concern for contemporary humanitarians – and, by extension, an experience substantial enough on its own to constitute an object of analysis. Departing from Arendt's notion of political responsibility, it was possible to grasp, in the last section, how the threat of "complicity" is becoming part of many citizens' self-formation. Yet, it was made clear from the start that the Arendtian approach is largely unsuited for our circumstances. By contrast, a Foucauldian approach – although he rarely spoke about anything like a post-Westphalian citizenship (see Chapter 5) – I think can offer a more compelling basis to address her limitations and thus advance in the analysis of volunteers' complicity.

Civil society as political technology. While Foucault and post-Foucauldian authors have never written about "political responsibility" in the way Arendt did – it is too normative a topic – they have diagnosed neoliberalism as precisely being about a citizen activation or offer of responsibility that in principle is collective or "ethico-political." From this perspective, responsible citizenship is first of all the product of a technology of government. If we have come to think of us as accountable beings in terms of our contribution to a collectivity, it is because of a "political technology of individuals" which, over the centuries, has led "to recognize ourselves as a society, as a part of a social entity, as a part of a nation or of a state" (Foucault 2000:404). In particular, Foucault detects two distinct technologies or "games" in the Western history of political subjectification: first, the ancient "city-citizen" game, which

prioritizes the law and destiny of the totality of citizens and, consequently, the glorious sacrifice of some for the whole; and, second, the much more modern "shepherd-flock" game, which prioritizes the life and optimal state of every single individual and, therefore, the willpower of all members of society to act upon their own best interests (Foucault 1981; 2007b, lecture 7).

The pastoral game would have been developed as an intrinsic part of the modern state thanks to what he precisely called its governmentalization. Initially, with the emergence of *raison d'État,* out of an interest in increasing wealth, urbanization, and regulation, territorial states would have started to be concerned with the coexistence of the common people, making sure that individuals did "more than just living" by trying to improve their health, wellbeing and even happiness (Foucault 2007b:321-336). And then, at the end of the eighteenth century, with the irruption of a promising market dynamic, the rulers of these states, who were used to having exploitable "subjects," would have had to become liberal, reimagining their space of sovereignty in terms of an autonomous "civil society" – without which they could not reap the benefits (for their nation and for themselves, as part of that nation) of an economically vibrant humanity (see Helliwell and Hindess 1999). Until this day, civil society would have in this way become the key pastoral solution or device by which liberal authorities, as Foucault suggests paraphrasing an eighteenth-century author, "cannot imagine or conceive an individual to be happy if the whole to which he belongs is not happy" and vice versa (2008:300).

This pastoral device has always been about the "responsibilization" of individuals. As Cruikshank (1999) and others have evidenced, from the nineteenth-century philanthropists who wanted "to help people to help themselves" to the

twentieth-century attempts of social movements at "empowering the poor," the intention of all those involved in the liberal arts of government has always been to "work upon the capacities of citizens to act on their own behalf" (pp.4, 68, 39). What happens in neoliberalism, as Rose (1999) has explored in detail, is simply that "disciplinary techniques and moralizing injunctions … are no longer required; the project of responsible citizenship has been fused with individuals' projects for themselves" (p.88). Civil society, as the pastoral basis for one's sense of political responsibility, is no longer necessarily defined by the civilizing and nation-building projects of a strictly Westphalian era. Each individual's political self-identity is just thought to respond to its own "community," to its own "emotional bonds of affinity to a circumscribed 'network' of other individuals – unified by family ties, by locality, by moral commitment to environmental protection or animal welfare" (p.176).

With this understanding of political responsibility, it becomes possible to explain why, in neoliberal conditions, humanitarians are susceptible to disorientation and complicity as a form of conscience. In principle, governmentality scholars agree that, at least in the dominant terms established by the liberal tradition, political responsibility indeed requires a pre-existing collectivity, a "community" or "civil society."[63] But, unlike Arendt, they do not assume that it has to be a bond that individuals need to have in common with the recipients or targets of that responsibility. In recognizing the influence that Christianity has had on an essentially classical city-citizen game, Foucault opens our understanding of political responsibility to a case like neoliberalism, in which the pastoral game acquires an autonomy of its own. The governmentalization of the citizenship discussed earlier amounts to handing down the technique of pastorship to the "flock" itself, who then, individually, must take on the task of watching over the interests and welfare of

certain others besides themselves. The neoliberal foundation for civil society is more than a common collectivity. The very source of the communal bond and one's allegiance to it is now the commitment to care for others, which, depending on the origin of this commitment – family values, urban cosmopolitanism, protective regionalism, religious worldview, ethnic loyalty, identity politics, and so on – may be more or less immediate and may include taking responsibility and acting upon the social problems of individuals that are not necessarily part of one's same civil society.

Undecidable targets. The problem that follows from this understanding – and that challenges the last of Arendt's preconditions for political responsibility – is that, in post-Westphalian times, knowing what civil society one should exercise one's political responsibility *in relation to* is not always self-evident either. To become politically responsible, pastoral citizens may need to know more than where they belong to and what social problems fall within their legitimate scope of care. In many cases that are not even as evidently transnational as that of the volunteer tourist, they would need to also know *who they can actually be responsible to*. This is something that the Dutch blogger we met earlier was able to convey when he reflected on the kind of life skills he taught while volunteering in Guatemala:

> What's the point?
>
> My project was to teach Guatemalan kids English. The rationale was that the chances on a job are higher if you speak English. The government doesn't do it (properly) so that's why my NGO was established. Next to English we were told to teach the kids norms and values: such as do not pollute the environment (pick up your candy wrap!), respect each other (no teasing) or be fair (everybody gets one sheet of paper) and working hard pays off (do your homework and you get an extra candy)…

> Maybe some of those kids did manage to get a job at a multinational, in the tourism sector or in one of the aid industry's NGOs. I helped them right? No failure this time? It is however measuring success on a superficial level. If you think about it, I taught English because the government doesn't do it and I taught values that are believed to be necessary for a successful society. One of those values is equality of opportunity… I taught the kids to be fair. Isn't there a paradox? If I teach them so they will have a better chance on a job than the kids from the village next door, am I then teaching the right values? Or worse, am I promoting inequality? Would it not have been better to stay at home and raise funds for the Guatemalan government so they can teach all kids English, on a fair basis?
>
> In fact, by doing this work I take away the incentive for the government to take action or for businesses to give (free) English training. If you think about it in that way I have become part of the problem rather than being part of the solution. I think that qualifies as failure (disregarding the good intentions and the few kids I might have helped).
>
> I guess I'm back to my question: what's the point? … I can't help wondering if my NGO thought about this question very long.
>
> (22nd of May, Ethnosense blog)

At the heart of the current humanitarian frustration there seems to be a basic or what used to be a basic problem of selectivity. When volunteers helped in the traditional way, in their own local community, it was easy enough for them to imagine that their duty was fulfilled as long as they engaged, served and participated, for it was the participation of every member what was presumed to eventually be able to bring about the satisfaction of their collective interests. Contemporary volunteers like the one above, on the other hand, can easily struggle with the question of how to be selective. As he indicates, there is no commonsensical reason that can justify his helping this or that community instead of the one "next door" or, for that matter, any community at all. Selecting any community as a

humanitarian target runs the risk of being "pointless," among other reasons, because it could put its neighbours in disadvantage, cultivate individualistic values, drive away public resources or discourage private initiative. At some point, it is suggested that raising funds and focusing on the governmental level could perhaps avoid some of these nagging questions. But, in such a case, he would probably find himself facing similar concerns since he would still have to be selective, if only at a larger scale.

It is true that the state is supposed to be all about fairness and, unlike individual citizens, has no trouble with being selective. Its political structure is meant to prioritize which social issues are urgent and relevant for the wellbeing of a nation. Still, choosing to direct one's individual efforts towards the state is these days also a form of selection. After all, as this volunteer himself expressed, if his service was needed in the first place it is "because the government doesn't do it." States have today a limited power to deal with situations of precariousness and inequality. And the fact that their bureaucrats have systematic and institutionalized ways of being selective within their own population does not mean that their humanitarian practices come without exclusionary outcomes and arbitrary effects (Gupta 2012; Ticktin 2006). This is something that is generally clear for volunteers, as posts like the following one reflect:

> Having volunteered in India and Vietnam it is so easy to cast blame for basic human rights violations on corrupt governments and the cycle of poverty. But I cannot, and will never, understand the blatant and intentional punishment of such vulnerable and innocent people [asylum seekers] in Australia. The hypocrisy of it saddens me beyond belief.
>
> (25th of June, Ethnosense blog)

The political choices made by governments are not ones that volunteers, even in the most transparent, democratic, wealthy, and multicultural nation-states, would instantly and blindly accept as effective or fair… NGOs, on the other hand, would appear to be doing much of the deciding, at least in regards to the distribution of private contributions and volunteering practices. As a giver and voluntary worker, however, the individual citizen is still the one who needs to choose between them, and the one who must be satisfied with that decision. Nonprofits and humanitarian organizations may be increasingly efficient in matters of allocation (Krause 2014). But, while selectivity is for them a matter of self-preservation – something that needs to be performed regardless of the paradoxes and aporias that any given project may involve (see Fassin 2007; Redfield 2012) – it is not so for volunteers.

For humanitarians, singularly, the ethico-political problem is much more pressing. "Being selective," to start with, must seem justifiable. By acting on their humanitarianism, they are risking their own complicity. Thus, they need to know, personally, for their own conscience, if what they did actually helped in general terms, if it was an actual intervention. To gain such certainty, a neatly distributed political map would be appropriate, for what they would need to know is who they can be responsible to, what *circuit of collaboration* is immediately relevant in a given scenario of care. If they knew that (what sort of ethico-political framing has precedence over another to tackle a specific and localized social problem), they could unproblematically be selective – whether that meant choosing a boycott towards a consumer product, a protest towards a state, a donation to an international NGO, a conscious purchase through a responsible corporation, a vote for a party with a certain aid policy, or a direct contribution or service to a community organization. Knowing who they should be contributing to – the local sovereignty of the market,

the state, or the third sector, to put it simply – would allow them to adopt an avenue of intervention without fearing that the very decision to help could eventually become the source of their frustration.

If political responsibility was a thinkable and applicable condition of citizen self-formation in a Westphalian world, it is not only because individuals knew who they were in the obligation to help, but also because they knew (or at least were able to assume) that their contribution and participation would actually be of help. Volunteers may have firm opinions about questions of social justice and be well informed about how global or structural the causes of inequality are (as the blog posts reviewed here often suggest). Yet, the trouble they have with the multiple framings of sovereignty currently defining the living conditions and citizen entitlements of individuals is that targeting any one of them could very well be counterproductive. As such, the problem is not that these targets – a specific village, community, company, government or international NGO – could be too narrow. Rather, the problem is that their relative effectivity in the improvement of established circuits of collaboration or "civil societies" is undecidable.[64]

3.ii.e. Failing to intervene

Complicity from a Foucauldian perspective, then, would not be the failure of an uncritical subject in resisting a certain power, but rather the failure of a citizen who, in wanting to assume her collective responsibility, finds herself confronted with an unsolvable challenge. Neoliberalism does appear to be causing this internal experience of irresponsibility. Further, if, as I have done here, we understand the

neoliberal rationality as a humanitarian strategy, then it is possible to see how this failure is more than an ethico-political experience – how it is the unexpected and unwanted outcome of a whole way of solving things.

When Foucault implicitly qualifies the liberal notion of "political responsibility" through the classical concept of "civil society," he illuminates how it is that it used to be possible for individual citizens to have a sense of effectivity in the practice of social intervention. Civil society is the paradigmatic circuit of collaboration, the kind of target that volunteer tourists would still like to have today. In political theory, the field of "civil society" has always been imagined through its relation with the state, but Foucault's suggestion is that, technically, it refers to an autonomous, cohesive, and well-defined circuit of collaboration among subjects who share an interest in maintaining their mutual happiness and social bond (2008, lecture 12). It is in that capacity that it became a thinkable plane of reference for liberal citizens – and it is not only as part of such a kind of circuit but as governmental actors seeking to act upon such a kind of circuit that individuals would have been able to realize their political responsibility until this day. Civil society embodies a whole nexus of biopolitical strategies, as I examine in the next chapter. But, essentially, if historically volunteers could confidently foreclose their freedom, it is because they trusted this quasi-natural solution that said that a civil society such as "the nation" corresponded to a compact social whole with regulative processes of its own that were susceptible to improvement by means of intervention.

The kinds of allegiance that are now binding together these communities or ensembles of civil society may be very diverse, but their diversity, as such, has done nothing to undermine their function in the pastoral game. The reason for our current

undecidability, for why civil society does no longer offer a reliable circuit of collaboration that can serve as target of intervention, can be found instead in the expansion of the market. Singling out an expansive market as the decisive reason will probably sound obvious to a generation that has learned to associate neoliberal globalization with the economization of the social. But, from a perspective that insists in recognizing the social dimension of neoliberalism, it is triply ironic that the market could be diluting the strategic value of civil society:

(i) Firstly, if neoliberalism makes use of market and quasi-market mechanisms, it is to foster a regime of accountability, that is, to act upon the subject of civil society. Its strategy depends on intensifying the caring or "pastoral" capacities that individuals have as ethico-political beings, who, feeling part of a certain community that "does not coincide with humanity in general" (Foucault 2008:302), are prepared to compete for its collective interests in globalized arenas like the "market for projects." Expanding the market so as to activate a series of civil societies in a field of competition is its chosen technique.

(ii) Secondly, if neoliberalism spreads financial modes of calculation and fosters social subjects of interest, it is because it assumes that "it has to intervene on society so that competitive mechanisms can play a regulatory role at every moment and every point in society" (p.145). The rationale of neoliberalism is that a more socially active and competitive humanity would guarantee the conditions for "a general regulation of society by the market" (p.145). Expanding the market, without discounting the specificity of society, is thus also its goal.

(iii) And, finally, if neoliberalism seeks to work through the forces of civil society, it is because the market, on its own, cannot be relied on. What the Foucauldian tradition suggests is that the security of the market has in fact always been the goal of modern liberal government, not because it has always been considered the best political argument, but simply because it has always been seen as an economic mechanism that must be reckoned with. I have already touched in different occasions on this issue and I will finally discuss it at length in the next chapter, but, broadly, one can say that the unruly expansion of the market is liberalism's original difficulty (even if not its constitutive problem), and civil society, its logical starting point.

In spite of the neoliberal vision, the calculated expansion of the market has ended up disrupting the way of solving things that is civil society. These days, the governmentalized citizen working in a transnational terrain cannot avoid suspecting the effectivity of what he or she is doing for distant others. Even if those others form a recognizable circuit of collaboration, like, say, a young green movement, the suspicion remains:

> I kept on wondering, do these teenagers and young adults blame the developed countries for disproportionate consumption of resources and exploitation of the developing world? How do the youth of Vietnam think about Nike factories in their country? They must be angry at the West, right?
>
> During the breakout discussions, they talked about reducing their own consumption and living greener. However, the bigger issues weren't discussed. I still don't know if that was intentional or not. For me, the elephant is still in the room.
>
> (22nd of May, Ethnosense blog)

There are two ways in which an all-expansive market disrupts the biopolitical perception. First and most evidently, the interconnectedness of local problems makes it difficult not to wonder whether there are "bigger issues" involved in any context of intervention. It is always possible to widen more and more the frame of relevance for a humanitarian practice and fall into what Fraser captures as a "butterfly effect" (2008:64), that is, the intrinsic possibility of widening the frame to the point of generalizing it to the whole globe – which, of course, renders the biopolitical device of civil society just as unmanageable as the market.

On the other hand, the field of competition in which social institutions are increasingly placed incites what could be called a "blame game" in the mind of the volunteer. In a way, the openness of this field creates an excess of responsibility, because potentially many other circuits besides the one targeted could be blamed for the problem at hand – the consumers of wealthy countries or "the West," the industry of transnational manufactory or "Nike's factories," and so on. It is not that volunteers are hoping to blame someone; only in some cases their intervention takes the form of a political demand or denunciation. It is rather that to intervene as a volunteer is at the same time to make a diagnosis in relation to a specific circuit of collaboration. As Elizabeth Povinelli puts it, "to care for others is to make a claim; it is to make a small theoretical gesture … What we believe care to consist of is directly related to where we believe failure resides" (2011:160). And when many circuits can be "blamed," when assigning responsibility becomes a competitive game, none of them can be confidently targeted. Where many could be responsible, nobody is.

The humanitarians of neoliberalism still aspire to a self-evident target like civil society. They are attracted to "morally magnetic missions," as someone like Eliasoph

(2011:2) has evidenced. That has not changed. It continues to be the biopolitical paradigm of intervention. But, on reflection, they increasingly find themselves dissatisfied, lost, complicit – unable to know how much is enough to actually make a difference. The strategy of neoliberalism has suddenly started to work against itself. If its rationale requires citizens to embrace the care of populations as part of their own political responsibility in a financially efficient post-Westphalian space, then, the moment they are unable to become ethical through the effective practice of intervention due to the very globalization of the market signals somewhat of an impasse – a failure that is not internal to the subject as much as to what could be called the neoliberal machine.

End. Neoliberal Paranoia

This chapter sought to grasp complicity as an object of critical analysis and cultural form of experience rather than as a critical commentary or conclusion made from a relatively safe distance. What could make such an analysis "critical" had to be the possibility of detecting in the experience of complicity an evidently negative or undesirable effect that could not be rebutted from neoliberalism's own perspective. One such effect was found with the help of crucial insights coming from volunteer tourists. It was argued to be an ethico-political impasse, a failure created by a biopolitical machine that cannot avoid to produce the opposite of what it wants, frustratedly irresponsible subjects, volunteers who are skeptical towards their own interventionist desires.

The point of this analysis was not to offer a counter-claim in an existing debate about complicity. Rather, its relevance comes from the fact that it allows the Foucauldian tradition to bypass entirely a debate that can only take place in a register of denunciation. The question, then, is not *whether* there is a certain neoliberal complicity or not. What instead needs to be explained is *why* neoliberalism is prone to produce such paranoid concerns. By using Foucault as a point of refraction, it has become possible here to discern a few vectors feeding into this neoliberal paranoia:

1 The fact that neoliberalism, as a political technology of individuals, pushes to an extreme the pastoral game makes it pray to a range of judgments made from the classical understanding of the city-citizen game, a game that is principally about

individuals making claims on the state rather than about taking on the responsibility of care *like* the state (c.f. Burchell 1991:145).

2 From a long tradition of sociological critique situated in a register of denunciation, a political rationality like neoliberalism, which finds its inspiration in the competitive dynamic of the market, using quasi-market mechanisms to intervene upon the social domain, is no doubt a rationality to which it is easy to extend a politics of suspicion.

3 From a more recent tradition of critique situated in a register of failure, it would have also been difficult to avoid an accusatory tone. For, in spite of the questionable assumptions that are considered to be intrinsic to the neoliberal regime of accountability, the ultimate effect that is usually detected is the activation of a responsible citizenship and, as such, this is not something evidently wrong. In this way, not having a critical element to hold on to in terms of failure, it becomes tempting to resort to denunciation by sticking to a welfarist framework.

4 Even those critics heavily influenced by Foucault who resisted the temptation of vilifying the neoliberal mentality would have also been likely to generate a paranoid awareness. They would have followed Foucault's own aversion "to tell others what they have to do" (1988:265), an approach that does not talk of complicity, but that leads the reader to think that all the existent arrangements of power are dangerous.

5 When, on the other hand, neoliberalism is assumed to be a humanitarian strategy, as we did here, it can be evidenced that its strategy creates by itself a sense of political irresponsibility or "complicity" among volunteers – which means, adding to the last point, that even those neutral critiques that do not mention anything about complicity and rather let the audience judge for itself have likely reinforced this latent feeling of frustration, forming a serious "knot" for the practice of intervention.

6 Finally, that "neoliberalism" has such a widespread negative connotation (see Flew 2012:45-46) means that even an argument about complicity being a sign of neoliberal failure could be taken to be a further confirmation of the power of neoliberal subjection. Indeed, that contemporary citizens continue to volunteer in spite of their skepticism could be seen as proof of the effectivity of the neoliberal machine, which can still work with disappointed and half-formed subjects. Avoiding what comes so easily to us these days, a rather sweeping fatalism, the following two chapters explore instead what the strategic specificity of these skeptical practices might be.

Chapter 4 | A HISTORICALLY STRATEGIC CONJUNCTURE:

The opening of a divide in social intervention

It is not yet possible to know how or even if the humanitarian problem is solvable. What has made this cultural project so persistent and "problematic" or worthy of problematization, from Rousseau's time to ours, is precisely this lack of certainty – although one could say that "postmodern" and late-twentieth-century philosophers in general, from Michel Foucault to Richard Rorty, came to be particularly concerned with the radical openness of this problem. Perhaps, as three centuries of social intervention suggest, we will never know whether it is completely solvable or not. At any rate, suffering is far from a finite experience in beings as diverse and variable as humans, which means that, regardless of the strategies we have at our disposal, most likely, there will always be a chance to reach a more inclusionary justice, a chance to collectively prevent an overlooked form of suffering (Taylor 2002:98; Brown 1995:134). Solvable or not, whichever the case may be, we can still gain a better understanding on the solvability of this problem. Even if we cannot know whether a humanitarian coexistence can be fully achieved or perfectly planned, we can still gauge whether our methods have the capacity to get us closer and closer to that ideal. The prospects of this project necessarily depend, in the end, on the strategic potential of its modes of intervention.

My contention in this chapter is that we have reached a privileged conjuncture in the history of liberalism, a conjuncture that allows us to pose this question of

solvability in the form of a dilemma, that is, as a problem for which we have two mutually exclusive answers, each with a strategic value that is difficult to ascertain. In a way, this binary set of options is inherent to the architecture of the humanitarian problem. A humanitarian self that wants to enact its ethos has a radical freedom of intervention, a freedom that cannot be avoided as such, which means that any such self will be found to either *embrace* or *foreclose* this freedom. And yet, while this bifurcation is practically deducible from the structure of the problem, one cannot say that both of these options were readily available from the start (see Chapter 2).

"Neoliberalism" is the site of this historical conjuncture. In principle, as a political rationality, neoliberalism constitutes an exemplary manifestation of the liberal approach that has been at work in Western culture since the time of Rousseau, the approach that, from imperialism to sensitization, has restlessly tried to achieve some closure by generalizing a particular solution. On the other hand, as an established apparatus of governmentality, neoliberalism has created the perfect conditions for an entirely different practice of intervention to flourish, one that is "skeptical" and, it is my thesis, morally exposed or difficult to understand and process through conventional expectations. To this extent, neoliberalism sits at the center of the conjuncture that I seek to explore here. It is the occasion for a dilemma or at least for an inquiry into solvability that amounts to a dilemma.

In principle, a skeptical practice of freedom could be seen as a humanitarianism that is destined to remain imprisoned in the neoliberal rationality of government. For, even if these skeptics decide to act and move past their ethico-political frustration, it is not evident why there would be any difference in their form of action. In the absence of a good alternative and with an urgency to do something,

they would have to resign themselves – one might assume – to do something conventional while simply being skeptical about its meaningfulness. Thus, the challenge is to show how an actual strategic divide can take shape. While Rousseau seemed to have opened up this divide for the first time, the question would be why such a potential for bifurcation finds in neoliberalism the conditions to be fully and recognizably developed, to become more than a possibility that may or may not be happening in frustrating times.

Embracing this question has a number of implications. To depart from this dilemma is first of all to depart from Rousseau rather than Smith. It is to deduce the content of the liberal project from its prospects rather than from its tradition. Thinking in terms of such a dilemma is also to avoid reducing our critical inquiry on neoliberalism to a matter of reinforcing a paranoid sense of complicity. It is a way of unfolding or untying the Foucauldian "complicity" knot by exploring how the skepticism of a subject can lead it to do things that go beyond the strategic limits created by a regime of power. And, finally, to frame the analysis in terms of a liberal dilemma is to avoid the issues that come with "negative critique" (see e.g. Povinelli 2011). It is to provide a basis upon which, at least by means of comparison, our modes of intervention can be judged without either having to superimpose a moralistic judgment or leave that task to the reader by suspending judgment altogether.

I consider this comparative aspect to be crucial for the purposes of this research. It is the critical edge it offers to the Foucauldian tradition. A Foucauldian analysis tends to focus on one single regime of practices, "with the aim of grasping the conditions that make these [practices] acceptable at a given moment" (Foucault

2000:225). Many commentators suggest that this mode of inquiry is able "to reveal how things have come to be what they are and by so doing show how they could be different" (Rabinow 2003:42). However, the second part of the enterprise has always remained somewhat obscure. Foucault's style of historical critique may invite the reader to problematize the cultural practices of the present, but it is generally unwilling to spell out what makes them problematic. A register of failure has at times been useful for this tradition to advance in this direction, as the previous chapter demonstrated. But the possibility of contrast, in our case, provides the additional angle that might be necessary to be able to undertake a fully explicit critical labour by other means than the use of an arbitrary normative framework. After all, when one speaks of a "strategic conjuncture" one makes neither a normative, nor a purely technical statement; one points to something that cannot be assumed to actually resolve anything, but that neither leaves things untouched.

Part I. Inherited Tactics

What can be said to lie beyond the scope of neoliberalism, strategically speaking, is not "the political," as Rosanvallon (2006) among many others would suggest. For Rosanvallon, neoliberalism champions a mechanism that historically appears as "the implicit competitor of the democratic project of artificially constituting the political realm" (p.148). The political is for him the necessarily open, contentious and experimental process of defining the rules and conditions of a life in common, a process of which democracy, with all its tensions and equivocations, is the best example (pp.34-38). The mechanism of the market stands, in this light, at the opposite end of the political (pp.149-50). It is the embodiment of a depersonalizing and simplifying "capitalist utopia," one that by definition would be in competition with the "democratic utopia" of a "unified people and a general will" or, in any case, of a "society deliberately and voluntaristically instituted" (pp.152, 158-59).

Instead of assuming such an unbridgeable divide, I continue to elaborate in this chapter on the complex articulation of social and economic strategies that, according to the Foucauldian diagnosis, takes place in neoliberal conditions. In particular, the first part delves into the three forms of biopolitics that would be most relevant to neoliberalism: "the invisible hand," "the people," and "the impartial spectator." The point of this analysis is thus not to set the stage for a more "political" strategy. It is rather to take advantage of the fact that, when a new way of solving things appears on the liberal horizon, the intrinsic limitations of our traditional strategies – including the typically "political" ones – suddenly become understandable.

Specifically, the challenge of solvability that any biopolitics faces is one, I argue, of "technical opacity." There is always a certain opacity or lack of certainty in this kind of technical approach. Can we actually balance our interests as though by an invisible hand? Can we actually follow the general will of the people? Can we actually make judgments as an impartial spectator would? It is a peculiarity of biopolitical humanitarianisms to be blinded technically by their ambition. It is true that any solution that has a level of generality is bound to be implemented in many different ways. This is what Krause (2014) for example calls "the indeterminacy of ideas" in relation to humanitarian relief. From "abstract ideas, values, or meanings," she writes, "very little follows by way of concrete instructions as to what to do" (pp.171-72). But what makes a given humanitarian approach "technically opaque" is not the variability that it may manifest in practice. It is almost the inverse. It is the fact that, regardless of how it is implemented, one can never be sure if its strategic logic is being applied correctly.

In the second part of the chapter, the technical opacity of these strategies will serve as a background to detect the contrasting development of a skeptical humanitarianism. The difficulty of this task will be more theoretical than empirical. It will, again, have nothing to do with identifying a more political practice. It will rather consist in explaining how from what is in principle a strategic impasse can emerge a whole different mode of intervention with a distinct principle of operativity. After a contextualization of "civil society" as the biopolitical nexus of modernity, the answer will be found in a certain "neoliberal anomaly," an anomaly derived from the specific arrangement of tactical opacities that, as a technology of government, is neoliberalism.

4.i.a. A researchable solvability

Beyond exhaustively reviewing the infinite diversity of forms humanitarian intervention can take, from macro-economic doctrines and international initiatives to social work and community service, the present inquiry calls us to zero in on the challenges of solvability that may be encountered as a whole. It would of course be impossible to study all the circumstances that can make a given practice of intervention more difficult or more unlikely to be successful. From the most abstract of matters such as political climates to the most concrete and practical ones such as the availability of resources can have a bearing on the eventual success of an implemented answer. If the question of solvability is made researchable here, it is thanks to the proposed existence of a liberal dilemma – which, beyond simply appealing to a register of failure that faults what does exist, materializes the possibility of a strategic assessment between readily practicable and conceivable alternatives. It is this dilemma that makes it possible to investigate, not the circumstantial, but rather intrinsic challenges that come with an engaged humanitarianism.

One can distinguish between humanitarian practices that personalize or "embrace" their radical freedom and others that streamline or "foreclose" humanitarian conduct. Thus, we are presented, at least conceptually, with two modes or proposals of intervention, each with a relative potential for effectivity that is yet to be explored, although perhaps never fully determined – two options that, unless one day we managed to solve the humanitarian problem, are bound to remain with a minimal feasibility and to maintain, in their simultaneity, the shape of a dilemma. Together they exhaust, in a way, the entire humanitarian problematic.

Still, it is difficult to conceptualize how exactly this dilemma can be exhaustive in practical terms. There would be endless practices of intervention that could be formed departing from either side of the dilemma. And it would be hard to imagine that the point of difference between one mode of practice and the other is simply a programmatic agenda or a certain range of techniques. What conceptually sets the two sides apart would have to be something more abstract and yet closer to the minutiae of everyday life. In short, I find that any actual, researchable difference would be rather consequent upon a distinct "principle of operativity." This would not be an explanatory principle that specifies how each mode of intervention works as such, internally. This is a "principle" not in the sense of an essential core or mechanism of action that would make a series of strategies function, but rather in the sense of what in mathematics would be called an axiom: a principle that binds a given set of strategies as a kind of implicit rule they cannot operate without. This is why "moral exposure" can be suggested as one such principle, and what I call in this chapter "technical opacity," as the other. As principles of operativity, moral exposure and technical opacity do not define what certain strategies do as much as what they cannot avoid doing. They elucidate the source of concern that haunts a way of solving things across its multiple variations, innovations and permutations.

Each of these two principles forms, as it were, a pole of a strategic field, which, following the premises of this inquiry, is a field where norms by themselves cannot be effective. One pole would be the hyper-technical one, where practical investments are guided by an aspiration to pursue a quasi-natural solution. Because, in these cases, humanitarian technique is necessarily foreign to one's practice and that foreignness is not due to a black-and-white rule or "norm" but rather due to a certain strategic rationale with an ambitious orientation, the implementation of

solutions is bound to be a matter of concern. Questions about whether one is "doing it right" or applying the technique correctly, and whether the applied technique "is working" or demonstrating its effectivity invariably accompany humanitarians when they are situated in this pole. In its superlative form, when the concerns related to technical opacity become for some reason exacerbated, this pole can lead to an "impasse" or state of absolute frustration in which there is no longer any trust or self-evidence in regards to a solution. In spite of their participation in well-structured humanitarian projects, reflexive individuals can end up feeling complicit, as we saw in the previous chapter.

Conversely, in the other pole of this strategic field, one would encounter the kinds of questions that arise from a loose, vague, idiosyncratic or contextual humanitarian approach. Because of this technical flexibility and level of personalization, the pressing concerns in this case become about communication, about how to "make sense of it" or render one's approach intelligible, and how to make others "get it" or render the approach technical. Among returned volunteer tourists, precisely, this kind of self-problematization is commonplace. Many of the participants of my project explained their initial motivation to join and blog in these very terms, with statements like, "I would like to be able to explain my experience to others more clearly" or "[I want to blog about] the walls that exist when trying to explain volunteering experiences to non-volunteers". During the project itself, this source of concern became even clearer. Consider the following thread:

> Post: This is a question I think about every day. Will people ever understand?
>
> I tell all the stories and show all the pictures. I know they're interested because they're my family and friends and I went on a "holiday". But I just feel like they don't understand the impact it had on me. I try to explain but they still can't see it…

> Comment: I feel the same way. I miss Hanoi all the time, especially the kids I worked with. Nobody really gets that. Like you said, they think I went on a holiday … I think the reason why people don't get it is because they have nothing to link it with. Your experience is just not compatible with normal life at home. So people will hear your story, see your pictures and then put it in the same category as 'nice travel experience'. They won't understand because they can't, there's nothing to relate to.
>
> (6th of Apr, Ethnosense blog)

This is the kind of concerns that moral exposure can create. The volunteer tourist knows that she did not go on a "holiday" or "nice travel experience." What makes their collaborative experiences with other cultures meaningful is the fact that they amount to practices of intervention, even if, as the next chapter explores, the form of social effectivity that is embedded in them cannot be easily grasped from an outsider's perspective. In spite of being confident in their own efforts – usually after having gone through a process of idealization-anticlimax-personalization, as I also continue to discuss in Chapter 5 – returned volunteer tourists cannot avoid feeling misunderstood, misrecognized.

These two principles can thus fulfil the conceptual need this inquiry has for empirical differentiation. In the hyper-technical pole, communicative concerns can be expected to have no relevance, and vice versa. When humanitarians are trying to foreclose their freedom, they follow an idea that seems acceptable in itself or that is at least recognizable as to its meaning, intentionality, moral logic, etc.; hence, there is no need to ask the communicative questions. There is only technical opacity. Likewise, when they themselves are shaping and reshaping their technical approach as they go, they may risk moral exposure, but their humanitarian practice is already self-perceived as the optimal and effective one or, more precisely, they do not have

the need to ask the questions of implementation. Whatever they decided to do is nothing other than what they thought was best for the situation at hand. It is for these reasons, in brief, that one can assign to each pole of the humanitarian field a distinct "principle of operativity" – even if it is not uncommon for contemporary humanitarians to go back and forth between them, and even if it is only thanks to the current conditions that it is possible to confidently theorize about two such principles.

4.i.b. The impartial spectator

I will begin the inquiry into humanitarian solvability with the exploration of its traditional pole, starting with Adam Smith's "impartial spectator," the solution that he put forward in his, to this day, influential book *The theory of moral sentiments* (c.f. Wilkinson 2005:114-16). Without a doubt, the scope of his proposal was ambitiously biopolitical. "This is *the only* looking-glass," he wrote, "by which we can, in some measure, with the eyes of other people, scrutinize the propriety of our own conduct" (2004:131, emphasis added). "Propriety" is an important concept in his discourse, to the extent that the purpose of an impartial spectator is nothing more than assess how coherent, harmonious or "proper" a certain conduct is in relation to a perception or judgment upon that conduct: "when the original passions of the person principally concerned are in perfect concord with the sympathetic emotions of the spectator, they necessarily appear to this last *just and proper*, and suitable to their objects" (p.20, emphasis added). In this way, one can assume that the more this technique or faculty is cultivated, the more justice in general can be expected. At some point, Smith for example remarks on how, "the violator of the more sacred laws of justice can never

reflect on the sentiments which mankind must entertain with regard to him, without feeling all the agonies of shame, and horror, and consternation" (p.98).

For the purposes of this chapter, it is exceptionally revealing that Smith himself seemed forced to dedicate a good portion of his life to clarify to his readership how exactly this solution gained its effectivity in practice. From its first edition, it was a solution that created concerns about its inner workings. It is well-known, for example, that his friend Sir Gilbert Elliot expressed to him in a private letter that he could not see how the use of such an imaginary position could ultimately avoid the trap of moral conventionalism – of simply reproducing the existing social attitudes. According to Forman-Barzilai (2009:96), this is one of the signs suggesting that the five editions that followed, published during a span of thirty-one years, would have been driven by Smith's anxiety to elucidate the technical mechanism that was in question.

The solution was seemingly simple and unproblematic, "to examine our own conduct as we imagine any other fair and impartial spectator would examine it" (Smith 2004:129). It relied, as Boltanski comments in one of the most recent appropriations of the concept, on a "topography of interiority" that was rather familiar to the eighteenth-century reader (1999:44). As Smith explains, the idea is that, "I divide myself, as it were, into two persons" where one becomes the spectator, judge and tribunal of the other, which he calls the "agent" (2004:121). The agent can also be another person though, in whose case the challenge becomes about putting oneself in the situation of the other (e.g. pp.26-27). Seeing with "the eyes of other people" is of course impossible. But thanks to the very distance that one has with that other, one would be able to be impartial while at the same time attempting

to imagine and consider the motives and feelings that would be just and "proper" for that very specific person found in that very specific situation (Forman-Barzilai 2009:66-68). Conversely, when it is the case of judging oneself, what one would then need to imagine is what it would be like to observe oneself from a distance. As Smith puts it, self-judgment "must always bear some *secret reference*, either to what are, or to what, upon a certain condition, would be, or to what, we imagine, ought to be the judgment of others" (2004:128-129, emphasis added).

In this last passage, one can start to sense the opacity that comes attached to an impartial spectator. One wonders what the status is of that "secret reference." Forman-Barzilai suggests that this implicit link Smith creates between conscience and society amounts to a disciplinary view of sympathy, by which individual subjects learn to maintain others and themselves under surveillance (2009, chs. 2 and 3). She cannot see how a "socialized conscience," as she calls it, can produce judgments that have a "genuine *independence* from convention" (p.98, original emphasis). There is no doubt that Smith presented sympathy as the basic requirement for judgment. It was the imaginative faculty that a spectator needed to reflect on the affective situation of the agent, "our fellow-feeling with any passion whatever" (2004:13). And, as such, one cannot deny that the Smithian formation of conscience is dependent on gaining a deep awareness of what others think, feel, and expect – which may at times translate into a disciplinary effect (Churcher 2016:435). The following passage is a good example in this sense:

> The man who has received great benefits from another person, may, by the natural coldness of his temper, feel but a very small degree of the sentiment of gratitude. If he has been virtuously educated, however, he will often have been made to observe how odious those actions appear which denote a want of this sentiment, and how amiable the

> contrary. Though his heart therefore is not warmed with any grateful affection, he will strive to act as if it was, and will endeavour to pay all those regards and attentions to his patron which the liveliest gratitude could suggest … [Thus,] the motive of his actions may be no other than a reverence for the established rule of duty, a serious and earnest desire of acting, in every respect, according to the law of gratitude (p.188).

In this case, one could surely speak of a disciplined subject who has learned to show "reverence" and, in general, direct himself in relation to norms of conduct like "the law of gratitude" thanks to a Smithian pedagogy. It is in this light that the method of the impartial spectator becomes close to not just a Foucauldian account of discipline, but more generally to a Foucauldian account of civil society. As we saw in the last chapter, for Foucault civil society amounts to a spontaneous mechanism that through sympathy and "disinterested" interests – or, perhaps, we could say here, "impartial" interests – maintains the social bond. After authors like Smith and Adam Ferguson had materialized this "civil" mechanism in the realm of liberal thought, as Foucault (2008:298) indicates, it would have then proceeded to form the basis of classical liberal government. Synthesizing a number of governmentality studies on the subject, Rose (1999) for example explains how the nineteenth century was witness to a new series of governing tactics that opened public space to the "play of normative gazes" (p.73). From the schoolroom to the department store would have rapidly become the governmental technologies for a civilizing program of self-regulation based on mutual visibility. To this extent, the ethical method that Adam Smith proposed, with its aspiration to produce "the most perfect harmony of sentiments and affections" (p.24), stands as a direct contributor to the Western project of a "civil society."

Nevertheless, what Forman-Barzilai claims – like a kind of pre-late Foucault who has not yet become critical about the excessively restrictive nature of her account of discipline – is that the impartial spectator is "substantively" and not just "procedurally" dependent on the sympathy process (p.89). The kind of conscience that the impartial spectator provides is, in this light, not simply one developed through a process of socialization that takes "the mirror of society" as its source of moral learning (p.71). It is one that adopts that mirror as its own standard. For her, the lesson of the method is that, "when we judge ourselves we employ the *very same criteria* used by 'the eyes of other people' when they judge us in the social world" (p.89, original emphasis). This specific extrapolation is not, however, part of Smith's vision. It is rather the product of a reading that is unable to recognize technical opacity as a principle of operativity.

Technical opacity. From the start, Smith denied the rather Humean interpretation that his theory could be reduced to a moral conventionalism. As Alexander Broadie reminds us, right after the first edition, he replied to his mentioned critical friend with certitude: "conscious virtue can support itselfe under the disapprobation of all mankind," and by the second edition, he had sought to clear the confusion (2006:180). Still, what Forman-Barzilai argues is that, in any case, in spite of those early efforts of clarification and apparent confidence, Smith continued to be haunted by this issue for a long time at a personal level; to the point, she believes, that Smith felt forced to make some "perfectionist moves" in a theory that was intended to stay at the empirical level – as opposed to the normative, philosophical or theistic levels (2009:104). The most important of these moves would have come in the sixth and last edition, where he emphasized the kind of "mature" moral judgments that all individuals were capable of when they aspired to what is "praise-worthy" in itself,

offering no other basis for what is praise-worthy than "the demi-god within the breast" (2004:98-103). Smith thus would have had to resort, according to this account, to a deistic formulation in order to sustain that, beyond the mirror of society, "the idea of exact propriety and perfection … is in every man more or less accurately drawn" (p.291).

First of all, the extent to which one can say that these moves were done in a spirit of moral perfectionism is rather uncertain. If one follows a reading of the same text like Broadie's (2006), one finds that the impartial spectator has an intrinsic range of fallibility, since, necessarily, "each person creates his own" (p.182). Smith seems to recognize that, even in the case of those individuals who would be seeking to judge themselves from the most impartial and mature position, they could easily: lack enough accuracy in their self-perception, succumb to the influence of forceful peer pressure, or find virtue in what is actually the result of moral luck (pp.182-85). The textual evidence offered by Broadie is able to reveal in short that, far from perfectionist, Smith's solution acknowledges the possibility of limited information, distortion, and even error in judgment (see also Churcher 2016). The reference to a less-than-perfect "demi-god" could constitute, then, only a way of conveying in the language familiar to the eighteenth century reader that, "the impartial spectator is simply not ideal, but instead the best, for all its many faults, that we can manage" (Smith 2004:184).

Second and more important, Forman-Barzilai's interpretation stems out of an interest in cosmopolitan ethics that, as she herself recognizes, is foreign to Smith's theory.[65] Her interest is of course valid to the extent that a whole debate has emanated from that very perspective. But, still, it leads her – and many other

scholars then – to demand from Smith a technical detail that is incompatible with his solution. She wants to know, "what makes something *praise-worthy*? Who decides? Very literally, what determines worth? … *how* the impartial spectator comes to know the difference [between what is praise-worthy and what is not]?" (pp.101, 186, original emphasis). But, unless one is expecting to find in his theory a universally valid normative criterion that follows the truth of "Nature," as many of Smith's contemporaries did, or that can produce irrefutable judgments even across cultures, as some scholars do at the moment, one would be able to see that what Smith spent so many years of his life doing was reasserting again and again his original solution. Smith may have tried to clarify this solution, but he never seemed confused about it. He knew from the start what he was trying to convey. He knew that the impartial spectator was something much more elaborate and ambitious than a mere affirmation of convention. At some point in the first edition, he describes the decisive case of someone who follows the impartial spectator, yet receives no actual praise:

> though mankind should never be acquainted with what he has done, he regards himself, not so much according to the light in which they actually regard him, as according to that in which they would regard him *if they were better informed* (p.135, emphasis added).

Doing what is praise-worthy, Smith stressed, is not to do what would be instantly praised by one's immediate social circle. One may be in a corrupted society – as he in fact thought he was (Hanley 2008) – and still act in a just and virtuous way. Doing so in such circumstances might entail doing something that is left unrecognized. But, what makes it praise-worthy is precisely that it would be the conduct that one thinks everyone would agree with "if they were better informed." The technique that Smith offers to achieve a harmonious and fair society is based, then, on the individual

aspiration to achieve a non-particular judgment or, as Boltanski qualifies it, an "aperspectival objectivity" (1999:24). Thus, if he visualized the maintenance of a "proper" or *civil* society through the use of the impartial spectator, it is not because he imagined it to be a tool for a disciplinary dream of panopticism. After all, for a corrupted society to achieve that harmonious level of civility, its members would have to start by making an independent effort to prioritize what they think is "objectively" praise-worthy and avoid mimicking what others would be rather thoughtlessly doing at that point in time in society.[66]

The concerns that Smith's solution tends to generate I think can be seen as a symptom, not of the incompleteness or faultiness of his theory, but rather of the principle of operativity that accompanies a biopolitical form of solvability. The impartial spectator is supposed to be a solution that guides the judgment of individuals by helping them to distinguish the "point of propriety," as Forman-Barzilai (p.162) understandably questions; yet, the only access they have to this measure or standard is through a "secret reference" to the judgment of others. Contrary to what a purely disciplinary interpretation would suggest, this is not necessarily a reference, we have said, to what other people already think. It can be a reference to what "upon a certain condition, would be, or to what, we imagine, ought to be" their judgment – as Smith himself remarks – if they were sufficiently well informed and reflected seriously about a situation. The reason, however, this kind of solution generates so much concern can be said to be still the fact that its reference is, precisely, "secret" – that there is not a clear-cut criterion that one can confidently borrow from Smith, a "universally normative measure that can be grafted onto any moral context" (Forman-Barzilai 2009:162). No matter how much one tries to reach an "objective" or impartial standpoint from which to judge what is

socially agreeable, it will always remain uncertain whether one actually reached the "point of propriety." This uncertainty is the inherent technical opacity of a quasi-natural solution that seeks to create a humanitarian society through practices of freedom, potentializing, in this case, everyone's imaginative use of their sympathetic sensibilities.

Perhaps no other study has systematically explored or at least been faced with this opacity in the course of its inquiry as much as Boltanski's *Distant suffering* (1999). This work is able to adapt Smith's solution to our contemporary circumstances thanks to the opportunity offered by modern media, which happens to place us in an already advantageously distant position to undertake the challenge of impartiality as moral spectators.[67] Boltanski's focus, however, is not so much on the modern spectator as on the cultural process that would have formed its sense or, better, *senses* of objectivity. His hypothesis is that during the last centuries different "forms of expression," from historical narratives and novels to films and television reports, would have nourished our moral imagination, creating and coordinating "common sensibilities" that "trace relatively stable facilitating paths" (pp.50-53). What is telling for our discussion is that each of the paths he traces follows a different way of judging how one should react to scenes of suffering, and it is demonstrated that each of them is open to a number of criticisms and uncertainties that cannot be resolved in a satisfactory manner (this is for example what happens with the path of "denunciation," as reviewed in the last chapter). In this way, he places a heavy asterisk next to Smith's "impartial spectator," deepening our understanding of how this solution may have evolved in practice, while at the same time warning its inadvertent users about the challenge of solvability that such an objectivist strategy presents.

But Boltanski takes his inquiry still one step further. Having concluded that none of the stable topics of moral impartiality that have been historically developed is capable of reducing the humanitarian anxiety of modern spectators, he proceeds to examine whether the recent humanitarian movement in France has been able to offer a new source of relief to their concerns, which are starting to appear, he comments in the context of the 1990s, in "the register of 'shame,' 'bad conscience' or 'guilt'" (p.188). His conclusion, in a way, evidences the frustration that the opacity of Smith's technique is able to produce. For he resolves that the only way such a technique could become effective is, "by being rooted in groups and thereby linked to preexisting solidarities and local interests" (p.190). Having discovered, that is, that the sense of objectivity or "principled justification" that each common sensibility or "community of reactions" (p.54) makes possible cannot offer absolute certainty, he resorts to propose a locally rooted and group-oriented solidarity for humanitarian claims.[68] He decides, in other words, to tighten the Smithian coordination of moral affinities to the point of recasting the impartial spectator into a much more active ethical practice, into an actual "constitution of groups" (p.18). In this sense, he would seem to be superimposing an altogether different solution out of frustration, what could be called the strategy of "the people."

4.i.c. The people

Long before it became possible to think that a whole people or nation could have interests in common, the notion of "interest" had shown that it can be as promising as it can be confusing. In his genealogy of the term, Hirschman notes how the first time the notion was used for political purposes occurred back in the late sixteenth

century, when the princes who had distanced themselves from the church were looking for a way of replacing religious precept, and turned in vain to it: "it was easy enough to say in general that the interest of a king is to maintain and increase the power and wealth of his realm, but this principle hardly yielded precise 'decision rules' in concrete situations" (1997:35). When, a century and a half later, Rousseau proposed that the common interests of the people amounted to an incorruptible and indivisible general will (1994:63-67), the notion revealed again its ambivalent nature, becoming to this day a source of confusing, if promising, aspirations.

"The people" introduced a revolutionary way of founding political authority, but the practical application of this solution was hazy from the start. Rousseau presented it as the only sovereign body with "any rights of making law," knowing full well that these could not be other than "incommunicable rights" (p.78). A free vote and a concerted assembly, he conjectured, could be seen as positive signs that the common interests of a polity were being translated into action (pp.136-37). But, in the end, he also repeatedly emphasized, the general will was intrinsically susceptible to distortion in practice. For example, it would become instantly distorted if it were to be used for the making of actual decisions on specific cases, that is, "whenever a particular action or right is in question" (p.68). Even in the case of general law making, for which it was meant for, it would be difficult to trust "the blind multitude, often ignorant of what it wants, because it seldom knows what is good for it" (p.75). In this way, one could say that knowing what precisely are the solutions that best cater to the interests of the people at each particular juncture is fundamentally uncertain. The concept of the people is, in Rosanvallon's words, "indissociably imperious and vague," a "sociological incertitude" whose purpose is rather to mobilize a "positive utopia" (2006:79, 85, 88).

Rousseau's own suggestion was that every polity should have a legislator, who would be in charge of actually drafting the laws and, therefore, of appreciating what the general will wants to prescribe. But, in principle, his proposal was that "the people," regardless of what form of government was chosen specifically for them by their legislator, needed to be the source of political authority. That is the basic insight of his solution, and probably what he would have probably wanted to perdure, since it is clear, as Christopher Betts comments in his introduction to the Oxford edition, that for Rousseau "political perfectionism is not sustainable" (1994:xxiii). From this kind of historical rather than literal perspective, Rosanvallon has for instance reflected about how the people has become "the philosophical perplexity related to the very meaning of democracy, a regime that simultaneously is given as a solution (to the problem of foundation in a secularized world) and as a problem (the opaque character of this same foundation)" (2006:85). To elaborate further on this opacity, which someone like Rosanvallon already assumes as granted, I would like to use Arendt's controversial comments on the radicalized period of the French Revolution known as the Terror, offered in a book that is highly critical, although I think for the wrong reasons, of Rousseau's way of solving things.

Robespierre's reign of terror in the early 1790s is generally considered the first experiment with the sort of "legislator" that Rousseau had imagined, and the first proof of the dangers that come with his solution (e.g. Bloom 1997:162). Nonetheless, the extent to which *The social contract* was really the basis of the Terror and the revolution in general has been much debated among historians. François Furet for example notes how Robespierre, in spite of his repeated references to "the will of the people," only followed Rousseau's instructions at times and, even then, mostly for tactical reasons (1997:177). Thus, although one could allude to one of the two

passages where Rousseau adopts a rather tyrannical position, these could be hardly taken as sufficient evidence of a causal chain between his proposal and this cruel event that saw thousands of suspected traitors of the revolution swiftly executed during a short period (see Betts 1994:xx-xxiii). A better explanation can be found, I believe, in Arendt's *On revolution* (2006).

For Arendt, the Terror was "still enacted in good faith, and if it became boundless it did so only because the hunt for hypocrites is boundless by nature" (2006:90). Hers is a phenomenological explanation. It is "the boundlessness of their sentiments" for the people what would have led them to such a violent radicalism (p.80). The revolutionaries saw in the sentiment of compassion a force that could "unite the different classes of society into one nation" (p.70), according to Arendt, which is why "the people" would have become around this time "the equivalent for misfortune and unhappiness – *le peuple, les malheureux*" (p.65). Thus, first of all, such a sentiment would have been rendered boundless the moment it became orientated towards "the boundless suffering of the multitude in their sheer overwhelming numbers" (p.80). But, more generally, her point is that this kind of fervent patriotism that relies on a demonstration of one's genuine feelings for the poor can only produce a boundless politics of suspicion:

> However deeply felt a motive may be, once it is brought out and exposed for public inspection it becomes an object of suspicion rather than insight; when the light of the public falls upon it, it appears and even shines, but, unlike deeds and words which are meant to appear, whose very existence hinges on appearance, the motives behind such deeds and words are destroyed in their essence through appearance; when they appear they become 'mere appearances' behind which again other, ulterior motives may lurk, such as hypocrisy and deceit (p.86).

This, I think, is a satisfactory explanation. One can never be entirely sure of what anyone's motives and sentiments are. There is no reliable way of bringing them to light. Therefore, when a whole revolutionary movement is organized around the idea that the selfish individuals who do not genuinely feel compassion for the *malheureux* constitute the common enemy, the practice of intervention can easily get out of hand. I do not think, however, that this thesis can be considered to be a critical thesis on Rousseau's solution per se. As Clifford Orwin (1997) has for example sustained, the people was not for him a solution based on compassion. He rather considered the morality of compassion to be a poor alternative to it (p.309). Moreover, his thoughts on compassion were driven by an evident "moral realism" that stressed its intrinsic limitations (p.303). If an individual like Emile, Rousseau's imaginary pupil, could be taught to be someone compassionate, it was only because he could learn to see how being that way "proves to be even better for him than it is for his neighbors" (p.307). Rousseau simply had no aspiration – as was stressed in Chapter 2 – to make out of compassion a kind of natural humanitarianism (Riley 2011).

Nevertheless, I do find Arendt's thesis to be illuminating of a possible limitation that accompanies those solutions which, like the people, have a technical opacity. While Robespierre may have truly wanted to follow the democratic principle of "the people" – beyond Rousseau's exact proposal to realize it, which was extremely vague and abstract anyway – the uncertainty of not being able to know whether others or even himself, as Arendt at some point suggests (2006:87), were really following and enacting "the general will" could have led him down the path of a perpetual interventionism. The boundless hunt for hypocrites would have thus been

the result of an initiative that, in principle, simply wished to appease a relentless technical concern and guarantee that a certain adopted solution was being effective.

Compassion, in this light, just happened to be the indicator of generality and, hence, effectiveness for the revolutionaries. One could even assume that such an indicator was highly influenced by the work of Rousseau (see e.g. Orwin 1997:311; Furet 1997:179-180); but, in any case, it would not have been essential to Rousseau's solution. It just became the symbol of patriotism, the badge of those working in the name of the general will. It was never part of *The social contract*. If anything, it is a sentimentalism that undermines the principle of "the people," for, as Rousseau would have commented, it places the interests of the *malheureux* before those of anyone else (see Orwin 1997:307-08).

In this sense, then, the reign of virtue of the Jacobins that undermined the principle of the people and led to the Terror would have been itself a side effect of a solution with a principle of operativity that cannot avoid to be a source of concern. A perpetual interventionism can be almost expected when individuals embrace a way of solving things that cannot be tested, whose ultimate effectivity is bound to remain uncertain. The Rousseauian humanitarian with a political vocation will always be troubled by the polemic and ambiguity that comes with any speculation as to what the "real interests" of the people are. "The people" will remain a problematic foundation for modern political authority, not because it is a "pseudo-solution," as Arendt at some point implies (2006:150), but rather because it is a solution with technical opacity. Historically, the notion of "interest," unless attached to a strictly economic meaning, has produced confusion. "The inability of men to perceive their [best] interests" (Hirschman 1997:45) has always been known. At some point, it is

true that it would become fully embraced because of the opposite, as Hirschman recounts, because when applied to economic activities it offers certainty and predictability (pp.48-56). Yet, even then, its indisputable clarity would leave an even greater opacity in its wake.

4.i.d. The invisible hand

While Rousseau envisioned how individuals could acquire effective rights by means of a certain common interest or will, Smith decided to rather explore how by means of interest alone, irrespective of rights, individuals could harmonize their wills to produce a common benefit. It is Foucault's thesis, if we remember, that there are two different mechanisms for this spontaneous harmonization of interests, depending on whether these interests are social or economic (see Chapter 3). And both, in fact, he suggests are palpable in Smith's work (2008:298). During his lectures on the subject, Foucault would make exclusive reference to *The wealth of nations*, when, in reality, it is a thesis that is nowhere stated as clearly as in *The theory of moral sentiments.* The "subject of interest" that Foucault places at the heart of the biopolitical revolution and contrasts with the "subject of right" (2008:273-74) finds in the last edition of this text an explanation for its bipolar nature, an explanation written with the hindsight of a career devoted to reflect on both its social and economic expressions:

> To deserve, to acquire, and to enjoy the respect and admiration of mankind, are the great objects of ambition and emulation. Two different roads are presented to us, equally leading to the attainment of this so much desired object; the one, by the study of wisdom and the practice of virtue; the other, by the acquisition of wealth and greatness (2004:73).

In such a conception of the subject, all individuals are "interested" or spontaneously driven by an ambition for recognition.[69] More important, this interest can either be pursued through a quest for profit or through a cultivation of virtue, although the latter is not a road that Smith finds suitable for the "great mob of mankind" (p.73). This last comment has sometimes been seen as a justification for why Smith would have gone from writing a moral treatise to writing a whole other one on political economy (Hirschman 1997:109-110).[70] But it would be an exaggeration to infer from it that the virtuous road is one that Smith "came to consider precarious" (Rosanvallon 2006:181). After all, a few lines later Smith makes the inverse comment, that, if those in "the middling and inferior stations of life" can unintentionally create harmony through their disciplined pursuit of fortune, for those in "the superior stations of life the case is unhappily not always the same" (2004:74). As Denis Rasmussen (2006) has persuasively argued, Smith did not write *The wealth of nations* with an economic perfectionism in mind. "If he defends commercial society, it is not because he thinks it is perfect," but rather, he concludes, because it is "preferable *on balance*" when compared to "the considerable ills of pre-commercial societies" (p.640, original emphasis).

For those who follow the road of wealth rather than virtue, Smith left a solution whose details would suffer endless modifications in the hands of his academic descendants. For example, when Smith wrote his economic treatise, he did it, very much like Rousseau, with a powerful statesman or "legislator" in mind (Bonefeld 2013a; Dean 2013:84-86; Helliwell and Hindess 1999:14-16). Furthermore, he might have not even had the entire global market in mind, but, resembling Rousseau, his might have been a predominantly nation-based humanitarian approach, in which what mattered was each country's prosperity on its own (Lubasz 1992; Hill

2010:467). In fact, he commences his famous reference to an invisible hand with: "By preferring the support of domestic to that of foreign industry, he [the individual] intends only his own security." But, then, he continues with an insight that, not unlike "the people," is surely meant with a certain intrinsic sense of generality and perdurability:

> and by directing that industry in such a manner as its produce may be of the greatest value, he intends only his own gain, and he is in this, *as in many other cases*, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention (1976:456, emphasis added).

Smith had doubtlessly conceived as a rather general principle the idea that the market could lead to a common benefit without the need of intentional calculations. From the very first chapters, he had explored how the advantages of the division of labour were "not originally the effect of any human wisdom" (1976:25). And by this point in the text, he feels comfortable enough to evoke the broader relevance of this solution by referring us to "many other cases." Indeed, a couple of lines later, he stresses how his larger point about the economic subject is that, "by pursuing his own interest, he *frequently* promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it" (1976:456, emphasis added). Without narrowing down the range of scenarios in which this biopolitical principle would apply, Smith introduces a way of solving things that fully embraces its own technical opacity.

The invisible hand is a strange form of "biopolitics," as the term has been defined here. It is not exactly about a radical humanitarian who decides to foreclose her own freedom. In reality, its technique is so opaque that using it requires the culmination of the volunteer figure – subjects whose trust in the solution must be so absolute that

they need to remain blind to its existence.[71] Beyond certain academic and policy-making circles, it is indeed difficult to encounter a volunteer-like subject whose moral duty is actually to work towards the advancement of this organizing principle – even the disciplined workers and ascetic entrepreneurs described by Max Weber (2011:81-93) could not be imagined to have a humanitarian intention behind their strict acquisitive ethic. It is precisely this obliviousness that is essential to the commercial humanitarian. As Smith unequivocally remarks, "I have never known much good done by those who affected to trade for the publick good" (1976:456).

Foucault I think goes to the heart of this solution when he criticizes the way the invisible hand has been usually read as "the remains of a theological conception of the natural order" (2008:278) – but not because I agree with his account of secularization (an account that has recently come under heavy criticism [see Agamben 2011; Dean 2013]). Foucault argues that what should be stressed in this solution is its "invisibility" and not the fact that it could refer to a providential "hand" (2008:279-280). What makes the behavior of economic subjects of interest have a positive effect, he elaborates, is the accidental nature of their encounters, the "uncontrollable" and "involuntary" features that not only internally but also externally define the exchange situation (p.278). As Smith explicitly comments in this sense:

> The statesman, who should attempt to direct private people in what manner they ought to employ their capitals, would not only load himself with a *most unnecessary attention, but assume an authority which could safely be trusted, not only to no single person, but to no council or senate whatever* (1976:456, emphasis added).

Foucault for some reason does not refer to this revealing passage in his lectures. It is probably because when he says that there is an essential invisibility, an "unknowability" about the economic process that "begins to demonstrate the pointlessness, but also the impossibility of a sovereign point of view over the totality of the state" (2008:282), he is referring to more than any "statesman" or "council or senate whatever." He is also including any divine agency. He is trying to prove that "economics is an atheistic discipline … a discipline without God" (p.282). Ultimately, he does not offer any actual reason or evidence as to why we should assume that the invisibility of this solution extends to god. But in his attempt to make this argument, he makes plain that Smith's solution is marked, perhaps as no other, by what has been called here technical opacity.

The mechanism of the invisible hand requires a spontaneous market dynamic among subjects of interest, and to this extent, as is well known, it "prohibits any form of intervention" (p.280). But what Foucault adds to this understanding is that its invisibility prohibits, "even better, any form of overarching gaze which would enable the economic process to be totalized" (p.280). In view of the potential benefit that can be collectively created by free economic exchanges, the sovereign is left in an awkward position, Foucault concludes, but not just because this solution states that nobody should interfere. Rather, it is because, in any case, "it is impossible for the sovereign to have a point of view on the economic mechanism which totalizes every element and enables them to be combined" (p.280). In Foucault's argument, the possibility that not even god can have access to the workings of this mechanism becomes the sort of ultimate proof that "the economic world is naturally opaque" (p.282). But had he come across an explanatory concept like that of technical opacity, one could speculate, he might have refrained from taking his argument that far.

After all, as Forman-Barzilai would argue, Smith was neither "starting theistically from God's will to establish" this solution, nor denying that "God's will is compatible" with it (2009:115). He was simply, as sustained in Chapter 2, crafting a universal solution that did not have to be deduced from the voice of nature.

The more substantial implication of Foucault's reading is obviously not that any state or authority that has an appreciation for the market's humanitarian potential would be unable to gather information, make measurements or design policy interventions with respect to the economy (c.f. Walter 2008:111) – if anything, one should expect the opposite effect, that is, an excessive interventionism, but I leave this point for the end of the chapter. Arguably, what Foucault means is that, in spite of our best efforts to develop scientific measures and indicators, the basic principle of operativity attached to Smith's solution is that there is no way of knowing whether it is working or not. One can devise economic models that explain why in theory it should work, or one can collect information and draw statistical connections about a collective economic result, but no human knowledge will be able to guarantee that the mechanism is effectively operating in practice. The economic subject, strictly speaking, has an "interest which is dependent upon *an infinite number of things*" (Foucault 2008:277, emphasis added). From the smallest and most immediate occurrences in everyday life to the "more or less distant political events" and "accidents of nature" can affect "the specifically individual calculation that he makes." It is a subject that unfortunately interacts in an "indefinite field of immanence" (pp.277-78). Any solution appended to such a subject is constitutively opaque.

Part II. Liberal Humanism Two Centuries Later

The ethical influence of neoliberalism can be felt nowadays at an ethnographic and not simply policy level. Based on her ethnography of the region of Lombardy in Italy, Muehlebach has even called it a "moral authoritarianism" that is expressed through a "new voluntary labor regime – a regime that has allowed for the state to conflate voluntary labor with good citizenship" (2012:6). This ethical citizenship, Muehlebach argues, is developing in parallel with a market fundamentalism, but still within the confines of neoliberal rationality. The social, instead of being an a priori universe of rights mediated by the state, seems to have become the incremental product of unmediated relations between individuals, forged by spontaneous expressions of compassion taking the form of a pleasurable voluntary labor (pp.42-49). Her in-depth observation of this "other-oriented economy of virtue" leads her thus to conclude that "neoliberalism is a force that can contain its negation" (p.25).

In this section, my intention is to explore how Foucault's reading of neoliberalism helps to historically elucidate, not only what Muehlebach finds in practice to be a "productive tension" between the social and the economic (pp.24-25), but also how this tension is a delicate one – how, if not maintained carefully by governmental technology, it can produce what from a historicist perspective can be said to be "anomalies." Thus, this part starts with a genealogical contextualization of the different ways liberalism has found to articulate its social and economic biopolitical tactics only to then account for the phenomenon of a skeptical humanitarianism in terms of its disruptive historical import.

4.ii.a. The social-economic foundation of liberalism

Foucault, we saw in the previous chapter, finds that neoliberalism is characterized by the activation of a competitive "social subject of interest." Such a subject, we are now in a position to appreciate more clearly, seems to be both the correlative of an economic solution and a combination of the civil and political solutions. It is a biopolitical combination of the latter two to the extent that it is a subject that manages to harmonize its interests with those of others as well as guarantee the happiness of a social whole or "civil society." Civil society materializes, one could say, the kind of spontaneous synthesis of interests that Rousseau first envisioned when he referred to the general will of the people. Rousseau, however, left the mechanics of this synthesis largely unexplored (see Rosanvallon 2006:149). As Arendt once commented, "his silent assumption is that the will is some sort of automatic articulation of interest" (2006:68). What seems automatic in Rousseau receives much more detailed attention in the work of Scottish Enlightenment authors like Adam Smith and Adam Ferguson, who come to think of society not in terms of a "juridical-logical sequence" that starts with a founding contract, but as "the endless formation of new social fabric" (Foucault 2008:308). Smith, in particular, as we have seen in this chapter, would have advanced a specific theory about how the satisfaction of individual interests can translate into the active formation of a social bond made out of sympathy and moral sentiments. In short, Foucault seemed to have found in the social subject of interest a nexus that, as he anticipated early on in his 1979 course, is able to bring together these two distinct liberal traditions tracing back to Smith and Rousseau or at least "establish the possible connections between disparate terms which remain disparate" (p.42).

Foucault's own interpretive frame was of course technical rather than strategic. In his account, civil society does not appear as a solution to the humanitarian problem, but to the problem of "government." It surfaces as a political technology for the responsibilization of individuals, as discussed in the previous chapter. The problem, moreover, of how to govern, is caused by what has been considered here to be a solution. The invisible hand of the market, as I have been suggesting, may have appeared in the eyes of Smith's contemporaries as a promising humanist solution (see Hirschman 1997) and almost utopian way "of mobilizing the resources of 'society' behind the purposes of the state" (Helliwell and Hindess 1999:16). But, with even more certainty, it would have appeared as a disconcerting truth about the autonomy of society. "To that extent," Foucault specifically conjectures, "I think the emergence of the notion of *homo œconomicus* represents a sort of political challenge to the traditional, juridical conception, whether absolutist or not, of the sovereign" (pp.292-93). The idea that an economic subject of interest, to be productive, required an "invisible" space of non-intervention would have led to problematize the suddenly relative question of the adequate limits of power, rule, and public law (pp.37-39). And the resulting effect of such a problematization would have been the conception that the relevant object of government is, precisely, civil society. As Foucault concludes, "the problem of civil society is the juridical structure (*économie juridique*) of a governmentality pegged to the economic structure (*économie économique*)" (p.296).

And yet, although Foucault did not explore a more biopolitical interpretation, in grasping the technical challenge that would have led to a liberal form of government, he still posed a humanitarian mechanism that is just as quasi-natural and technically opaque as the invisible hand. His thesis was that civil society was a

political technology that became determinant to a conflicted sovereignist thought because it offered a "new plane of reference" in relation to which the individuals of a population could be rendered governable: first, without rejecting their economic agency and, second, while still accepting that they are subjects of right (pp.294-95). Civil society, he argued, could accomplish these two functions of "governmentability" (p.294) to the extent that it constituted in itself a mechanism that could be reduced neither to an old conception of right based on the idea of a founding contract, nor to a modern economic conception that undermined the role of intervention. On the one hand, civil society would have appeared as a mechanism that, without any reference to god or a natural right but solely to a human dynamic of sympathetic interaction, is able to produce an effect of communitarian unification and satisfaction (pp.300-01). The maintenance of a civil society would have been theorized, in other words, as the result of a quasi-natural principle capable of providing collective benefits to any aggregation of individuals in the history of humanity.

On the other hand, civil society would have appeared as a mechanism that, without having to be economic, still creates a synthesis of interests "that has in fact the same form as the immediate multiplication of profit" (p.301). Foucault leaves unaddressed an implication that necessarily follows from this formulation; namely, the fact that this mechanism would also have to be technically opaque, since it is equally "constituted from a multiplicity of points of view which is all the more irreducible as this same multiplicity assures their ultimate and spontaneous convergence" (p.282). The implication that he draws instead is that the domain of civil society, to the extent that it is based on an analogous subject of interest, one that – although opaque – at least does not forbid any attempt at intervention as a

condition for its effectivity, would have served as the new point of reference for an art of government that now needed to depart from the independent rationality of the governed (see Foucault 2008:39-42, 312). In brief, the totalizing (Rousseauian-like) effect of civil society would have made it possible to still deduce a notion of right, not from an original juridically binding obligation, but from the collective interests found in a population – while the individual (Smithian-like) basis of its integrative mechanism would have still allowed it to work as "both the support of the economic process and economic bonds, while overflowing them and being irreducible to them" (p.301).

Foucault's reading is thus open to an interpretation which would see civil society as a biopolitical nexus of three classical solutions, and, perhaps, more broadly, as a strategic field upon which a government that wants to guarantee fair coexistence needs to intervene. If we recall, avoiding the imposition of norms and morals is the definition of a strategic field. It is a field in which one must encourage or interest potentially skeptical individuals in moving forward towards a humanitarian society. Reviewing the history of civil society, Cruikshank for example comments how it is indeed a field that, as early British reformers like T. H. Green claimed, demands indirect interventions, interventions that do not enforce morality but that rather work through the social interests, capacity for rights, and will of individuals (1999:46-47). But, following Foucault's strictly technical, power-oriented perspective, she then concludes that what those liberal reformers who elaborated on Green formulated was a technology of citizenship for a "voluntary subjection." In order to not "undermine the sources of civil society," she infers, the liberal art of government "aims to make the poor into citizens through their voluntary subjection to their own

interests" (pp.46-54) – leaving behind, in the same stroke, the larger and perhaps more important question of strategics that traverses the history of civil society.

Specifically, Cruikshank for example critiques the proposal made by a figure of Victorian philanthropy, Helen Bonsaquet, who advanced that citizens from all classes would be able to guide themselves and follow the path towards self-improvement by being more conscious of something that is, she believed, already used everyday, the "Standard of Life." Rather than being a "fixed moral standard," Cruikshank clarifies, this was a convention that in Bonsaquet's mind each social class already had at its disposal and conceived in its own way, always as an implicit, agreeable, adaptable measurement of the conduct capable of leading to both individual and social progress (pp.52-53). For Cruikshank, this proposal is typical of how "Foucault characterized normalization," because it depends "upon the operationalization of an illusive norm that is nowhere actually defined" (p.53). But if one were to apply a strategic lens, then the normalization that could be expected from a solution like the Standard of Life could be understood not as the result of an "illusive norm," but of a quasi-natural strategy of indirect intervention that cannot avoid to be technically opaque. Civil society is a field of intervention where a fair coexistence is expected to come, precisely, out of one or other opaque coordination of interests.

4.ii.b. The historical instrumentalization of the social

What from his unique technical perspective, centred on the problematic of rule, Foucault does definitely elucidate is that the government of civil society must work through the tension that exists between different types of "interests" (see pp.44-45,

312-13) and, in particular, through the basic and unavoidable tension that lies at the heart of its constitution between economic and social ones. A governor who wants to govern adequately a population in which individuals can adopt the rational behavior of *homo œconomicus* must refrain from acting upon the economy as such and rather intervene upon the realm of civil society, in which the economic process is in any case inscribed. The reason why the history of liberalism is filled with political and philosophical allusions to a civil society is not, Foucault suggests, that it works as a kind of metaphysical foundation or oppositional background for the work of politics. Rather, it is "a concept of governmental technology" required by a liberal government "insofar as it is pegged to the specificity of economic processes" (pp.296-97).

Historically, liberalism would have needed to govern civil society through rather indirect methods – considering the spontaneous nature and technical opacity of this field – but, especially, it would have needed to govern the economy without governing the economy, which, to be effective, must remain thoroughly "invisible." The social, in other words, would have needed to play an instrumental role in relation to the economic mechanism: somehow, it would have had to help activate, indirectly, the economic subject of interest. In the case of classical liberalism, one thus finds, for example, the idea of Jeremy Bentham that, in order to secure the minimal conditions for the life of the population, the state must only be prepared to provide means of subsistence when its assistance does not discourage the participation of the poor (or of anyone else for that matter) in the economy, to the extent that it is the economy itself what can assure in general the security of the governed (Dean 2010a:137-39). In this sense, as Dean elaborates, "the problem of *laissez-faire* then is not about the retreat from regulation" (p.139). It is rather about

intervening upon society in such a way that it ensures "the participation of labourers in the labour market" (p.138).

In the case of the welfare state liberalism of the twentieth century, one similarly finds the ideas of John Maynard Keynes and William Beveridge, whose social policy is, as Foucault comments, "broadly speaking a policy with the objective of everybody having relatively equal access to consumer goods" (2008:142). Such a policy entailed, of course, a considerable amount of intervention through the economic machinery of the state, but its main intention, as Rose emphasizes, was to save the free market "from those economic and political forces that threatened it." "Economists," he further explains, "tried to develop political programmes and policies that would create the conditions under which the market would prosper, yet without destroying the essential freedom of economic agents – bosses, investors – to conduct their financial affairs according to their own choices and in pursuit of their private profits" (1999:80). The target of macro-economic welfarist technologies was never intended to be, directly, the economic subject of interest. Rather, the idea was to reinforce certain mechanisms of compensation in society so that the market mechanism could still subsist.

Finally, we are in a position to notice what is historically peculiar to the case of neoliberalism. Neoliberal theorists think that the best way of securing the market mechanism is neither by making out of the social a kind of "counterweight" to it (see Foucault 2008:142), nor a sort of "residuum" at its margins (see Cruikshank 1999:53-54). Instead, starting with prominent precursors like those who attended the Walter Lippmann Colloquium in France in 1938, they propose that, "the problem of liberal policy [is] precisely to develop in fact the concrete and real space in which the formal

structure of competition [can] function" (Foucault 2008:132). Their approach to civil society does not entail the "death" or "economization" of the social, as has often been hyperbolically proclaimed (see e.g. Rose 1996b; Brown 2015). On the contrary, the structure of civil society had never been considered to be so crucial for the success of the market. It is now imperative for the social to become the kind of space where the spontaneous competitive game between economic interests can thrive – which in concrete terms means that social policy needs to be privatized or, to be precise, work on an individualized, prudential basis, "according everyone a sort of economic space within which they can take on and confront risks" (Foucault 2008:44; see O'Malley 1996). Through economic and quasi-economic avenues (like the "market for projects" we reviewed in the last chapter), the individual citizen is to be motivated to secure the social interests of its civil society, and thus create a suitable, already competitive platform for the market.

In this way, what a Foucauldian reading of neoliberalism suggests is that, if the productive tension between the social and the economic is becoming an object of research with sufficient observable density to create ethnographic interest, it is because the social subject of interest had never been activated to the same degree and with the same intensity as the economic subject of interest in the history of liberalism.

4.ii.c. The neoliberal anomaly

The intensification of the social subject of interest would have been produced, ironically, through the "expansion of the market," whether that expansion refers to the opening of trade barriers or the privatization of public services. For

neoliberalism would be using measures that, while patently "economic," do not act on the economic subject of interest as such, but rather upon the kind of shape and role that has been envisioned for civil society. Instead of creating safeguards or limits in regards to the jurisdiction of the market, society, it is decided, must adapt itself to the kind of competitive environment in which the market mechanism can optimally function – which means that the social, far from eradicated by the expansion of the market, acquires a crucial instrumentality in the neoliberal technology as a supportive web for economic relations. On the other hand, and even more ironically, it is this same "market expansion" what can also be said to foster – inadvertently, as argued in the previous chapter – a neoliberal impasse at the level of political responsibility, a sense of insurmountable complicity. This effect, in itself, already suggests the possibility of an unusual and ethically ambivalent practice of intervention, since those humanitarians who for some reason decide to still act in spite of their skepticism would not be following any self-evident solution, but a concoction of their own that would be, potentially, "morally exposed." At this point, however, it becomes possible to elaborate with a greater level of concreteness on why, as a result of this expansive and doubly ironic tactic of intensification, acting with moral exposure becomes a real possibility in neoliberal conditions.

Neoliberalism does not call individuals to be *homo œconomicus* any more or any less than any other liberal form of government. Its tactic stems from the same enduring expectation that its governmental approach can be the most effective one to secure the conditions for a spontaneous market dynamic. What it does expect, as no other liberalism has, is for its citizens to match that spontaneous intensity in the social field. As self-governing citizens, they are encouraged to compete for the interests of their families and moral communities, whether that translates into

volunteering a few hours a week, paying for private health insurance, or investing more energy in the education and human capital of their children – and, in the meantime, they are expected to be looking for the best prices and market opportunities that may come up while pursuing these or more self-interested endeavours. But what is definitely not expected and by design lies beyond the scope of a neoliberal strategy – yet is a direct by-product of a political rationality that demands such a matching of intensities at the personal level – is a subject who pursues *at exactly the same time* economic and social interests.

The offspring of an era of neoliberal citizen formation is an active self with two sets of demands on itself. The experience of those who participated in my research project was often described along these lines. "It's tough being a Gen Y graduate. There are more university graduates in the job market than ever before. Competition is fierce," wrote one of them, while she was explaining that when she "applied for the overseas volunteering opportunity, [she] was struggling to find employment as a recent double-degree graduate." In other posts she elaborated on the kind of juncture she found herself in:

> I was volunteering in my hometown of Sydney after completing a double Arts/Law degree. I found out about a volunteer program for young professionals to contribute to capacity-building programs overseas. This one attracted me because it was for young people with particular sets of skills transferring those skills in partnership with others. I applied and after a lengthy process, found myself at the week-long pre-departure training course.
>
> I knew I wanted to take this opportunity to work on climate change education with young adults, in an emerging space globally and in the developing world … It was hard

convincing my parents that it was a good career move, but in the end, I made my decision regardless and jetted off over the horizon!

(7th of Jul, 30th of Apr, 1st of May, Ethnosense blog)

Working more or less separately, there is a tangible intensification of interests in two different directions. As seen above, the level of competitiveness that is required to find a job is more than recognized by this double-degree graduate, and her parents. But in addition to this rather usual requirement of responsible citizenship – which has become more taxing, no doubt, in a flexible labor market – it is clear that she is also the product of a policy environment that now cultivates the desire to contribute through unwaged labour of its citizens, in a way that previous generations would not entirely understand; and, moreover, that the institutional offer of volunteering programs is now considerable, if not necessarily less competitive.

Such a double intensification may cause feedback loops between the social and the economic. In fact, this is what neoliberalism hopes for. But it should never be mistaken for a hybrid tactic (c.f. Feher 2009). The biopolitics of any liberal government – its sustained effort to optimize the life of a population – relies on a clear distinction or divide between the market and civil society. It is their productive tension, and never their collision, what forges a humanitarian solution from the technical perspective of the modern liberal arts of government. In the case of neoliberalism, the competitiveness of the citizen in relation to its social interests is thought to guarantee that the economic mechanism is not hindered but facilitated and accompanied by the dynamics of solidarity of society. And yet, what is not necessarily true is that a subject whose interests become the object of such a parallel

intensification will always enact a rationality that fits neatly within the bounds of the biopolitical social-economic divide.

An increasing number of ambivalent practices of intervention, from volunteer tourism to social entrepreneurship, is pointing in the direction of this neoliberal anomaly. We may feel rather unperplexed by this point in our everyday life about the fact that such business-like voluntarisms emerge with so little resistance in these particular conditions (of which they can be considered to be by-products). But, for neoliberalism, an ambivalent hybridity is still "anomalous." The moment the profit motive becomes indistinguishable from the social motive, it becomes a superfluous governmentality, a governmentality that fails to render itself technical, for it is simply unable to reconcile the interests of individuals through its technologies of citizenship and hence secure the circuit of collaboration that is a nation. As Adam Smith would say, a merchant that trades for the public good is not very useful for the entirety of the state. In such occasions, one can no longer assume that the principle of operativity humanitarians are embodying is the one of technical opacity. They would rather be pray to moral exposure, since their practices would be located in a spectrum of concerns and motivations that defies simplification.

My intention is not to suggest that any behavior associated with initiatives of, say, corporate social responsibility amounts to an anomaly in every single case. There will be many cases in which the true interest behind an initiative is so blatantly cynical or, on the contrary, so uncontrovertibly philanthropic that it would be irrelevant to reexamine them. Even among cases that could be deemed borderline, some of them might well turn out to be at times strictly one or the other. What I am suggesting is that, nevertheless, the result will increasingly be an anomaly: a local

and personalized articulation of interests which does not fit into the neat categories of the social or the economic and which comes to be combined or interlaced with the interests of others in ways that are unique to their encounter.

A neoliberal anomaly cannot be something verifiable, in any case. On the one hand, if one were to actually ask whether a certain practice is morally exposed, one would have given oneself the answer, in the very same act, by demonstrating the need to raise the question about the true interest behind that practice. On the other, as Arendt would point out, it is just not possible to determine with certainty what the motivations of human beings ultimately are. Nonetheless, I believe that, generally speaking, it can be accepted that the more ethical choices are presented to individuals as, say, consumers – fair trade, cruelty free, locally made, etc. – or businesspeople – social investments, corporate volunteering, hybrid business models, etc. – the less distinguishable and ascertainable it becomes whether their choices are based on an either/or scenario divided between strictly social and economic interests. Are consumers willing to pay this or that price because they think it is what will benefit them the most, or is it because they are thinking of the social benefit that it will bring about to those who receive the gains from the product? Are businesspeople willing to volunteer because it improves their chances for future income in a company or because of the benefit that will come about to immediate others and society as a whole? At times, one might be inclined towards one side. At others, both sides of the question might happen to find their best answer in the same behavior. But, even so, there would be still others when the ambivalence remains unresolved.

The emphasis on "anomaly" shares with other analyses of neoliberal practice the idea, so central to development and governmentality studies, that human interventions tend to fail or at least produce unexpected results. I prefer this notion, however, to other expressions of disjunction like "excess" or "exception." Neoliberalism can be excessive in its demands from individual citizens, yet to grasp the anomaly as, say, an "excess of economics" (Stäheli 2011:281) would be to suggest that its existence is reducible, parasitic, always an *excess of*. Likewise, it may be true that the anomaly is exceptional, but to speak of "exceptions to neoliberalism" could lead to interpret it in terms of a familiar territory like "sovereignty" or "rights" (Ong 2006), and imply that an exception to the new can just be seen as something that is left of the old. The notion of "anomaly" invites us, instead, to explore how a new form of practice that may be deducible to some extent from the coordinates of neoliberalism can nonetheless be recognized as an irreducibly distinct mode of intervention. To be precise, the neoliberal anomaly signals a loosening of the biopolitical tension that for such a long time has led to a foreclosure of the freedom of intervention. It signals, that is to say, the potential appearance of a humanitarian self that in floating between "the social" and "the economic" manages to remain free to intervene.

The neoliberal anomaly can be produced in either direction. An individual can start from a rather economic outlook and then, because of the hybrid character of the experience, move towards a social one, as the following post reflects:

> My decision to volunteer was a no brainer. I knew that I wanted to go somewhere. Actually I would take whatever possibility affordably presented itself … In all honesty, my decision to volunteer was not altruistically motivated. To put it bluntly, it was to better my career prospectives since cross cultural experiences

> seem to be the biggest rage. But since I have returned from volunteering, being the experienced employee does not even matter to me. Upon arrival, the smiles of the kids broke me and I realised that my time there was for them. Building a website, the walls and the school was to better their futures.
>
> (12th of May, Ethnosense blog)

It would probably be a stretch to say that her economic interests completely disappeared, even after returning to her habitual context where finding a job becomes imperative. And yet, it is this very fact, that one cannot make such a clear-cut conclusion, what precisely makes it relevant to speak of such a thing as an anomaly. This should not be seen as the typical neoliberal anomaly, though. The interests of an individual can just as easily move in the opposite direction:

> I realise my volunteering experience has three stages to it.
>
> 1. I am doing a wonderful thing (self aggrandisement?), how important this is and my ability to 'give back'. Good stuff. Taking advantage of my ability to partake in such a program. Bonus life points.
>
> 2. This is a joke! Anyone with a hand to hold a pen could be doing this job – I am useless, is it just about the program fee for the organisation? Surely not, I'm more valuable than that?! Withdrawal. Denial. Let down.
>
> 3. This experience is mine, my work partner is like a private travel guide/translator, it is not about the work, but the culture, the people, the experience. I suddenly feel bad for having such a good set up over there, but that's the only way I can come to terms with it. Break away from the tight framework that we started with, enjoy hours on buses often for 20 minutes of work, watch India roll by, know that I have discovered and redefined a precious part of the world and of myself.
>
> (21st of Jul, Ethnosense blog)

What started as a commitment to "give back" to others progressively turned, as a reaction to the ambivalent circumstances she found herself in, into an exclusive travel package to see those remote parts of India that only a local has access to. Again, it would be difficult to assume that the deep travel component was not part of her plan from the start. But, at the same time, it is perceivable that her different interests come together in her story and do not really stay attached to a single point of the experience like the purchase moment or the volunteering period. Whether the citizens of neoliberalism start with a dominant economic outlook or a heartfelt social intention, their interests are susceptible to move in an unexpected direction and generate uncertain amalgamations in what must be considered to be more than just a spectrum.

A mixture of self-oriented and other-oriented motives, interests and desires has always populated the meaningful actions of human beings. This is what anthropologists at least since the classical work of Marcel Mauss have repeatedly claimed (see e.g. Fleischer 2011:301; Muehlebach 2012:27). Western culture, however, as they do accept, seems to be the only one in which one can find a generalized exception in the form of a profit-oriented market. To this exception, Foucault adds the one of civil society, as a characteristically liberal construct made up exclusively of disinterested interests. In effect, what makes the neoliberal anomaly relevant is not the finding that individuals can be creatively ambivalent in terms of their moral rationality. It is precisely that they can become so in these exceptional social conditions, within the rare circuits of collaboration established by this culture. Moral exposure is here decipherable as a principle of operativity for pertaining to the technological and strategic levels of liberalism rather than just its norms and values.

End. The post-neoliberal dilemma

Not having any certainty on matters of solvability – which is the basic definition of "technical opacity" – can leave humanitarians insisting on the same kind of solution. It is this fundamental unknowability what could explain why free market policies continue to have so much support even in times of financial crisis and growing inequality. As Lev Marder (in press) has historically reflected, expanding on Foucault's account, "political power begins to adapt to its own ignorance and that of *homo œconomicus* instead of producing and enforcing knowledge as it did before," but, "paradoxically, political power has no basis of knowing if laissez-faire – this adaptation to ignorance – is the right choice." If no matter how hard we try, we cannot have access to a definite proof of the market's effectivity, it means that there is nothing that can stop us either from remaining oblivious to its failures. An organization like the International Monetary Fund will always be able to recommend structural adjustment policies to fix national economies, since it will remain forever uncertain whether the invisible hand has ever broken any economy, and there will always be a chance – equally uncertain, at any rate – that it is capable of doing what it promises. Lack of results, in this case, may well motivate more of the same intervention, simply because it cannot be proven that the technique is what is actually being ineffective.

For a long time, humanitarians have relied on solutions over which they have a fundamental lack of mastery, solutions that are supposed to guide and coordinate acts of judgment, but that at the moment of actual consultation cannot really be accessed or made transparent. Three such solutions were reviewed here. The first one, capitalizing on sympathy, was the one that broadly states that one should help

others in the occasions and in the manner an "impartial spectator" would. The second one, passed down from the political liberalism of Rousseau, was the one that says that one should always strive to contribute to the needs of "the people." And, finally, the last one was the one typical of an economic liberalism that says that individuals in their local situation can judge better than any statesman what the fair price for a given exchange would be, leaving the latter to trust the "invisible hand" of the market. In every case, a trade off takes place between moral comfort and technical mastery. In the attempt to provide a compelling orientation for humanitarian conduct, each of these liberal traditions ends up relying on a universal that, when pushed to the limit, cannot avoid to reveal its inscrutability.

The problem with their universality has nothing to do with a kind of Christian-inherited "hermeneutics" which rests the base of our knowledge on a mysterious truth that only a few true experts can manage to apprehend (see Foucault 2014). The problem is not that they are "impersonal" solutions either, as a long sociological tradition might suggest (see e.g. Hart 2005). On the one hand, the logic behind their technical mechanisms is far from secret or unintelligible. We know that they rely on either a certain intensification of our bargaining skills to help form a natural price, or a certain use of our associational and deliberative capabilities to reproduce a contractual sociability, or a certain training of our ethical imagination to lead us closer to a mutual understanding. On the other hand, the fact that, as Keith Hart (2005:25-42) reminds us, highly normalized rules of conduct, large industrialized cities and heavily bureaucratic states have made modern society so depersonalizing does not mean that these classical liberal solutions are intrinsically impersonal. I do not think that sympathizing, bargaining, or fraternizing can be considered to be the core experience of an impersonal strategy. They can become so when they are used

as the justification for a disciplinary, excessive, or perpetual interventionism – but any such eventuality would be, precisely, a *side effect* of the technical opacity inscribed in their biopolitics.[72] Without striving to any kind of moral, economic or political perfectionism or wanting to ignore the variability of the human experience, these are simply ambitious solutions that, for their very principle of operativity, are bound to create concerns of effectivity and be susceptible to dangerous appropriations.

The intention of this chapter has not been to be pessimistic about the kind of impossible choice we are faced with as humanitarians between "technical opacity" and "moral exposure" or, on the contrary, to be optimistic about our chances of overcoming the neoliberal impasse given the opening of a timely "liberal dilemma." The post-neoliberal dilemma that has been postulated here is not exactly what anthropologists have come to call a "double bind" after Gregory Bateson's work on schizophrenia – any scenario with two contradictory choices, which ultimately "entraps its victim precisely because he or she wishes to answer *correctly* to each injunction" (Redfield 2012:377, original emphasis). The dilemma, as hinted early on, is not one that humanitarians need to face in practice as such, but one that rather sums up the shape the liberal range of solvability describes. It is still true that what makes it a dilemma is that, no matter how humanitarians decide to intervene, they will have to deal with concerns, frustrations and limitations of one or other kind. But the insight that I hope is gained from this comparative argument is that a challenge of solvability is intrinsic to a mode of intervention, regardless of the existence of other alternatives.

At the same time, it might have seemed optimistic to put forward a historical account that departs from a certain potential for bifurcation found in the thought of classical liberals like Rousseau and that ends up detecting the realization of this potential in practices that would only develop two centuries later when they happen to be immediately available to us. What should seem strange, however, is not that one has to wait until neoliberalism for such a bifurcation. Foucault's point, after all, is that liberalism is an art of intervention that continually criticizes and reforms itself to suit the spontaneous mechanisms that a society naturally has to maintain a collaborative coexistence (2008:319-320). While those mechanisms were recast here as technically opaque solutions purposefully articulated by eighteenth-century authors like Adam Smith, his diagnosis is still telling of the fact that a biopolitical liberalism is always ready to reassess its form of intervention upon civil society. Considered in this light, the difficulty for this account was then not to explain why an alternative to biopolitics did not happen before or only happened until now, but why did it happen at all.

In short, to explore the liberal dilemma is neither to be too pessimistic nor too optimistic. The rather realistic justification for such an inquiry is simply that this "dilemma" opens up a vantage point on the history of liberalism. It is an analysis that calls for a historical recovery of the liberal project that is able to consider its prospects and strategic possibilities. Without the need of high expectations, it takes into consideration a new principle of operativity emerging in neoliberal conditions, a principle that places in a comparative light the solvability of the humanitarian problem. Ostensibly, it is an analytics that emphasizes a new challenging frustration, but, importantly, without being fatalistic about it either. Essentially, it is interested in gaining a better understanding of the potential or viability of an enduring

problematization, in sharpening the attention we give to the practicality or ultimate effectivity of our ways of solving things. This chapter has already made some headway in this sense, exploring some of the crucial limitations that come with a technically opaque intervention. The next one will now concentrate on the advantages and problems that can come with moral exposure.

Reflections on the Historicization of Liberalism

Historically speaking, what has been suggested is that our post-neoliberal position is politically useful for the way it confronts us with a liberal dilemma. We have a "strategic conjuncture" at our disposal, something that can inherently help us to illuminate the solvability of a problem; in this case, allowing us to discern the two alternative challenges that are unique to a humanitarian. This is an unusual critical reading, one that manages to work on a strategic level thanks to a certain mode of historical analysis or at least a certain way of relating the past and present of liberal intervention.

The point of analyzing the history of liberalism, as authors like Rosanvallon and Hirschman have suggested, is "to recover problems" not in order "to resolve issues, but to raise the level of the debate," "to make the succession of presents live again as trials of experience that can inform our own" (Rosanvallon 2006:39; Hirschman 1997:135). The immediate methodological question, in this sense, is how those problems can be usefully recovered to inform any debating present. One possible option is to recover them *retrospectively*, following the progressive elaboration and development of a solution, thus making a linear connection between a past problem and a current answer. This option can be useful to show, for example, like Hirschman did, that a solution such as capitalism, which has come to be so criticized for the "way it inhibits the development of the 'full human personality,'" was in fact envisaged with the expectation that it would solve the very issue of the instability of

the human passions (1997:132).[73] There is also another option, as Dean comments, which is to recover a historical problem *prospectively*. The focus in this case is on an existing problem and the challenge becomes that of connecting its apparent self-evidence in the present to a disruptive event that came to give it meaning in the past. In other words, it is about interpreting the history of a problem not from its ready-made familiarity but "from the viewpoint of what it displaces" (1992:228)

There is I think, however, a third option, which is the one that has been explored here: to recover them by means of what could be called, following Massumi, a *retroductive* procedure. "The back-formation of a path," Massumi writes, "is not only a 'retrospection.' It is a 'retroduction': a production, by feedback, of new movements. A dynamic unity has been retrospectively captured and qualitatively converted" (2002:10). While a retrospective recovery can be useful to recognize which are the paths that we have already covered, and a prospective one can help us to put into perspective the problems that continue to be our own, a retroductive recovery can lead us to reconsider the paths that we have available thanks to a revealing solution that, although emerging in the present, connects back to an enduring problem in the past. The analysis of history, in this approach, is based on a possibility that comes to be realized at a certain point, out of a potential that, before this happened, we could not have confirmed was actually there (see Massumi 2002:9). Something as radical as the open-endedness of Rousseau, for example, can easily go unnoticed when there is no experience to relate it to. It is the new angle produced by an anomalous way of solving things what allows us to retroductively grasp a broader range of solvability, for a problem we could not have perceived before in the same way.

The difficulty of recovering a historical problem retroductively is precisely that, as Massumi's term well indicates, it invites a type of inquiry that, in comparison to the others, needs to be particularly productive. While it is a current experience what motivates a new analytical perspective from which to reinterpret an inherited problematization, the challenge for the inquiry must be understood to be, at the same time, to articulate and solidify that very experience. It is neither a linear history nor a discontinuous history. History works in this case through a peculiar feedback between what is its actuality and its potentiality. The intelligibility of past and present depend upon one another. The recovery of a historical problem, in this sense, is made possible by the opening of a solution that is not yet entirely present, for the extent to which it constitutes a unique way of solving things cannot be recognized either, unless one is able to understand what is its problem.

In our inquiry into skeptical practices of freedom, a retroductive procedure has allowed us to revisit a series of classical authors and solutions of liberalism, shifting their locus of problematization from the state or the market to the humanitarian self. In this way, the liberal ethos has been able to be reconsidered in the light of a range of solvability that can include morally exposed interventions, placing at its core an understanding of freedom that is not that of liberation/emancipation or of freedom as a condition/instrument of government, but of freedom as the freedom to intervene. It is thanks to a locus retroductively recovered that liberalism has been approached here at a strategic level. If one were to depart from a differently recovered locus, one would arrive at either a programmatic or technological understanding of freedom.

The distinction between *programme, technology* and *strategy* is one that, as Gordon (1980:246-255) famously argued, Foucault heuristically deployed throughout his different works. But, at the very least in regard to his studies on practices of intervention or what he generalizes as "power," Foucault always gave precedence to the technological level, to "regimes of practices." It is within that level that he then considered discursive or explicit *programmes* and *strategic* or unforeseen effects, as Gordon himself suggests is entirely possible (p.246). Another French researcher who has more clearly had the level of programmes in mind developing a sophisticated historico-philosophical approach for it is Rosanvallon. As he explained in his inaugural lecture at the *Collège de France*, his approach to the history of the political could be called "conceptual," focused on political norms like liberty or equality and interested in "touchstone works" and theoretical manuscripts (2006:46-47). Yet, while being conceptual, it is at the same time an approach that seeks to incorporate "the totality of the elements that compose that complex object that a political culture is" (p.46). It is thus not meant to stay either, then, at one single level; in this case, at a simply discursive, normative or "programmatic" level. The significance of this level is for him necessarily tied to the practical reality of its "experiential testing," without which the antinomies of democracy and, in general, "the aporetic essence of the political" could not be apprehended (pp.43-46).

The understanding of liberalism that Rosanvallon derives from this particular level is directly related to what we can assume is for him the liberal locus of problematization: the market. In his historical account, which could be deemed "retrospective," the market became crucial not so much as a solution, but as a mechanism that materialized the liberal aspiration, the "search for an alternative to inherited relations of power and dependence" (p.155). By systematically studying

how the refusal of authority progressively developed in Europe from the seventeenth century, Rosanvallon concludes that the significance of the market in "the intellectual history of modernity as a whole" (p.149) is that it managed to capture a specific mode of problematizing society, based on the ideal of autonomy and self-regulation. "The market figures as the archetype of an anti-hierarchical system of organization and of a model of direction in which no intention intervenes" (p.152). Departing from this locus, he offers his interpretation that "the proliferation and occasionally contradictory character of this literature, all called 'liberal,'" can be read in the light of its shared understanding of freedom as "emancipation" (p.155), even if "the picture of the self-regulated society would leave behind its original economic framework" (p.152).

While the market comes to play an equally determinant role in Foucault's genealogy of liberalism, his prospective angle results in a very different view of freedom. For Foucault, the centrality of freedom in modern society is not deduced from a certain programmatic aspiration, but rather from a certain development in the rationality of state intervention. The analysis that Foucault pursues is that of how the market of Adam Smith, along with many other eighteenth century ideas about the natural processes of a civil society, comes to affect the received understandings of statecraft:

> With what must the state concern itself? For what must the state be responsible? What must it know? What must the state, if not control, at least regulate, or what kind of thing is it whose natural regulations it must respect? (Foucault 2007b:350).

As has been recently suggested, the locus of problematization that Foucault uses for the study of liberalism, in spite of his unrelenting critique of sovereignty, is in

any case the state (Villadsen and Dean 2012:405). It is the shift from *raison d'Etat* to a liberal art of government, in the hands of "the sovereign," what drives his historical recovery – a recovery that cannot therefore account for the emergence of freedom as a political imperative without registering the break that made it persuasive, not for a general intellectual milieu or political culture, but to guide the activities of the state itself.[74] Ultimately, from this analytical angle, freedom becomes legible as a necessary condition or technological requirement for the proper government of a population. The state at some point would have recognized the relevance of respecting and even maintaining domains of freedom like the economy in order to achieve its own purposes (Foucault 2008:61-65).

Against these two possible readings, I have superimposed a third one offering, broadly, an intelligibility of liberalism not in terms of an increasingly programmatic aspiration to an ideal, or in terms of a suddenly functional technology of power, but in terms of an eventually strategic range of solvability. The appearance of an anomalous practice of intervention is what guides in this case the recovery of the historical dimension of liberal thought: what is the relation of this skeptical practice to the conventional way of solving things? What is the problem that they share? How are they then different? What kind of range of solvability do they describe? The possible existence of alternative answers for an enduring problem incites, in short, a search for their historical potentiality – a shared point of reference or "locus of problematization" is to be retroductively recovered.

For a historical locus to be able to mark the kind of problem-space within which such a range of solutions can acquire a meaningful status, it can prioritize neither a certain institutionalized form of intervention, like "the state," nor a given ideal

vision of society, like "the market." It must be a locus that calls for a relation between ethos and techne but without preempting the form of that relation. The source of problematization must rather be a practical challenge that can then account for a number of essentially different answers. Seen this way, it becomes clear why a "humanitarian self," in spite of its contemporary reference to a ready-made style of ethics and short-term assistance, is able to act as the retroductive locus for liberalism. Historically, the problem a humanitarian perception created cannot be considered to be normative as such. It did not amount to a predefined vision like "emancipation." It was simply defined by its radical reaction to a set of reproachable circumstances. Likewise, it was technologically open, not necessarily confined to the sphere of government or "the arts of conduct." It only anticipated the need of a creative method to move towards a coexistence without preventable suffering. As a locus of problematization, the humanitarian self opens a perspective on liberalism in which freedom is relevant at a strategic level. The freedom that matters is the one that a humanitarian has to depart from to conceive of an effective way of intervening.

Thanks to this locus, moreover, a certain critical approach has been made possible. Neoliberalism has emerged as a conjuncture that is "strategic" to the extent that it confronts us with a liberal dilemma or bipolar range of solvability. This is not an approach that, after retrospectively reconstructing a cultural project of market-like regulation, decides at the end to champion a particular solution (not even one as normatively balanced as "politics" or, as Rosanvallon puts it at some point in a rather Arendtian manner, "will-driven interventions" [p.152]). This is not an approach either that, after prospectively reconstructing the instrumental needs that led states to care for the freedom of individuals, simply assumes that its readers will now be able to come up with informed solutions of their own. Instead, the analysis

that is presented by retroductively reconstructing the paths that a humanitarian can take is already strategic in itself. It deploys a form of critical inquiry that does not need to choose a solution, nor ignore making that choice, for it deals directly with the challenges of solvability – for instance, in the order of "side effects" – that await any of the possible modes of liberal intervention.

Chapter 5 | SOLIDARITY WITHOUT A CONTRACT:

A potential strategic logic in a messy humanitarianism

> I would suggest that a fundamental mistake is made when we think that we must sort out philosophically or epistemologically our "grounds" before we can take stock of the world politically or engage in its affairs actively with the aim of transformation. The claim that every political action has its theoretical presuppositions is not the same as the claim that such presuppositions must be sorted out prior to action. It may be that those presuppositions are articulated only in and through that action and become available only through a reflective posture made possible through that articulation in action.
>
> —Judith Butler, *Contingent foundations*

Knowing when a certain practice of intervention has been effective is problematic in general, full of contingencies and mismatched realities. But it is particularly so when said practice has not even departed from any agreement or manifested "theoretical presuppositions." As an empirical social phenomenon, "effectivity" becomes immediately discernible only on the condition of some pre-written or somehow pre-stated contract. In the absence of a readily applicable script or principle, the only methodological resource is, as Butler (1995:128-29) suggests, a "reflective posture." But the fact that one must come up with a judgment about the question of effectivity itself ex post facto does not mean that the answer will be arbitrary or forever confined to the realm of theory. It just means that the usefulness of an assessment will only go as far as its ability to creatively gather the "grounds" or strategic logic that a whole culture already more or less intuitively associates with that practice.

Arendt carried out this kind of articulatory exercise in her classic book *On Revolution* (2006[1963]), to which I already alluded in the previous chapter. There, she concentrates on the strange fact, long perceived by historians, that the eighteenth century revolutions were brought about by rather conservative "men who were firmly convinced that they would do no more than restore an old order of things that had been disturbed and violated by the despotism of absolute monarchy or the abuses of colonial government" (p.34). And her defying suggestion is that the actual, practical meaning of "revolution" has largely eluded and remained implicit and vague in the discourse of modern revolutionaries, while political theorists, on their part, have been unable to fully illuminate its "secret center of gravity" (Wellmer 2000:221). For a commentator of this work like Wellmer, this suggestion is only "radical in a *philosophical* sense of the word" (p.222, original emphasis), in the sense that it attempts to introduce new categories into political thought. Yet if one departs from Butler's insight and agrees that the "grounds" of certain practices of intervention are only graspable on reflection, it becomes harder to underplay the empirical substance of her suggestion.

Any revolutionary experience poses a problem of self-intelligibility, an "obscurity," as Patchen Markell (2010:99) puts it. For it always consists, Arendt reflects, in coming to grips both with "an entirely new beginning" (p.27) and with the "experience of being free" (p.24) to shape that beginning. Such an event of political freedom does not lend itself to easy interpretations. It appears precisely as a challenge to those who come to enjoy this freedom, since what they face is the uncertain question of how to deal from that moment on with their public affairs, and the future that they share depends on their own decisions, promises and deliberations (see e.g. p.206). If for Arendt "the shape of revolutionary experience

was peculiarly obscure to those who lived it" (Markell 2010:99), it is because making sense of what one is doing is the very mark of such experiences.

In spite of that obscurity, she still considers that "revolution" can act as a clear-cut criterion of evaluation. There is a kind of absolute measure in the revolutionary idea about what it means to successfully realize an intervention. It is in fact a measure that is so absolute that she can confidently sustain, against the grain of much historical common sense, that the American Revolution was much more revolutionary than the French one (see Markell 2010:97). There is a universalism in her account, even if, as Wellmer elucidates, it is only "the universalism of a human *possibility*" (2000:229, original emphasis). But such a universal measure would not have been the result of a planned effort or calculated theory. Rather, it would have been the unforeseen outcome of a surprising collective experience unique to modern history, "unknown prior to the two great revolutions at the end of the eighteenth century" (Arendt 2006:18-19).

Even after having emerged in the perception of Western culture, her thesis is that the idea of revolution could have only been applied as a criterion of social effectivity retroactively. Against conventional Marxist readings, she finds in "revolution" the measure of a movement of public action that does more than initiate an unstoppable event, force a violent change, overthrow an old regime, liberate a people or execute a political mission – "the trouble has always been the same: those who went into the school of revolution learned and knew beforehand the course a revolution must take" (p.47). If one wants to speak of something like the core experience of modern revolutions, one must point instead to the opening up of a shared space or "island" of freedom (p.267), which allows individuals to spontaneously engage in public

affairs and express their political passions. In this sense, a successful revolution would be the one that manages to give this space a "foundation" and institutionalize the experience of political freedom in some way – to provide it with a *constitutio libertatis* (see e.g. p.247). Such a task of foundation would have been from the beginning of the revolutionary tradition difficult to realize and conceptualize, since it is invariably one that must serve to guarantee a phenomenon which in its essence is spontaneous, whose "preservation in some sense amounts," as Wellmer remarks, to its "continuous re-invention" (2000:229). This is the eighteenth century "perplexity" that Arendt believes "has haunted all revolutionary thinking ever since" (2006:224).

Arendt's intention would not have been simply to theorize what "revolution" should be. The validity of her claims reaches beyond her own philosophy. Her account of revolution is rather a careful exercise in what I will call in this chapter "cultural strategics." For the problem that she tackles is in principle methodological, not philosophical: what method of assessment must one use in order to be consistent with the strategy that a culture has put into motion? After a certain initiative comes into being, which is by nature spontaneous, what effects should one expect and demand from it? What is, in other words, an effective practice of freedom? The "foundation of freedom" is not something that can be translated into a stable theoretical presupposition, but it does convey in a way that is agreeable and apprehensible enough what we would somehow expect from a successful revolution.

Part I. Measures of Social Effectivity

Currently, we are faced with the growth of a cultural experience of intervention that we still do not know how to assess. There are no standards for what I have chosen to call here, in a rather theoretical vein, skeptical practices of freedom. "Humanitarianism" marks the field of problematization in which such experiences acquire meaning. But the problem cannot be whether initiatives of, say, corporate social responsibility, volunteer tourism or ethical consumption are really humanitarian or not. The landscape of social action that is covered these days by such an ethos is too crowded and "messy" to be of any use for an evaluative framework. Humanitarianism has incited in the last few decades a multiplicity of claim-making projects and governing technologies at different scales dealing, often in contradictory ways, with what is thought to be a threat to humanity (Feldman and Ticktin 2010). And, in general, it has become clear that "there are more forms of intervention by more different kinds of actors under the rubric of humanitarianism than ever before" (Barnett and Weiss 2008:28).

Didier Fassin has attempted to bring some coherence to this emerging field by speaking of a newly self-evident "humanitarian reason" (Fassin 2012:7-8). But as he himself recognizes elsewhere, this field is situated in a temporality of emergency in which an unratified "right to intervene" is embraced by states and NGOs at unpredictable junctures. In his own words, "exception has become the rule" (Fassin and Pandolfi 2010:23). The expansion that we can notice in the world is not that of a consistent rationality, but rather that of an open-ended ethos. The advance of a social-economic "human economy" (Hart, Laville and Cattani 2010) is only one of the incipient developments that have been diagnosed in these circumstances, along

with many others like a "post-capitalist politics" (Gibson-Graham 2006), an "economy of survival" (Abélès 2010) and an "authoritarian liberalism" (Dean 2007). "Humanitarian" is now and has always been a criterion that lends itself to multiple strategies and interpretations of what is meant by "intervention" (see e.g. Barnett and Snyder 2008). For us to be able to understand the potential for solvability that skeptical practices have, a preliminary reflection is first needed on the problem of measuring "humanitarian" effectivity.

This first part of the chapter examines the difficulties that the freedom to intervene of skeptical humanitarians creates for an evaluative inquiry. All criteria related with "the social" and sociability will be found to be inadequate for their idiosyncratic practices. Freedom will also be examined as a possible candidate, particularly in relation to the work of Foucault, but also of Arendt, which will lead to a certain redefinition of the term. This reconceptualization of freedom will not offer a criterion in itself, but it will open up the space for an analytics appropriate to extemporaneous practices. The second part will then elaborate in detail on the criterion of effectivity that the skeptical volunteers of neoliberalism could be considered to be applying now, everywhere in the world, without entirely knowing it. Hopefully, the suggested criterion is relatable enough (that being its only source of validity) to offer something of a social convention for today's frustrated and lost humanitarians.

5.i.a. Expectations of sociability

The problem of "humanitarian" effectivity, not as an active political project of realistic practice and invention, but as a methodological search for pragmatic

coherence within an existing circuit of collaboration, is a problem that only appeared two hundred years after Rousseau, particularly in Durkheim's first major work *The division of labor in society* (1997[1893]). In this work, he recognizes how messy and problematic it is to speak of a "human consciousness," since "every people forms regarding this alleged type of humanity a particular conception" (Durkheim 1997:329-330, see also xxvi). Durkheim's intention is still to find a way of advancing towards "the ideal of human brotherhood" (pp.336-37), but his strategy is purely analytical or, in his terms, "scientific" rather than "speculative" (p.xxvi). He believes he does not need to make any kind of proposal, but simply refine through observation the understanding of a "rule" or criterion of effectivity that is already intrinsic to the modern dynamics of morality and solidarity: "It will be objected that the method of observation lacks any rules by which to assess the facts that have been garnered. But the rule emerges from the facts themselves" (p.xxvii).

Durkheim agrees, like Rousseau, that the humanitarian project is no "more than a *desideratum*, whose realisation is not even certain" (p.341) and that moral philosophy alone cannot be effective (pp.338-39). And yet, he does not have the urge to craft a solution. His sole focus can instead be on analytical observation, to the extent that his inquiry originates in a hopeful rather than merely grim perception, namely, that "the morality we require is *only* [which is also to say, *already*] in the process of taking shape" (p.340, emphasis added). Although he does not seek to grasp the specific contents of that morality – in fact, he concludes by saying that "our first duty at the present time is to fashion a morality for ourselves" (p.340) – he does pose *sociability* as the guiding principle, as the ultimate criterion of biopolitics. "Mutual linking," "social feelings," "charity" or "altruism" is what necessarily produces "justice" and the respect for "rights," he finds, whether in traditional society or in the modern

circuits of collaboration characterized by the division of labor (p.77). His point is biopolitical. He accepts the skeptical position, for example, when he states that justice, moral order or "peace in itself is no more desirable than war" (p.76). It is only that his scientistic outlook on humanitarian intervention allows him to make what is, even for quasi-natural standards, a highly ambitious claim: "Men need peace only in so far as they are already united by some bond of sociability. In this case the feelings that cause them to turn towards one another modify entirely naturally promptings of egoism" (p.76).

The enduring influence of this Durkheimian approach is still palpable today through communitarian concepts like "social capital" (Portes 1998:2) and through a broad sociological purview in general, manifested in a continuing relentless academic concern with "the problematic unity of a society" (Dean 2010b:690) and the fact that "we are losing the skills of cooperation needed to make a complex society work" (Sennett 2012:9). Alejandro Portes captures well this influence when he confesses in his well-known review article on social capital that, "indeed it is our sociological bias to see good things emerge out of sociability" (1998:15). In a true Durkheimian spirit, this is not a bias that simply amounts to a kind of moralism. As a renown sociologist like Richard Sennett readily cautions these days, "the problems of living with difference being so large, there can be no single or total solution" (2012:5). It is rather a bias that continues to exist in the form of a humanitarian critique whose primary regard is for the methodological question of effectivity from the perspective of sociability. Portes's larger point in his review was, precisely, to warn that the version of "social capital" that has been popularized through the work of political scientist Robert Putnam (see McNeill 2010) cannot work as a useful

criterion of evaluation unless its "downsides are examined with equal attention" (1998:22).[75]

Surely, one could use a social capital perspective to assess the benefits that may come from the skeptical interventions of volunteer tourists, considering the impact on network ties and local bonding that these ambivalent humanitarians have been reported to foster in certain circumstances (McGehee and Santos 2005; Spencer 2010; Palacios 2010:873; Zahra and McGehee 2013). Anne Zahra and Nancy McGehee in fact successfully adopted this perspective in a recent study, whose intention, as they stated, was "to illuminate a broad range of impacts" (2013:40). Nevertheless, even if many positive and negative impacts can be traced through such a framework, methodologically, the question remains of whether there is an intrinsic correlation or "fit" between the kind of judgments that a lens of social capital invites and the rather ad hoc orientation of these voluntary practices. An emphasis on the generalized adoption of norms of "civicness" and sociability like the one that Putnam (1995) for example places in his notion of social capital seems unwarranted and out of place in the case of a skeptical humanitarian that already has to face in society a certain sociological "prejudice" or bias. This brief post from the blog shows one of the ways a volunteer tourist can express her perception of this bias:

> Self –ish?
>
> I want to start from a beginning – from why I decided to go. People responded in so many different ways, but a common theme was that they "couldn't do it" – do what? I thought, when this whole thing, essentially, honestly, first and foremost, was for me. As much as I liked to think it was a selfless act, commendable, worthy... the motivation to do it came from somewhere inside, somewhere that was fuelled by personal reasons,

> something I must have needed to fulfill within myself and as long as I acknowledge that and don't pretend otherwise then I think that is okay.
>
> (9th of April, Ethnosense blog)

The suspicions that a social-economic practice like "volunteer tourism" is able to incite begin with a strong and basic cultural attachment to the altruistic image of the volunteer. Only from that basis can any market contamination appear distasteful. Yet, as the post above suggests, it is the rest of society rather than the individual practitioner of an ambivalent morality that continues to impose such Durkheimian expectations. A large-scale, community-oriented criterion like Putnam's version of social capital would offer a rather partial perspective on what really is an extremely localized and self-oriented, albeit relational, humanitarian practice.[76]

On the other hand, one could still take up a more instrumental, actor-centered view of social capital, as the one that appears in Portes's definition: "social capital stands for the ability of actors to secure benefits by virtue of membership in social networks" (Portes 1998:6). But, again, it would seem to be still unsuitable to capture what a wilful and transient collaborator such as the volunteer tourist stands to offer. Consider the kind of insightful self-reflection one such traveler was left with:

> Opportunism vs altruism
>
> Sometimes I think my decisions to volunteer are opportunistic and almost without any altruistic motives. I go because the opportunity comes up, because I have time, because I want to travel. I went to Yuendumu because for years I had been saying "I would love to work in an Indigenous community!" And then I got back from overseas and had 5 months till uni started again, and I saw the Youth Challenge Australia link on a website.

> I went to Christmas Island because I was returning to uni after working for a few years and had excess time over January and February and a lack of money. A few people in my immediate circle had applied with ALIV to volunteer on Christmas and in other detention centres, and it was one of the few completely supported volunteer positions available.
>
> Only later, after the decision has been made, and people start responding do the altruistic motives seem to come in. They say, "wow, what made you do that? What a great thing to do!" And even though I try and make my opportunistic and selfish motives plain they only seem to hear and recognise altruistic motives.
>
> (10th of May, Ethnosense blog)

Other types of humanitarians like Red Cross volunteers have been found to display similar attitudes when being disproportionately praised or compared with "Mother Teresa" stereotypes. But in their case, the rejection of a self-sacrificing identity does not come with moral exposure. It is rather the expression of a safer moral identity based on their considerable insertion in a compelling institutional network, one in which the professionalism of one's aid work comes before anything else (Malkki 2015:26-30).

Skeptical humanitarians may belong to social circles for which global ethical concerns are important and may travel through institutions or agencies that have a partnership with host communities. But neither the organization of their experiences, nor the bonds they form in the field have that clause of long-term reciprocity that allows others to draw on their "social capital." The kind of Facebook friendships they form can often end in "broken bridges" (Zahra and McGehee 2013:34-35), while local organizations are prone to remain in a "sort of limbo in one way or another," as Harng Sin has noted, not knowing the amount or if volunteer

tourists and private funds are "coming their way at all" (2010:990). Rather than stable networks, the circuits of collaboration that skeptical humanitarians bring to life tend to be ones in flux, that is, in need of being constantly renewed by new short-lived bonds and new suddenly-inspired volunteers. Theirs are circuits sourced by scattered opportunities, subject to the tyranny of random connections between things like "website links," "excess time" and even "a lack of money."

The point is not that the skeptical interventions of volunteer tourists do not have any positive impact in terms of social capital – or in terms of other "social" standards like rights-based solidarity (Spencer 2010), capacity building (Lough et al 2010) or cultural exchange (Wearing and Grabowski 2011) for that matter – but that, precisely, social capital does not capture the strategic logic that is unique to these practices, the way they produce more than impacts and manage to affect, in a qualitative way, a circuit of collaboration.

5.i.b. Post-social collaborations

> I remember feeling very foreign when I first arrived at my placement. I had a reoccurring thought of the meaning of the word foreign. To me I had mostly heard the word used by mum, who works in medicine, referring to a "foreign body," something that should not be where it is, likely to obstruct the function of an organ or catalyse an infection.
>
> —A volunteer tourist who spent six months in India

Foucauldian scholarship on governmentality has introduced some important modifications in our understanding of the social, modifications that allow us to grasp the way skeptical humanitarians put into question our usual understanding of

solidarity and, specifically, how the circuits of collaboration that, say, volunteer tourists promote and in which they awkwardly insert themselves – as a kind of "foreign body" – do not need to be conceptualized in Durkheimian terms.

The idea of society as a systemic whole or cohesive circuit of collaboration, endemic to the human sciences, comes from an atomistic conception of the subject that Foucault for example captured as "the figure of man" (2002) or "the subject of interest" (2008). It is due to such a conception, as Helliwell and Hindess have pointed out, that the socialization and integration of "self-directing individuals" becomes a relevant problem (1999:6-9, see also Herbert 1991, esp. 38-42). Still, it is important to consider that there is not a *necessary* connection between this Western construct of autonomous individuality and the kind of circuit that amounts to a self-contained unity or sociable totality, as Durkheim famously assumed. The historical development of this assumption – an assumption that Mary Poovey (2002) would say is that of "the social" as a metaphysical if objectified abstraction – has not only reached an obstacle with the exponential increase of border-crossings and mobility in recent times (Urry 2007), but has also depended, from its very beginning, on two contingent influences.

Firstly, the desire to tie a free and interested subject to an overarching and self-regulating "social" whole was exacerbated by the governmental ambitions of the late eighteenth century. British moral philosophers, in particular, would have been concerned with justifying the liberal regime that followed the Glorious Revolution (Poovey 2002:138-41). They would have been actively looking for a way of conceptualizing and harnessing the spontaneous productivity of a political unit that is composed of an autonomous population and a sovereign state (Helliwell and

Hindess 1999:12-4). Secondly, the atom-totality connection would have been nurtured by what has been called here a politics of suspicion towards the skeptic, or the tendency for a subjectivity with "drives and appetites" to be "regarded as 'naturally' prone to unsocial – if not positively anti-social – behaviour" (Helliwell and Hindess 1999:6). Without the influence of this factor, there would not have been a reason to assume that the freedom of the individual absolutely needs a collective mediation like the pull of a "culture" or "society" to be able to produce a circuit of collaboration.

Doing without this "Durkhemian" assumption opens the possibility of exploring phenomena of solidarity as a matter of dynamics between individualities and not as an intrinsically "social" matter. Any practice of humanitarian intervention, even a skeptical one, would still have to be predicated upon the idea that we are bound to form "circuits of collaboration." But this would not be because human beings are believed to have "a general tendency to sociability" (Durkheim 1997:27) or because we find ourselves in "a tradition that places harmoniously living together (convivance) as the highest aim of social beings" (Abélès 2010:15). Neither would it be because we have a historical tendency to share tasks and divide our labor (Durkheim 1997:179-225) or because we know that "the capacity to cooperate in complex ways is rooted in the earliest stages of human development" and does not just "disappear in adult life" (Sennett 2012:9). Without taking for granted such ontological imperatives as "living together" or "working together," and therefore without implying that some suspicious inidividuals may lack the sufficient orientation required to follow these quasi-natural mandates, one can simply say that circuits of collaboration are in any case unavoidable to the extent that our coexistence is threaded by mutually determinant relations that come to shape our

life chances. That individuals have autonomy means that they can have a range of effects on each other. And it is that variability what poses a problem for those concerned with humanitarianism; namely, that of what would and would not constitute an intervention. The aim of intervention can be defined precisely as the desire to affect our circuits of collaboration – whatever their composition is – in some significant way.

To consider the possibility of meta-ethnographic circuits, circuits in which mobile, transient, ethnographer-like subjects are involved, one must leave aside the classical ideal that "to co-operate is to share with one another a common task" or "function" (Durkheim 1997:79-85) – that solidarity consists of realizing a single, "common" project. Beyond being a methodological option, "meta-ethnography" suggests an epistemological corollary that comes with the study of morally exposed humanitarian practices. It points to the fact that all such practices lack an evident mode of insertion in the existing chains of collaboration and, therefore, whatever role of solidarity they come to play in a given locale is achieved through a sort of chirurgical attachment. There is not an obvious role that has been assigned to them by a larger and coherent social body. In fact, once it is accepted that atom-based human collaboration does not necessarily take place in the plane of "the social," it is also accepted that, even in those cases when it does produce a social or cultural formation, there is no reason to believe, like Durkheim did, that society "pre-exists" the individual – that, without it, "the clash of individual interests" would engender "chaos" and disintegration (1997:217-221).

With this departure, Foucault's analytical purview becomes, on the one hand, more useful and illuminating than any other, while, at the same time, intrinsically

limited and constraining due to its own epistemological assumptions. Foucault's understanding of civil society becomes crucial to approach the traditional type of circuits, for it manages to convey, unlike other conceptions of civil society (see Fine 1997), the way the social can be constructed through the practices of a skeptical individuality or "subject of interest" (Palacios in press). Likewise, his work has inspired contemporary cultural observers to theorize how circuits can be composed by collaborations that are, for example, non-local or easily mappable in terms of discrete territories (see e.g. Gupta and Ferguson 1992), non-holistic or easily reducible to a macro-context or coherent whole (see e.g. Candea 2007) and non-codified or easily pinned to a discursive grid or structure of subject positions (see e.g. Massumi 2002).

And yet, the historical reading that Foucault ultimately derives from his understanding of civil society cannot avoid championing a critical subject or *homo criticus*. As Dean and Kaspar Villadsen (2016:141) have recently pointed out, by driving the trajectory of liberalism towards a state of government that is defined by the rationality of the governed, Foucault's lectures seem to describe a certain "political eschatology," one that already in neoliberalism demonstrates to be interested in basing the rationality of rule on our own self-government. Beyond neoliberalism, his lectures would appear to postulate "perpetual contestation" as the truly justifiable telos for the construction of civil society, even if this is a "relative" rather than "absolute" telos (p.142). Despite Foucault's deeply strategic orientation, and his sophisticated approach to political constructs like that of "civil society," his sociology of power had its limitations. As sustained in Chapter 1, these limits had to do with his effort to deduce an "ethical hinge" out of an ontology of power, which led him to indiscriminately encourage the practice of critique. Now I will explore in

more detail some important questions about freedom and social effectivity opened up by such an approach to coexistence.

5.i.c. *Homo criticus* everywhere

Perhaps a "humanitarian mess" where everyone was freer in a skeptical way could be imagined to have a critical effectivity of its own. Considering the creative acts of intervention that a post-Westphalian cartography facilitates, and without the warranties that used to be afforded by a principle of sociability (see Chapter 3), a global swarm of inventive and boundary-crossing humanitarians could now well be thought to have a value in itself and automatically offer a chance for solvability. The following is for example the way Isin grants young transnational volunteers the possibility of a positive impact: "There may well be some youths who come away from these activities with experiences that do not quite conform to the intentions of governmental programmes," in which "the creativity, inventiveness and autonomy of some of its subjects would contravene its intended purposes" (2012:160). Through these occasional cases of proactive subversion, he believes, citizenship could be fully enacted, rights, really performed, and justice, truly claimed. The following blogger would be, in this sense, an ideal example for the contemporary humanitarian:

> Six months into my twelve month volunteer position, I was faced with … what seemed to be an incommensurability between my own ethics and that of "my keeper". In fact twice before this moment the same challenge had arisen, and I had chosen the path laid out to me by the pre-departure training DVD. But on the third occasion, my own now frayed and worn ethics could take it no more, as I struggled with the dilemma of exposing the truth or toeing the line as an Australian volunteer. On this occasion, I chose

> the former. The response was swift, with my position being suspended along with a visit to the Australian High Commission for a 'please explain'. And what was interesting about the latter was the sense of solidarity that came along with my disciplining. A feeling of support for what I had done for it was consistent with a truth, yet there existed another truth confined within the context of my volunteering that required my to be disciplined.
>
> (9th of May, Ethnosense blog)

As the story of this participant-ethnographer demonstrates, it is entirely legitimate to envision a version of the humanitarian or transnational citizen that corresponds to *homo criticus*, the kind of agent that can engender a "sense of solidarity" out of disruptive acts that readily appear to be "consistent with a truth" that is not yet official. Arendt would be sympathetic to this vision. As Wellmer suggests, she made "political freedom into a project of *all* human beings" (2000:230). The creative and liberating energy of action, "man's essential political activity," was in her eyes indispensable to prevent the spread of a totalitarian and isolating reality or "the law of the desert" (Arendt 2005:190, see also 201-04). But for Foucault, in particular, this criterion would be applicable, since he could be said to have remedied a "humanistic thematic" that "is in itself too supple, too diverse, too inconsistent to serve as an axis for reflection" with "the principle of a critique and a permanent creation of ourselves in our autonomy." This is what he called a "limit-attitude" and considered to be the inheritance that the Enlightenment ultimately left at the heart of the modern ethos (2007a:111-13).

The problem of a strategy purely based on *homo criticus*, however, is that it cannot explain by itself how it would lead to a humanitarian coexistence. It can point us to the continuous opening of a space for new solutions, but it is not a strategy that

points to a solution as such. The encouragement of a *homo criticus* may be a task that we can immediately associate with the kind of political vibrancy Arendt called "worldliness" (see e.g. 1998:57-58) or the kind of realistic agenda Foucault accepted as a "minimum of domination" (see Chapter 1). But a world where humanitarians only worked through deliberative politics and relationships of freedom would not necessarily be one less violent and more collaborative.

In principle, as a champion of free relations between nations like John Stuart Mill (1984) once sustained, for a non-imposing government a violent intervention could still be justifiable on the grounds that it is needed to liberate others from oppression or encourage them to be more critical (see also Asad 2015). Furthermore, with or without violence, there is no way of assuming that: first, a culture of *homo criticus* can be artificially created in any social context (Mill himself noted this difficulty in his own racist language: "no people ever was and remained free, but because it was determined to be so" (1984:122)); or, second, that those who critical humanitarians target will use their freedom of thought and action for humanitarian purposes (based on their own experience, they could find, individually, that, say, leaving their home to fight with terrorists makes more sense to them); or, finally, that those who definitely want to be humanitarian will not choose to use their critical capacities to advance a moralistic agenda (this is the position of Carl Schmitt, that acting "in the name of humanity" is the seed of a political imperialism that ends in a "world policing power" [Feldman and Ticktin 2010:12]).

Rather than being itself a criterion of effectivity, freedom must be seen as constituting the horizon of human action that a skeptical scenario departs from – but in a sense much more radical than the one embraced by Foucault in his analytics of

governmentality. Foucault came close to placing his analysis on this horizon of freedom when, towards the end of his life, revisiting his own concepts, he stressed that "we must distinguish between power relations understood as strategic games between liberties … and the states of domination that people ordinarily call 'power'" (1997:299). As Dean indicates, this represented a considerable move towards "an ethical problematic" and a "retirement of conventional conceptions of power" (2013:68). Through this move, the question of power becomes in fact about a relational freedom, a matter of *agonism* or "of reaction and of mutual taunting, as in a wrestling match" (Foucault 1982:222, translator's note). And yet, while Foucault would end up advancing "the concept of governmentality" because it "makes it possible to bring out the freedom of the subject and its relationship to others" (1997:300), he would never be able to leave power behind.

Foucault at some point suggested that the reversal of power relations could constitute its own "level" within his mode of investigation, and that to explore how "relationships are in perpetual slippage from one another … we would have to bring out a whole form of analyses which could be called *strategics*" (2007a:65, original emphasis). "Reversibility" (p.66) could be said to be the answer that he gave to the question of "what is intervention?" – which is an answer that forcefully and originally suggests that there is a generalized freedom to intervene that has the potential to become useful anywhere. Nonetheless, in his case, such a suggestion at the same time implies that a "minimum of domination" amounts to an actual humanitarian strategy, that a critical or "limit-attitude" can be a criterion of effectivity in itself. Studying the question of "strategics" as a level in itself might just not be possible in this or any other methodologically sweeping way. There is nothing that can assure us that the game between liberties can become a site of

intervention in every historical place, that there is something like a "perpetual slippage." But at the very least, taking up the argument developed in Chapter 1, we can say that it is possible to explore this question in a skeptical scenario, in which the freedom of reacting in non-predictive ways is still foregrounded – only that instead of the question of intervention being closed at once, it is opened up via the existence of a polemic skeptic. A skeptical scenario does not lead us to presume that we can know in general what the content of "intervention" is. Rather, it leads us to take seriously the dimension of freedom in social relations and the way criteria of intervention can develop in specific cultural contexts.

5.i.d. Valuing the skeptic

In principle, the "skeptical" attitude could be seen as a void, as a position that, already lacking any content itself, goes on to empty of meaning and value whatever discourse, theory or opinion it confronts by destabilizing even its most commonsensical premises and scavenging for disproving counterfactuals. Foucault went beyond this extreme interpretation, endowing the skeptic with a certain strategic value – even if that value only makes for a vague, indirect or "weak" humanitarian strategy – yet he still rejected the possibility that the skeptical subject could come up with some content of its own. Although most of us may have a certain freedom to be critical or "skeptical" as part of our ontological condition, the expression of that skepticism, for Foucault, cannot be in itself productive. The skeptic only amounts to a moment of reflection, to the freedom that is left from a social world in contention – and the modest positive value that it has only becomes truly visible to the analyst of power (c.f. Dean and Villadsen 2016:49-52).

Freedom appears in a Foucauldian ontology as that space which gives individuals the opportunity to modify and react to their existing relationships, to themselves act upon conducts, but never as a specific form of relating to others in itself. In most human relationships, there would be room for skepticism: whatever I am invited to do or think or say is only an option and not necessarily the best one for one's case. But from that skepticism can only come out another, modified relationship of power – not necessarily one that involves an Other, but simply it could appear inasmuch as one then seeks another form of conducting oneself. In this view, a horizon of freedom can only be either a world with a "minimum of domination," in which everyone's active, tireless skepticism constantly keeps power at bay preventing the establishment of dominant relationships; or a world with a "cynical" ethics or philosophy, in which everyone's skepticism turns inward forming a mode of existence based on the rejection of this life and all of its expressions of power, and on an orientation to an "other world" which can only be negatively defined as one where "every individual forms a vigilant relationship to self" (Foucault 2012:315). In other words, from this perspective, the freedom of a skeptic can only become productive *through* power. This is a skeptic that can only become critical of things, and out of that criticism relationships of power either become more agonistic, or one's conduct of the self becomes more "cynical," in the ancient sense recovered by Foucault in his last lectures of having to put everything into question as part of one's moral mission (see e.g. 2012:284-85).

A more substantive skeptical scenario calls for a slightly different ontology, one that does not assume that the reaction to power will always be also a calculated attempt at directing conduct. Just as a state of domination became something thinkable for Foucault at some point, that state in which freedom is nullified or,

better, practiced "only unilaterally" (1997:283), positing the existence of a skeptical humanitarian opens up the opposite possibility: that of a relationship in which calculation is absent, or at least left aside by one of the parties (due to circumstances and decisions that happen to engage the self with a humanitarian problematic in its most radical, experimental, undetermined form). The fact that all individuals necessarily affect and influence each other through what they do and that they could always come up with an answer as to what it could be expected to follow from their actions is not sufficient reason to assume that their mutual reactions are universally reducible to some passive or active form of the "conduct of conduct." The agonism of their relationships can just as well be the effect, on occasion, of creative acts of freedom. Departing from an unexpected "action" rather than a calculative "conduct," Arendt for example makes this very point:

> Since action acts upon beings who are capable of their own actions, reaction, apart from being a response, is always a new action that strikes out on its own and affects others (1998:190).

Furthermore, if an absolutely skeptical scenario can exist, it would not only mean that freedom can at rare times have a productivity of its own and form actual relationships – as Arendt contended as well (1998:190-91) – but that, also, freedom might then perhaps have its own productive dimension within most relationships, just as we have come to assume power does. To explore this option, and thus bring clarity to the broader question of strategics, there is probably no better case than Foucault's own characterization during his last lectures of the ancient practice of political truth-telling called *parrhēsia*.[77]

It may be true that Foucault's interest in this cultural practice, a practice that consisted of speaking one's mind during the Greek assembly, came from the opposite direction. He postulated it as the first formulation of governmentality (2011:159). And yet, while parrhēsia clearly appears as linked to the whole political structure of ancient democracy in his analysis, the practice itself of this truth-telling does not seem to consist of governing oneself or others – the latter is rather a development that follows the crisis of a political model organized around parrhēsia. Before this democratic crisis and ethico-political transformation that Foucault locates at the start of the fourth century B.C. occurs, parrhēsia simply appears as the prerequisite for a functional government.[78] While later it becomes the very foundation of conduct in Greek culture, for the Prince as much as for the ordinary citizen (see e.g. Foucault 2012:86), in its classical form parrhēsia unquestionably stands for an expression of freedom.

In a sense, parrhēsia was the right to freedom that the citizens of Athens and other city-states possessed by virtue of being born there, the democratic right to speak freely to all the other citizens of the polis and engage in an agonistic politics of rational debate (Foucault 2011:105; 2012:34-35). But that this was a right only meant that a certain number of individuals could venture putting it into practice. This is perhaps why someone like Arendt compares the law of the polis to a "wall" or "inclosure" (1998:63-64; see also 2005:121-130). For the freedom that parrhēsia entails is definitely not one that can be granted or obtained by means of a right. As Foucault remarks to his audience, it does not refer to "the freedom of speech" (Foucault 2011:188). It involves a mode of acting and relating to others and oneself; in precise terms, a "dangerous exercise of freedom" (p.67). The one who spoke frankly in the assembly and told the "truth" was always taking a considerable risk. A truth-teller

is, as Socrates would later on articulate, the one who says what he thinks, in his own ordinary language, and using "no more than the series of words and phrases which occur to him" (p.313). Being this open about one's true thoughts and leaving the art of rhetoric behind represented an act of courage, to the extent that it exposed an unfiltered individual to the reactions of high-ranking citizens, who were in a way his political rivals, and who could be justified to be critical of him and even take extreme measures like ostracize him, exile him or condemn him to death.

It is in the contrast Foucault draws between rhetoric and parrhēsia that the distinction between power and freedom becomes most defined: "rhetorical language is a language chosen, fashioned, and constructed in such a way as to produce its effect on the other person" (p.314). The very purpose of rhetoric is to create a "bond of power," Foucault affirms, through the use of a certain skill and well-defined technique which consists of styling discourse in such a way that it becomes believable and persuasive (2012:14). To be a successful rhetorician one precisely does not need to convey a truth one trusts thus revealing one's inner thoughts, but only to produce a sense of conviction in the listener. It is the art by which one forges "a constraining bond between what is said and the person or persons to whom it is said" (p.13). The parrhēsiastes, on the other hand, practically seeks to break that bond, in the sense that, without risking exposure, he could not be a truth-teller – he could not attach his "signature" to what he says and affirm that his speech belongs to his own opinion rather than being borrowed, through the mastery of discourse, from an agreeable understanding of things. His speech is inherently polemic and localized. If it requires courage it is because it calls him to express what he thinks is true and appropriate in relation to a very specific situation, even if doing so involves putting in danger the very continuity of his immediate relationships (pp.10-14).

Whether the parrhēsiastic act of a citizen was found to be distasteful and offensive or it was rather welcomed, a relationship of freedom would have been initiated. It was the democratic principle born in Athens that all citizens should be able to establish such relationships and gain through them the virtue and right to govern others (Foucault 2011:155-58). That those relationships were made possible thanks to a cultural convention does not mean that they pointed to a calculated form of conduct, that ultimately they belonged to the dimension of power. I delve into this issue in the next section. At this point, I would instead like to draw what I think is a reasonable generalization about what differentiates a relationship of freedom from one of power.

Freedom as a problem. Mirroring Foucault's memorable construct, one could say that there are relationships or at least moments in a relationship that are not about the conduct of conduct but rather about the "reflection of reflection."[79] Freedom would refer to all those human practices that strive to "reflect" an individual's own personal take or "reflection" on a certain matter, regardless of their position vis-à-vis power – whether power is conceived in terms of ideological knowledge, institutional glory, charismatic authority, class hegemony, or some other expression of immediate and recognizable truth. What is reflected in practice will never be an exact mirror image of what one would have wanted to do or say – this is what Butler would call the performative element of our conduct. But this does not necessarily mean that freedom is a kind of surplus of power, the unexpected side of every performance (c.f. Butler 1997). The implication of the performative is rather that, the less calculated an action is, that is, the more open it is to articulate rather than reiterate, the higher the chance is that this action will cost us (see Butler 2005:120-135). Speaking or acting in a way that reflects one's own peculiar reflections is never easy or straightforward. It

threatens the performer with the risk of losing herself in an action that is not fully intelligible to her or anyone else, and, in cases like parrhēsia, of undermining her standing in society in some considerable way.

Instead of referring us to a highly definable "conduct," this definition uses the two meanings of the term "reflection," whose contours in each case are intentionally hazy. In the first term, the allusion is to a certain transparency in behavior that differs from the kind of agendas and desires of control that populate conduct.[80] Yet, what is captured is only a "reflection," a glimpse of meaningfulness, what Arendt would call an "appearance" (see e.g. 1978:21; 1998:179). We need to speak in terms of appearances or "reflections" when we recognize that only "*up to a point* we can choose how to appear to others" and, at times, we are "willing to risk the disclosure" (1978:34; 1998:180, original emphasis). Those moments of freedom, when a known narrative does not guide the instrumentalization of our conduct, may not allow for an objective or clear-cut interpretation of what we are trying to express, but they do suggest to our spectators that there is at stake a distinct way of approaching a situation.[81] That distinct way is in turn marked by the second term, "reflection" in the sense of mental reasoning. The reference is again here non-specific. It does not point to "reflexivity" as some kind of special human capacity in the way many late-twentieth century sociologists did (see Rose 1996a). The difference with "conduct" would not be that in these cases there is more thinking involved. Following Foucault, one can say that there is "thought" in every human practice, regardless of how purposeful or automated it is (1988:155). "Reflection" simply refers us to what a specific individual thinks, to a precise locus, rather than to an immediately recognizable and therefore generic calculation for conduct.

The fact that this definition accepts that every individual can have a particular way of seeing the world due to her partial position in it does associate it with the ontological view of Arendt, who, similarly drawing on a Socratic contrast with rhetoric, invites us to acknowledge the unique standpoint of every human being, the perspectival "*dokei moi*" or "it-seems-to-me" (1978:21; 2005:12-15). Yet, this association does not make this definition reliant on an existential phenomenology or fundamental faculty. It rather assumes that human experience has been historically organized around different kinds of problems, and that, at least in our culture, one of those problems has been that of how to act in a way that reflects one's own reflections – just as another one has been that of how to adequately direct conduct. This problematization of freedom has existed at least since the origins of democracy with parrhēsia, when being vocal about what one truly thought became a cardinal political task. Nevertheless, it must be noted that the way I have chosen to define it does capture "freedom" as the exact opposite of "power" – which makes this definition more and, perhaps at the same time, less arbitrary.

A relationship of freedom requires the presence of power precisely in the same way a relationship of power requires that of freedom. If the exercise of power consists in directing the conduct of free individuals who could just as well act otherwise, the exercise of freedom consists in challenging the perception of powerful subjects who could just as well take their own understanding for granted. For freedom to become a problem there must be a minimum of – material, not relational – power, a risk in articulating one's tentative thoughts. Every time something is left unsaid in a conversation due to the fear of the reactions and repercussions that saying so could cause (e.g. looking out of place, being yield at, losing status, receiving a disciplinary response, etc.) is a time when the opportunity for a

relationship of freedom has been lost. Without the feeling that there is a certain level of risk in the way one would be perceived if one were to express oneself openly and without calculation, freedom is no longer a problem – or at least one's reflection of reflection becomes a given.

I explain freedom in this way in order to show how close its definition mirrors Foucault's conception of power, who for example states that,

> power relations are possible only insofar as the subjects are free. If one of them were completely at the other's disposal and became his thing, an object on which he could wreak boundless and limitless violence, there wouldn't be any relations of power (1997:292).

But in spite of the parallel that I have drawn with Foucault's mode of description – the way both power and freedom could be said to ontologically require each other's presence – the truth is that, even in the extreme states of absolute skepticism and absolute domination a certain problem, in each case, remains. One could say that the history of power as the conduct of conduct actually begins with the problem of the sovereign who, having complete authority and control over its subjects, still does not know what to order. For a king it may be unproblematic to wield power, in the sense that its application is likely to reach its aim and subjugate the target to its will. Yet, the problem that started with thinkers like Machiavelli is that of what the orientation of this will should be, the principle of its rationality (Foucault 2007b:242-48; Hirschman 1997:33-35; c.f. Dean 2013:71-74). Directing conduct really creates, then, two problems of calculation, one regarding its tactics (a "how" problem) and another one regarding its programmes (a "what" problem).[82]

In the case of freedom, to start with, the problem in general is not one of calculation but one of courage – although not because exposing one's reflections solely depends on the willpower of the individual. There will always be contexts that encourage more, or less, this problematization of experience (as Arendt for example argued, in an authoritarian regime the citizen completely loses her capacity to intervene and express herself through freedom: there is an "impotence or complete powerlessness" that cannot be reproached [2003:43]). Nevertheless, it is still the case that all relationships of freedom stem from a certain individual skepticism and that they cannot come into existence without a measure of courage. One may have infinitely imaginative and incisively critical "reflection," but unless the risk to express and embody that reflection is taken, that critical purview cannot give rise to a relation of freedom. Someone within a social movement relates to others in terms of freedom, for example, not the moment she finds herself in her own mind to be fully convinced of a different way of judging things, next to others who also have come to that understanding. A relation of freedom would rather appear in those moments she displays a certain courage to risk uncertainty, when she is confronted with others who have a settled view of things and, in deciding to communicate or manifest her more or less elaborate skepticism, she knows she is exposing herself to the possibility of seeming unrecognizable, unintelligible, unbearable, even to herself.

While the ancient "truth-teller" is probably the best figure to represent the problem that is posed by the reflection of reflection, one cannot say that an archetypical figure like "the revolutionary" captures well the specific problem that remains in a state of absolute skepticism. Revolutionaries do get to relate to others in a radically open field but, as Arendt precisely complains, their challenge, the

foundation of freedom, has often been confused with that of a programmer who must decide the course of society for everyone else; in short, with the "what" problem of power. "The fieldworker" is a better figure, I believe, for it points with precision to the kind of courage that is still needed when the materiality of power is absent (its normative force as well as its disciplinary threat). We have found ways to explain why in contemporary life, in this "humanitarian mess," the ethico-political frustration of a humanitarian can lead to a state of radical skepticism, in which she has such moral liberty and flexibility that reflecting her own reflections in practice stops being dangerous. But what the fieldworker figure specifies is that, even without the risk caused by the presence of power, the skeptical humanitarian still engages in a relationship of freedom, with herself and others, due to the courage that it takes to act with uncertainty, without a reliable common ground. In a skeptical scenario, one must have the courage to find a truth by oneself, adopt an exploratory attitude and deal with the incipiency of meaningful practice (see Chapter 1).

5.i.e. Cultural strategics

Having a definition of skeptical freedom like the one above, based on the courageous confrontation of power and the autonomous exploration of truth, still does not allow us to base an analytical level of "strategics" on the idea that all relationships of freedom are valuable in themselves. Rather, it allows us to appreciate the specific productivity that is relevant to freedom and the ways it can acquire cultural value when these relationships come to have an effect that is socially graspable. An inquiry at the level of strategics cannot really advance without grounding itself on a certain cultural context. Foucault may have made some

abstract suggestions about a constitutive freedom to intervene, but the only time he was close to explore it systematically, he did it through a tangible practice like parrhēsia – which, he clarified, without being "integrated in a clearly identifiable and localizable way within a particular conceptual system of philosophical doctrine," was still conspicuous as a cultural "theme" (2011:45).

Following Foucault, while also drawing on an author that has payed much more attention to the enactment of freedom such as Arendt, Isin for example tries to simplify the question of strategics to a distinction between "rupture" and "convention," suggesting that creative acts of citizenship can only be investigated through disruptive events "developing," as he writes, "a vocabulary or analytics for understanding acts when subjects *fail* to follow conventions" (2012:122, original emphasis). He traces the capacity of freedom to produce an intervention in the field of justice to those "actions that bring about events as rupture in the order of things" (2012:126). But from an angle of cultural strategics, Arendt rather appears as a pioneer in the methodological project of grasping the way relationships of freedom with a certain potential for intervention can become institutionalized or at least thematized through the formation of shared conventions.[83] This is what we earlier identified in her text *On revolution*, an effort at articulating a criterion of effectivity that was immanent to action, following the premise that the expression of freedom that revolutionary practice embodies in Western culture already has a discernible principle embedded in it. She elaborates upon this premise at some point:

> The absolute from which the beginning is to derive its own validity and which must save it, as it were, from its inherent arbitrariness is the principle which, together with it, makes its appearance in the world … [Our language] still derives 'principle' from the Latin *principium* and therefore suggests this solution for the otherwise unsolvable

problem of an absolute in the realm of human affairs which is relative by definition (2006:205).

While a relation of freedom signals a kind of "rupture," "beginning" or irruptive event, constituting, as it does, a kind of challenge to the expected sequence of social interaction and conduct of the self, the type of irruption that it creates is not always "arbitrary," as Arendt eloquently puts it. At times, a culture can develop a convention that manages to explain the effectivity or "principle" that comes with it.[84] A "convention," in this sense, does not entail what a norm does. It is not a doctrinal boundary of inclusions and exclusions, a moral condition that is promised to those who adhere to a certain form of behavior. It rather refers to the measure of a difficult accomplishment. As a shared point of reference, it evokes an image of what those relationships look like when they have been successful. But it cannot guarantee that any such relationship, since they are all based on the explosive expressiveness of freedom, will be productive. In brief, instead of providing an ethical "absolute" – a norm that applies to all cases, even when said norm is recognized to be socially constructed – these conventions offer a strategic "criterion of effectivity" – a guiding idea or parameter for the kinds of interventions that can be effective in constructing a certain social scenario out of freedom.

To show how conventional a criterion of effectivity for a relationship of freedom can be we can take the example of "civility," at least in the form Sennett (1992) historically recovers it.[85] Sennett relates civility back to the kind of public game that allowed strangers to interact in the first truly diverse urban centers of the eighteenth century, like London or Paris, at a comfortable distance (p.17). The convention of "civility" consists for him in the wearing of a mask which incites strangers to fully engage with each other but in a kind of impersonal manner (p.264). That mask was

for example created at the time by dressing in an overly theatrical form in the street or by adopting a very stylized form of speech in meeting places like the coffeehouse. In both cases, the enactment of a certain public personae allowed strangers to talk to each other openly, expressively, in a kind of fictional mode, unburdened by the frictions, fears and general wariness that come with any difference in occupational rank or social status.

Implicit in Sennett's characterization of civility is an understanding of the individual as a subject capable of relating to others successfully through freedom. "Convention," he says, referring to the social rituals and verbal cues that signal and drive the embodiment of civility, "is itself the single most expressive tool of public life" (p.37). It facilitates "the expression of certain creative powers which all human beings possess potentially – the powers of play" (p.264). He uses play and playacting as the explanatory references for this shared capacity for free expression. Play of the kind children perform among themselves, which as a general rule includes differential levels of skill dependent on age, size and so on, is guided, he suggests, by the respect of rules that were found at some point to be satisfying for the enjoyment of all the players involved (p.319). Play, in this rather quasi-natural model presented by Sennett, highlights the crucial role that situational rules can have in social interaction. They make "risk-taking" possible, while "mastery over others is put off" (pp.319-20). In this sense, the coffeehouse for instance appears as the field for a game that is contained to itself, in which the "rules" or conventions of sociability have been redefined (p.322):

> Inside the coffeehouse, if the gentleman had decided to sit down, he was subject to the free, unbidden talk of his social inferior… As men sit at the long table, telling stories of great elaborateness … they have only to use their eyes and tune their ears to "place" the

> stories or descriptions as coming from one with the point of view of a petty-minded petty clerk, an obsequious courtier, or a degenerate younger son of a wealthy merchant. But these acts of placing the character of the speaker must never intrude upon the words these men use to each other … a frown goes round the table if someone makes an allusion that may be applied to the "person of any one of his hearers" (p.82).

Sennett's treatment of civility illustrates a number of things. Firstly, it helps to clarify that the challenge of expressing oneself freely is unrelated to the idea that there is an authentic self that one can strive to display by avoiding all social formalities and embodying one's genuine motivations. The reflection of one's reflexive efforts does not have to allude to a "quest for personality" (p.6) or even, as in the agoras of Ancient Greece and beyond, for "ethical differentiation" (Foucault 2012:49). It can appear through the ordinary use of a social mask that takes focus away from the self. Secondly, these forms of civility show how quotidian and familiar a scene of freedom can be – how ingrained into a culture a convention of cultural strategics can become, functioning on an everyday basis, casually and indiscriminately between strangers. Finally, and most important, Sennett's study demonstrates how a convention like civility can capture the success of a social scene in which a relationship of freedom has become productive, establishing, for example, an engaging conversation between individuals who, while having a differential of power, agree to let the other one talk unreservedly and leave unmentioned one another's rank and status.

Sennett probably brushed off the many imaginable occasions in which the powerful would not have actually accepted to play this game once they had heard what their subordinates had to say, or it may be that the convention became so agreeable and generalized that the game was for the most part successful. But what

is revealing, in any case, is that civility points, as a measure or criterion, to a situational game rather than an absolute norm, to the acceptance of a certain set of mutual rules rather than the tyranny of a fixed standard that separates winners from losers.[86] There is a strange productivity when we observe human relations without the linear lens of power. While we would usually expect from a "criterion of effectivity" to tell us when someone "wins" or succeeds in reaching the endpoint in a certain game, "civility" inside an eighteenth-century coffeehouse tells us that there is a certain effectivity simply when a game of freedom gets to be played.

Once again, it is useful to go back to Foucault and his analysis of parrhēsia if we want to elucidate this counterintuitive production of effectivity – even if it will remain unknown the extent to which he had the specificity of freedom in mind (see Foucault 2011:67-70). The practice of speaking truthfully to someone else, whether that someone was a Prince or an ordinary citizen, could not be effective, Foucault emphasizes, unless that other person accepted to play the parrhesiastic game:

> The true game of parrhēsia will be established on the basis of this kind of pact which means that if the parrhesiast demonstrates his courage by telling the truth despite and regardless of everything, the person to whom this parrhēsia is addressed will have to demonstrate his greatness of soul by accepting being told the truth" (2012:12).

Parrhēsia can be said to be, for this reason, a cultural convention that marks the kind of relationship in which the expression of freedom has not only been manifested, but has also been reciprocated, at the very least with a listening gesture. Parrhēsia cannot be a predictive criterion that allows individuals to calculate their actions so as to reach a certain outcome. It can only designate the event by which risky actions acquire an actual effectivity through a certain "retroaction" (Foucault 2011:68). As a

cultural term, it served to make reference to the successful establishment of a pact or game with a powerful subject, but only after a certain courageous player had found himself in a dramatically open situation, faced with binding yet poorly codified risks and effects (p.62-68).

In the case of relationships of freedom, any criterion of effectivity has to be retroactive. And the reason is not that these relationships are bound to be creative, and the "truly creative," as White (2008:55) suggests, can only be gathered "in retrospect." After all, the calculations that govern relationships of power can also be creative, since they tend to produce – as governmentality scholars have often stressed – applications that differ from the plan, which then feed back onto the understanding and refinement of the original model. A relationship of freedom is simply productive in a different way to one of power (in which what matters is just to realize a calculation, for which "productive" simply means effecting a certain programme). The effectivity of freedom is possible, even in those cases when a more or less vague cultural criterion exists for the situation in question, thanks to the risk involved in advancing that kind of relationship and not in spite of it. Many individuals who courageously find themselves in dramatic situations never manage to produce a relationship of freedom, even if they follow a procedure similar to those who do succeed. What could be called the parrhēsiastic game of listening to the other's truth just does not work out on every occasion, and on the occasions it does work out, it cannot be said to have resulted from a well-executed maneuver. A relationship of freedom always constitutes an event in itself.

Likewise, even if both freedom and power relations have a productivity that can only be checked with a criterion at the end, after the fact, this still does not mean that

in both cases their effectivity is in some sense "retroactive." Power mainly works through the meticulous calculation of programmes that are then applied or "rendered technical," whereas, even if a culture has developed a clear measure for certain relationships of freedom like "truth-telling" or "civility," that measure would have always had a retroactive formation. It would have definitely needed to be articulated at some point rather than planned. Parrhēsia, for instance, only became a serious object of problematization in Ancient Greece after its actual expression in practice as a form of political intervention had gone into crisis (Foucault 2011:193). While Foucault finds earlier traces of this theme and pre-existing connotations for the word parrhēsia in the Greek literature, the conceptualization of such a possibility, of someone courageously using his freedom in political settings and achieving a productive result, only truly surfaces with the death of Pericles, who comes to represent its ideal example (pp.71-184).

With his late studies on *The courage of truth* (2012), as he titled his last series of lectures, Foucault seemed to be attempting to pose, for the first time, the question of what he precisely called "strategics" on its own, without the need of a universal value. He departed from tangible expressions of freedom, with which he probably thought he could avoid giving the practice of collaborative intervention a content in advance (as examined earlier, a relation of power in contrast demands a highly defined moral orientation, an answer to the question of "what should one and those others one can also act upon do?"). He, however, could not entirely foresee the possibility of something like a relationship of freedom (see Foucault 2007a:75-76). And running out of time, rather reluctantly, one could say, he must have felt compelled in some of his last interviews to return his inquiry to the question of ethics or "what is right" (see Dean 2010a:46-50). Confined to an ontological horizon

of power, all he was in a position to do is provide an untested generalization, imagining, in a rather normative vein, that our freedom to react and rethink has a constant critical value.

Nevertheless, when parrhēsia is seen from a less restrictive ontological perspective, as it was explored here, the reflection of reflection can suddenly be considered to be a dimension of experience as ingrained in Western culture as the conduct of conduct, and the question of "what constitutes an intervention" is able to acquire autonomy and specificity. Only in rare occasions, courage would have translated into effective and ultimately transformative collaboration. One can imagine that, most of the time, an embodied skepticism would have appeared through bursts of life without achieving a critical productivity; at times, perhaps, it would have shaken the continuity of mundane places but without still acquiring a widely recognizable value. And yet, since the effectivity of such relationships can only be appreciated in restrospect, it is also conceivable that, in some cases, in which the skeptical practice of freedom could be said to have attained considerable momentum in society, its due political significance and capacity for intervention can run the risk of remaining ungraspable simply for lacking a shared convention. The moment certain productive expressions of freedom are being dismissed, in spite of having a perceptible value in the eyes of many who in growing numbers are attracted to their enactment, is a moment that calls for analytical elaboration at the level of cultural strategics.

Part II. Symbiosis and the Consistency of a Circuit

In nature, one finds many examples of serendipitous encounters that end up producing a consistent circuit of collaboration. For instance, certain species of ants and trees have found themselves deriving such benefits from their co-presence that they have come to develop traits whose evolutionary advantage has the sole purpose of cooperation. The head of some ants, for example, is able to act as an exclusive key for their passage to hollow twigs, for these twigs have an entrance hole that acts as a "lock" corresponding perfectly in shape and size (Douglas 2010:93). Such a cooperative trait would have only evolved after time, of course. It would have been the eventual consequence of a random interaction that happened to be particularly collaborative. Ants at some point would have discovered in these trees a good habitat for their nests, which among other things supplies them with nutritious extrafloral nectar, while at the same time the trees would have started to enjoy the protection that a patrolling army of ants can inadvertently provide against such threats as herbivores and fungal infections. In time, each species developed or, rather, emphasized its cooperative traits assuring a tighter cycle. And yet, the sustainability of their relationship is never something that nature can guarantee as such – an ant cheater with a similar head shape and poor patrolling habits in fact exists for this example (p.66), and there is phylogenetic proof that such associations between ant colonies and plants have broken down in the past (p.51). A symbiosis is always open to disruptions. Its consistency is not a crafted achievement but, essentially, a sustained convergence of conditions. It is nothing more than the meeting point of two or more individual trajectories in the context of specific environmental factors.

The symbiotic pattern, as I will argue in this part of the chapter, challenges our understanding of consistency in human collaboration, suggesting that it depends on neither its calculability (through, say, governmental policy), its predictability (through, for instance, a one-dimensional model of exchange) or its agreeability (through some kind of all-inclusive moral pact). Symbiosis is an extremely familiar and, for that very reason, relevant explanatory concept to articulate a cultural strategics for skeptical practices of freedom. It is a notion that, in spite of its familiarity, has not received systematic attention in contemporary social theory, usually making a quick appearance to describe little more than a "win-win" situation (see e.g. Wright 2010, ch. 11).[87] Part of the reason for this has to do, as I will briefly review, with the observational ambiguities and moral overtones that from its conception have surrounded this phenomenon. But at a time when biologists have started to identify symbiosis as a well-defined, first-order natural process, one that is so persistent and generalized that it could be called a "habit" (Douglas 2010), it becomes possible to draw an analogy stable enough to be useful for the purposes of conceptualization in the field of humanitarian intervention.[88]

I do not believe that using a biological construct to illuminate a certain form of human collaboration automatically leads to the adoption of one or other moral naturalism (Escobar 1999; Blencowe 2013). In what could seem to be a similar analysis, Durkheim once evoked the symbiotic principle, at least as it can be found in Darwin, to explain the progressive division of labor in society. Noting that the possibility of diversification and speciation is what can guarantee in nature the coexistence of increasingly dense populations, he deduced: "Men are subject to the same law. In the same town different occupations can coexist without being forced into a position where they harm one another, for they are pursuing different

objectives" (p.209). If the Darwinian image of countless species of plants living in the same piece of turf close together allows Durkheim to postulate a symbiotic diversity as the cause for the division of labour, it is because he goes along with Darwin in assuming that the life of individuals is defined by "the struggle for existence," and the life of societies, by "the centrifugal influence of competition" (p.217). In what follows, the use I make of natural metaphors goes in the completely opposite direction. What symbiosis expresses, once Darwin is reduced to its proper proportions, is in fact a form of collaboration that has no determinate "cause," the lack of necessity in the form of things, the way sustainable coexistence can respond to a phenomenon of convergence.[89]

5.ii.a. The criterion of symbiosis

The relatively recent notion of symbiosis has helped to specify in our culture the form of collaboration that can take place in nature between many different species. The phenomenon has been an object of fascination since Ancient times, but its conceptualization as a unique and differentiable natural mechanism is particularly modern and, some biologists would even say, still a work in progress. In what is considered to be the first observation of a symbiotic relationship, Herodotus was for example trying to provide evidence for the pre-Socratic conception of a "balance-of-nature:"

> The bird is of service to the crocodile and lives, in consequence, in the greatest amity with him; for when the crocodile comes ashore and lies with his mouth wide open … the bird hops in and swallows the leeches. The crocodile enjoys this, and never, in consequence, hurts the bird (Heredotus II, 68 cited in Egerton 1973:326).

By drawing the basics of what would become a classic scene of symbiosis between the Nile crocodile and a species of plover, Herodotus's particular intention was to reflect upon what he thought was a superintending force in the universe, one that would be able to maintain the animal populations of prey and predators in balance (Egerton 1973:325). And yet, when a couple of thousand years later in the rather secular late 1870s the notion of symbiosis surfaced, taking shape in biological theory and discourse, the expectations that were placed upon it were no less ambitious. While the pioneers who coined the term defined it broadly as a relation or situation of "coexistence" or "living together" that simply could at times be considered to be "mutualistic" (Sapp 1994:6-7), the connotation of "mutualism" is the one that had the most impact upon history as well as their contemporaries. Whether as an argument of natural theology, social anthropology or evolutionary theory, the mutualism associated with symbiosis became in many instances the key antithesis to counter the "post-Romantic" attitudes towards nature – Hobbesian, Malthusian, Darwinian – which came to populate the late nineteenth century (see Worster 1977, ch. 6).

The influential idea that mutualism could apply to biological descriptions had been introduced in the early 1870s by Pierre-Joseph van Beneden. He had basically appropriated a term characteristic of post-revolutionary France and applied it to scenes like the one described by Herodotus, in an effort to prove that, as per an organizing divine providence, the natural world could not have just evolved based on a ruthless competitive drive (Sapp 1994:18-20). His few lectures and isolated writings on the topic appeared a couple of years after the experience of the Paris Commune, an event considered often as the last substantial effort in the mutualization of the workers' movement (see e.g. Defert 1991:227-232). But by the turn of the century, the influence is even stronger, and it is possible to find natural

theorists fully embracing the French spirit of mutualism found among revolutionary thinkers like Proudhon, whose political writings were already filled with reflections about animal sociality like: "The elephant knows how to help his companion out of the ditch into which the latter has fallen" (1970:228). Peter Kropotkin would in particular produce a rather radical, Russian take on evolution, based on the proposition that "those animals that practiced mutual aid were much more 'fit'" (Sapp 1994:22).

The specter of mutualism thus dominated the whole initial reception and popularization of our modern symbiotic terminology, and it has continued to do so practically until this day. The ensuing debate became largely about whether non-human organisms could actually cooperate, whether it was in their nature to be something other than thieves and parasites and whether every symbiosis was not in reality a hostile bond (Sapp 2004:1050-52). As the historian Jan Sapp has detected, its reception was strongly politicized. Even though an influential author like Kropotkin had not even mentioned the word symbiosis in his works, and had focused for the most part on ant colonies and examples of cooperation between members of the same species, the discussion of this collaborative phenomenon remained for a long time reduced to the morally-charged idea of "mutual aid" (1994, esp. 23, 207).

The way I adopt the criterion of symbiosis here rather follows the value-neutral definition that is now becoming prevalent in contemporary biology and that, in its minimal form, is recognizable to anyone in contemporary culture: "an association between different species from which all participating organisms benefit" (Douglas 2010:5-6). The value of adapting this notion to human affairs may not be perceivable at first. There are after all many types of "associations" that are thought to produce

benefits for all the parties involved – market exchange, reciprocal gift-giving, democratic citizenship, and so on. But there are a number of elements that are unique about the biological pattern of symbiosis. My suggestion is that from those unique elements one can start to imagine human collaboration in new terms, namely, as a *co-enhancement of capabilities achieved in the context of a contingent relation constituted by practices of freedom.*

Symbiosis describes a *co-enhancement* rather than any type of give and take, mutualistic or otherwise. An ant and a tree, just as a bird and a crocodile, are not "exchanging" things. Their behaviors just happen to benefit someone else (c.f. Sennett 2012:72-86). A symbiotic characterization cannot suggest any thoughts on intentionality since, as a wide-ranging biological conceptualization, it needs to apply to organisms that have no foresight. Microbes, as it has been proven and accepted since the 1960s and 70s, are particularly prone to symbiotic mergers – or "endosymbiosis" – and would have played a central role in evolution (see Margulis 1999). That non-human beings can lack foresight, however, does not mean that they do not react in their own particular ways and make choices of their own. As an influential voice in this area like Lynn Margulis has emphasized, even the simplest of bacteria display circumstantial preferences (Margulis and Sagan 1995:218-19; see also Connolly 2011:24). It is because of the basic freedom that exists in every natural being, and not the lack thereof, that a phenomenon of convergence like symbiosis can take place. Any such collaboration is simply one of the possible results that a "chance encounter" between species can have (see Douglas 2010:46).

A symbiosis is therefore constituted by what in human terms one could call *practices of freedom*, by parties with their own trajectories and ways of reacting to the

world that cannot be simply deemed to be either individualistic or altruistic, competitive or cooperative. As a precursor of endosymbiotic theory, Ivan Wallin, argued a long time ago, it would be teleological to say that all symbiotic relationships are either mutualistic or, as was a common argument in his time, parasitic (Sapp 1994:134). Natural selection applies to this phenomenon; it is what ultimately can explain why choosing certain behaviors that are "symbiotic" can turn out to be beneficial for a species or an individual. But those behaviors are never done with an eventual symbiosis in mind. They just occur and take shape at certain times and we can witness the successful product of those choices. Both symbiotic and antagonistic scenarios are, as it were, effects without a cause, effects of a relationship constituted by practices of freedom. Natural selection applies regardless of the behavioral routes individuals take: competitive or cooperative. An "alliance" is oftentimes what endows a species with more fitness for survival (Douglas 2010:2, 12, 137).

The measure of symbiosis is one that is external, one that, regardless of the drives and modes of reasoning that are involved in a situation, is able to assess the collaborative effects that appear *in the context* of a relationship or interaction thanks to a widely agreed-upon scale of assessment. Only under this condition can one speak of "mutually" beneficial relationships. As current researchers like Angela Douglas are quick to clarify, any specific study or determination of symbiosis can only refer to "the interaction between the organisms, not the organisms themselves" (2010:8). In the case of biology, natural selection can fill in the content of what being collaborative means. One can say that the "fitness" of two individuals is simultaneously enhanced without having to say anything about their mutualism as particular species. In many cases, in fact, the benefits that an organism derives do

not even come from anything the other party does. They just appear as a result of the relationship. It is as though certain organisms are simply "tuned to function well in the context of the symbiosis" (Douglas 2010:169-170). And, for example, in many others, although the collaborative effect may come directly from something the other organism stands to offer, the benefits each party gains are "cost-free" for the partner. No extra effort or sacrifice is needed. The impact on fitness is all positive (Douglas 2010:60). Rather than suggesting that organisms can be considerate or "mutualistic," all that a language of symbiosis can really say is that they are *being*.

For the application of symbiosis to humanitarian theory, instead of fitness, one can use *capabilities* as the baseline, being a common framework that, since Amartya Sen (1999) conceived it, has been increasingly adopted and accepted in politics and academia as a minimal understanding of human development (for a review of the relevance of this framework from a Foucauldian angle see Saul Tobias [2005]).[90] As in nature, this baseline would allow one to identify cases that have "benefits" for all the individuals partaking in an encounter. Taken too literally, however, the analogy would lead to complicated judgments. Deciding whether certain relationships are symbioses is inherently difficult, for they may improve capabilities that are not "central" or significant enough, or they may even involve "tragic choices" about humanitarian priorities, if it is the case that they increase certain capabilities while reducing certain others (Nussbaum 2011:28, 37). This problem of cost-benefit calculation is prominent among biologists, and yet, even in their case, where one could imagine it is more straightforward to measure things like survival rate, reproductive output, pace of growth and the like, it is thought that "the variability of real associations" is "a fundamental problem" (Douglas 2010:6), and "the complexity of the biotic interactions is overwhelming" (Sapp 2004:1053). The point of

extrapolating this criterion, it must be left clear, is essentially heuristic. I do not intend here or expect others to start measuring real human symbioses in practice. Evoking this criterion is bringing to the fore a different understanding of intervention practices.

I envision such a criterion becoming applicable to the relations between certain clusters of individuals – volunteer tourists and their host organizations, fair trade consumers and fair trade producers, community service learners and social enterprises, companies with corporate social responsibility and their orbiting community segments. These are cases that would usually be considered to be marginal in terms of human solidarity – fleeting, unreliable, inconsequential. Against this common presumption, the criterion of symbiosis leads one to recognize the circuit of collaboration that can emerge and subsist through *contingent relations*. For biologists themselves, grasping the effectivity of such relations has taken a long time. Ecologists as well as evolutionary theorists dismissed for almost a century the stability of the phenomenon (Sapp 1994:200), even though their arguments for doing so directly contradicted each other (Douglas 2010:12). The difficulty in appropriating this concept lies in the way collaboration cannot be deduced in symbiotic cases from anything other than its own existence. An encounter, for example, between the same two partner species may be symbiotic in certain circumstances and not necessarily in others (Douglas 2010:8). Biologists have attempted to elaborate on the standard features or "definition" of this phenomenon, but have continually run into the problem of its containment (Sapp 1994). To this day, beyond saying that it involves mutual benefits between species that cannot be called "mutualists," they have only been able to add that the relation must be persistent enough. And even then, they are forced to acknowledge that:

> there is no minimal residence time that can be used meaningfully as a criterion for symbiosis. In other words, it is biologically unrealistic to create a simple dichotomy based on duration of contact between relationships that are, and are not, symbioses (Douglas 2010:11).

5.ii.b. Effective by-products

At a certain point, Ancient Greeks came to understand the care of the city, and of others in general, as a by-product of the "care of the self" – collaboration as a by-product of the practices of ethical intervention that citizens in the polis conducted based on the meaningfulness of their own lives, tasks and selves (Foucault 1997:287). Christianity would eventually invert this understanding of ethics in which the self, as a being of autonomous and peaceful reflection, appears as the telos of a moral life. But, at least for a number of centuries, the maintenance of collaboration among fellow human beings would have been understood in Western culture as the "correlative effect" of individual practices of freedom (Foucault 2004:192; see also 2011:273). Symbiosis, in a post-Christian world, is a challenging conception. For it similarly articulates a way of understanding the collaborative state as a by-product of a relationship of freedom.

In a sense, symbiosis is an immediately acceptable proposition. It refers to nothing else than "mutual benefit," which we could say, following Charles Taylor (2002), amounts to the core moral imperative in our modern social imaginary. But, in another sense, its bareness makes it problematic. The very same fact, that it characterizes nothing but a result of mutual benefit, makes it dependent on deeply localist methods. It signals a mode of intervention that gives individuals absolute latitude to experiment and freely react to contemporary humanitarian problems on

their own, from the humble scale of the local level. There are at least two foreseeable "logistical" difficulties that current social critics would find in the way this proposed criterion tackles the issue of macro-effectivity. I would like to address them with an empirical example, before placing symbiosis side-by-side more conventional frameworks in the next two sections.

With the ironic title "Think locally, act globally" (2008), Carrier's critical essay on ethical consumption raises both of the difficulties I have in mind. By inverting this well-known slogan, Carrier puts into question, on the one hand, whether it is true that the everyday humanitarians that buy fair trade coffee or engage in ecotourism can actually "think globally" from their narrow position in society. In his view, the complexity of critical global situations is simply illegible from such a local angle. Individuals are largely informed by companies, NGOs and institutions whose survival depends on recruiting followers – "systematic processes are at work that make it unlikely that purchasers will be sufficiently knowledgeable to assess more or less ethical states in the world" (p.40). On the other hand, he rejects the idea that we ever just "act locally" when the market is somehow involved. With every monetary transaction the logic and values of the market are deepened, its global reach extended a little bit more. Each local act of ethical consumption "effectively elevates the economy to the prime vehicle for affecting change" (p.46). In a concise way, then, Carrier's ironic slogan reveals the two sources of hesitation that would surround a localist notion of social effectivity like symbiosis, both repeatedly encountered in our inquiry: "legibility" and "complicity."

It may be true that in symbiotic relations, collaboration does not occur simply because there is a motivation or plan to collaborate.[91] Carrier's suspicions about an

encroaching market mentality would seem to be confirmed, in this sense. In spite of the mutually beneficial effect of this type of interactions, the parties are not there just for the sake of collaboration or, to be precise, while they may be interested in cooperation, the success of their encounter is not reducible to a matter of mutuality. It is a complementarity that is rather found, stumbled upon, and there are always peculiar motivations and personalized orientations that feed into the continuing existence of such serendipitous entanglements. That collaboration is only a by-product of symbiosis, however, does not mean that this mode of intervention can be simply said to be governed by a more or less inadvertent individualism and, ultimately, the market. To judge the quality and reach of these interactions, one rather needs to apprehend the non-biopolitical kind of effectivity that can be expected from them. Consider the way one of the participant-ethnographers made sense of her volunteer experience in India, when I asked her to elaborate on some of her posts:

> Like in the first week, I realized this kind of work could be done by anyone. We come with the idea that we are going to be useful. We are selected for our, you know, there is selection criteria: there's this, there's that, and you get there, and it's like, this is actually bullshit. This could be actually done (the putting together of the book) sitting at home, in the computer.
>
> She is in another office, emailed me three files and said "that's all you have to do." So I was like, you're kidding, I have twelve weeks in this office and you've emailed me and I don't actually have to be here. And we paid how much? And I start to resent the organization and the work because it was just crap. We found out that the books that we were meant to be working on, these English educational books, were not even going to be used and were not really needed. *So, I was, "what a scam!" And I started to be like, "why*

am I doing this?" And I had to think, well, I'm in a way, indirectly, donating funds to this charity or NGO, and that is a good thing I suppose.

Then, when I changed projects (I took ----'s project, because she didn't want to do it) and I was going on the buses, going to the schools… that was like my own private tour. That's how I started to interpret it. And we would go to the schools and have these experiences, and we would be in the depths of India in places where they have never seen a foreigner and in places that I would never have seen otherwise. ------ was my translator, and it was just so special.

So, even though the work itself is still crap… (because with a translator [who simply tells you what to write down all the time] … there was no point to even have me there. It was stupid. I thought, they made up this stuff, called them "internships", fluffed it up and got kids, you know… to go there and pay for them too, who've even been going there for a couple of years. I was like, what's the point? You go there thinking you're doing a pretty good thing, something that... it's quite humbling). *So I made it less about going, [and more about] the importance of how I felt I was contributing, like make it mine, do the work, get the stuff done I needed to do; and it was less and less about the actual work, the actual volunteering, and more about my experience of India through the medium of the volunteer internship.*

(Interview 14th of July, emphasis added)

In spite of having high expectations and an explicit desire of intervention, the volunteer tourist faces many obstacles, as Carrier would expect, and a result like "symbiosis" is far from automatic. In the above case, she arrived at her placement thinking she "was doing a pretty good thing." But, rapidly, a number of doubts overshadowed her sense of initiative, many of them pointing directly to the omnipresence of the market – "what a scam!" "And we paid how much?" The mundanity of the assigned tasks put into question her entire perception, not only of what she had decided to do, but also of her host and sending organizations. She started to resent the very efforts that had gone into making out of her journey a

practice of intervention, like going through a selection process. The first thing to note, then, is that a volunteer tourist can rather easily perceive how complicated her local position is in the field of ethical consumption. The problem of illegibility is not one that is foreign to the humanitarian, whose skeptical self I would say is, in neoliberal conditions, always ready to recognize the many interests and agendas at play in social scenarios that still involve monetary transactions.

A few important things come to light once it is recognized that ethical market actors like this one take as their very point of departure that a "human economy" cannot be blindly trusted. Skeptical humanitarians would know that, unfortunately, they can only "think locally." If they decide to act, they must do so while knowing that they cannot resort to a moral guidepost to justify their displacements and investments, or reduce a global issue to a single practical measure by simply saying that "it's quite humbling." This participant even suspected that her "work could be done by anyone" or that she might not "actually have to be there." Being so easily replaceable, her mere presence could not have great ethico-political significance in itself. In frustrating contexts like this one, humanitarians have to adapt their understanding of effectivity to the reality of moral exposure.

Symbiosis only acquires relevance once it is accepted that, in certain conditions, there is no easy link to totalizing answers and actors depart from what is locally graspable. The idea that it is actually possible to "think globally" – from which Carrier seems to depart – avoids the growing problems, which occur at every level of knowledgeability, of limited information and creative judgment (see Chapter 3). In the case of this volunteer tourist, she was forced to leave behind the presumption of truth about the politics of intervention. She had to ask questions – "what's the

point?" "Why am I doing this?" – that only she herself could eventually satisfy. She could not trust the institutions that were involved or the work that she was doing, which meant that she had no clear-cut understanding available of how she could or should collaborate. Intervening could not mean anymore doing something evidently good, selfless or heroic. She was suddenly free to intervene, in a position to approach her experience in her own terms – "that's how I started to interpret it," "more about the importance of how I felt I was contributing, like make it mine."

To some extent, she may have acted through the market, but she was also quickly frustrated by it. If she stayed in India and got "the stuff done [she] needed to do," it was because of the complementarity that surfaced once everything had lost meaning. The encounter between this participant-ethnographer and her local host became mediated by something else than collaboration or exchange. She knew she was "indirectly donating" some funds and perhaps adding some menial labor, but what came to sustain their relationship was "less [her] volunteering and more [her] experience of India." The collaboration between these two parties was actually, in the last instance, unexpected. It became possible thanks to a sudden change of circumstances (taking over a task that someone else "didn't want to do") and her eventual realization that "it was like [her] own private tour," for doing simple volunteer tasks with a translator as a companion "was just so special." The market had made it possible for these two remote humanitarian actors to interact. Yet, even with such skepticism in place and by-products like funding, on the one hand, and touring, on the other, it is still not clear at the end that their interaction was solely the product of economic interests. A symbiosis, as I continue to elaborate in the next section, marks a qualitative displacement to a different circuit of collaboration. It does not simply reinforce the grip of the invisible hand, pace Carrier.

5.ii.c. The imbalance of nature

The notion of symbiosis has a strong affinity with the ecological tradition that from Linnaeus's "œconomy of nature" to Lovelock's "Gaia" has imagined nature to be, in its totality, "an enduring community of peaceful coexistence" (Worster 1977:35). During the late twentieth century, the knowledge that symbiosis could have been a significant source of evolutionary innovation made this affinity even stronger (Sapp 1994, ch. 13). But, while symbiosis may evoke a certain kind of sustainability that can be perceived in nature, the difference between this collaborative pattern and any universalizing idea about an automatic global coexistence is stark. Symbiosis is precisely defined for being a form of collaboration without an invisible hand, drive or mechanism, divine, physical or man-made.

Early on, in the late nineteenth century, specifically in the 1899 edition of his *Principles of biology*, Herbert Spencer sought to collide the phenomenon of mutual benefit with that of a perfect division of labour, finding in sweeping "symbioses" like that between oxygen-producing plants and carbon-dioxide-exhaling animals or prey species and predatory ones the proof that the whole of nature amounted to a functionally-divided superorganism (Sapp 1994:27-28). This organismic model in which every being implicitly has a useful purpose that benefits the other parts of a general whole lies at the core of modern biopolitics. It traces back to the political economy of Adam Smith, of course, the pioneer on the problem of the division of labour, but it connects even further back to the natural history of Linnaeus and, if one follows Agamben's (2011:109-112) genealogical correction of Foucault, even back to the Christian theology of Thomas Aquinas. For Aquinas, the proof that the world was governed by god and not just chance could be found in nature: "For we observe

among beings of nature that what is best comes to pass either always or most of the time. This would not be the case were there not some providence guiding such beings to an end, the good" (Summa Theologiae I, q. 103, a. I cited in Agamben 2011:131). In Linnaeus's influential essay *The œconomy of nature* (1749), this sign of immanent providence develops into a fully organismic ecology (see Worster 1977:33-34):

> By "economy of nature" we mean the wise disposition [*dispositio*] of natural beings, established by the sovereign Creator, according to which they tend to common ends and execute reciprocal actions" (cited in Agamben 2011:278).

Agamben suggests that this idea of nature as an "economy," as "an order produced by the contingent game of immanent effects" (p.122), is intimately linked to Aquinas's providential-governmental machine, as can be perceived in his use of the medieval term "*dispositio*," which refers to a divine and absolute order that organizes life through its secondary effects on the relations between beings (pp.136, 279). In Smith's work, this immanent œconomy comes to be explained as more than a form of divine government or natural chain of sustenance. The invisible hand that brings reciprocal benefits to all the participating members of an "economy" acts this time through a specifiable "disposition" that is only quasi-natural, "the disposition to truck, barter, and exchange" (see Chapter 2; c.f. Agamben 2011:283-84). It is this disposition what "originally," Smith postulates – influencing deeply an increasingly commercial and industrial culture throughout the nineteenth century (Polyani 2001, esp. 45-46) – "gives occasion to the division of labour" (Smith 1976:27).

Thus, when Spencer comes to talk of organic wholes that serve for mutual benefit, the notion that society and nature could work as harmonious circuits of

collaboration through a perfect division of labour had long been in the works. After Spencer, this evolving biopolitical notion would come to permeate the whole of social science, through authors like Malinowski and Durkheim. The latter, as suggested earlier, would recognize in the symbiotic effect created by the division of labour an even more immanent biopolitics than the invisible hand. "Exchange," he would advance, "is only the superficial expression of an internal and deeper condition," that of having an "inseparable" and "natural complement" (p.22) – of an "organic" solidarity.[92] The concept of symbiosis, as has been defined here, based on its refinement in contemporary biology, points in the exact opposite direction of this biopolitical tradition.

Symbiosis is a concept that, as Douglas comments, can no longer be "something of a catch-all category" (2010:5) by which absolutely any association between organisms, including parasitical and predatory ones, can be deemed "symbiotic" when seen from a top-down holistic perspective. Such a lack of specificity, as she immediately adds, would make it scientifically useless and culturally unrecognizable (p.5). In an important sense, the symbiotic phenomenon reveals that nature is not organic but actually imbalanced in the way it fosters collaboration, that those collaborations that are thought to be "natural" lack in fact an intrinsic tendency to generalization or equilibrium. Biologists for example have found that "the predisposition for the symbiotic habit is far from universal," being unevenly distributed within and across "multiple phylogenetic scales" (p.54). And, more crucially, they now know that symbioses do not necessarily take place between "co-equals" (p.22), that is, between organisms with the same degree of selective interest. As Douglas forcefully clarifies, this is largely "the erroneous assumption that symbioses are perfectly mutualistic" (p.12). By turning to this model of coexistence

from nature's own reservoir, it becomes possible to emphasize here how the kind of collaboration that we usually think is most sustainable, the kind we find in nature, has in fact no "internal condition" or "disposition" or any kind of "invisible hand" balancing or sustaining it.[93]

In an economic model of coexistence, the generalization of a practice like bargaining or "market exchange" is supposed to guarantee, by the law of demand and supply, a circuit with an equitable distribution of value. Similarly, in a social model like the one described by Mauss, Durkheim's academic descendant, the widespread ritualized practice of "gift exchange" is supposed to have facilitated a fair public distribution of goods and services, by the law or obligation to reciprocate, in circuits like that of the Melanesian *kula* (see Douglas 1990:xiv). But in the case of this symbiotic model, there is no uniformity of practice, no such rules or laws of exchange. A symbiotic circuit cannot promise that the benefits of a collaborative chain or relation will be distributed evenly between the parties. Symbiosis, even culturally, has never implied a sense of fairness that is strict as to the equivalence of the benefits received. In everyday use, I think it is fair to say, a symbiosis is simply thought to be a happy discovery, a found complementarity that is positive to the extent that it creates a synergy, not an even plateau.

When used as a frame of humanitarian analysis, then, "symbiosis" can help to recognize those mundane practices that have a connection to social justice without the need of a leveling organicism – that point to something other than the log-term equilibrium of the market or the steady reciprocity of community. By having an unbalanced (or at least non-automatically-balanced) frame like symbiosis in mind, one can begin to read the localism of volunteer tourism experiences in the light of a

distinct circuit of collaboration, rather than as the poor version or suspicious expression of a circuit with a more "naturalist" or biopolitical projection:

> When I was in Quilla Huata, the villagers were amongst the most generous people that I have ever encountered. They not only sacrificed their time for me but their money and their trust. Me, a girl they hardly know, yet majority of the village showed up on our farewell day and celebrated us. They bestowed us with bouquets of beautiful flowers, hand made personalized cards, spent the entire day cheering us on and giving us words of encouragement. They made the girls necklaces and the boys woven bracelets. *These are people living in utmost simplicity, yet they never complained.*
>
> *We students were treated like royalty. We spent five weeks in a rural town giving our time and efforts but when the time elapsed, we went back to luxury and comfort in developed Sydney.*
>
> (Ethnosense blog, 12th of April, emphasis added)

> What has happened to the boys since we left? I'm not sure about R__ and M__. But they were capable, mature. *I'm sure they're fine.* G__ is in rehab for his glue-sniffing addiction. D__ is back in Manila with his unstable family…
>
> I tried to convince myself that I was in paradise. I never was. None of the boys were at the Bahay Tuluyan centre because they wanted to be. They were there because they had no other option. They came from places stricken by poverty. They came from families who abused them or simply did not have the means to care for them properly. *Paradise does not exist for these boys.*
>
> *This was a hard lesson to learn. But necessary. Despite this, any memory that I have of my time with the BT boys is cherished. And every time something fades, I feel the loss. Deeply.*
>
> (Ethnosense blog, 3rd of June, emphasis added)

Aware of the aporetic balance of their collaborations, volunteer tourists can come to adopt a strangely optimistic kind of realism – "paradise does not exist for these

boys" but "I'm sure they're fine"; "these are people living in utmost simplicity, yet they never complained." It was not some form of ignorance or delusion about the state of the world that led them to such localist conclusions. They are clearly conscious of how paradoxical it is that they were being "treated like royalty" or that those they met "were there because they had no other option." Simple perceptions like Peruvian villagers being extremely "generous" or Filipino street kids being "capable" and "mature" are surely not arguments that can give a volunteer tourist peace of mind in regards to the future of those Others they encounter. These are rather perceptions that can accompany a humanitarian who has become skeptical about the promise of a universal solution. They belong to a form of realism that decides to focus on the specific experience of collaboration that is available at hand rather than on choosing a grand technical path that can appease one's ethico-political concerns all at once.

Such a localist view of things is incomprehensible as a form of "intervention" unless one leaves behind all biopolitical frameworks. If these volunteer tourists intervened – as I think we should interpret their actions (otherwise, why would helping abroad have social meaning) – it was not as small cogs in a larger humanitarian initiative. They do not expect an established force like the market to bring global equality one day – even though "this is a hard lesson to learn" – or a new bond of reciprocity to even things out in the long term – "luxury and comfort" awaits them in any case in the end. The way their intervention works cannot be by contributing to a homogeneous circuit. Each party may receive benefits that satisfy its private interests. Each may even offer gifts or services to its counterpart. Yet their collaboration remains irreducible to a form of exchange. Value does not circulate in a symbiotic circuit – there is no system of equivalence. What each party in a symbiosis

finds is a particular meaning and benefit in the relationship. What is valued and produced is not a generic solidarity. Instead, specific volunteers, specific organizations, specific villagers and specific street kids find the collaboration rewarding – which can for example lead, as growing evidence attests, to scenes and moments of heightened affect, filled with a fleeting sense of intimacy, trust and the expectation of memories of attachment (Sin 2010:987; Palacios 2010:866-868, 872; Conran 2011; Vodopivec and Jaffe 2011:117; Parreñas 2012; Zahra and McGehee 2013:34; Mostafanezhad 2013b:494; Malkki 2015:74; Molz 2017).[94] It is not, then, that symbiosis fosters circuits that are unbalanced. It is rather that the effectivity of such circuits is achieved through the always local, always unpredictable co-production of incommensurable value (see Lambek 2008).

5.ii.d. Peripheral encounters

> Amnesty International, Terre des Hommes and Médicins du monde are initiatives that have created this new right – that of private individuals to effectively intervene in the sphere of international policy and strategy (Foucault 2000[1984]:475).

Speaking at a time of Westphalian rupture, Foucault envisioned a whole universe of initiatives emerging from the freedom to intervene of private individuals, private individuals that would have to act, as he clarified at the beginning of the same text, "with no other grounds … than a certain shared difficulty in enduring what is taking place" (p.474). It must be recognized that those professionals who in growing numbers continue to join transnational organizations like The Red Cross do not necessarily lack a common ground. As the ethnographer Liisa Malkki (2015, ch. 1)

has shown, they tend to carry with them a strong sense of obligation towards their own professionalism, even without an explicit professional code such as the Hippocratic oath. Nevertheless, Foucault touched on an important development. He sensed the groundlessness with which future private individuals could soon start intervening on international affairs.

This groundlessness is still largely unrecognizable in contemporary social theory, even among those who have been inspired by Foucault. If it is not through "the mobilization of a majority assemblage" (Connolly 2005:9), the "constituent political tendency" of "the multitude" (Hardt and Negri 2000:398) or "the collective unworking of identities and moralities" by "becoming communities" (Rose 1999:195-96), the atomistic practice of intervention cannot be imagined (for an exception see Beaulieu 2010). Isin articulates without ambiguity the received interpretation of Foucault:

> What does Foucault mean by "private individuals"? Obviously, he cannot use "citizens" because that would mean "nationals." The kind of right that he is claiming as new cannot be confined to citizens as nationals. Yet, "private individuals" is a problematic phrase for a statement of solidarity that traverses frontiers (2012:7).

For Isin, a private individual can have no political relevance unless it becomes a public one, a seed of collective claims, rights, obligations or some other element that makes up a body politic (p.151). Although, in general, he is incisively critical of any static "whole-parts politics" (p.159), social intervention appears in his work still restricted to "the moment of the enactment of citizenship, which instantiates constituents" (Isin and Nielsen 2008:18). His reaction is I think telling of a wider critical culture. Foucault's prognostic statement inspires Isin to elaborate on the idea

that there might now be a "new right" that citizens without frontiers could have and, hence, to brush off the notion of "private individuals," which in his eyes seems to respond to "the absence of a vocabulary" (2012:8). Foucault was no doubt rhetorically adept to oxymoronic formulations when trying to convey a novel perception (see e.g. Butler 2005:115). But, in this case, it is hard to believe, knowing his deep rejection of all things related to sovereignty (see Dean 2013), that he was being more serious about a protean right than about a resourceful individuality (c.f. Patton 2005:279).

Skeptical humanitarians are bound to be private individuals, and to promote circuits of collaboration without foundational bonds like citizenship or rights. Symbiosis does not depart from a certain claim of equality with a collectivizing potential of more or less determinable range. Its circuits are necessarily *peripheral* to the extent that they are not held together by a *central* claim. They are the result of personal trajectories that remain personal, that, instead of exercising "the right to claim rights" (Isin 2012:109) or appealing to something like "humanity as [their] political constituency" (Feldman and Ticktin 2010:1), produce localized collaborations through practices of intervention that make sense to the individual, rather than the collectivity however it is defined. The problem that symbiosis poses to our current modes of critical thought is that of imagining a circuit of collaboration made up of skeptical and, therefore, private individuals, that is, a circuit that does not need to be resolved through a social contract of sorts.

The real limits of symbiosis. While it is true that they are "private" individuals, these humanitarians definitely do not promote, as I have been arguing, a circuit based on market exchange. This is the case even in a social-economic context like

that of fair trade, where skeptical interventions require to be fully mediated by the market. Fair trade branding is often said to "embed" the exchange of commodities in less economic and more social relations, revealing who the participants in the creation of a product are and, hence, shortening the chain between consumer and producer. But, as we would expect from our old politics of suspicion, at times this capacity for embeddedness has been put into question and, with it, the independence of such trade from the capitalist market (see e.g De Neve, Luetchford and Pratt 2008:3-10; Schmelzer 2010:233-34). What a criterion like symbiosis precisely helps to clarify and sharpen is how distinct the kind of circuits that fair trade promotes can be.[95]

Very much like in volunteer tourism, fair trade allows for a closer encounter between two asymmetrical parties that may or may not result in a humanitarian collaboration (the benefits of fair trade are unevenly distributed among producers, especially in relation to women, and are not guaranteed, since the supply of such products substantially outweighs their demand, which is largely restricted to educated and affluent consumers in the North [Schmelzer 2010:231, 233]). As a potential source of symbioses, then, fair trade can be understood to work through emergent, variable and *incommensurable* complementarities between socially distant and independent parties (c.f. Gibson-Graham 2006:62). A consumer that wants to effect a "buycott" (see Schmelzer 2010) is suddenly linked to another one that simply wants to look more Western and "modern" by buying fair trade coffee from a Starbucks (De Neve, Luetchford and Pratt 2008:16), which is a company that is only interested in sourcing a small percentage of this kind of coffee as part of its corporate social responsibility program (Schmelzer 2010:237). Without a guarantee of universal applicability or binding moral nexus, fair trade forges a chain of collaborations

between essentially private individuals or organizations that may well prove to be sustainable.

That skeptical initiatives are sustained by private individuals does not mean either that they can be reduced to a unilateral form of giving. The idea that traditional forms of philanthropy and volunteering are unaccountable and that they reinforce unequal relations in society creating wounding moral debts that cannot be repaid has a long history, and it is rather easily perceived these days by common sense (Kidd 1996:187; Douglas 1990:vii-viii). Still, one finds in this widespread critical idea the empirical assumption that the giver or donor always departs from a "position of relative strength" when, in reality, one should speak in many cases of "the need to help" (Malkki 2015:164) – something that would bring such forms of one-way giving much closer to symbiosis. There is also an unquestioned technical assumption about "the impulse of philanthropy," namely, that one needs "to obliterate its freedom" in order to make it socially effective (Bornstein 2009:643) – something a criterion like symbiosis also relativizes. At any rate, the strategy of a human economy made of skeptical initiatives would be precisely characterized for fostering collaborations of mutual (even if somewhat unbalanced) benefit.

With the strategic option of symbiosis, it is true that one is left, then, with a private individual that is unable to form a constituency or claim a right, but that neither is simply interested in effecting a one-sided transaction, such as an act of consumption or practice of giving. These are private individuals whose practices rather realize their always hybrid, ambivalently self-oriented *and* other-oriented, interests. In this they resemble closely the gift-giver-and-receiver imagined by Mauss (1990:72-76), who, if one follows a reading of *The Gift* like that of David Graeber

(2001), was not exactly obligated to return someone else's generosity as though there were a need of balancing accounts. If an irreducible hybridity of interests could take place in such gift exchanges and Mauss decided to call them "total prestations" (1990:3), it is because they could not be reduced to repayments on a gift. Rather, every gift constituted the material expression of a long-term commitment to have a reciprocal relation, one in which each party was indefinitely open to address the other one's needs (Graeber 2001:217-220). To this extent, what Mauss captured was an "individualistic communism" (pp.159-60) or a circuit of collaboration based on voluntary gifting relations of mutual benefit created by strictly private individuals.

Nevertheless, although such reciprocal associations may surface at times in the contemporary human economy (Carrier 1991; see also Caillé 2010), the notion of a "gift economy" would still be based on a certain social contract (Graeber 2001:152-154, 230-231). Albeit not obligatory in a strict sense, gift exchange is a hybrid practice and not simply a self-interested one due to the agreement that two or more parties implicitly make to be committed to each other's welfare. Its hybridity is the very product of an ongoing expectation, whereas in the case of symbiosis, it is instead the product of an anomaly. This single difference has enormous consequences for the understanding of intervention in a skeptical human economy, consequences that may be best considered in relation to an empirical example:

> Reasons why
>
> Before I left to Guatemala I dropped out of university. I hated what I studied, didn't know what to do and it didn't take long before I gave up my (boring) job at an event management company to leave Europe to do some voluntary work.
>
> If I'm really honest, I think I went to Guatemala to leave all the problems at home behind for a while. I didn't go to help people, I went to help myself. It was sort of an attempt to

> sort my life out, to place myself out of the context of normal life in order to try to find a new direction. It worked: I think I did get a better understanding of the world, a better understanding of myself, and I'm back in university, so a new direction in the end.
>
> Satisfying a selfish need by an unselfish act. Is there anything wrong with mutual benefit? I think there are always more reasons why you do things. If I had not enjoyed teaching english then I would have quit. The reason why I left Holland was not the same as the reason why I went to my little English school everyday. While being abroad I didn't think about my life back home at all, it fell into place only when I returned.
>
> And now I'm back and I wonder what happened to the kids I taught? I look back on it as a fantastic experience, but I can only hope that I really taught these kids something that will help them create a better future.
>
> (Ethnosense blog, 26th of April)

Experiences of collaboration that are anomalous and peripheral, that take place "out of the context of normal life" and for reasons that only start to become clear during their enactment, are experiences that may tend to happen in contexts like volunteer tourism, but that, in essence, cannot be orchestrated or governmentalized. They follow from the creative judgments made by thoroughly private and isolated individuals in their search for serendipity, for a "new direction." Unlike exchange or reciprocity, a symbiosis is not a form of realizing calculations or expectations. It may be a form of collaboration driven by very personal interests, almost by a "selfish need." At the same time, a humanitarian theme is intrinsic to such experiences. And yet, the most these skeptical and wandering monads can do is to hope that, at the end, whatever they decided to do, for others and for themselves, will "fall into place" and "help them create a better future."

That the symbiotic experience, in spite of the sustainable circuits that it happens to create, cannot be governmentalized, that it cannot be generalized at will, is what in strategic terms really makes it criticizable – not that it is local, marketized, asymmetrical, misinformed, self-oriented or private per se. Symbiosis has been suggested here to be useful for a cultural strategics to the extent that it can act as a retroactive and familiar criterion for skeptical interventions. Humanitarians that are "skeptical" are of course those who, to begin with, do not aspire to a universal mode of action. But they do at the very least aspire to mutual benefit, and even that local and concrete result is something that they cannot guarantee. Reflecting back on his improvised plan, the above participant-ethnographer was surprised to find that, at least with respect to himself, "it worked." With respect to the local community, in spite of all his efforts, he could only "wonder what happened to the kids [he] taught." Symbiosis can only provide a frame to explore in what cases a skeptical practice of freedom would have been effective, and it cannot but suggest this retrospectively. Symbiosis stands for a way of solving things that only works through peripheral circuits, circuits created by the interlocking of deeply idiosyncratic and inscrutable trajectories, circuits that by design resist the humanitarian impulse to increment, expand or scale their spontaneous effectivity.

To this extent, we can say that moral exposure is a principle of operativity, then, that comes with its own set of difficulties. Far from resolving the question of humanitarian solvability, if in an incremental and slow-paced way, it exhibits, like technical opacity, an internal limitation: not the potential for side effects, but for the self-containment of effects.

End. An Economy of Freedom

The messy cultural penetration through market avenues of such an open-ended ethos as humanitarianism has allowed us to consider the possibility of a skeptical interventionism and, specifically in this chapter, of its strategic projection towards an "economy of freedom." The skeptical practices of freedom of private individuals like a volunteer tourist and a fair trade consumer need not be related in any way, but if they were to share a certain style of producing collaborative effects, the question about the reach and limits of their general effectivity or "strategics" would be framable as the matter of whether there is a certain "economy" they could potentially generate. I invoke, for the purposes of this conclusion, the term economy only in a general and not in an organic sense, that is, in the way it is being used in post-capitalistic formulations like a "human economy" (Hart, Laville and Cattani 2010), "economy of survival" (Abélès 2010) or "community economy" (Gibson-Graham 2006) – as a circuit whose spatiality and totalizing effect cannot be presumed beyond the idea that it comprises a series of contingent yet self-sustaining dynamics among plural individualities leading, from an external point of view, to an aggregate productivity with a generally positive balance for those involved as a result of a certain form of collaboration that, while not being necessarily homogeneous, is describable enough to apprehend it, precisely, as an "economy" of some sort.

To an important extent, Foucault anticipated and marked the way for this mode of exploration. He seemed to have envisioned as a solution to the humanitarian problem an economic economy of power made of critical private individuals. Alain Beaulieu even suggests that he had in his sights a descentralized "liberal utopia,"

concluding that, "one originality in his views on liberalism deals with the transfer of this economic idea to the sphere of existence" (2010:813). Foucault, however, would never develop this suggestive understanding of humanitarian solvability into a rigorous form of inquiry. This chapter, taking up that challenge, dedicated itself to extrapolate a methodologically sound criterion of effectivity for an economy composed of skeptical humanitarianisms. These are some concluding insights after considering the possibility of an "economy of freedom:"

1 Freedom was suggested to have a certain usefulness or productive value. Unlike Nikolas Rose, Adam Smith or Amartya Sen would have it, its utility was not found in a governmental instrumentality, economic productivity or development metric per se. Freedom, rather than being of use to a modern state, thrifty population, or policy maker, was found to have at times an immanent social function, a capacity for intervention at those moments when it is completely devoid of calculation. Its effectivity was associated to the active expression of one or other form of skepticism towards power.

2 Nevertheless, relationships of freedom, even when they productively realize an intervention, are not necessarily collaborative. While such relationships can be accepted to have historically appeared at different junctures and locations, they would have had their own orientation and specificity in each cultural scenario. Instead of trying to solve the humanitarian problem, they would have been concerned with other issues of social effectivity, as the reviewed constructs of parrhēsia, civility and revolution illustrate.

3 Symbiosis was proposed as a suitable criterion of effectivity for a contemporary skepticism. Without being standardizable as such or referring us to a stable and easily comparative unit of measurement like "wealth" or even "social capital," symbiosis allows us to think about the positive or negative balance a relationship of freedom can create, by simply assuming that the capabilities of the parties involved can be used as a baseline.

4 In spite of its simplicity and seemingly tautological explanatory role, "symbiosis" manages to convey the orientation of a certain cultural strategics. It is a criterion that captures the kind of collaborative effect that can be currently expected from a set of local practices that are much more implicitly than explicitly directed at global intervention. Rather than being limited to a socially circumscribed scenario of intervention, like the polis, the city, or even the nation-state, symbiosis signals the coming into existence of a spatially open circuit of collaboration. Furthermore, its applicability comes from articulating a set of meanings that are grounded on a cultural perception. Symbiosis does not make sense of intervention, for example, through a political, urban or epochal register – as ancient, classical and modern skeptical practitioners of freedom arguably did, respectively. It rather evokes a quasi-naturalist language of sustainability, found synergy, and fieldwork that is peculiar to our post-Westphalian era.

5 A symbiotic circuit of collaboration can be said to emerge "naturally," even if it does not stem from some objectifiable aspect of our nature. These are circuits in which solidarity works and is sustainable without the need of a universal commonality or mediating contract. Their sustainability does not depend on the acceptance of a certain moral rule, communal bond, collective right, mode of

exchange or any other type of relational obligation. Instead, such circuits come into being and are continually maintained by the spontaneous meeting and complementarity of interests, needs and desires – which is how from the perspective of biology nature actually works. It is the contingency of a serendipitous encounter rather than the reassurance of an inhibitory promise what can sustain free collaborations and produce "an achieved state in which desire no longer lacks anything but fills itself and constructs its own field of immanence" (Deleuze and Guattari 2004:173).

6 The non-contractual nature of symbiosis also means, however, that its generalizability is not guaranteed, that it is a "non-programmable" object (see Gordon 1980:248-49). While it amounts to a social pattern that is to some extent knowable and specifiable, every symbiosis is self-actualizing, the collaborative by-product of an interaction without uniform causes or calculable sequences. Symbioses may intrinsically point to a certain form of endurance thanks to the very serendipity of their emergence, but, for the same reason, the potential reach of such an "economy of freedom" cannot be determined.

7 An economy of freedom does not lead, in sum, to the formation of social totalities or a form of solidarity based on sociability. In this respect, it resembles the conventional capitalist market, although without being based either on a promise of total universality. Instead of reducing the pressing issue of solidarity to a "simple choice of restraining or unleashing market relations" (Robotham 2009:280-82), it follows the Maussian realization that we are "stuck with a market of some sort or another" (Graeber 2001:157). It is an economy that does not result in social cohesion nor in an even distribution of resources. While it

displays its own way of solving things, the fact that it does not have a predictable final form means that it has the potential to be a "pressure valve" for a "globalized capitalism" (Abélès 2010:185) as much as a way of "democratizing" and "reclaiming the economy" (Hart, Laville and Cattani 2010:11; Gibson-Graham 2006:xxi).

Conclusion

In the great chess-board of human society, every single piece has a principle of motion of its own, altogether different from that which the legislature might chuse to impress upon it.

—Adam Smith, *The theory of moral sentiments*

In this thesis, I have been rather fair. At times, perhaps too fair. I have tried to be understanding towards neoliberal economists, market humanitarians, conservative bureaucrats, charitable volunteers, colonial writers, militant activists, and postmodern critics. But this fairness of perspective or lack of suspicion should not be confused with a principled pluralism or simple "tolerance" agenda. I am, in reality, being disparaging of everything and everyone: for their lack of seriousness with the real problem, for their close-mindedness in getting bogged down by one perspective, for their insufficiently strict thinking. I am, that is, taking the typically humanitarian position – throwing everything that exists overboard, treating everyone with the same disdain, demanding an explanation for our state of affairs. What makes it possible to place all of these modern subjects in a comparative position is the historical vantage point of a sociologically realistic humanitarianism. Such a locus reveals, precisely, how difficult it is to impose any "legislature" on others – beings like oneself who can be drastically unpredictable in terms of their ethical rationality – and why then one must pursue the challenging problem of how to achieve a solution that works for this human reality. From this angle, one can appreciate the radical liberalism of Adam Smith as much as that of Rousseau. Both chose not to ignore this more fundamental issue. Both reproached, with their skeptical position,

those who could happily remain at the level of "politics," investing their life energies on nothing more than the recruitment of souls, situational debate, and partisan competition.

Radicalism, beyond what we have thought since Marx and, then, since Foucault, arguably stems from a humanitarian perception that is intrinsically susceptible to skepticism, for it departs from an infinite sense of frustration, from a disappointment with the entire edifice of social organization. From a humanitarian rather than political understanding of radicalism, intervention always involves at least a minimal "skeptical practice of freedom," for it follows from a lack of confidence in the existing orientations and solutions, which in turn calls for a practical decision to do something within a field of action that is, by definition, open-ended, despite the persuasiveness and dogmatic presence of any political positioning in one's present. But interpreting our modern history through the lens of this skeptical radicalism does not lead us to reject "the political" – even if, it must be granted, anything we do within this domain rests on a certain suppleness. Instead, the conception of the political can be expanded. It can be observed from the broader scope of problematization that Foucault once named "strategics."

Foucault marks the moment when our radical humanitarianism becomes extremely self-conscious, obsessed with its underlying skepticism, and almost incapacitated by the idea that its solutions could be worse than its problems. In an attempt to detach himself from the malleable ethics of modern intervention, Foucault championed the value of skepticism over everything else, to the point of finding in critique the only viable answer. By doing this, he pushed our thought to consider human relations and sociality as a whole in terms of strategies. Everything an

individual does could be interpreted in terms of how it affects and gives shape to the conduct of others. And, as a corollary, this meant that every subject would also have a minimal freedom to react and intervene in turn. Instead of determining the normative content of an intervention, it thus became more realistic to think that a cautious and skeptical civil society could bring about, through a democratization of the practice of intervention itself, a progressively better coexistence.

Foucault developed a particular sensitivity to the potential that we all have as free thinking beings to engage in courageous intervention. But, by itself, this insightful perspective does not demarcate anything in practical terms beyond the rough edges of a humanitarian tactic – a tactic that, besides, regardless of its exact form, is meant to rely on a weak connection with a *homo criticus,* whose capacity for skepticism and creative judgment is in any case limited, and whose frustration with its own complicity, if exacerbated too much, can lead to a bottomless social criticism. The postulate that was called here the "freedom to intervene" has been awaiting analytical elaboration. Beyond his own vision for civil society, Foucault crystallized the possibility of a different form of political problematization. He opened the way for an inquiry thoroughly performed at the level of strategics.

The post-Foucauldian argument introduced, in this sense, is that the only way of conceiving the question of "what is intervention" without answering the one of "what is right" is by examining a skeptical practice of freedom. Rather than championing this practice in any sweeping way and falling again into a sort of strategic moralism, I sought to analyze the ways in which it is critically variable: how it has a changing contextual value, an unpredictable productivity, and an uncertain level of recognition in any given historical locale as "intervention." With

this analytical departure, Foucault's last series of lectures take on a revelational character. They would seem to explore how the phenomenology of this practice is historically situated and can have such a unique line of development in different places that, at times, it can even become the seed for a certain form of power. In short, after pressing Foucault on important philosophical decisions, we were able to imagine how this skeptical freedom would be sociologically mappable in a comparative framework (within the bounds of Western culture) by defining it as "the reflection of reflection," and how at the very least such a freedom would be ontologically plausible (within a history of thought) through the recovery of a certain humanitarian radicalism – a radicalism that not only allows us to identify a certain conjucture in which this freedom can be embraced, but that also helps us explain the historical existence of a biopolitical form of power.

"Technical opacity" was advanced as a neutral concept to explain the kind of modern authoritarian effects we have usually associated to political radicalism, biopolitics and bio-power. It captures these effects as the expectable expression of a strategic logic that is frustratingly undecipherable, hazardously manipulable, prone to misuses but, in any case, always in its essence humanitarian. Thus, it encourages us to pursue a form of critical inquiry that is concerned with the way a humanitarian perception is able to become imposing or even violent. That is to say, instead of asking a moral question about what it is or who it is that we should suspect in a strictly political field, technical opacity prompts us to ask about malfunctions and side-effects within a shared political enterprise – at least in those cases where force is not part of the original design and normatively does not guide (which is still possible within a humanitarian radicalism, as Talal Asad [2015] has for example considered in all its philosophical complexity) the practice of intervention.

The critique of neoliberalism was pursued in a similar way. If neoliberalism does not pose the problem of "ethics" – by privileging, for instance, as Michael Behrent laments, the problematic of "welfare" or "rights" (2009:562) – it is because it is not absolutely necessary to do so within its field of problematization, since the founding liberal concern is in any case organized at the level of "strategics." To take the opposite example, for Durkheim (1997), the scientific initiative of privileging a "social" solution had to be dedicated to justify that such a solution could be effective and plausible for a contemporary coexistence, regardless or, at least, besides the fact that sociability is usually seen as something intrinsically moral. Without having to dismiss or forget about Foucault in order to return to a certain pristine humanism – as Behrent (2015) has for example called for – I embraced the stark polarity between ethics and strategics in order to undertake what Brian Massumi calls a "productivist" critique (2002:12), following the lead of authors like Michel Feher and James Ferguson who, rather than reject the current "personalization of politics" (Feher 2009:37-38), stress that the point is to explore how these neoliberal conditions "can be repurposed" (Ferguson 2009:181-83; see also Beaulieu 2010:810; Blencowe 2013:23; Lemke 2011b:39).

When the pastoral characters of neoliberal rationality are found in philanthropic vacations, corporate community programs, ethical shops, and many other polemic places, instead of facing a consensual biopolitics, they become immediately susceptible to a frustrating skepticism. At the very moment they try to enact their political responsibility in a globally interconnected society, they leave themselves exposed to the overwhelming openness of post-Westphalian justice. Their doubts and preoccupations may be explainable in terms of an individual sense of "neoliberal complicity," but this explanation cannot translate into social critique by

itself. As I have argued, making out of this empirical observation a critical claim would be to dismiss (i) the results of our historical debate on a politics of suspicion, (ii) the way civil society is a nexus of both economic and social solutions, (iii) the fact that this claim lacks a testable basis in reality, and (iv) that it has no meaningful content from the optic of governmentality.

From a strategic perspective, the critical question for skeptical humanitarians is that of how exactly they are modifying the modern circuits of collaboration. It is in this sense that "symbiosis" becomes illuminating as a cultural convention, articulating what we can expect from the kind of contingent relationships they forge out of pure individual freedom. Symbiosis may be a way of solving things that is localist, as many current social critics would say "neoliberalism wants," yet that, without being indeed welfarist or having universal ambitions of rights, citizenship or cosmopolitanism, is absolutely distinct from neoliberalism and its quasi-natural aspiration to a global market. For not having to speculate about the source of a collaborative effect or ask whether it is compassion, self-interest, communal obligation, political passion or something else that drives an expression of solidarity, thanks to its very non-need of speculation and universal guarantees, "symbiosis" manages to bypass the strategic horizon of biopolitics. The truly critical question that this alternative development raises is whether, in spite of its modesty of scale, non-automatic generalizability and non-programmable peripherality, there can be something like a "symbio-politics."[96]

Since symbioses occur without a unifying driving force, through the serendipity of complementary encounters, the challenge for a symbio-politics is that of reimagining the proverbial political task. It must ascertain how it is possible to

intervene in society without convincing others of a certain solution or resorting to any kind of governmentality, that is, without requiring to "conduct" (or direct under a pre-established form of programmatic rationality) other "conducts" (the citizen practices a self can be persuaded to volunteer for through a generic and predictive form of ethical calculation). My closing thought is that this challenge could be addressed, following an Arendtian cue, through a critical mode of "foundational anticipation:" by supporting initiatives that are already showing signs of nurturing symbioses. We have established that the foundations for a mode of intervention must not necessarily be devised, but that at times these can be explored as they are appearing and taking shape in actual practice. Perhaps, then, we can also consider the possibility that they can be, on these occasions, strategically anticipated.[97] From a radical departure, one can aspire to find more than a "postfoundational usefulness" in biopolitical strategies that were traditionally thought to be essentialist and "natural," as Butler has for example suggested (1995:128-131). One can actually build on the foundational value of emerging practices that display collaborative effects in ways that are rather unforeseen (see Blencowe 2013).

This type of "policy," broadly defined, would thus consist in helping to give deeper foundations to successful practices and, by extension, to symbiosis as a cultural convention. This could be done in a myriad of ways. Academically, for example, I have to some extent contributed to this approach by helping to visualize the type of solidarity emerging from projects of volunteer tourism. But there are much more direct and practical ways of giving symbiotic circuits "foundation." An exemplary prototype for this policy orientation can be found, I believe, in the German-based online giving platform called "Betterplace." This is a research-oriented platform that channels resources by linking existing social projects to

potential donors through a flexible database which lists all the relevant information that humanitarian individuals or institutions may possibly need to make a satisfactory, informed decision. Digital platforms like this one are currently starting to open the path for a mode of intervention that does not simply advance the biopolitical imagination of a commonsensical giver or the logistical schemata of a bureaucratic institution, but that rather provides further stability to initiatives that seem to be already working on the ground, while lacking a guarantee of effectivity beyond their own continuing existence.

Such a policy orientation would have to depend on the choices that a number of individual contributors make once they have conducted a thorough review of existing social projects, using the accounts provided by scholarly platforms like Betterplace, accounts that, crucially, would be customized to each project and open to further interactive inquiry – which is, at least, how this organization currently does it, following an ethnographic spirit of contextualized knowledge. Far from replicating the financial type of standardized criteria found in neoliberal models of accountability, this form of evaluation is congruent with a heuristic convention of cultural strategics like symbiosis, which cannot be metrically objectified. Deciding what is and what is not a symbiosis, or which symbioses are better and which ones are rather unbalanced, can only obey to the creative judgments concrete individuals make, based, precisely, on the information, experience and advice they have available to them.

It is not possible to conclude that either a biopolitics or a symbio-politics, or some combination of both, is the right answer to the question of humanitarian solvability. This is, unfortunately, our post-neoliberal dilemma. Regardless of how desperate

and unsatisfied we are with any solution, we cannot go past this fork. The outcome of this inquiry has only been to show that an alternative way of solving things, solid, traceable and conceivable enough, is opened up when humanitarians make the courageous decision to act in spite of their daunting skepticism. This unforeseen route has its own intricacies and complications. But it does hold, we can say with some measure of confidence by this point, at least one comparative advantage. While adopting a quasi-natural solution can always create side effects and lead to an uncertain place, supporting immanent forms and spontaneous collaborations can be done indefinitely without losing our way. The biopolitical impulse to enforce a technically opaque model takes the mastery over the humanitarian problem out of our hands, and we can be forever chasing the model rather than the problem, with what that implies – an excessive, disciplinary or simply perpetual interventionism.

The foundational anticipation of symbioses points to a humanitarian path that grows capabilities without the need of power relations, thus avoiding the dangers that come with the path of technicalization. Yet, what we have found through this inquiry is that if skeptical humanitarianism can be deemed to be potentially desirable, it is not because it enacts freedom and bypasses power, neither because it evinces a strategic rationale that stems from the ground and is naturally sustainable, nor because it advances a mode of intervention that can slowly expand its reach without resorting to a politics of suspicion. Symbiosis may avoid the imposition of wills over conducts. Its vitalism may be theoretically more or, at least, just as sustainable as the invisible hand or the social contract. It may even mobilize an inclusionary rather than exclusionary humanitarianism. But, in any event, freedom, vitalism, and social inclusion are not criteria of effectivity in themselves. The sole reason that can decidedly justify why a symbio-politics deserves our careful

attention is its consistency – for which it does not need to make any promises, being its very reticence to the making of promises what makes it so reliable.[98] Unlike the faithful volunteer in biopolitics, the skeptics of humanitarianism can ironically afford to imagine their modest practice of intervention as a steady, cumulative, and complementing labor, one without foreseeable misdirections, counterproductive scenarios, or disappointing outcomes.

Notes

[1] The point that I will make, in this sense, is not that there is a humanitarian "gap" as much as a "blind spot" in Foucault's account of liberalism (see Fassin 2010:272; Brown 2015:85-86). A key argument of Foucauldian scholars has been that liberal practices of intervention did not necessarily appear as a result of this moral sensibility. Governmentality studies have in fact shown how seemingly humanitarian events like a concern with the "well-being" of society (Foucault 2007b:328), the institutionalization of "poverty relief" (Dean 1992), the birth of a "social point of view" (Procacci 1989), the generalization of "social insurance" (Defert 1991), and "the new respect for the humanity of the condemned" (Foucault 1995:78) were mainly the result of technical difficulties presented at the level of governance. To this extent, one cannot speak of humanitarianism as something these studies leave out of their accounts. What can be said instead, I argue, is that by opting for a "technical" level of explanation, these studies have overlooked how this culture's historical awareness of its own humanitarian skepticism shaped its modernity and fundamental modes of intervention from the start.

[2] Richard Rorty offers an elucidating summary of the "anti-foundationalist" position in contemporary philosophy: "the most philosophy can hope to do is summarize our culturally influenced intuitions about the right thing to do in various situations … Foundationalist philosophers, such as Plato, Aquinas, and Kant, have opted to provide independent support for such summarizing generalizations. They would like to infer these generalizations from further premises, premises capable of being known to be true independently of the truth of the moral intuitions which have been summarized. Such premises are supposed to justify our intuitions, by providing premises from which the content of those intuitions can be deduced" (1993:117).

[3] "Neoliberal conditions" will be used to refer to a polemical state of affairs as the material by-product of a "broad family of ways of thinking about and seeking to enact government" (Rose, O'Malley and Valverde 2006:97). Neoliberalism as such may have well been the result of "contingent lash-ups of thought and action" (Rose 1999:27) or it may have to a great extent been initiated and propagated by a "particular intellectual movement" that sought to influence states and institutions in substantial ways (Dean 2012:80). But, at any rate, the point here is that it has not just resulted in a compelling "assemblage of diverse components, persons, forms of knowledge, technical procedure and modes of judgment and sanctions" (Miller and Rose 2008:200), but that, further, such an assemblage creates social conditions with their own unexpected effects.

[4] In principle, the idea of tailoring the inquiry into social justice to the particular conditions one inhabits is a move that Foucault championed with fervency, constantly appealing to an "ontology of the actuality" or "the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us" (2007a:95, 118). And yet, it is a move one could not apply to our present if one were to stay within the ontological restrictions set by his sociology of power. With the deepening of skepticism in contemporary society and fuzzy subject positioning of its humanitarians, power is no longer the sole reason for an inquiry into the strategic limits of social policy and development practice. The moral exposure granted by the current political environment makes out of "freedom" a suddenly tenable, and not necessarily desirable, modality of intervention. This critique of Foucault will be an important argumentative thread throughout the chapters.

[5] In this thesis I will only refer briefly and indirectly to the resurgence of the "war on terror" in Chapter 5. As is well known, George W. Bush justified the invasion of Irak by using the expression of "humanitarian intervention." In this sense, there will be some important points to make about the contemporary discourse and uses of humanitarianism. But I do not find it relevant to integrate into this inquiry a discussion on the current figure of "the terrorist." I do not think that the present archetype of the terrorist can be considered to be "skeptical," not only because it is placed in a highly moralized universe of religious and political referents – its fundamentalism is the very opposite of moral skepticism – but also because there is no reason to assume that those who commit or agree with sacrificial acts of violence and terror – Bush not excluded – reject the value of a humanitarian coexistence.

[6] Historically, in anthropology, the reference to "fieldwork" has been appropriated to the point of assuming that it self-evidently refers to a Malinowskian style of fieldwork (see Kuklick 2011). To put this assumption into perspective, a number of anthropologists started to pay attention in the 1990s to alternative field practices and to the roots of this field tradition in general, emphasizing, for example, how fieldwork first appeared in the naturalist work of biologists and other scientists, and how the dominant idea of "the field" has been largely shaped by imperialist and colonialist imaginaries (see Gupta and Ferguson 1997). I embrace here what Roy Wagner, an influential voice in the postmodern phase of the discipline, had already suggested two decades earlier: that "it might be helpful to think of all human beings, wherever they may be, as 'fieldworkers' of a sort, controlling the culture shock of daily experience through all kinds of imagined and constructed 'rules,' traditions, and facts" (1981:34).

[7] Still, in an important sense, meta-ethnography does nothing but build on the debate in anthropology about the empiricism found in the canon of participant-observation. It follows in its own way the recent opening of an anthropology of the contemporary that aspires to orientate

itself towards the "near future" by investigating constitutive "modes of problematization" through a certain experimentation with "fieldwork in philosophy" (Rabinow 2003).

[8] Foucault's work on governmentality but in particular his controversial lecture course on *The birth of biopolitics* (2008) has become a highly influential framework for the interpretation of liberal modernity, although, at least in the last few years, after its full publication, in a perplexing mode rather than an enlightening one. While his lectures reveal that, with neoliberalism, an even more ambitious economic purview is at stake than a policy of *laissez-faire*, these also examine the way neoliberal politics is still connected to the revolutionary moment in the eighteenth century when the security of "society" became relevant. A number of commentators have wanted to find in this particular course a critical platform or even stronghold for the privatizing tendencies of the present (e.g. Lemke 2002; Feher 2009; Hamann 2009a; Beaulieu 2010; Patton 2013; Behrent 2015; Brown 2015; Dean and Villadsen 2016; Palacios in press; among others). But since Foucault forges, at any rate, a continuity between neoliberal theory and the "birth" of the modern concern with the welfare of society and its population, the result has been a polyphony of interpretations without a common orientation. One could say that a considerable window has opened for a revisionist outlook on the meta-narrative of governmentality (see Dean 2015a).

[9] The "humanitarian self" is not what would have led to abolitionist and other humanitarian reform movements as much as what would have been formed and articulated through them. It is not a concept, in other words, that resorts to an "ethical foundationalism" as a mode of historical explanation (see Dean 1992). It departs from the Foucauldian premise that "'the self' is not that which is shaped by history" (Rose 1996a:300), for it is not some kind of material that can be detached from or exist prior to its problematizations.

[10] Such an argument is made relevant by the fact that, long before even the term "humanitarian" had appeared in the early nineteenth century (Calhoun 2008:77), it became possible in Western culture to think, as Susan Maslan reminds us, of "the human body – not as a body to be fed, nor as a producer of labor, nor as an object of demographic concern – [but] as a locus of sensibility, of feeling, and consequently of sympathy" (2004:362). A humanitarian conception of the ethical self has been in the background of liberal thought at least since the mid-eighteenth century. Even Foucault's diagnosis of liberalism is heavily reliant on a social subject of "disinterested interests" (2008:301). And although the humanitarian self, as I capture it here, refers to a much less objectifiable conception of moral subjectivity, the point is that a vantage point on liberalism is created when its intelligibility is tied to a "locus of sensibility."

[11] The writings of these contemporary humanitarians will only constitute an example, a way of "grounding" the analysis but not of "making" the analysis. That I categorize, for instance, all

of my research collaborators as "volunteer tourists" and derive from them conclusions about a strange ethos growing in the global neoliberal market does not mean that they would all accept this sort of label or see themselves as a new kind of volunteer. Their relevance for this inquiry does not come from them being "exemplary," the most genuine embodiment of a contemporary skepticism. Their role here follows the inductive rather than the deductive logic of the example, as Hannah Arendt would suggest (see Marshall 2010:379) – the kind of example that induces a more general thought rather than the one that simply helps to exemplify after something has already been thought in the abstract.

[12] As a methodological avenue (not an object of research in itself), the blogosphere has usually been used for the dissemination of findings or academic debate (Price 2010). At times, blogs have also served as an online strategy to supplement areas like recruitment, connectivity, reflexivity, data keeping and accountability (Wakeford and Cohen 2008). Beyond a rather logistical use, they have also acted as a kind of 'virtual design studio' (Rabinow et al 2008:84) or medium for feedback and cultural contextualization, considering that their web-based format allows the researcher to maintain a channel of consultation open with the community (Olive 2012). In the case of meta-ethnography, the use of an online blog can capitalize on some of these applications while adding, however, a crucial collaborative dimension to the technology, for this time it is the participants who take ownership over its flexible writing platform. Many qualitative researchers have of course started to investigate the multiple kinds of blogs that people are spontaneously creating online (see e.g. Molz 2012; Reed 2005). But, in this case, by creating a blog from scratch through a collaborative effort, the classic assumption of sociocultural boundedness that even virtual ethnographies continue to uphold (see e.g. Boellstorff 2008) is fully avoided and replaced with a meta-ethnographic epistemology.

[13] There are a number of advantages, in this sense, to using an online blog for the purposes of meta-ethnography. Unlike the popular 'brain dump' use of personal journaling blogs (Reed 2005:228), blogging in this case rather aids participant-ethnographers to give some shape to their scattered insights. While maintaining a certain therapeutic function, revelatory tone, and "ethos of immediacy" (pp.227-28), the meta-ethnographic blog is meant to work much more as a reflexive tool, helping to structure the participants' ideas about their memories and experiences in the field. As a research platform, such a blog can generate richer data than the popular "multimedia travel blog" that the "flashpackers" of today are creating, which tends to be rather short in words and oriented to "photo essays" (Molz 2012:28). Returned travelers can still experiment with diverse means of expression in the blog, from videos to survey tools and soundtracks, yet they do so while focusing on reflection and deliberation rather than diary-

keeping, online socialization, or social media drama (see Molz 2012:31). Finally, a collaborative blog also avoids the ethical issues that appear in the area of "covert digital ethnography" (Murthy 2008:839-841). The participants of my project had to sign consent forms before joining and were therefore fully aware of the purpose and potential academic use of their blogging.

[14] This argument that Diderot puts in the mouth of the skeptic has a much longer history. Willer et al. refer to it as the "invisible men" problem, mentioning Plato and H.G.Wells as exemplary contributors to this genealogy (2010:315). Richard Rorty calls it the "rational egotist's question," referring us once again back to Plato, the question being that of "Why should I be moral? (1993:124, 133). What is peculiar in Diderot's case, as I further elaborate below, is that his skeptic is not avoiding the question about the morality of his actions, but actually justifying how what he does is the most moral human beings can aspire to be. Notice how, after posing his rhetorical question, the skeptic justifies himself with the following rationale in Diderot's text: "Yet I am fair and honest (…) If my happiness demands that I rid myself of all persons who intrude upon my life, then anyone else may equally rid himself of my presence if it offends him. This only stands to reason, I agree. I am not so unjust as to demand from someone else a sacrifice which I am not myself prepared to make for him" (1992:18-19). In this way, the skeptic clarifies how, in spite of everything, he is indeed trying to "ward off the ascription of 'evil.'"

[15] I will not be simply invoking what in moral philosophy and the anthropology of ethics is known as an ancient tradition of "personalism" (see e.g. Faubion 2011:49-50) – although there are some important links and affinities with what Foucault called "the culture of the self" of the Hellenistic and Roman periods (2004:179), as I briefly address in this and especially Chapter 5. The skeptical humanitarian is more radically idiosyncratic than any ancient Greek, for, even if the latter was interested in gaining absolute independence of thought and moral self-sufficiency (see e.g. Foucault 2004:206-07), he still was oriented by a common philosophy or ethical framework. He was still guided by "a set of rational principles" or rules of behavior (Foucault 2001:165-66). The skepticism of a humanitarian, on the other hand, leads to a form of intervention that, in spite of the subject's desires, is ruled by the absence of a shared orientation to practice.

[16] As it may be clear by now, in this thesis I do not follow a strict distinction between "ethics" and "morality." Still, I tend to use the latter to emphasize traditional views and restrict myself to the former for analytical discussions, in which "ethical" means "conduct of the self." See Lambek (2010:9) for a discussion about why and when these terms can be used interchangeably.

[17] The placement of Foucault in a liberal register should not be seen as a particularly extreme or original move (see e.g. Stenson 1998; Tobias 2005; Cruikshank 2007; Beaulieu 2010). What I

believe will be unique about this line of argumentation is rather the integration of a liberal framework with a humanitarian sensibility by means of a critical historicism.

[18] That this is true can be sensed from the way Rousseau frames the problem of the social contract, as a matter of both self-preservation, of defending oneself from moral skeptics who could feel free to harm others in the absence of a collective force, and as a matter of individual freedom, without which those who would be tempted to be skeptical could not be persuaded to genuinely commit to a protective form of association (1994:54-55). I elaborate on the uniqueness of this solution in Chapter 2 and Chapter 4.

[19] Ironically, in spite of a concern with such reversibility, his famous studies on institutions like the clinic and the prison usually focused on the strategies of the ones on the dominant side. The insight about a freedom of intervention is better illustrated by the work of James Scott (1990), who, by focusing on the subordinate – serfs, slaves, untouchables, colonized peoples – shows historically how, even in the worst states of oppression, there have been many dissident strategies that have been developed subterraneously, from ambivalent deference to backstage plotting.

[20] The debate around this issue has been going on for more than three decades and I do not intend to review it at length, neither expect to close the matter here once and for all. For a radically different and highly influential interpretation of the normative character of Foucault's work, see Fraser's article on "Normative confusions" (1981). The working interpretation that I introduce at this point is largely based on the more recent work of Judith Butler.

[21] If anything, the non-skeptic is the one who would become problematic for its lack of critical qualities; however, it would be difficult to suggest that one can initiate a strategic inquiry based on the idea that those who are not critical are the ones that hinder coexistence, that they are the "true" skeptics. This kind of skeptic would in fact be rehearsing all the same issues of the previous skeptics, for it would embody a non-intentional, relative, and commonsensical "skepticism."

[22] I am the one who is saying that this is a frustrating skepticism, not Butler (although see Butler 1997). She has actually developed the argument that being critical is morally productive, because it leads to a sense of responsibility towards the Other stemming from the awareness of one's own limitations in terms of self-knowledge. See Butler's *Giving an account of oneself* (2005). What allows me to say that a critical practice is frustrating is the analytical angle adopted here of "moral skepticism."

[23] My intention is not to suggest that this mode of critique has no use. See e.g. Povinelli's illustration and justification of the radical potential of what she calls "negative critique" in

Economies of abandonment (2011). I am just stating in a purely descriptive sense that, if critique is seen as a form of moral skepticism, then it must be accepted that the skepticism that it involves is a frustrating one. Its very premise is that one can never be fully skeptical, because that would entail removing oneself completely from the normative framework that governs the present.

[24] In Foucault's works, "problematization" plays an important explanatory role, but it usually appears as a complex and almost ungraspable notion. Still, in a lecture at the end of his life on the Greek practice of parrhēsia*,* one can detect the cited comments as the most practical implications of this notion – see *Fearless speech* (2001). While these comments belong to a larger philosophical and methodological point he is trying to make, I think it is justified to appropriate them in this context, since the founding contrast he creates with "interdictions" alludes to this rather practical semantic use of "problematization" (see Lemke 2011b:32; c.f. Rabinow 2003:48-49).

[25] For a review of the experimental dimension of Foucault's notion of critique see Lemke (2011b). And for an application of this experimental view see Ferguson (2011).

[26] I think Foucault came close to the consideration of this scenario and was not necessarily closed to it. On the one hand, his late studies on the care of the self tended to emphasize the importance in Ancient thought of the theme of a self-sufficient freedom that is achieved through a mastery of the self, self-possesion or "autarchy" (see e.g. Foucault 2004:184-85). It is in the context of these studies that he comes to define freedom as "the ontological condition of ethics," which is, in itself, a positive conception that sharply contrasts with his negative definition of freedom as a reaction to power. On the other hand, there are a number of instances where Foucault reveals his openness in this area: whether by confessing that he had been avoiding for a long time "the problem of the will" and an "originary freedom" (2007a:75-76); by exploring an Ancient practice of truth-telling as "actually the exercise, the highest exercise, of freedom" (2011:67); by posing the question of nihilism, cynicism and skepticism as "how to live if I must face up to the fact that 'nothing is true'?" (2012:189-190); or, simply, by considering the practical possibility of a "crisis of the subject, or rather a crisis of subjectivation" which demands an "original response" (1986:95, 71, see also Dean 1994:202). In general, one could say that Foucault did not reject as much as simply did not consider enough this radically skeptical scenario.

[27] Fassin has developed a similar approach to what he calls "humanitarian reason" based on the Foucauldian notion of "problematization," suggesting that "this way of seeing and doing has now come to appear self-evident to us" (2012:7-8). "Humanitarianism," he suggests elsewhere, "is a language whose genealogy can be traced back through the last three centuries and that today

structures the way we think of politics almost without our noticing … Thus, this language produces a certain kind of understanding of the world and configures a particular form of collective experience. It forms and informs the moral economy of contemporary societies" (2010:273).

[28] It is important to emphasize that I place the humanitarian problematic in a much larger register than the one Craig Calhoun calls "the emergency imaginary" (2008; 2010). The imaginary of emergencies – civil wars, epidemics, catastrophes, famines, genocides – has come to dominate the contemporary understanding of "humanitarianism." Within this imaginary, "emergencies arise as exceptions to otherwise normal social conditions" (Calhoun 2010:45) and the language of "crisis" is simply used to organize "the prose of everyday existence into more poetic, if only partly analytic, chapters" (Redfield 2005:336). The sense of crisis I refer to is much more structural. It is the sense that what has to change is the very understanding of what is normal. This is the larger problematization that a humanitarian sensibility implies, which is not necessarily tied to the emergency imaginary. As Calhoun reminds us, "humanitarianism took root in the modern world not as a response to war or 'emergencies' but as part of an effort to remake the world so that it better served the interests of humanity" (2008:76).

[29] This signalling function could be said to be the task that many contemporary humanitarians have in fact embraced. As Peter Redfield for example explains, it is the case of *Médecins sans frontières*: "By demonstrating what is possible, the MSF doctrine suggests, a technically efficient project can highlight the failures of political will behind inadequate health care and remove the excuse that 'it can't be done.' At the same time, members of MSF rarely suggest that their work will directly build a better society or achieve a state of justice. The goal is to agitate, disrupt, and encourage others to alter the world" (2005:334).

[30] I chose this translation from 1923 because it seems to me to convey well the meaning of Rousseau's words – "Quoi donc! Faut-il détruire les sociétés?" (1823:335) – given the way they are lodged in between a statement about the unavoidable existence of luxury in society and a response to his critics about what he actually thinks a reasonable practical reaction to this denunciation can be.

[31] Clifford Orwin for example sustains that Rousseau "was the first to promote compassion as an affair of social class, as something owed by the rich just because they were rich to the poor just because they were poor. It was he who first dared tell the rich that they were unjust simply by virtue of being rich, and that the poor, conversely, were oppressed simply by virtue of being poor" (1997:309).

[32] Rousseau credits Diderot the first time he introduces the notion of general will by referring the reader to the latter's article in the *Encyclopédie* (Rousseau 1994:7). The term, however, has a much longer genealogy and its influence on Rousseau may well go beyond Diderot (see Agamben 2011:272-77).

[33] Of course, the forms of suffering that humanitarians find reproachable have long been associated with a lack of freedom, Rousseau being an exemplary case in point. Still, it must be recognized that an affirmation of freedom is not intrinsically tied to one of "social justice" (as the state in which such sufferings would not exist could be described). As Berlin remarks in this sense, "it is perfectly conceivable," on the one hand, "that a liberal-minded despot would allow his subjects a large measure of personal freedom," for at the same time he "may be unjust, or encourage the wildest inequalities, care little for order, or virtue, or knowledge" (2002:176). And, on the other, if what a humanitarian seeks is more social justice, there is no obvious reason why freedom would have priority as though it were the most relevant value to consider in every single situation (see Berlin 2002:214-15)

[34] This may sound counterintuitive, since Rousseau is best known for his inversion of Hobbes or the idea that human beings are intrinsically good and compassionate, and that it is society what corrupts them. To address this issue briefly, since it can be deduced from what has been said up to this point, Rousseau is talking here about human beings who already live in society, whose compassion is not spontaneous anymore, and who cannot simply go back to a state of nature. For Rousseau, once human beings come to have dependencies and live with each other, they can no longer be assumed to have the inner capacity to prioritize the interests of humanity as a whole.

[35] The way I conceptualize this foreclosure here cannot be reduced to the Hegelian insight that freedom is always foreclosed once an option is adopted: "if freedom inheres in the capacity to choose a course of action, then it is simultaneously realized and negated in the very act of choosing. Commitment to a particular course of action forecloses the freedom that enabled the commitment" (Brown 2005:83). This is because, first, I do not speak of freedom in general but of a specific freedom of intervention, and, second, because, as I intend to show, this specific freedom can be practiced and embraced in ways that do not require its foreclosure.

[36] See Maslan's article "The anti-human: Man and citizen before the declaration of the rights of man and of the citizen" (2004), where she illuminates how irruptive the project of the framers of the *Declaration* would have been, through a literary genealogy of the terms "man" and "citizen." These were absolutely opposite terms in the Old Regime. One could not be a socialized citizen and an independent human monad at the same time. Thus, by exploring this

inheritance in detail, she comes to the conclusion that: "When drafters and supporters of the 1789 Declaration announced that the 'truths' of the rights of man and of the citizen were not only eternal and immutable but immediately recognizable to all – '*ce que tout le monde sait, ce que tout le monde sent*' (what everyone knows, what everyone feels) – they, like Rome, were dissimulating, hiding what was in fact an ongoing struggle to form the categories of man and citizen" (p.372).

[37] The Book II of *The social contract* is particularly telling of the naturalness of society that starts to take shape with Rousseau. In it, essential elements of the general will are discussed which resemble Foucault's characterizations of biopolitics, from the non-transferability of sovereignty due to the irreducibility of a society's interests (see Rousseau 1994:63; Foucault 2008:272) to the idea of the people as a "site of veridiction" (Foucault 2008:31) "that is always in the right" (Rousseau 1994:66). In general, Foucault seeks to mark, of course, a sharp contrast between the juridical theories of social contract that were dominant up until the middle of the eighteenth century and the more economic analyses of interests that then supersede them. But in Rousseau the transition is already under way. In his work, it is clear that, "it is not because we have contracted that we respect the contract, but because it is in our interest that there is a contract" (Foucault 2008:274). His social contract is conceived precisely as an arrangement by which "none has any interest in making it burdensome to the others" (1994:55). See Wokler (2012:105-09) for an account of Rousseau's constitutive rejection of any "pact of submission" or "voluntary servitude" and also Friedrich Balke's article on "Rousseau's contribution to the modern history of governmentality" (2011) where he comes to the conclusion that "it already becomes clear from the manner Rousseau formulates the logical paradox of the legislative work in *The social contract* that his problem is no longer the people, understood as a mass of legal subjects" (p.79).

[38] I do not mean to imply that altruism is real and possible – although I do not discard it either. I refer to altruism in the sociological sense, as Robert Wuthnow for example treats it: "Doing good, engaging in prosocial behavior, volunteering, helping our neighbours, constructing accounts of the worth of such actions – these are not examples of altruism; they are only made possible by the idea of altruism, by our conception of it as a more pure, higher existence to which we can only aspire" (1993:356).

[39] This means, of course, that usual contrasts like that between acts of volunteering and acts of public protest or political activism do not apply here (see Eliasoph 2013, ch. 2). Volunteering has been often associated with charity (see e.g. Morton 1995) and what could be called a "conservative" approach to humanitarian intervention (Brauman 2004:400). But, as I hope is clear by now, what I am proposing is a different categorization. Within the category of

biopolitics, one can find revolutionaries and protesters just as much as aid workers and volunteers – and charity, in any case, as urban ethnographers have stressed, cannot be simply said to be disconnected from politics in practice, or have no influence in social change (see e.g. Allahyari 2000, ch. 5). Nina Eliasoph, in particular, has usefully shown how the absence of "public-spirited political conversation" that characterizes volunteer settings is not due to a lack of concern and broader awareness among its practitioners, but how politics is simply relegated to "backstage talk" in order to maintain a sense of effectivity during their collective work (1998, esp. 63).

[40] While Hirschman emphasizes the way Hobbes "devotes the first ten chapters of Leviathan to the nature of man before proceeding" (1997:13), Foucault simply treats him as someone who shows that, "the sovereign instituted in this way [through *raison d'État*], being absolute, will not be bound by anything" and "will therefore be able to be fully a 'ruler'" (2007b:245). The point of Foucault's account is of course to introduce a unique angle on the usual interpretation of early modern authors. At this point, I am simply trying to put that original angle into perspective in order to clarify my take on biopolitics.

[41] Hobbes, on the other hand, cannot be said to have proceeded yet in only a "quasi-" natural way. As his opening in *Leviathan* elucidates, he was largely trying to imitate nature: "Nature (the art where by God hath made and governs the world) is by the *art* of man, as in many other things, so in this also imitated, that it can make an artificial animal … by art is created that great Leviathan called a Commonwealth, or State, (In Latin Civitas) which is but an artificial man" (1998:7, original emphasis).

[42] Alan Ryan, who has dedicated his academic career in political science to the study of liberalism, arrives at a similar conclusion. For Rousseau, he writes, "not enough of our nature is visible or recoverable to provide us with a clear guide to what viable self we can create" (2012:232).

[43] For a discussion on the possible influence of Rousseau on Smith, see for example Rasmussen (2006). At the very least, it is well known that when he was thirty-two years of age, Smith wrote a review of Rousseau's *Discourse on inequality* to encourage his readers in England to engage with French philosophy.

[44] Smith's intention in this book was to find "a way of stabilizing judgment without grandly leaping into the easy metaphysical salve of rationalism or theism or intuitionism" (Forman-Barzilai 2009:98). Smith may invoke "reason" and "principle" at times, yet he finds casuistic rules derived from reason to be rather ineffective, due to the complexity of human interactions (p.58). He also may mention "conscience," yet he rejects the Humean idea that judgment should be

based on culturally acquired conventions (p.96). And although he speaks about "the inhabitant" or, as he puts it elsewhere, the "demigod within the breast," he does not "attribute our moral faculties to God or to any divine dispensation" (p.57). I will delve into what is actually involved in this solution in Chapter 4. At this point, it is only relevant to point out that the solution is not a "moralistic" one. If an individual adopts the view of an impartial spectator, it is ultimately because it makes sense for this individual to do so, and not because there is a sense of obligation involved.

[45] See for example Thierry de Duve (2015) who reads Kant's problematization of humanity as a strictly "aesthetic" ideal that must still be considered foundational for political action precisely because it is a "postulate" and, as such, cannot be proven or disproven. "Humanity" becomes a legitimate transcendental and irrefutable claim the moment it is recognized that it can only be pursued as a matter of art.

[46] Foucault obviously recognized this other type of naturalism in his works, particularly in *The order of things (2002)*. But during his lectures on governmentality – it is what Agamben reproaches him – Foucault did not treat this "immanent" world as a naturalism as such. He called this classical form of thought a "de-governmentalization of the cosmos:" "there is now a nature that no longer tolerates government and that only allows the reign of a reason that is ultimately the common reason of God and men. This is a nature that only allows a reason that has fixed once and for all – what? … it is not yet what are called 'laws,' [but] 'principles,' *principia naturae*" (2007b:236-37).

[47] For a possible theological layer of this kind in Rousseau's thought, see Wokler (2012, ch.7, esp. 117) and Agamben (2011, appendix, esp. 277).

[48] Hannah Arendt (2003:17-48) famously developed this argument for the case of those who, under the rule of Nazi Germany, and not being part of the victims, still decided to abstain from opposing or infiltrating the regime. The moral notion of collective guilt is a fallacy, she sustained (p.21) – "where all are guilty nobody is" (p.147) – while the reproach of political irresponsibility would require some minimal conditions: "I think we shall have to admit that there exist extreme situations in which responsibility for the world, which is primarily political, cannot be assumed because political responsibility always presupposes at least a minimum of political power. Impotence or complete powerlessness is, I think, a valid excuse" (p.45). Similarly, one could say that, if today's citizens do not have the possibility of breaking away from the causal chain that neoliberalism creates between privilege and oppression, the claim of complicity cannot be legitimately raised.

[49] As I hope was made clear earlier, I do not mean to direct this possible criticism towards Vrasti alone. At least since Kate Simpson's landmark article in the *Journal of International Development* (2004), denunciation has gone hand in hand with a rather condescending treatment of the volunteer tourist. Based on extremely popular commentaries like "the local people seem poor but happy" Simpson draws large conclusions about the mistaken understanding of development and social justice that is in place in gap year projects. Undoubtedly, many of these volunteers are rather young and far from thoughtful or critical. But I also think that such extrapolations are the product of a method of data collection that elicits or captures quick and "normal" answers to extremely complex matters, implicitly or explicitly using a tendencious mode of questioning in which the researcher seems to hold a privileged knowledge over what a correct answer sounds like.

[50] In general, the way the complicity of volunteers has been conceptualized so far has not managed to dislodge, I believe, the Foucauldian critique of neoliberalism from the register of denunciation. Whether the volunteer is seen as the paradigmatic worker in an exploitative neoliberalism that becomes "persuasive" thanks to a fantasy of non-commodification (Muehlebach 2012, esp. 48), or is rather seen as the model of citizenship in a calculative neoliberalism that "masks" the free market imperative by celebrating volunteerism (Hyatt 2001, esp. 205), the fact is that the critical implications drawn to this day from Foucault's work remain largely accusatory in character. If the finality of a Foucauldian analytics like, say, "governmentality" is not to demand "the accountability of power," as Barbara Cruikshank (1999:124) elaborates, but to assess the costs and profits of a given "formula of power," as Nikolas Rose (1999:65) manifests, then one would have to say that a diagnosis like "complicity" cannot be useful as long as it simply signals a sense of indignation, a co-optation or a global manipulation.

[51] Although Foucault recovers this historical understanding of civil society through Adam Ferguson, there are other authors that could be considered important for such a genealogy. It is perhaps Cruikshank who has best captured this understanding of the social through her emphasis on Alexis de Tocqueville, referring us, for example, to his influential ideas on "interest rightly understood:" "it is impossible to obtain the cooperation of any great number of [men] unless you can persuade every man whose help is required that he serves his private interests by voluntarily uniting his efforts to those of all the others" (Tocqueville 1969: 517, cited in Cruikshank 1999:98). Another author that is critical to capture "civil society" as a mechanism of interests is Adam Smith himself, as I sustain in the following chapter.

[52] An important part of this trend, as the national report on the matter admits, has had to do with the popularization of volunteer tourism among young people, who used to count for 16 percent of the volunteering rate in 1995 and whose participation, by 2010, had gone up to 27.1 percent (VA 2012:3). This seems to be on par with the growth in international volunteering in similar countries. For the US, it is estimated that "over one million individuals volunteer abroad every year" and that 70 to 80 percent of them do so through short-term programs (Lough et al 2010:1). In the UK, it is believed that at least 200 thousand young people take a gap year annually (Simpson 2004:447). And, in general, according to a survey of 300 sending organizations performed by a tourism association, there would be at least 1.6 million volunteer tourists working domestically and abroad in the world each year (ATLAS 2008:5).

[53] Another type of internal governmental mechanisms that has been recently growing, for example, is what Annelise Riles calls "legal technology," which basically refers to "private dispute-resolution regimes" that realize the dream of the rule of law and self-regulation "through technical legal devices that take power out of the hands of public entities and put it in the hands of private individuals, corporations, armies" (2011:7-8; see also Foucault 2008:167-176, 259-260). This is an interventionist domain of neoliberalism that Foucault largely underestimated (Brown 2015:151-52), one that has definitely been shaping the volunteer environment – Muehlebach noting, for instance, for the case of Italy, "the hyperlegalization and hyperstandardization of a once relatively informal sphere of activity" (2012:114).

[54] Two relevant initiatives, in this sense, have been the development and implementation of a *Manual on the measurement of volunteer work* by the International Labour Organization (see UNV 2011:22) and also a *Handbook on nonprofit institutions in the system of national accounts* by the UN, which seeks to make visible all those nonprofit institutions that currently escape international economic statistics because they get some revenue through market sales or are partially funded by the government sector (see Salamon 2010). As Lester Salamon explains it, one of the lead academics behind these two initiatives, the intention behind these efforts is to put "the civil society sector on the economic map of the world for the first time in a systematically comparative way" (2010:168). Such a detailed economic mapping of the sector, regardless of any traceable encouragement it may have received from neoliberal theory, is symptomatic in itself of an organizational culture that requires financial types of conversions, standards of comparison and grids of visibility to guarantee public funding, policy initiatives, entrepreneurship, donations, consumption and all the elements that are necessary for the construction of competitive non-profit-oriented quasi-markets.

[55] While many researchers are interested in more than "number crunching," as the mentioned UN report for instance declares (UNV 2011:15), this emerging interest in measuring effectiveness reflects and contributes to the neoliberal agenda of self-government and accountability by leading nonprofit institutions and other autonomous centres of authority to monitor themselves more closely. A tangible product, in this sense, would be the *International voluntourism guidelines for commercial tour operators* recently developed by The International Ecotourism Society, in which one can find detailed recommendations on financial transparency, impact assessment and ethical conduct, with check-lists and "reality checks" for each individual organization in this industry to independently follow (TIES 2012).

[56] Instead of a subsidy or a grant for core organizational funding, states have been inviting nonprofits to tender for specific projects with predefined objectives, which means, among other things, that they must reduce costs, become adaptable, work around donor funding cycles, focus on their marketable programs, maximize their unwaged labour, seek multiple funding sources, and emphasize outcomes that are easily quantifiable in order to prove their worth in a competition that often includes for-profit contenders (see e.g. Taylor 2007).

[57] A case in point is the book of Tania Li, *The will to improve* (2007), where she sets out to complement Ferguson's Foucauldian mode of criticism with Marxist and Gramscian forms of theorizing. There she concludes that the anti-politics machine "does more than enable the development apparatus to sustain itself. It maintains the divide that separates trustees from their wards" (p.276). In her work, as in the work of many others who have been attentive to depoliticizing effects, the result is thus a critical claim akin to denunciation.

[58] While Ferguson makes a consistent argument for why failed development projects can motivate more rather than less of the same style of intervention, one could argue that he underplays the way the "depoliticization of poverty" is first of all a premise for such projects rather than their instrument-effect (see e.g. 1990:270). Li (2007) has made in fact this very point. Elaborating on Ferguson, she has argued that development projects are characterized by the practice of *rendering technical*: "First, they [repose] political-economic causes of poverty and injustice in terms amenable to a technical solution. Second, they [highlight] only those problems for which a technical solution [can] in fact be proposed" (pp.7, 126). If one reduces Ferguson's critique to this claim, as Li (e.g. pp.275-77) and many others at times have done – including Ferguson himself (2006:60-65) – then one would unavoidably be stepping into a register of denunciation rather than one of failure. In a register of failure, the depoliticization of poverty does not appear as a negative effect in itself. It is simply part of a certain strategy that could be broadly called "technical." In turn, a register of denunciation only becomes thinkable if one

favors from the outset strategies that are instead "political" – which, following Li's proposal, could be defined as those that leave collective problems open rather than in a state of "closure" (2007:11). The next chapter challenges the technical/political contrast by offering a different classification of intervention strategies based on their strategic limitations rather than their political ideology.

[59] I suggest the relevance of my argument here in terms of an academic debate, but, in general, it is not meant as a purely academic insight. After all, as one of my participants evidenced, the notion of neoliberal complicity has spread rather widely among development practitioners: "A few of us volunteers did ponder from time to time why a right-wing neoliberal government would want to mass together 200 left-leaning young people and fund their travels and work overseas. We never did have the answer, but it did bring to light an interesting space where both were using each other for means that existed at opposing poles. The challenge I guess then became how does one navigate this space? Could I be guided by the ethics of both my utopian humanitarianism and Australia's foreign aid policy? Were they compatible? Or would I need to simply become a puppet?" (9th of May, Ethnosense blog).

[60] I mention at this point expressions like "subjection" and "internalized" for the sake of clarity, but I leave them in inverted commas to signal the awkward meaning that they have from a Foucauldian stance. Judith Butler, in her brilliant book *The psychic life of power* (1997), manages to explain how "subjection is neither simply the domination of a subject nor its production, but designates a certain kind of restriction *in* production" (p.84).

[61] As plenty of observers have noted, the contemporary exercise of politics is not always directed at the state or confined to one's national territory. Many social movements have broken with the "vertical politics" of previous centuries (Ferguson 2006:105). Countless NGOs have disrupted the centre/periphery paradigm of colonial and post-colonial eras "by reinforcing the pressure of the peripheries on the center" (Abélès 2010:173). And, in general, many occupations, boycotts, and other forms of protest are taking place in what Saskia Sassen (2004) calls "global cities," confronting a worldwide audience with informal urban politics through social and conventional media, and global capital, with disadvantaged and immigrant workers's claims for rights.

[62] Here he is referring to the only post that I actually wrote in the collaborative blog in the spirit of participant-observation towards the end of the project. For that post I decided to articulate the frustrating part of my brief experience as an international volunteer in terms of "luck" (c.f. Palacios 2010). My intention was not, of course, to reduce poverty or inequality to inevitable and completely random situations. In fact, I closed the post with these questions:

"Why is everyone so comfortable with taking "luck" as it is? Why, if we all know it's wrong, can't we find a rational way to organize our societies that does not entail the cruelty of insane inequality and chronic scarcity?" The point of the post was rather to react towards those who have read volunteer insights about how they "feel so lucky" in rather patronizing ways (see e.g. Simpson 2004). To assume that there is an objectively better explanation than luck that volunteers can give would be to assume that it is actually possible to determine what Fraser (2008:35) calls the "question of causal primacy: What precisely is the primary factor that determines people's life-chances in the current conjuncture?" Or that it is possible to find what Boltanski (1999:67-68) calls a "principle of equivalence," a principle that even in globalized times can "ground a connection between the unfortunate's suffering and the persecutor's good fortune" as though both belonged to the same "city" or regime of justice. By using "luck" as a point of departure, what can be stressed is the strategic question of intervention, of social reorganization, rather than any moralistic question that would seek to place blame on a certain structure, agency or behavior. In this way, it is still possible to challenge the conformist attitude that certain volunteers at times may have, without having to reproduce one or other politics of suspicion.

[63] If one were to deduce a sense of political responsibility from the Foucauldian tradition itself and not from its reading of liberalism, it would be one that also finds this first condition questionable. For, in the very act of intervening, one would be seeking to make possible the future formation of a "we" rather than reaffirm an already existing community. In Chapter 5, I will also challenge this first condition for political responsibility, but from a critical perspective situated at a certain distance of this Foucauldian one.

[64] When Fraser (2008) suggests that we should embrace the meta-question of political framing, of how to decide whether a certain matter of social justice is national, transnational or global, the issue of skepticism and complicity is only partially explained. What humanitarians seeking to "make a difference" need is not a scale in which their sense of justice would be definitely agreeable, as much as a circuit of collaboration in which their practice of intervention would be truly cumulative. It is the question of effectivity, and not of justice as such, that can turn them into skeptical humanitarians. As a logistical solution, Fraser even proposes at some point the creation of global representative institutions that could be "meta-democratic," that is, which could arbitrate between different claims about the right political framing for a given dispute and determine whether it is more a matter of, say, cultural recognition or economic justice what is at stake (2008:67-70). But, again, even if there were such a "meta-political" judging panel, they still would not be able to confirm, in our case, that one or other humanitarian

practice is productive while another one is counterproductive. A deliberative-democratic method could be effective to resolve disputes between parties, but it cannot have a say on the design of intervention.

[65] Forman-Barzilai takes, of course, a sophisticated angle on Smith's cosmopolitanism, as we saw in Chapter 2: that Smith himself is a localist and believes that the individual is not intrinsically prone to develop compassion for distant others, even if what he wants to do with his theory is find a way of bypassing such a human bias.

[66] The effectivity of this Smithian argument comes from understanding that a "corrupted society" cannot be defined in advance but would precisely mean something different in every historical and cultural context. Samuel Fleischacker for example rebuts that "if a feeling of contempt for Africans or hatred for Jews or homosexuals, say, has become confused with a moral feeling, and a society's judgments of these people's actions have been comprehensively skewed as a result, the impartial spectator within each individual will share in, rather than correct for, that corruption" (2005: 8, cited in Forman-Barzilai 2009:186). This author departs from the cosmopolitan premise that there can be in fact a universal criterion of judgment from which those or any other moral views can be confirmed to be "corrupted." Following the argument made here earlier that Smith departs from a strategic humanitarian problem, this kind of criticism appears misplaced. The moral relevance of the impartial spectator as an imaginary exercise would always come from the individual's own perception of corruption and her effort to be objective about that perception by thinking in relation to what others would have to say about it.

[67] His interest is circumscribed to the recent humanitarian movement, particularly in France, and the images that motivate our commitment to it. But the premise, orientation, and scope of his research are recognizably Smithian. That he takes as his context the "shocking spectacle of distant suffering" (1999:xv) brought to us so lively by the representatives of the media is undoubtedly resonant. As Smith would himself put it, "the abstract and ideal spectator of our sentiments and our conduct requires often to be awakened and put in mind of his duty, by the presence of the real spectator" (Smith 2004:178). He also asks a characteristically Smithian question about the "aptness" (Boltanski 1999:45), acceptability or, we might even say, "propriety" of our reaction to unfortunate situations. And, finally, he organizes his historical inquiry based on the notion that the coordination of moral sensibilities is not simply the result of a "contagion of opinion and affects" (p.49), which is in line with Smith's vision as it has been presented here. See for example Smith (2004:179-181) where he praises those "who preserve their judgment untainted by the general contagion."

[68] At this point, Boltanski describes a similar dynamic of political participation to the one reviewed in the previous chapter in relation to the political technology of "civil society." He connects a rooted solidarity with the "problem of the selection of the unfortunates who matter" (1999:191), arguing that this selectivity is inherently political. It amounts to a "politics of the present" whose objective is not to "legitimise appeals to the identity of peoples" based on the "sacrifices of past victims," but rather target "present suffering and *present victims*" (p.192, original emphasis). As sustained in that chapter, this form of selectivity is currently facing an impasse, not necessarily because it is not possible to act from a pre-existing collectivity, as Boltanski envisions, but simply because knowing who precisely are "the unfortunates who matter" and how they can be helped poses an undecidable problem in neoliberal conditions.

[69] The Smithian individual exemplifies the kind of general characterization Foucault provides for the subject of interest. Foucault simply states that for such a subject any choice is "both irreducible and non-transferable" regardless of "what may active it" from the perspective of different Enlightenment thinkers (2008:272). If the choices of this subject are irreducible, Smith in his own terms would have explained, it is because they are all choices that can be ultimately reduced to a basic desire for sympathy: 'nothing pleases us more than to observe in other men a fellow-feeling with all the emotions of our own breast' (2004:17). And if they are non-transferable, it is because none of these choices can be changed for another under any influence or pressure (as the objection of *homo œconomicus* to political intervention illustrates). Smith explains this point in *The theory of moral sentiments* by giving the example of someone who finds new enjoyment in a book by reading it again but to someone else, concluding that, 'the mirth of the company, no doubt, enlivens our own mirth, and their silence, no doubt, disappoints us. But though this may contribute both to the pleasure which we derive from the one, and to the pain which we feel from the other, it is by no means the sole cause of either' (2004: 18).

[70] For a discussion of why this debate commonly known as the "Adam Smith Problem" has become largely irrelevant, see the first chapter of Forman-Barzilai (2009).

[71] I am referring here to the figure of the volunteer as defined in Chapter 2. However, it is interesting to consider that if one were to depart from its common usage, the culminating point of volunteerism would result in a similar paradoxical challenge, as Arendt's following comment in *The human condition* suggests: "Goodness can exist only when it is not perceived, not even by its author; whoever sees himself performing a good work is no longer good, but at best a useful member of society or a dutiful member of a church" (1998:74).

[72] Modern institutions like the market or the state are of course impersonal in the sense that they are based on rules that cannot be changed by any individual person. What I am contesting is

that if these institutions have come to largely demand the personal submission of every single individual, regardless of their identity, and reject the possibility of creating reasonable exceptions based on personal circumstances, it cannot be simply said that it is *because of* the formulations of the "invisible hand" and "the people." The implementation of these solutions may follow dangerous paths, for the reasons I just stated, but they cannot be assumed to be necessarily "depersonalizing" in the sense that they will always trample over the values and priorities of individuals. They are not bound to result in an "iron cage" (Weber 2011:177). Their reach, relevance, and configuration are decided by those who directly or indirectly have a say in how to implement them and coordinate them. And, in any case, one must maintain the distinction between solution and institution, because the state and the economy have not always been shaped by and do not always follow these two liberal principles (see e.g. Walter 2008).

[73] While the "retrospective" way of doing history has been usually criticized within the Foucauldian tradition and used as a contrasting background to differentiate itself (e.g. Dean 1994:35), I am able to grasp it here as just another potentially useful possibility by grounding it on a history of problematizations whose task is the *recovery* of problems. Retrospection, in this sense, would not be about deducing the coherence of past solutions from the rationality of current ones – as the history of science has often proceeded – but rather about paying attention to "the historical contents that have been buried," to their "immediate emergence" (Foucault 1980:81).

[74] One of Foucault's last points of clarification in his course summary of these lectures was precisely that, "this is not an 'interpretation' of liberalism that would claim to be exhaustive, but a possible level of analysis, that of 'governmental reason,' of those types of rationality that are implemented in the methods by which human conduct is directed through a state administration" (2008:322). The state, he could have said, was the locus he had chosen to study the irruption of the liberal event. In fact, he finishes his summary by restating how the technology of government that is the state, "although far from always having been liberal, since the end of the eighteenth century has been constantly haunted by the question of liberalism" (pp.323-24).

[75] Even Putnam himself called, in his most popular article "Bowling alone: America's declining social capital," for a more "rounded assessment of changes in American social capital over the last quarter-century," which "needs to count the costs as well as the benefits of community engagement. We must not romanticize," he added, "small-town, middle-class civic life in the America of the 1950s" (1995:76).

[76] While some would associate Putnam's political project with that of a "neoliberal corporatism" (Narotzky 2007:410), its orientation is still fully communitarian. In fact, it is one that goes beyond the individual level of analysis that for example Bourdieu maintained in his treatment of social capital (Portes 1998). See Rose (1999), especially Chapter 5, for a discussion of how neoliberalism and community are joined these days through concepts like social capital.

[77] Foucault investigates this practice from many different angles and at a variety of junctures in Antiquity during his last three courses at the *Collège de France* (2004; 2011; 2012), describing, not always chronologically, the transition of parrhēsia from a political form of truth-telling that could bring about an ethical differentiation among the vocal citizens of the polis, to a much more personal exercise that could be just practiced among friends or strangers if with beneficial side effects for the body politic. It is the beginning of this transition which can be illuminating, before a political and largely spontaneous parrhesia becomes a whole ethical philosophy of life, an aesthetic programme of conduct or "art of existence" (see e.g. Foucault 2012:160-63).

[78] Only in the rather figurative case of Pericles one sees a governor who governs *through* parrhēsia (Foucault 2011:176-77). But, in general, the practice of parrhēsia is simply the means by which the citizens of the polis can gain a legitimate position of superiority to govern the city (pp.157-58). The right to govern is gained through "imprecation," by letting the weak confront the powerful (p.135). And yet, since this legitimacy does not depend on the sovereign force of laws and constitutions but on the agonistic game of discursive confrontation, which is supposed to guarantee the virtuous ascendancy of some over others, Foucault considers this to be a prime field of governmentality.

[79] While Foucault uses a variation of the term "reflection" when he defines ethics as "the considered [*réfléchie*] practice of freedom," in his case this terminology has the opposite function to the one I intend to give it here. For Foucault, it serves to qualify – as its tense for example reveals – the practice of freedom as always being an already calculated exercise of conduct.

[80] In this sense, my use of "reflection" is diametrically opposed to that of David Graeber, who uses it to differentiate "the power to act directly on others," or what he calls "action," from "the power to define oneself in such a way as to convince others how they should act toward you" (2001:104). The way a woman or a king persuades others to treat them in a certain way through a calculated display of the self is for Graeber a form of power that can be defined, rather cross-culturally, as a matter of "reflection" (pp.94-99). In our case, acting upon others through this cross-cultural form of relating to self still belongs to the sphere of the conduct of conduct (see Dean 1995).

[81] Arendt's theatre-inspired phenomenology of "appearances" is only useful here as an ontological account of human reality and not as the basis for a whole political model (c.f. Villa 1999, ch. 6).

[82] The cultural crisis of the Christian pastorate that leads to problematize the "conduct of conduct" along such lines was already sketched in Chapter 1.

[83] In a way, Isin does recognize and even emphasize this cultural process of formalization when he speaks of acts of citizenship as "descriptions" that appear at a given moment in society as intelligible, yet contested interpretations of an action (2012:126-27). Nevertheless, he only applies the question of the formation of shared "descriptions" to the problem of what is and what is not an "act of citizenship." Isin makes out of the latter his preferred convention for strategics – which in his case can be properly called a "convention," being much more culturally grounded than Foucault's "reversibility." In his theory, when a disruptive action or event is recognized as an "act of citizenship," a new right becomes socially thinkable and a new course is thus established in society for making claims of justice (see pp.127, 186).

[84] An approach of cultural strategics attempts to overcome, in this way, the two extreme interpretations that exist about Arendt's notion of "principle;" namely, that it is either essentially conventional or essentially disruptive. Arendt speaks on different occasions of certain ruling principles or criteria of virtuosity at the heart of action "whose validity is universal … not bound to any particular person or to any particular group" (2000:445). This view of "action" as having such a universal "principle" or virtuosity has led commentators to critique Arendt for her "moral homogeneity" (see Villa 1999:136). However, one can rather recognize in Arendt's notion an immanent correlation between thought and practice for the case of freedom. Isin asserts well the opposite interpretation when he writes that, "our acts may contravene our responsibilities but are answerable to the principles for their enactment" (2012:130). And yet, ironically, in pursuing this interpretation, he still falls pray to the same criticism of moral homogeneity, by then trying to generalize too much the applicability of what would be essentially contextual principles. He makes out of "act of citizenship" a quasi-natural criterion, even if what he thinks would be universal about such acts is their equally disruptive character (see previous footnote).

[85] Unlike other historical sociologists like Norbert Elias, Sennett finds that the development of codes of courtesy, diplomatic conversation and other self-conscious behaviors in European culture did not necessarily lead this culture to become more controlling and moralistic. Norms of conduct like being a "gentleman" were, according to his research, imagined and devised with the explicit intention of making out of conversation a more open and pleasurable experience. From its inception in the sixteenth-century literature about the courtier, civility would have thus aimed

at more than bodily restraint. It was meant to facilitate a greater sociability in a hierarchical society, for example encouraging the aristocrat to act politely and modestly in front of others, regardless of their rank (Sennett 2012:116-127).

[86] Sennett recently referred to civility as an "ethics of sociability" (2012:98), but quickly elaborated on it by saying that "civility, more than a personality trait, is an exchange in which both parties make one another feel good about the encounter" (p.120). This scene of exchange is a game rather than an "ethics" as such, as one would expect from his original framework of interpretation.

[87] Symbiosis is only now starting to become a key point of reference and analytical tool in post-human critique (e.g. Adema and Woodbridge 2011), multispecies ethnography (e.g. Helmreich 2009) and the ecological humanities in general (e.g. Rose 2010). Nonetheless, considering the key use Deleuze and Guattari made of the term in *A thousand plateaus* for the explanation of "becoming" (2004:263), one could say that symbiosis permeates the entirety of contemporary social theory, from philosophies of "radical immanence" (see e.g. Connolly 2011:152) to "flat ontologies" in political ecology (see Escobar 2010).

[88] My appropriation of symbiosis will not go beyond the realm of analogy as, for example, the work of William Connolly does seem to do, when he integrates notions of the natural sciences such as "pre-adaptations" (2011:17) into cultural theory through a philosophical reworking of base notions such as explanation, agency and time.

[89] Durkheim's take on symbiosis can be found in a fully developed form in the work of Robert Park. See his article "Symbiosis and socialization" (1939), where he outlines a historical and psychological framework for understanding the process of socialization based on the idea that there is a functional development in societies and individuals that starts in a stage of symbiosis achieved through competition and ends in a social state achieved through communication and concerted action. My take on symbiosis is fundamentally detached from the field of "human ecology" that sociologists like Park advanced and is not intended to generalize a naturalist framework across Western and non-Western cultures, present and past societies or human and non-human species. While I agree that it refers to something other than concerted action, I capture symbiosis as a unique and contemporary mode of collaboration whose dynamics and effectivity need to be explored, rather than as a generic, non-fully-developed form of sociality.

[90] The capabilities approach, as Martha Nussbaum (2011) calls it, started with Sen's well-known proposal of seeing development as a matter of freedom rather than economics, freedom understood as the range of opportunities that are presented to an individual in society to become

a person with a certain quality of life. In general, however, as Nussbaum has rectified, it is imprecise to say that capabilities are about "freedom," since freedom is not necessarily in itself a social good and can often stand in the way of more collective needs (2011:70-73). Following what was said earlier in this chapter, there can very well be relations of freedom, for example, that make use of violence to reduce the capabilities of others who are perceived to be a threat to freedom in general. Thus, I follow the emphasis on capability, rather than on freedom, to refer to a measure of collaboration that considers and balances an individual's "opportunities to choose and to act" (p.20).

[91] My take on symbiosis does not imply an "unconscious" form of collaboration, since it is meant to apply as a criterion of effectivity to practices of intervention (c.f. Park 1939:4). The point that I seek to clarify here is rather that while the individuals partaking in a symbiosis are indeed conscious of the collaborative effect of their relationship, their relationship cannot be said to be maintained by this effect alone.

[92] As he elaborates in the conclusion, "if the division of labour produces solidarity, it is not only because it makes each individual an agent of exchange, to use the language of the economists. It is because it creates between men a whole system of rights and duties joining them in a lasting way to one another" (pp.337-38).

[93] To reiterate, it is through a serendipitous complementarity, and nothing else, that certain non-antagonistic interactions end up being long-lasting and beneficial in terms of fitness. One cannot even say that it is "natural selection" what drives this form of collaboration. As stressed earlier, natural selection cannot be thought of as a universal drive that guides organisms as some kind of internal force (see e.g. Bevir 2002:132-35). It is rather an accurate scale of assessment or effective way of making sense of the successful products of their interactions, whether they are competitive or symbiotic.

[94] This kind of affective findings have been subject to many different critical interpretations in which the inequality of benefits received is perhaps the main concern. Moreover, a whole literature has emerged in recent years dedicated to the careful consideration and assessment of the positive and negative impacts that volunteer tourism projects can have on host communities and volunteers (see e.g. Sherraden, Lough and McBride 2008; Guttentag 2009; Spencer 2010; Fee and Gray 2011; Mostafanezhad 2013c; Zahra and McGehee 2013, among many others). What the criterion of "symbiosis" offers to this academic project of evaluation as a whole, beyond its variable assessments, is an understanding of what "social intervention" means in a micro-political scenario populated by skeptical humanitarians and morally exposed practices.

[95] In spite of the radical anti-capitalist connotations of "embeddedness" (see Robotham 2009) and the intentions of the fair trade movement to create "committed relationships with producers" (Cotera and Ortiz 2010:108), the circuits of collaboration that fair trade promotes are far from ones based on a social contract. Fair trade "resocializes" the economy to the extent that it makes out of the economy a "site of decision, of ethical praxis," but it does not result in any social "whole" or "commonality of being" (Gibson-Graham 2006:86-87).

[96] Symbio-politics has here a more specific meaning than the one provided by the anthropologist Stefan Helmreich (2009), who in his ethnography of marine biologists defines it as "the governance of relations among entangled living things" (p.15). While his definition stems from the kind of open-ended, socially applicable, and biologically informed understanding of symbiosis advanced here (p.24), his intention is to reflect on the influence of natural categories on cultural practice rather than on articulating through a natural concept the practical strategies that a culture is using yet does not know how to name.

[97] This would involve a method of "cultural anticipation" similar to the one Marc Abélès (2010:207) has advanced, only that, besides recognizing the "virtual" formation of a certain circuit (pp.78-79), one would further seek to reinforce it. It would not be strategic, however, in the sense, for example, of Paul Gilroy's "strategic universalism," which seeks to promote a theoretically derived "planetary humanism" (2004:17-18, 326-56). A symbio-politics must precisely avoid the imposition of a political project, choosing not to prompt but only anticipate certain valuable practices.

[98] In this sense, an approach of foundational anticipation, while Arendtian in inspiration, cannot be attributed to Arendt herself, who identified the task of foundation with the making of promises, thinking that consistency in human collaboration could only be attained by means of a more or less explicit mutualistic agreement to protect each other's political expressiveness (see e.g. Arendt 2006:164-67; Bernstein 2010).

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MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY

Faculty of Arts Research Office
Building W6A, Room 233
MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY NSW 2109

Phone +61 (0)2 9850 9663
Fax +61 (0)2 9850 7054
Email ArtsRO@mq.edu.au

27 July 2018

Reference: 5201000735 (D)

Dear Dr Spencer,

FINAL APPROVAL

Title of project: 'Informed Democracies: Discovering the other side of politics through hybrid forms of volunteering'.

Thank you for your responses to the Faculty of Arts Human Research Ethics Committee conditions of approval, as outlined in our email dated 21st June 2010. Your responses have been reviewed by the Chair of the Committee and approval of the above application is granted effective 1st July 2010, and you may now proceed with your research. The following personnel are authorised to conduct this research:

Dr Rochelle Spencer - Chief Investigator/Supervisor
Mr Carlos Palacios - Co-Investigator

Please note the following standard requirements of approval:

1. The approval of this project is **conditional** upon your continuing compliance with the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007)*.

2. Approval will be for a period of five (5) years subject to the provision of annual reports. **Your first progress report is due on 1st July 2011.**

   If you complete the work earlier than you had planned, you must submit a Final Report as soon as the work is completed. If the project has been discontinued or not commenced for any reason, you are also required to submit a Final Report on the project.

   Progress Reports and Final Reports are available at the following website:
   http://www.research.mq.edu.au/researchers/ethics/human_ethics/forms

3. If the project has run for more than five (5) years, you cannot renew approval for the project. You will need to complete and submit a Final Report and submit a new application for the project. (The five year limit on renewal of approvals allows the Committee to fully re-review research in an environment where legislation, guidelines and requirements are continually changing, for example, new child protection and privacy laws).

4. All amendments to the project must be reviewed and approved by the Committee before implementation. Please complete and submit a Request for Amendment Form available at the following website:

   http://www.research.mq.edu.au/for/researchers/how_to_obtain_ethics_approval/human_research_ethics/forms

5. Please notify the Committee immediately in the event of any adverse effects on participants or of any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.

6. At all times you are responsible for the ethical conduct of your research in accordance with the guidelines established by the University. This information is available at: http://www.research.mq.edu.au/policy

http://www.research.mq.edu.au/for/researchers/how_to_obtain_ethics_approval/human_research_ethics/policy

If you will be applying for or have applied for internal or external funding for the above project, it is your responsibility to provide Macquarie University's Research Grants Management Assistant with a copy of this letter as soon as possible. Internal and External funding agencies will not be informed that you have final approval for your project and funds will not be released until the Research Grants Management Assistant has received a copy of this letter.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Buck
Professor
Associate Dean Research Faculty of Arts
Chair, Faculty of Arts Human Research Ethics Committee