1 Women’s Freedom Practices

Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) is the author of an extensive oeuvre. Apart from *The Second Sex*, a series of autobiographies, a play, some philosophical articles and reviews, and a voluminous study on the position of old people throughout history, she wrote philosophical novels, a genre that gave her the opportunity to express her ideas about human existence in a non-academic form. In most of her novels she outlines, in indirect ways, her philosophical concept of an ethical self in contrast to other models of personhood – as is the scheme of *Les belles images*.

Laurence, the central character in the novel *Les belles images* – published in French in 1966 – is an advertising manager immersed in a world of ‘pretty pictures.’ We meet Laurence as she broods over a slogan to sell wooden panels, going through recent psychological surveys and questionnaires that once more show that people want ‘novelty, but with no risk’ (Beauvoir 1968a: 36). Laurence knew her job: ‘I am not selling wooden panels: I am selling security, success and a touch of poetry into the bargain’ (20). In addition to being a career woman with developed market skills, she is successful in her personal life as well, with an affluent architect husband, two daughters, a lover on demand, and a family house in the country. All seems to be well: ‘(e)verything was clear, fresh, perfect: the blue water in the swimming pool, the opulent sound of the tennis-balls, the sharp white rock of the peaks, the rounded clouds in the smooth sky, the smell of the pines’ (19). But cracks begin to show.

Super Woman and Organization Man

‘Every morning when she opened her shutters Laurence gazed at a splendid glossy photograph’ (19). Being an advertising specialist, ‘she knew too much about how a set was put together – it fell to pieces under her eyes’ (91). Laurence increasingly feels like the king who turned everything he touched into gold: ‘(e)verything she touched turned into a picture’ (18), including her daughter Catherine.

Laurence had always been a pretty picture herself, a ‘faultless child, an accomplished adolescent, a perfect young woman,’ ‘so clean-cut, so fresh, so perfect’ (19). But Catherine suddenly starts to ask difficult questions, about why people are poor and why there is war in the world, and she cries at night in her sleep. Pressed by family members, Laurence arranges for her
daughter to see a psychologist. Catherine is advised to break contact with a new girlfriend, who worries too much about ‘sad things’ in the world (67). Laurence, against the will of her family, ignores the expert advice. Raised as socially unaware, she wants a different life for her daughter.

According to Mario Vargas Llosa, *Les belles images* contains a critique of people’s alienation in modern, consumerist society. The work describes the depersonalization of human beings and their subtle transformation into robots (cf. Vargas Llosa 1996: 56-57). To Irène Pagès (1975), *Les belles images* deals with an attitude of absence and a flight from everyday existence (Pagès 1975: 133). However, the main characters in the novel, rather than coming across as depersonalized robots or absent minded people, present as individuals who are highly invested in their own daily lives. *Les belles images* shows us a deep modification of the modern subject, rather than the end of man. It shows us a new – increasingly global – model of personhood: the subject of a society of (risk) management, who is a risk-averse executive in work and life, focused on status and success and, above all, security.

In her novel, Beauvoir sketches the Americanized way of life of the Parisian upper class in the 1960s. She does so along the lines of William Whyte’s 1956 bestseller *The Organization Man*, to which she repeatedly refers in her autobiography. According to Whyte, the American way of life in the 1950s had become a life under the protection of organizational planning. As corporations increasingly bureaucratized, in their pursuit of success, security, and safety, these norms spilled over into American society at large. At stake is a collective organization of the American population by planned thought and calculative action with the help of the social sciences. Whyte analyses the science-based social engineering of people’s life and work, and focuses especially on ‘the personal impact that organization life has had on the individuals within it’ (Whyte 1956: 4).

According to him, modern society’s bureaucratization, as analysed by Max Weber, has most poignantly affected the United States (cf. 5), since it went together with a new ideology, holding that the ends of organization and morality coincide and that science-based techniques can lead to a finite, achievable harmony (cf. 8). The Organization Man has internalized this ideology. As ‘the man of success’, he is actively participating in, and endorsing, a corporate society that he instead should resist. Look at the growth of business administration courses at universities, Whyte concludes with horror; look at the new suburbia, these dormitories where Organization

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1 Authors of the Foucauldian ‘governmentality school’ discussed later in this Chapter as well refer to Whyte’s famous study *The Organization Man* published in 1956 (cf. Miller and Rose 2008: 119).
Man lives. And see the growth of personality testing. Pointing out how psychological experts are involved in the making of organization man, Whyte aptly concludes his book with an appendix entitled ‘How to cheat on personality tests’.2

Beauvoir claims that in her travel account America Day by Day (1999), published in French in 1948, she had already reached similar conclusions on the American way of life: ‘no one, as far as I know, was talking about the organization man yet; but that was whom I described in my reports’ (Beauvoir 1968b: 132-133). She specifies that she was struck by how even very young boys and girls employed only the abstract measure of money (cf. 133). Whyte’s study shows that America has become ‘essentially a consumer society [...] measuring value by success’ (385) – with people living in suburbs where space, air, light and order prevail, and where the world is one big ‘kitchen garden’ (439).

In her novel Les belles images, we also encounter Organization Man, who measures his worth in terms of status, success, and safety. Laurence’s father and her husband – who calls himself a ‘feminist’ – are convinced that technical organization will change all societies for the better: the ‘gap between the capitalist and socialist countries will soon be done away with’ (Beauvoir 1968a: 11). The world will form a single entity and men will no longer suffer: ‘thanks to synthetic proteins, birth control, automation, and atomic energy it was reasonable to think that by about 1990 the civilization of abundance and leisure would be in existence’ (61).

The main female characters, Laurence and her mother, ‘design’ their lives by organizing and safeguarding their consumption patterns, status, and success. Guaranteeing themselves a marital status is a necessary ingredient to their safety, since – as Laurence’s mother expresses it, ‘(s)ocially a woman without a man counts for nothing’ (119), a woman without a man is ‘a half-failure, a kind of derelict’ (120). Laurence needs her family around her as a ‘cocoon,’ alongside her career and luxurious life-style, and is keen ‘to prevent anything breaking in upon this security’ (38). The female characters in the novel represent the ‘woman of success,’ i.e. Organization Woman.

2 To the sociologist Max Weber mentioned by Whyte, bureaucracy was a necessary element of modern society. Weber famously concluded that: ‘once it is fully established, bureaucracy is among those social structures which are the hardest to destroy’ (Weber 1968: 987). In contrast, Whyte optimistically argues that if ‘organization has been made by man; it can be changed by man’ (Whyte 1956: 14). A new balance between individual and organization is needed. To Whyte, we need to know ‘how to cooperate with The Organization but, more than ever, so do we need to know how to resist it’ (13). Whyte concludes that education is central to the problem (cf. 447) and that a revitalizing of the humanities is decisive (cf. 106-107, 109).
In Beauvoir’s posthumously published novella *Misunderstanding in Moscow* (2011), probably dating as well from 1966 (cf. Keefe 2011), we come across another example of the Organization Woman. As one of the characters in the novel expresses it:

She’s the “super woman” type (*femme totale*). [...] There are a lot like that in Paris. They have some sort of career, they claim to dress well, to engage in sports, look after their house perfectly, bring up their children very well. They want to prove to themselves that they can be successful at all levels. And, in fact, they spread themselves too thinly, they succeed in nothing (Beauvoir 2011: 226).

The Super Woman type also appears in Beauvoir’s novel *The Woman Destroyed* (1971), published in French in 1967. These women claim to ‘succeed on every level. And they don’t really care deeply about anything at all’ (Beauvoir 1971: 19).

In *Les belles images*, Super Woman’s way of life, with her focus on personal success and safety in all domains of life, is contrasted by Beauvoir with another way of life that is about friendship and a concern for others. The self-regarding lifestyle of Super Woman Laurence is contrasted with the voice of her former teacher, who told her ‘(s)ay what you think’ (Beauvoir 1968a: 31); ‘[f]orm your own opinion’ (37); and: ‘(i)t will depend upon us whether these deaths [of the past wars] were useless or not’ (22). Laurence finally decides that, rather than enclosing her daughter in a world of beautiful pictures, she should allow her to experience the real world and get involved with other people. She concludes: ‘(n)ot Catherine. I shan’t let what has been done to me be done to her. What have they made of me? This woman who loves no one.’ Her daughter won’t be deprived of her girlfriend, and is not going to see the psychologist any more. She maybe then ‘will get herself out of it. Out of what? Out of this night. Of ignorance, of uncaring’ (152).

For a better understanding of the contours of this more ‘caring’ way of life, we must turn to Beauvoir’s essays on ethics, especially to *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1948).

**An Ethics of Ambiguity**

Together with the existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, Beauvoir always opposed abstract morality: both view moral maxims or dogmas as false universalities. In her essay *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1948), published
in French under the title *Pour une morale de l’ambiguïté* (1947), Beauvoir explains why she believes this is the case, and how, instead, we should conceive of ethics as always radically situated.

She starts her essay by pointing out ‘the ambiguity’ of our human condition: as human beings we are a ‘thinking reed.’\(^3\) We experience ourselves as consciousness, but also as a body, ‘a thing crushed by the dark weight of other things’ (Beauvoir 1948: 7). For this dualist approach she refers to Sartre’s study *Being and Nothingness* (2001), published in French in 1943 (cf. 10-12). In this work, Sartre argues that, in contrast with ‘immanent beings’ or things in the world, human consciousness is always at a distance of being. It acts, so to speak, as a spotlight that discloses ‘being’, ‘transcending’ it instead of coinciding with it. Since human consciousness involves this distance by definition, it is devoid of any content or ‘being’. We are, therefore, free by definition, or as Sartre has it, we are ‘ontologically’ free, but we experience this as emptiness and ‘lack’ of being. To compensate for this lack we seek the recognition of others of ourselves as ‘being’ a consciousness. But, according to Sartre, this is impossible, since our perception of our fellow humans turns them into things as well, or – vice versa – we turn into a thing under their gaze. There will always be enmity and struggle between consciousesses, according to Sartre, about who looks and who is looked at: the first remains a – lonely – consciousness, the second becomes a bodily thing in the world, not only for the other but for himself as well, since he petrifies under the gaze of the other.

After a brief introduction to Sartre’s mind-body dualism in *Being and Nothingness*, Beauvoir’s essay sets off in another direction. While many philosophies have tried to hide the ‘tragic ambiguity’ from which we suffer (7), we have to accept it, and precisely by doing so we can surpass it. If we assume our ambiguity by an ethical ‘conversion’ (13), we accept our freedom: instead of ‘wanting to be,’ we are ‘wanting to disclose being’ (12). We then exactly coincide with who we are. Wanting to disclose being, we experience ourselves as ‘the positive existence of a lack’ (57, cf. 13; cf. Langer 2003: 94). We take upon us that we have to disclose the world in concrete projects, and realize our existence as presence in the world, in the shape of an ‘engaged freedom’ (Beauvoir 1948: 10). The ethical conversion involves that we turn into a situated, incarnated – embodied – existence, experiencing emotions like pride, joy, and passion, but also

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\(^3\) Beauvoir refers here to a famous phrase of seventeenth-century philosopher Blaise Pascal: ‘Man is but a reed, the most feeble thing in nature, but he is a thinking reed.’
desire, hate, love, and friendship, in close contact with the world and our fellow men.4

Beauvoir, then, in reference to the philosopher Hegel, examines how our freedom is related to the freedom of others. We find a justification of our own existence ‘only in the existence of other men’ (72): ‘each one depends upon others’ (82). The ethical ‘conversion’ of willing freedom therefore implies willing the freedom of others: ‘(t)o will oneself free is also to will others free,’ which ‘points out to each person concrete action to be achieved’ (73). Beauvoir thus takes on Hegelian notions of the interdependent and dialogical character of human existence, and articulates these, moreover, in terms of our embodied existence in the world.5 To her, living as an embodied and situated ethical self is a preferred, higher phase above pure consciousness. Freedom is not something we have, but is only realized in an ethical project: ‘to will oneself moral and to will oneself free are one and the same decision’ (25). Willing oneself free is to ‘effect the transition from nature to morality by establishing a genuine freedom on the original upsurge of our existence’ (25). As she formulated it elsewhere: ‘(t)rue freedom comes about only through a positive project’ (Beauvoir 1999: 333).

However, living ethically, as a ‘positive’ existence in the world, does not mean that our ambiguity is totally left behind. Our existence ‘still remains a negativity in the positive affirmation of itself. [...] The failure is not surpassed, but assumed’ (Beauvoir 1948: 13). The ethical conversion should be compared with ‘taking a trip,’ rather than with ‘escaping from prison.’ In the first case, our conscious dimension, which separates us from others, is ‘present in its surpassing’ insofar as it is accepted; in the latter case, it is left behind. Hegel confused these two movements in ‘the ambiguous term “aufheben”’ (84); a Hegelian optimism does not recognize that we always remain finite concrete realities.6

4 Her speaking in terms of man as a ‘positive existence’ in the world clearly departs from Sartre’s theory. But even more she departs from his original philosophy in valuing emotions as ways to connect with others, while to Sartre experiencing emotions is a matter of self-deceit. For an explanation of their different outlooks in this respect, see Vintges (1996).

5 Beauvoir mentions Hegel many times in her essay. She adds: ‘I remember having experienced a great feeling of calm on reading Hegel in the impersonal framework of the Bibliothèque Nationale in August 1940. But once I got into the street again, into my life, out of the system, beneath a real sky, the system was no longer of any use to me: what it had offered me, under a show of the infinite, was the consolations of death; and I again wanted to live in the midst of living men’ (Beauvoir 1948: 158). In her war diary she as well goes into her reading of Hegel’s works in the Bibliothèque Nationale, from July 1940 onwards (cf. Altman 2007).

6 The singularity and finiteness of our existence follows not from our bodily existence per se since our situatedness as a lived body can be collectivist as well and only singular in the sense
Through ethical conversion, mutual recognition and even connectedness between people, in the shape of love and friendship, are possible. They will, however, never be final since, ‘one can not imagine any reconciliation of transcendences: they do not have the indifferent docility of a pure abstraction; they are concrete and concretely compete with others for being. The world which they reveal is a battle-field where there is no neutral ground and which cannot be divided up into parcels’ (118). Out of ‘the irreducible character of ambiguity’ (9), which involves a remaining separation between people, the ‘plane of hell, of struggle, will never be eliminated’ (119). People will always want to subordinate others to compensate for their own ‘lack’ of being. There will always be enmity and ‘evil will’ – elements that are difficult to account for ‘in Kantian ethics, which is at the origin of all ethics of autonomy,’ out of its focus on man’s rational will (33).

Since separation and struggle between people shall never be finally overcome, an ethical conversion has to be practiced time and again: ‘ethical freedom’ (24) ‘requires a constant tension’ and a ‘permanent choice’ (26). Such an ethics ‘experienced in the truth of life’ is to be preferred, however, above Hegel’s consolation of an ‘abstract evasion,’ and any abstract humanism that claims to speak on behalf of mankind (159). ‘Universal, absolute man exists nowhere’ (112), there is but ‘the individual reality of our projects and ourselves’ (106). Beauvoir’s ‘realist’ position involves a permanent dimension of power and conflict between people and groups of people, to be overcome again and again by concrete ethical effort.

The ‘assertion of our finiteness’ (158) implies that abstract moral theories do not make sense since, in the end, we can never speak for other people. Moral maxims or dogmas hide the fact that we are all concretely situated and that our choices often affect others in negative ways. Kant conceives of ‘the human person insofar as it transcends its empirical embodiment and chooses to be universal’ (17). However, ‘it is not impersonal universal man who is the source of values, but the plurality of concrete, particular men projecting themselves toward their ends on the basis of situations whose particularity is as radical and as irreducible as subjectivity itself’ (17-18). As soon as ‘one introduces the presence of the finite individual in the world’ (121), one faces concrete and difficult problems, for which ethics ‘does not furnish recipes’ (134). Instead of applying abstract and universal moral maxims ‘there must be a trial and decision in each case’ (134), as if of expressing its momentous collective situatedness. Our finiteness and singularity follow particularly from the other side of our ambiguous condition; namely, our conscious dimension that to Beauvoir always involves our own situated rather than universal perspective.
we are dealing with a work of art. This does not mean ‘that we are likening action to a work of art,’ but ‘in any case human transcendence must cope with the same problem: it has to found itself’ (130).

Beauvoir’s ‘ethics of ambiguity’ essentially argues for ‘ethics irreducible indeterminacy’ (Langer 2003: 90). Time and again her essay underlines the ambiguous, contingent character of any ethical decision. There can be no ‘previous justifications which might be drawn from the civilization, the age, and the culture’; ‘the good of an individual or a group of individuals requires that it be taken as an absolute end of our action; but we are not authorized to decide upon this end a priori’ (Beauvoir 1948: 142). Instead of a ‘total truth,’ there are but ‘necessarily partial truths which every human engagement discloses’ (68). When people speak about ‘Nation, Empire, Union, Economy, etc.’ we should consider which concrete individuals are involved, and which genuine human interests are at stake (145). An ethics of ambiguity recognizes that all actions ‘must be legitimized concretely’ (48). In each case, we try to establish what is the main danger, so to speak, being aware of the fact that ‘all authority is violence’ and that ‘(n)o one governs innocently’ (108).

Beauvoir counterposes her notion of a lived, contingent ethics especially to the maxims of Kant, criticizing his abstract morality for not addressing the real substantive problems of daily life.7 Her approach in this respect comes close to Hegel’s view. In an open attack on Kant, Hegel, in his Philosophy of Right, argues that Kant’s abstract universalism is insensitive to the particular context of problems that need to be solved. Kant’s morality is all about a pure Sollen, comprising moral standards that are more about ethical purity than about real life. Instead, to Hegel, ethical life (Sittlichkeit) is grounded in concrete forms of existence.8

Beauvoir likewise grounds ethics in real social life. We even find her arguing in Hegelian terms that our social conditions can doom us to a passive existence, keeping us in ‘a state of servitude and ignorance’ as is ‘the situation of women in many civilizations’ (37) (cf. Chapter 2).9 But while she, like Hegel, grounds ethics in social forms of life, contra Hegel, they are radically plural. At stake to her are the forms of life of different communities and of different individuals within them: ‘the Arabian fellah

7 She equally does so in The Second Sex (cf. Beauvoir 2010: 650).
8 With thanks to Maarten Coolen.
9 Beauvoir in this respect refers to the situation of black slaves and of ‘Mohammedan woman enclosed in a harem’ (Beauvoir 1948: 38), as well as to ‘the situation of women in many civilizations’ (37). In The Second Sex she expanded this to the situation of all women throughout time and place (cf. Chapter 2).
is oppressed by both the sheiks and the French and English administration. [...] The interests of the French proletariat are not the same as those of the natives in the colonies' (89). During the Second World War, black leaders in the United States, like Richard Wright, refused ‘to drop their own claims for the sake of the general interest.’ Ethico-political choices are socially situated, and ‘(f)or each one it also depends upon his individual situation’ within these social contexts (89).

However, an ethical attitude requires that we are not blinded by the goals that we set up for ourselves (cf. 89), but that, through our own struggle, we aim to serve ‘the liberation of all’ (112). Since ‘each is bound to all’ (112), the cause which we serve ‘must not lock itself up’ (89–90). In our ‘surpassing toward others,’ each one exists as a ‘separate existence engaged in his own projects. So much so that the terms “useful to Man,” and “useful to this man,” do not overlap’ (112). But to abolish all suppression ‘each one must carry on his struggle in connection with that of the other and by integrating it into the general pattern’ (89). Our situated ethical projects need to connect to a general perspective.

The ethical self that emerges from Beauvoir’s ethics of ambiguity is socially situated, embodied, and engaged in concrete ethical projects in the world. To Beauvoir, ‘man’s project toward freedom is embodied for him in definite acts of behavior’ (78). In her novel The Mandarins (2005), published in French in 1954, she introduces the concept ‘art of living’ (art de vivre), to indicate the personal ethical way of life of one of the novel’s main characters (Beauvoir 2005: 180, 182). The term ‘art of living’ refers to a critically creative ethical life project that is developed and grounded in real social life (Beauvoir 1948: 159; cf. Vintges 1996: 81). It is this ethical way of life that Beauvoir posits as an alternative to the model of personhood of Organization Man and Super Woman, as depicted in Les belles images.

Later in the chapter we will discuss some remarkable parallels between Beauvoir’s notion of a lived ethics and the concepts of ethics that Foucault developed in his final work. To understand his approach, however, we must first examine his critique of modern societies and especially his concept of the neoliberal, ‘entrepreneurial’ self.

**The Entrepreneurial Self**

Who are we today, what kind of subjects have we become? Foucault, throughout his work, aims to answer this question, in order to open up possibilities for change. Tracking and tracing practices of power in Western
history that have constructed men’s subjectivities through the ages, he especially focuses on power practices that are entangled with the social and human sciences. According to him, these sciences play a major role in the various ways power is exercised in Western modern societies, ranging from disciplinary techniques to neoliberal ones – the latter spreading rapidly today across the globe. Foucault’s analyses offer us some relevant insights into who we are today and especially who women are today.

In his early works (1960-1969), among others *The Order of Things* (1970), published in French in 1966, and *The Archeology of Knowledge* (1972), published in French in 1969, Foucault, in a discussion of the history of the human sciences, criticized the concept of Man as a free, ‘original’ subject, i.e. as the origin or source of sense, meaning, and knowledge. Consequently, he is often referred to as a structuralist, but, in fact, his approach is more historical. To him, the figure of Man as an original subject is a historical product, a temporary effect of history that will be erased like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea, as the famous last lines of *The Order of Things* state. New forms of subjectivity will emerge: subjectivities to Foucault are historical products that change over time.

In his mid-work (1970-1976), among others *Discipline and Punish* (1979), published in French in 1975, and *The Will to Knowledge* (2006), published in French in 1976, Foucault again brings up the human sciences, but now he focuses on their entanglement with social practices of power that shape our subjectivities. This approach allowed him to conceive of a new type of power techniques, which made him one of the most cited authors in the social sciences.

In the two books mentioned, he introduces the concepts of ‘discipline’, ‘surveillance’, and ‘normalization’ to indicate a type of power that emerged and proliferated with the rise of the human sciences. From Foucault’s perspective, the latter encompass what now are called social and life sciences: at stake are sciences such as psychiatry, biology, medicine, and economics and, later, psychoanalysis, psychology, sociology, ethnology, pedagogy, and criminology. These sciences, in all their practical dimensions – such as buildings, therapy rooms, intake procedures, exams, and tests – are entangled with a type of power that classifies and categorizes people, and resocializes or treats them when they are deemed abnormal. This normalizing type of power that also trains the bodies and behaviour of ‘normal’ people, and surveys them on an individual as well as a collective level.

The sciences set out the Norm for these ‘normalizing’ and ‘disciplining’ practices: they produce the standards of ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ behaviour. By detailed control and sanctions, ‘normal individuals’, the normal child, woman, man, are produced as concrete realities, and the same counts for ‘the
Disciplining and normalizing power practices consist of fine-tuned power techniques – i.e. a ‘microphysics’ of power – such as the parcellation of groups of people into individual bodies, and the organizing of individual bodily behaviour by applying timetables, training exercises, examination, hierarchical observation and techniques of ‘continuous registration, perpetual assessment and classification’ (Foucault 1979: 220).

Since roughly 1800, these power techniques have spread throughout Western societies, among others in armies, workplaces, and in penal, medical, welfare, and educational institutions. Foucault’s main example is the modern prison, where these science-based techniques from minute to minute mould the bodies of the individual criminal. But, as the last lines of the chapter Discipline state, ‘prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons’ (228).

However, there is resistance in diffuse, spontaneous, and localized forms. In addition to a docile body that internalizes disciplinary power techniques, Foucault in his mid-works points to a direct bodily resistance against techniques of surveillance and normalization. From 1978 onwards, however, he puts forward some new concepts that involve people’s agency, rather than unmediated bodily responses. In his lectures at the Collège de France, he talks about the state, arguing – in line with his earlier analyses – that we should conceive of it as a set of techniques, rather than an institute. Speaking about the state from such a perspective is a matter of scale: at stake are techniques of managing the whole social body, i.e. the techniques of governing a population (cf. Foucault 2008: 186).

Foucault introduces the term ‘governmentality’ to indicate these governing techniques. A general problematic of governing emerged since the sixteenth century, in relation to the family, a household, a convent, a people

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10 By classifying who is normal and abnormal, disciplinary practices at the same time ‘produce’ abnormal people, i.e. the ‘perverse,’ the sick, the criminal, the madman, the abnormal child – each of them categorized in many subdivisions. By fine-tuning the categorizing of ‘abnormalities’ – cf. the emergence of the new spectrum of autism disorders – normal man is increasingly defined as well.

11 This happens among others through architectural planning – as is exemplified by Jeremy Bentham’s Panopticon. Foucault discusses his architectural design of this model prison as a metaphor throughout for disciplinary power. Bentham’s design consisted of cells in a circular structure, with a watchtower in the middle. The cells are illuminated, with windows on both sides, so as to completely overview the behavior of its inmate. For an excellent introduction to Foucault’s mid-work see C.G. Prado (2000).

12 ‘Agency’ as a concept standard refers to persons having some room to manoeuvre within social structures, or to intervene in and alter their surroundings.
(Foucault 2007a: 87ff.). At stake is the correct way of managing individuals, goods, and wealth — a type of power that can be characterized as ‘a conduct of conducts’ (Foucault 2000: 341; cf. 2008: 186). From the eighteenth century onwards, a process of ‘governmentalization of the state’ took place. Through the development of forms of knowledge such as statistics and political economy, and the installing of police institutions and practices, a management of the population as a whole became possible. The final end of government, since then, is ‘not just to govern, but to improve the condition of the population, to increase its wealth, its longevity, and its health’ (Foucault 2007a: 105).

In the last chapter of *The Will to Knowledge* (Foucault 2006), he already conceptualized the management of the population in the shape of a ‘biopolitics’. At stake is the management of the ‘species body’, i.e. of biological processes: ‘births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity, with all the conditions that can cause these to vary’ (Foucault 2006: 139). But as William Walters (2012) clarifies, to Foucault the concept of biopolitics ‘still offered only a very partial reflection on the nature of the modern state’ (Walters 2012: 16). The concept of ‘governmentality’ covers the state’s regulation of the population through a much broader set of management techniques, next to biopolitical ones. According to Foucault, the microphysical disciplining of individual behaviour remains important as well, since managing a population means managing it ‘in depth, in all its fine points and details’ (Foucault 2007a: 107). But ‘governmentality’ has become the dominant model of the modern state, a complex form of power ‘that has the population as its target, political economy as its major form of knowledge, and apparatuses of security as its essential technical instrument’ (108).

In subsequent lectures, Foucault focuses on liberalism and neoliberalism as two distinct ‘governmental’ regimes (Foucault 2008). Often these two forms of government are identified in terms of a minimal(ist) state and a maximum freedom of the market — based on the presumption that the mechanisms of the market economy will create prosperity and social order. Foucault instead characterizes them as political regimes that manage the population in extensive ways, and that construct rather than respect a free market.

Liberalism, from the eighteenth century onwards, had to organize the economy as a field where there can be no sovereign or state power (cf. Foucault 2008: 283). By way of concrete political measures and government techniques it established a freedom of the market, of property rights, of rights of discussion and ‘possible freedom of expression and so on,’ in this
way producing ‘free’ buyers and sellers (63). The arousal and production of freedom was paired with a management of danger, i.e. the implementation of strategies of security that had to guarantee the freedom of economic processes (cf. 65). Liberalism as a governmental regime thus organized security and freedom, among others by installing penal practices, assurance policies and biopolitics, and by applying techniques of disciplining and normalizing such as mass surveillance and the training of individual bodies. It thus created a ‘subject of rights’ that is simultaneously a subject of extensive control (cf. 67).

Neoliberalism, according to Foucault, likewise comprises an extensive set of governmental techniques, installing market competition, organizing societal security and producing a specific type of subjectivity. Foucault especially discusses the American type of neoliberalism\(^\text{13}\) – introduced by economists from the Chicago School like Milton Friedman, Friedrich von Hayek, and Gary Becker – that started to spread in the United States after the war. To these authors, market competition or the model of the enterprise, was a formative power of society as well (cf. 148). They conceived of a ‘society made up of enterprise-units’ (225), in other words of a ‘general regulation of society by the market’ (145). The model of American neoliberalism turned into ‘a whole way of being and thinking.’ Foucault concludes that it became ‘a method of thought, a grid of economic and sociological analysis’ (218) as well as ‘a general style of thought, analysis and imagination’ (219) – as Whyte already noted in his study *Organization Man* (1956).

To Foucault, the most characteristic feature of American neoliberalism is the production of the homo oeconomicus (economic man) as ‘entrepreneur of himself’ (Foucault 2008: 226). While homo oeconomicus used to be a partner of exchange, the new homo oeconomicus is a calculative agent, ‘being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of (his) earnings’ (226). The modern subject today is supposed to be a homo oeconomicus all over, a rational actor who calculates costs and benefits, and organizes his or her whole life accordingly, thus being ‘someone who is eminently governable’ (270).

Foucault goes at length into the emergence of this new neoliberal subject. He first discusses how, since the second half of the twentieth century,
economics is ‘no longer the analysis of the historical logic of processes; it is the analysis of the internal rationality, the strategic programming of individuals’ activity’ (223). The object of economic analysis shifted from ‘processes of capital, of investment, of the machine, of the product, and so on’ into ‘the way in which individuals allocate [...] scarce means to alternative ends’ (222). Economists used to conceive of labour in abstract terms, but new scientific approaches focus on the labourer as an active person, who acts on the basis of cost benefit calculations. The labourer is seen as possessing a certain capital – his abilities, his skills, his health – that he invests to generate a stream of earnings (cf. 224). This ‘human capital’ is made up of acquired elements, through education, good parenting, and cultural stimuli, and of innate, hereditary elements, such as good genes, that inevitably will become a topic of interventions and investment as well. The labouring subject is managed by all kinds of techniques to optimize his human capital, for instance by actively seeking skills or opportunities.

Homo oeconomicus’ conduct, involving an optimal allocation of scarce resources to alternative ends, became generalized to every form of behaviour. Every purposeful conduct was interpreted – and governed – as conduct that employs limited means to alternative ends (cf. 268-269). Since homo oeconomicus is calculating and planning his or her optimal satisfaction and success in the world (cf. 226-229), it is someone ‘who responds systematically to systematic modifications artificially introduced into the environment’ (270). Homo oeconomicus, as someone who accepts reality appears ‘precisely as someone manageable’: ‘(b)ehavioural techniques’ can be implemented to govern and activate the neoliberal entrepreneurial self (270).

Neoliberalism, far from being a laissez faire politics, according to Foucault, comes down to an active and extensive restructuring of self and society. Thomas Lemke (2001) summarizes that, to Foucault, neoliberalism is not just an ideological rhetoric or a political-economic reality, but, above all, ‘a political project that endeavours to create a social reality that it suggests already exists’ (Lemke 2001: 203). Neoliberalism involves that ‘(g)overnment itself becomes a sort of enterprise whose task it is to universalize competition and invent market-shaped systems of action for individuals, groups and institutions’ (197).

The sciences play a major role in the construction of the modern, entrepreneurial self, as providers of expert knowledge. Foucault especially shows how we are governed, individually and collectively, by ‘the gray sciences, the minor professions, the accountants and insurers, the managers and psychologists [...] Every practice for the conduct of conduct involves authorities, aspirations, programmatic thinking, the invention
of redeployment of techniques and technologies.’ The conduct of our
day-to-day conduct, ‘in our homes, workplaces, schools, and hospitals, in
our towns, regions, and nations, and by our national and transnational
governing bodies,’ is based on ‘expert’ knowledge and advice that, for a
large part, characterize who we are under neoliberal governmental regimes
(Rose et al. 2006: 101).

Neoliberalism in the Foucauldian sense is more than the latest version
of capitalism, and cannot be tackled by a purely anti-capitalist struggle.
Marxism comprises too blunt a set of tools to analyse the specificity of
current neoliberal regimes, which cannot be addressed ‘in terms of the
metastructures of labour and capital’ (McRobbie 2011b: 180). The conduct of
people is more intensely governed than ever, via their own investments and
endeavours to run themselves as an enterprise. Neoliberal man, according
to Foucault, is indirectly manipulated and activated by incentives – in other
words, is governed by ‘carrot and stick’ (Guus Dix 2014).

Examples of such incentives in my own environment as a university
teacher involve competitions for ‘the best teacher of the year’; regular ap-
peals to follow time-management or library-skills courses and to improve
one’s valorisation skills; cutting down research time for those who do not
‘produce’ enough; invitations to innovate one’s digital learning environment,
and a constant bombardment of self-assessment forms. These management
techniques sit side by side with overtly disciplinary ones, such as an exces-
sive and ‘transparent’ monitoring of one’s teaching and research activities.14

Foucault’s analysis of neoliberal self and society has been elaborated in
‘governmentality studies’ by authors Nikolas Rose, Peter Miller, Mitchell
Dean, Thomas Lemke and Mariana Valverde, among others. They mostly
focus on neoliberal governmentality, i.e. on the spreading of enterprise
regimes all over society and on current techniques of ‘governing the soul’
(cf. Rose 1990). Governmentality authors show how these techniques typi-
cally work ‘at a distance’ (Miller and Rose 2008: 16), by installing capacities
for self-control in ‘autonomous individuals’ (cf. Lemke 2001: 201). To analyse
the specific ways in which their ‘free choice’ is managed, they interestingly
take on board another concept that Foucault developed in his later work,
namely the concept of self-techniques.

14 For an extensive overview of these kinds of micro-management in Academia, see Gill (2009)
and Gill and Ngaire Donaghue (2016). Even cameras turn out to be in ample use across university
buildings and terrains. When some ICT students at my university hacked the university’s mail
data base to send out a protest letter against their department’s reorganization, they were tracked
down a few days later on the basis of camera footage, and suspended. The students sued the
university and won.
In 1980, two years after he launched the concept of ‘governmentality’, Foucault argues that, in all societies, we find techniques which permit individuals to perform, by their own means, a certain number of operations on their own bodies, on their own souls, on their own thoughts, on their own conduct, and this in such a way that they transform themselves, modify themselves, and reach a certain state of perfection, of happiness, of purity, of supernatural power, and so on (Foucault 2007b: 154).

He adds that governing people is all about ‘a subtle integration of coercion-technologies and self-technologies’ (155) and elsewhere characterizes current Western society as ‘a tricky combination in the same political structures of individualization techniques, and of totalization procedures’ (Foucault 2000: 332). People’s agency is at stake where it concerns the ‘processes through which the self is constructed or modified by himself’ (Foucault 2007b: 154). But the tricky part is that their agency is created and determined by coercive techniques. In the words of Kevin Thompson (2003), we only deal with a ‘minimal freedom,’ since people’s options are ‘defined precisely by the structuring work of governance’ (Thompson 2003: 122).

It is this type of ‘minimal freedom’ that is analysed in current governmentality studies, which focus on the indirect way neoliberalism ‘conducts’ people’s ‘conduct’, namely through offering them self-techniques. By way of these self-techniques, people act as entrepreneurial selves, i.e. as managers and designers of their own lives, choosing their behaviour, lifestyle, and opinions. In empirical studies, Miller and Rose (2008) demonstrate how authorities of various types ‘shape, normalize and instrumentalize the conduct, thought, decisions and aspirations of others in order to achieve the objectives they consider desirable’ (Miller and Rose 2008: 32). Advertising techniques, for instance, link the desires of individuals to the productive machine, in such a way that consumers become ‘active agents in their own consumption patterns’ (140), shaping ‘a style of life through participation in the world of goods’ (141).

Authors of the governmentality school thus focus on the link between self-techniques and top down social engineering. Exemplary to their approach is the argument that ‘the language of individual freedom, personal choice and self-fulfillment came to underpin programmes of government’ (48), and that ‘(p)ersonal autonomy is not the antithesis of political power, but a key term in its exercise’ (54). In that sense, governmentality studies, in the words of
Walters (2012), suffer from ‘panopticitis,’ while ‘[o]ur time is perhaps more open and plural than some would have us suppose’ (Walters 2012: 81).

From a postcolonial perspective, Aihwa Ong (2006), Van Baar (2011), and Walters (2012) identify neoliberal governmental techniques as a set of power techniques next to, and in entanglement with, other power techniques. They focus on the spreading of neoliberal governmental techniques today across the globe, in Eastern Europe, Latin America, China, and East Asia, especially, where ‘technocrats embrace business agenda’s and legitimize ideals of human talent and self-enterprise’ (Ong 2006: 12). Ong shows how governments all over the world have ‘fragmented the national territory and the population in the interest of economic development,’ (77), by creating areas of neglect and marginalization on the one hand, and areas of open markets on the other hand, where people are turned into world citizens with marketable skills.

Van Baar (2011) analyses how neoliberal governmentality is introduced in Eastern European policies, exploring the ‘hybrid assemblages’ of power technologies, and ‘the continuities with past socioeconomic and cultural formations’ (Van Baar 2011: 166-167). Neoliberal ‘activation’ techniques are imposed on the Roma, such as radical cuts in social benefits and awards for those who actively seek work, develop skills, or participate in public work programs. Neoliberal power techniques thus ‘responsibilize’ the members of this heavily discriminated and marginalized group to their deprived situation. Van Baar shows that, with the scarcity of jobs, the results of such activation policies have been that one per cent of the Roma has found work, while all others are living in extreme poverty, with no basic housing, jobs, or human rights.

Since neoliberalism in world perspective is but one set of power practices and techniques next to, and entangled with, others, Van Baar and Walters adopt Foucault’s concepts of neoliberalism as a toolset, instead of as an all-encompassing theory. From their perspective, and in line with Foucault’s aversion to totalizing theories and his own patchwork approach of societies (cf. the Introduction), neoliberalism in Western contexts also emerges as a dominant set of power patterns – in hybrid entanglement with other hierarchical power patterns – rather than an all-encompassing system.

Foucault explicitly pointed to the persistence of disciplinary power techniques and of sovereign – juridical – power: ‘we should not see things as the replacement of a society of sovereignty by a society of discipline, and then of a society of discipline by a society, say, of government. In fact, we have a triangle: sovereignty, discipline, and governmental management, which has population as it main target and apparatuses of security as its essential mechanism’ (Foucault 2007a: 107-108). This perspective allows for
an analysis of possible tensions and struggles between multiple layers and kinds of power techniques present in societies.

Neoliberal governmental power techniques, i.e. the proliferation of the model of the enterprise over society, can be countered, for instance, by a rights-based discourse that – as part of the sovereign state – may overrule neoliberal tendencies. An example is the furious reaction of the Dutch population in recent years against the secret filming of patients in the emergency centre at a main hospital, with a view to it being sold to a commercial television station. The juridical discourse on ‘privacy’ turned against this exploitation: the board of the hospital had to resign and the television programme was cancelled. Similarly, when the Dutch bank ING announced a plan to sell its client data, public opinion forced them to back off and to apologize for not ‘sticking to their core business’ and guaranteeing the privacy of their clients. Other layers of society as well may counter neoliberal tendencies, such as communitarian traditions. An example is the boycott some time ago by the Dutch population of a new commercial television station (TALPA), which had obtained the rights to broadcast summaries of the soccer matches in the Dutch League and did so interrupted by commercial breaks. TALPA went bankrupt, countered as it was by a communitarian trend that resisted the commodification of what was considered to be a Dutch common good.¹⁵

But other counter practices than those mentioned above can be detected as well. In the words of Walters (2012), instead of overvaluing neoliberalism, we should be keen on discerning ‘other ways of governing and contesting governance, however minor they might be’ (Walters 2012: 42). According to Walters, the concept of governmentality in principle allows for more mobile ways of seeing the world (cf. 53 ff.). However, its main definition (‘the conduct of conducts’), in my view, urged Foucault to develop some new concepts. From 1980 onwards, he points to another kind of power practices involving other types of self-techniques, uncoupled from techniques of coercion.

Practices of Freedom

In his final works after 1980, Foucault focuses on specific kinds of ethical techniques of the self, as they are found – in exemplary ways – in Western antiquity. As Frédéric Gros (2005) notes, the only salvation in Foucault’s

¹⁵ However, FOX now has obtained the rights, and will undoubtedly commodify the broadcasting of the Dutch soccer competition again in the near future.
early and mid-works beyond a disciplined identity was madness, crime, or literature (cf. Gros 2005: 513). But from 1980 onwards, Foucault discusses certain ethical techniques of the self to defy coercive regimes. He did so ‘not to abandon politics, but complicating the study of governmentali-
ties through the exploration of the care of the self’ (512-513). However, as Colin Gordon contends, the full implications of Foucault’s ethics for current governmentality studies are not yet understood (Donzelot and Gordon 2008: 53).

To date, Foucault’s work on ethics is undertheorized in social and political theory, since it supposedly proposes a lifestyle politics without any meso and macro political aims. But what Foucault actually provides is another concept of politics, contra top down political programs and social engineering: a bottom up way of practicing politics that not only involves micro-aims, but meso- and macro-aims as well.

In two books, *The Use of Pleasure* (Foucault 1986a) and *The Care of the Self* (Foucault 1986b), both published in French in 1984, in interviews, and especially in his 1981-1982 lecture series *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* (Foucault 2005a), Foucault draws attention to what he calls ‘prescriptive texts’ in Greek and Roman antiquity that offer tools for ethical self-improvement. At stake are ‘texts whose main object, whatever their form (speech, dialogue, treatise, collection of precepts, etc.) is to suggest rules of conduct. […] These texts thus served as functional devices that would enable individuals to question their own conduct, to watch over and give shape to it, and shape themselves as ethical subjects’ (Foucault 1986a: 12-13).

Crucial to Foucault is the difference between what he calls ‘ethics-oriented moralities’ and ‘code-oriented moralities’ (30). Today, we only think of ethics in terms of moral codes or moral rules that we should apply. But in antiquity, ethics mainly consists of vocabularies that are intended as guides for the concrete shaping of one’s personal existence. These vocabularies constitute a relationship of the self to the self; they envision ‘intentional and voluntary actions by which men not only set themselves rules of conduct, but also seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make their life into an *oeuvre* that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria’ (10-11).

All moral systems, Foucault says, require an ethical self-formation, an ethical work on the self, since people are to become the type of agents that can act in accordance with the moral rules of the system (cf. Foucault 1997c: 263). Every ‘self-formation as an “ethical subject”’ (Foucault 1986a: 28) has four aspects, which we can coin as the answers to the questions what, why, how, and to what purpose: *What* is the material that should be worked
over in the ethical self-practices, i.e. ‘the ethical substance’? Why should this work on the self be done, on behalf of what or which instance, i.e. what is ‘the mode of subjection’? How should this work be done, i.e. what is the ‘self-forming activity’ or ‘ascesis’? And, finally, to what purpose should it be done, i.e. what is the ‘telos’? (cf. Foucault 1986a, 1997c; Vintges 1996). While ethical self-formation is inherent to every moral system, the type of moral agency at stake varies with the relationship between, and the content of, these four aspects.

The space of this dimension of ethical self-formation varies as well. It is only limited when moral codes dominate the moral system. But it can also take the upper hand. The latter is the case in Western antiquity, according to Foucault. All the emphasis was on developing a personal ethos. The vocabularies that offered the self-techniques for one’s ethical self-formation were relatively independent from social and legal institutions and from moral rules (cf. Foucault 1997c: 255). Ancient ethics was not ‘a unified, coherent, authoritarian moral system’ (Foucault 1986a: 21). Instead, it was a matter of self-stylization, through the practicing of self-techniques (‘ascesis’), rather than of prohibitions (cf. 23). One cannot find ‘any normalization in, for instance, the Stoic ethics’ (Foucault 1997c: 254). Ethical self-formation was practiced ‘in the midst of many separate groups’ which ‘proposed – more than they imposed’ different styles of behaviour, ‘each having its specific character or “shape”’ (Foucault 1986a: 21).

To indicate the relatively independent status of ancient ethical ‘self-practices’ (with moral codes or rules only functioning in the background), Foucault develops the concepts ‘care of the self’, ‘ethos’, ‘aesthetics of existence’, and ‘practice of freedom’ (for the latter cf. Foucault 1997d). A freedom to create oneself was offered through vocabularies that provided the tools and techniques to acquire an ‘ethos’, i.e. a personal ethical way of life. At stake was an ethical self-creation in contrast to an ethical self-formation that is determined and limited by the moral codes of a moral system. Still, in ethics-oriented moralities, codes are not unimportant, ‘but they revolve around a rather small number of rather simple principles’ (Foucault 1986a: 32) The main emphasis in ethics-oriented moralities is not placed on the code or ‘the instances of authority that enforce the code’ (29), to which the ethical subject ‘must submit at the risk of committing offenses that make him liable to punishment’ (29-30). Instead, the accent is placed on the relationship with the self and on the exercises and self-techniques that enable one to develop an ethos (cf. 30).

Ethical self-techniques are, for instance, the practicing of bodily self-tests (can I stop eating for some time?), writing exercises (such as the keeping of
notebooks, ‘hypomnemata’, to record insights and ideas to guide one’s future actions), meditation, reflection, and dialogue with oneself and others. By practicing ethical self-techniques, one strives to acquire a personal ethos, which is ‘a mode of being for the subject, along with a certain way of acting, a way visible to others’ (Foucault 1997d: 286). Ancient ethics thus concerned one’s whole way of life, as Foucault’s colleague at the Collège de France, classicist Pierre Hadot, already had pointed out.16

Acquiring an ethos in ancient Greece is also ‘a way of caring for others.’ It enables one to be a good politician, citizen, and friend, and to occupy one’s ‘rightful position in the city, the community, or interpersonal relationships’ (Foucault 1997d: 287). Foucault specifies that human relations preferably consist of dynamic power relations. Often, we are faced with a situation of domination, however, when ‘an individual or social group succeeds in blocking a field of power relations, immobilizing them and preventing any reversibility of movement by economic, political, or military means’ (283). Acquiring an ethos through a care of the self is about trying to play the games of power with ‘as little domination as possible’ (298).

Gros (2005) notes that the care of the self, rather than isolating us from the world, ‘enables us to situate ourselves within it correctly. […] The subject discovered in the care of the self is quite the opposite of an isolated individual: he is a citizen of the world. The care of the self is therefore a regulative principle of activity, of our relationship to the world and to others’ (Gros 2005: 538). Instead of a solipsism, narcissism, or aestheticism, we deal with an ethico-political attitude: at stake is one’s acting in the world.

Foucault, moreover, suggests that inherent to ethical practices of freedom is a critique of domination. According to him, ancient philosophy ‘calls into question domination at every level and in every form in which it exists, whether political, economic, sexual, institutional, or what have you. To a certain extent, this critical function of philosophy derives from the Socratic injunction “Take care of yourself”’ (Foucault 1997d: 300-301). In practicing an ethical care of the self we affirm the principle of ethical self-creation, since, as Thompson (2003) aptly notes: ‘the activity of constitution is its own norm’ (Thompson 2003: 124). Ethical care of the self in that sense can be said to be ‘critically creative’ in itself (Taylor 2004: 266).

16 Arnold Davidson (1990) argues that in order to fully understand Foucault’s final work, one must take into account that it is guided or framed in terms of Hadot’s approach of ancient philosophy as spiritual exercises or ascesis (cf. Davidson 1990, 1994). Davidson clarifies that Foucault was a careful reader of Hadot’s major essay on ancient spiritual exercises, originally published in 1977 and reprinted as the first chapter of his Philosophy as a Way of Life (Hadot 1995).
The care of the self also implies a relationship with others insofar as an ethos is never invented by the individual himself, but concerns models that one finds in one's culture and are proposed and suggested by one's culture, society, and ‘social group’ (cf. Foucault 1997d: 291). In *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* (Foucault 2005a), Foucault repeatedly states that ‘the care of the self always takes shape within definite and distinct networks or groups,’ involving relationships that vary according to the different groups, milieus and cases [...] If you like, you cannot take care of the self in the realm and form of the universal. The care of the self cannot appear, and, above all, cannot be practiced simply by virtue of being human as such, just by belonging to the human community, although this membership is very important. It can only be practiced within the group, and within the group in its distinctive character (117).

Speaking of these groups, in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, Foucault not only refers to ancient philosophical schools, but also to some religious groups such as the Therapeutae (Foucault 2005a: 91, 114, 116). Membership of such communities, that offer self-techniques for a critically creative care of the self, is necessary, since people need others, preferably friends and tutors, to create a personal ethos. Gros (2005) summarizes that ‘practices of the self are neither individual nor communal: they are relational and transversal [crosswise KV]’ (Gros 2005: 545). Group membership enables the creation of a personal ethos, and the fabrics of such groups are the ethical life projects of their members.

When asked whether the care of the self in the classical sense should be updated, Foucault answers: ‘Absolutely,’ quickly adding that in modern times this will, of course, lead to something new (Foucault 1997d: 294, cf. 295). Ancient ethics developed from the fourth century BCE till the first and second centuries CE, from an elitist practice into a care of the self that appeals to a more general public. But it was always linked ‘to a virile society, to dissymmetry, exclusion,’ with slaves and women as the excluded others (Foucault 1997c: 258). Instead, ‘couldn’t everyone’s life become a work of art?’ (261).

According to his colleagues at the Collège de France, Hadot and Paul Veyne, Foucault’s final work is his ‘tacit attempt to offer contemporary mankind a model of life’ (Hadot 1995: 208). In the words of Veyne (1993):

Greek ethics is quite dead and Foucault judged it as undesirable as it would be impossible to resuscitate this ethics; but he considered one if its elements, namely, the idea of a work of the self on the self, to be capable
of reacquiring a contemporary meaning, in the manner of those pagan temple columns that one occasionally sees reutilized in more recent structures (Veyne 1993: 7, quoted in Davidson 1994: 67).

Foucault was especially interested in the ‘relatively independent’ status of the ancient practices of the self, which to him formed an alternative to the self-techniques of modern man that are linked to coercive power regimes. What fascinated him is the idea ‘that ethics can be a very strong structure of existence, without any relation with the juridical per se, with an authoritarian system, with a disciplinary structure’ (Foucault 1997c: 260; emphasis added). Foucault repeatedly highlights the relatively independent status of ancient ethical self-practices, for instance when he states that in the Greek and Roman civilizations ‘such practices of the self were much more important and especially more autonomous than they were later, after they were taken over to a certain extent by religious, pedagogical, medical, or psychiatric institutions’ (Foucault 1997d: 282; emphasis added). Elsewhere he argues that the ancient ‘“arts of existence,” these “techniques of the self,” no doubt lost some of their importance and autonomy when they were assimilated into the exercise of priestly power in early Christianity, and later, into educative, medical, and psychological types of practices’ (Foucault 1986a: 11; emphasis added). He adds that codes of behaviour and forms of subjectivation ‘can never be entirely dissociated, though they may develop in relative independence from one another’ (29; emphasis added).

Important is ‘the distinction between the code elements of a morality and the elements of ascesis’ and ‘their relative autonomy’ (31; emphasis added). The classical care of the self, however, ‘disappeared, that is, was integrated and lost a large part of its autonomy’ (Foucault 1997c: 278; emphasis added).

Foucault at some point suggests that the ‘growth of capabilities’ of modern humankind can be disentangled from the dominant power regime (cf. Foucault 1997e: 317) and turned into ethical self-practices. Cressida Heyes (2007) elaborates on this suggestion, in a superb chapter on dieting entitled ‘Foucault goes Weight Watchers’. Heyes analyses the tricky ways in which current weight-loss dieting programs install ‘self-techniques’ that, in fact, are integrated with a coercive regime of micro-management. Commenting on the Weight Watchers meetings she concludes: ‘I have never been in an another adult milieu where discipline was applied to such tiny behaviors, and deviance greeted with such serious and inflexible responses from the staff’ (Heyes 2007: 74). However, approaching dieting as a set of ‘self-techniques’, allows to conceive of their enabling effects as well, Heyes argues. She recalls the ‘paradox’ that Foucault hinted at, namely that
normalizing disciplinary practices also enable new skills and capacities ‘that may exceed the framing of the original activity’ (67). The self-techniques used in the Weight Watchers program, such as the keeping of notebooks (compare the use of ‘hypomnemata’ in Greek ethics), ‘have a resonance and potential that could exceed the regime of normalization that generated them’ (79). Drawing on Foucault’s ethics, Heyes mentions the possibility that dieting’s enabling aspects may lead people to a care of the self (cf. 87). Heyes gives us an idea of how the use of self-techniques in a constraining context may spill over into the developing of ethical practices of freedom.17

In a similar vein, Thompson (2003) examines Foucault’s strategic perspective, arguing that the minimal freedom of the neoliberal government-ized agent can be transformed into practices of freedom. This happens not by rejecting present techniques of the self, but by changing their goals and key features, placing them in service of the aims of an ethical care of the self (cf. Thompson 2003: 131).

Gros (2005), in my view, most adequately captures Foucault’s strategic perspectives by highlighting the collective dimension of the concept of practices of freedom. While community and individual today are produced, regulated, and dominated by the modern State as ‘complementary opposites’ (Gros 2005: 544), we should move beyond this opposition. Foucault counterposed ‘what he calls “modes of life,” “choices of existence,” styles of life,” and “cultural forms” to both the demands of community and individual rights together’ (544).

Moving beyond the opposition between individual and community is not only Foucault’s critical alternative to current neoliberal models of self and society, but at the same time a strategy to realize this alternative, as is clear from his articles on the gay movement. In one of these articles, he explicitly proposes to conceive of the movement’s politics in terms of an ‘art of life’ (Foucault 1997a: 163). He moreover adds that decisive social changes have taken place by way of bottom up, critical socio-political movements such as the gay movement. In the 1960s and 70s, they invented new ways of life and changed ‘our mentality, our attitudes, and the attitudes and mentality of other people – people who do not belong to these movements. And that is something very important and positive. I repeat, it is not the normal and old political organizations that have led to this examination’ (173).

Elsewhere he writes that ‘(r)ecent liberation movements suffer from the fact that they cannot find any principle on which to base the elaboration of a new ethics. They need an ethics, but they cannot find any other ethics

17 For further discussion of her assessment of dieting and cosmetic surgery, see Chapter 4.
than an ethics founded on so-called scientific knowledge of what the self is, what desire is, what the unconscious is, and so on’ (Foucault 1997c: 255-256). The ‘art of life’ to Foucault is an answer to this dilemma. Transforming self and society preferably takes place through collective practices of freedom that explicitly criticize forms of domination while at the same time creating ethical alternatives for self and society on micro- meso- and macro-levels (cf. Thompson 2003: 131; Vintges 2004a: 293).18

Foucault in his final lectures points to some practices in Western antiquity that were particularly critical in character. In his discussion of the notion of ‘parrhesia’ – literally meaning ‘fearless speech’ – he points to the way this was elaborated by the Cynics into a whole ethos (cf. Foucault 2001, 2005a, 2011). As he explains, parrhesia has more meanings in antiquity, namely criticizing oneself and one’s friends, among others. But Foucault is mostly interested in parrhesia as the fearless speech of the powerless to those in power, which involves serious risk-taking, as was practiced by the Cynics in particular. Foucault explains that the ‘right’ parrhesiast in antiquity, the one who is believed a truth-teller, is he who says what he knows to be true: his way of life and words are in harmony; in other words, his bios is in sync with his logos. Such a ‘harmonious accord’ (Foucault 2001: 136, 90) of one’s deeds and one’s words is exemplified by Socrates, but also by a farmer in Euripides’ play Orestes, who has the courage to express controversial political opinions, and who is respected as a parrhesiast since he is ‘a man of blameless principle and integrity’ (69). Overall, ‘the manner in which a person lived was a touchstone of his relation to truth’ (117).

Elsewhere, Foucault again suggests that critique preferably is an attitude, or a lived practice, in which bios and logos are linked and one’s acts and speech activities accord.19 An outspoken critical, socio-political

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18 Foucault argues that practices of liberation can be necessary but that they need to be linked to practices of freedom. A colonized people has to liberate itself from its colonizers, but also needs practices of freedom to define ‘admissible and acceptable forms of existence or political society. This is why I emphasize practices of freedom over processes of liberation; again, the latter indeed have their place, but they do not seem to me to be capable by themselves of defining all the practical forms of freedom’ (Foucault 1997c: 283).

19 The parrhesiastic attitude according to Foucault is at ‘the roots of what we could call the “critical tradition in the West”’; he specifies his research on parrhesia as ‘a genealogy of the critical attitude in Western philosophy’ (Foucault 2001: 170-171). Rather than as the triumph of pure Reason, Western Enlightenment according to him should be interpreted as the re-emergence of a critical attitude of testing limits and as such should be conceived of as an ethos instead of an analytics of truth (cf. Foucault 1997d). Foucault rereads Kant’s famous treatise ‘What is Enlightenment?’ through this lens, arguing that Kant’s question already involves an acceptance of the fact that we deal here with an event in time, and not with pure Reason.
movement in that sense entails such an accord as well; that is to say, it practices what it preaches. If the gay movement has to offer a critically creative ‘art of life’, it preferably consists of a set of critically creative ethical life projects.

Foucault’s notion of fearless speech indirectly addresses the fact that assemblages of neoliberal and disciplinary micro-management in Western societies install a lot of fear in people, demanding courage to counter them. From my experience as an academic in a corporatized university, practising parrhesiastic critique on an individual basis is exhausting, especially with the rise of a bully culture in neoliberal academia (cf. Zabrodska et al. 2011). A collective, outspokenly critical practice of freedom, as developed by students and staff at the University of Amsterdam in early spring 2015, is far more energizing and effective (cf. Gray 2015). From Foucault’s main interest in politics as bottom up, collective practices of freedom, comprising micro-, meso- and macro-aims, I take that parrhesiastic practices preferably take place in the context and shape of such socio-political movements.

Foucault’s notion of either explicitly critical (what he calls parrhesiastic), or implicitly critical practices of freedom, involve a new concept of homo politicus, something Wendy Brown (2015) does not notice when she complains about the lack of a homo politicus in Foucault’s work. While Brown advocates a return of the homo politicus in its sovereign classical shape, in terms of the original subject of Western political philosophy, Foucault posits a different concept of homo politicus, one that is embedded in and produced by collective practices of freedom, which allow him or her to im- or explicitly counter coercive frames while moving beyond them.

Summing up, we can distinguish five basic positions in Foucault’s work that people can occupy in power constellations. The first two we coined as (1) the docile body; and (2) direct bodily resistance – both with no room for people’s agency. Since 1978, however, Foucault introduces various concepts of human agency. Neoliberal man as theorized by Foucault is an agent who manoeuvres within the constraints of his neoliberal surroundings, and whose position we may coin – in the terms of Thompson (2003) – as (3) neoliberal ‘minimal freedom’. Discussing people’s ethical self-formation within code-oriented moral systems, which equally gives them some room to manoeuvre, Foucault points out a kind of agency that we can label as (4) moral minimal freedom. Finally, in Foucault’s works since 1980, there is a notion of (5) free agency – as constructed in relatively independent practices of freedom. While most governmentality studies focus on (3), i.e. on people’s agency in the sense of a neoliberally constrained ‘minimal freedom’,
they do not incorporate (5), i.e. people's free agency as constructed in relatively independent practices of freedom. They sometimes mention Foucault's notion of self-care, but without noticing the possible dynamics the concept allows for.\textsuperscript{20} The concept of practices of freedom, however, not only involves a strategic perspective, but can be used in analytical ways as well. Self-techniques can be transformed and overdetermined in such a way that we deal with ethical practices of freedom, rather than with self-techniques that are linked to coercion, as will be illustrated in following chapters.

\textbf{Freedom Practices: Five Core Characteristics}

Foucault's and Beauvoir's works on ethics show some remarkable parallels that allow us to finally synthesize their approaches in a concept of ethical 'freedom practices', i.e. distinct sets of critically creative ethical life projects, coined in terms of the following five core characteristics. A first similarity is that both authors conceive of freedom in terms of an ethical practice, and not as an attribute or quality of human beings per se. To Beauvoir, 'true freedom' involves the creation of an ethical life project, in a concern for the well being of others. To Foucault, freedom comprises creating an ethical life project that involves 'a way of caring for others' (Foucault 1997d: 287). Paraphrasing Beauvoir's formulation ‘One is not born, but rather becomes, woman’ (Beauvoir 2010: 293), we can conclude that to both authors one is not born, but rather becomes free, by developing a personal ethos, i.e. by developing a \textit{personal ethical life project} in a concern for others.

A second similar component is that developing a personal ethical life project to both authors concerns one's visible \textit{behaviour and acting} in the world, rather than inner life – being, in that sense, ethico-political in character.

Thirdly, to both, an ethical life project inherently involves a \textit{critique of any domination}. To Beauvoir ‘willing ourselves free’ entails willing others free, and involves a concrete commitment to those who are denied a personal ethical life project. To Foucault, practicing a personal ethos in

\textsuperscript{20} Lemke (2001) argues that neoliberalism is a political rationality that 'tries to render the social domain economic and to link a reduction in (welfare) state services and security systems to the increasing call for “personal responsibility” and “self-care”' (Lemke 2001: 203). Self-care here is directly linked to neoliberalism (see also Miller and Rose 2008: 7).
explicitly critical, parrhesiastic ways, or in implicitly critical ways, opposes any domination, since the activity is its own norm. Their normative perspective can be articulated in terms of ‘access for all’ to a personal ethical life project.

Fourth, to both, developing an ethical life project is not a matter of applying rules or laws but of creation. To Foucault, the relatively independent status of ethical self-practices means that one’s actions cannot be distilled from moral codes or dogmas, but are a matter of stylization and invention, as is clear from his use of the terms ‘art of life’, ‘aesthetics of existence’, and ‘arts of existence’. Beauvoir argued for the creative aspect of any ethical decision from the perspective of our situatedness as finite beings in the world, and she, too, spoke of ethics in terms of an ‘art of living’. To both authors, ethics involves inventing our behaviour and weighing our solutions, instead of obeying rules, or deciding upon ends a priori. To both, in the words of Foucault, ‘the ethico-political choice we have to make every day is to determine which is the main danger’ (Foucault 1997c: 256).

Fifth, both authors ground any ethics in social contexts. In The Ethics of Ambiguity, Beauvoir situates ethics as the concrete projects of groups of individuals and of individuals within them. She argues, moreover, that social conditions can deny people access to a personal ethical life project, which is the basic – Hegelian – premise of The Second Sex as well (cf. Chapter 2). Foucault more concretely refers to specific collective settings that are necessary for people to be able to acquire an ethos. At stake are groups and networks that operate relatively independent from moral codes and that offer people self-techniques to create a personal ethical life project. Our concept of freedom practices refers as well to this collective level, i.e. to identifiable and distinct relatively independent ethical communities, groups or networks offering self-techniques, and models for creating a concrete ethical way of life. But it also covers the personal level, i.e. the creation of a personal ethos in such a context. The term ‘freedom practices’ thus refers to both the collective and the individual level as two sides of the same coin, and can be used to indicate the creation of a personal ethos within such communities, groups, or networks, as well as these collective settings themselves – the fabric of which are the ethical ways of life developed by their members.

From the above, I propose to coin a concept of ‘freedom practices’ in terms of the following five core characteristics. At stake are distinct sets of critically creative ethical life projects that involve: 1) the development of a personal ethical life project in a concern for others; 2) consisting of one’s visible behaviour and acting in the world; 3) implicit or explicit critique of
any domination; 4) creation; 5) relatively independent ethical communities, groups, or movements offering self-techniques and models.

In an analogy with causal overdetermination – meaning that a social phenomenon or practice is the effect of multiple causes at once, one of which alone is not enough to account for the effect – I propose that a freedom practice is at stake as an effect of multifactorialism, i.e. of overdetermination by the five different factors, or five core characteristics specified above.

Where do the parallels between Foucault’s and Beauvoir’s concepts of ethics in terms of distinct sets of critically creative ethical life projects come from? Their respective theoretical backgrounds, i.e. poststructuralism and existentialism, do differ substantially. But to both intellectual movements power is an inherent dimension of social relations. Both share a critique on abstract moralism and abstract humanism, and specifically on Hegelian and Marxist notions of a final reconciliation between people. As we have seen, Beauvoir recommends looking at which concrete individuals are at stake behind abstract ideas, since there is only the multiplicity of life forms and projects, instead of one single ethical community. From his Nietzschean orientation, Foucault considers power as permeating the whole of society and knowledge, as do postmodern – i.e. neo-Nietzschean – thinkers. To existentialists and postmodernists alike, universal values and dogmas involve (a will to) power of concrete individuals or social groups. To both Beauvoir and Foucault, abstract universal morality is to be surpassed by a concept of ethics as radically situated embodied life projects that partake in power relations, being power practices themselves.

Furthermore, we should take seriously that Foucault explicitly distanced himself from postmodernism. Both Beauvoir and Foucault share an existential ethical perspective, arguing for a personal, ethical self-creation, rather than a deconstruction of the self.21

Moreover, both counterpose their notion of a radically situated ethical life project to collectivist ideals and programs. Foucault integrated the idea of a personal ethical life project in his final work, convinced as he was that there is no way we can return to totalitarian models of Hegelian-Marxist signature. Beauvoir, in The Ethics of Ambiguity (1948), criticized Hegel

21 Foucault, in this respect, refers to nineteenth-century poet Charles Baudelaire’s vision of ‘modern man’ as the man ‘who tries to invent himself’ (312). He adds, though, that Baudelaire unfortunately did not imagine that this ascetic elaboration of the self has ‘any place in society itself or in the body politic’ and is not limited to the domain of art as such (312). Beauvoir, in a similar vein, criticizes Oscar Wilde and surrealist writer Anaïs Nin for their ‘aestheticism,’ i.e. for making the beauty of their own lives their main focus as an art work in itself (cf. Beauvoir 1988: 165, 170; cf. Vintges 2001).
for his collectivist conception of man, and explicitly targeted a Marxist politics that subordinated the individual to collectivity (cf. Beauvoir 1948: 18 ff.). But Foucault and Beauvoir not only criticize a stifling collectivism or communitarianism, they also keep their distance from an unencumbered individualism. To them, a personal ethical life project takes shape within a specific collective setting, instead of being its counterpoint. They point to collective and personal dimensions as two sides of the same coin – as do postcolonial authors like Audre Lorde (1984). The latter, in a similar vein, conceives of a ‘community in difference’ that balances individual and collective dimensions – expressing a vision of community that is ‘shared by a number of black women scholars’ (Havis 2014: 247; Lorde 1984: 111).²²

Beauvoir and Foucault also share a certain distrust in academic philosophy. According to Hadot (1995), academic philosophy increasingly narrows itself into abstract reasoning; moreover, it risks losing its independence and turning into state ideology. In the words of Schopenhauer, university philosophy as a ‘state-financed philosophy’ aims ‘to give students opinions which are the liking of the minister who hands out the Chairs’ (cf. Hadot 1995: 271). In contrast, ancient ethics was relatively autonomous from moral codes, and engaged one’s whole mode of being in a practice of freedom. Hadot contends that remainders of this concept of philosophy as a way of life are present in the works of Descartes, Spinoza, Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Hegel, Marx, and Husserl, and, last but not least, in ‘the movement of thought inaugurated by Heidegger and carried on by existentialism (that) seeks – in theory and in principle – to engage man’s freedom and action in the philosophical process’ (272). Both Beauvoir and Foucault can be grouped under this tradition. They counterpose their concept of ethics as a way of life to certain academic strands of philosophy that, according to them, come down to an empty, timeless reasoning.

Besides these parallels between Beauvoir’s existential-ethical perspective and Foucault’s final work, some crucial differences remain. Most important is Foucault’s critique of the free, ‘original’ subject of existentialism. While Beauvoir in The Ethics of Ambiguity does situate the ethical self in social contexts, Foucault does so in more specific ways, pointing to certain relatively independent, identifiable networks and groups that offer the tools and models necessary for people to freely create and cultivate a personal ethical life project. Foucault’s final, more radical, socio-historical approach

²² Akeel Bilgrami (2014) interestingly argues for a ‘non-individualistic’ notion of individual liberty in terms of a larger view of the unalienated life (Bilgrami 2014: 173).
is an indispensable ‘update’ of Beauvoir’s ethics, transforming it into a
timely philosophy.\footnote{In this respect, I read Beauvoir through the lens of Foucault, while Kruks (2006) does vice versa.}

Whereas Beauvoir recognizes that social conditions may deny people access to a personal ethical life project, she does not specify these in terms of access to concrete ethical vocabularies. People kept in a state of servitude and ignorance should seize the opportunity ‘once there appears a possibility of liberation’ (Beauvoir 1948: 37). At some points in her essay, her emphasis on ‘willing freedom’ leads her to a moralism, which she later admitted and regretted. From Foucault’s more concrete, historicizing approach we take that people can develop critically creative ethical life projects only within \textit{relatively independent ethical communities, groups or movements offering self-techniques and models} – i.e. our fifth core characteristic of a freedom practice – that, like other discourses, emerge over time and cannot simply be made to happen.

As discussed in previous sections, Beauvoir and Foucault launch their concept of the critically creative ethical life project within collective settings as a counterpoint not only to abstract humanist and collectivist doctrines, but also to the current neoliberal models of Super Woman and Organization Man and the Entrepreneurial Self. But to what extent do their concepts of ethical self-creation differ from these models? Do the latter not involve similar projects of self-stylization and self-creation?

Comparing the ethical self involved in a freedom practice with the models of the neoliberal self, we can first conclude that the notion of an ethical life project involves a concern for the well-being of others, while the model of personhood of the neoliberal self is focused on personal success and safety. Developing a critically creative ethical life project moreover demands ‘slow, sustained, and arduous work,’ as Arnold Davidson notes (Davidson 2005: xxviii), instead of some quick and ‘Easy steps to Accessing More Happiness and Boosting Your Success.’ Furthermore, it concerns our acting in the world, rather than finding the truth of one’s inner self, as is standard in current training programs of self-improvement designed by ‘experts’. Next, it implicitly or explicitly opposes domination, instead of accommodating hierarchical and competitive frames, with dividing lines between winners and losers. And lastly, it is concretely situated within a distinct social group, community, or movement, while the neoliberal self is supposed to be autonomous and to independently choose his or her own way of life.
While, thus far, only freedom practices of men have come to the fore, we can finally ask whether the concept is of any use to analyse women’s positions in past and present. Is the concept of ‘freedom practices’ applicable to women as it is to men? And: is it not inherently Western? In Chapter 2, I will elaborate on the concept’s culturally plural character, especially on its cross-cultural model of the ethical self as well as its plural ‘keys’. Here, I will focus on the existence of women’s freedom practices from the main theoretical perspective articulated thus far, i.e. as developed within philosophical schools and circles.

Women’s Freedom Practices: Some Examples

In view of Foucault’s claim that ethical practices of freedom in antiquity were only meant for free men, where do women and girls come into the picture? As we have seen, Foucault explicitly criticized the hierarchical, male character of antiquity’s ethics. When discussing how ‘Greek ethics were linked to a purely virile society with slaves, in which the women were underdogs’ (Foucault 1997c: 256), he adds: ‘(a)ll that is quite disgusting!’ (258). Moreover, when he points to remainders of the ‘care of the self’ tradition in Christianity (Foucault 1989: 451), and in a string of religious groups in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance (e.g. Foucault 1997c: 278, cf. Chapter 2), he never refers to women either. Hadot (1995) likewise only mentions men, in ancient times and thereafter, as practitioners of philosophy as a way of life.

In Chapter 2, I will argue that many women in history developed freedom practices in ways that Hadot and Foucault never conceived of. But, already from their concepts of philosophy as a way of life, we find women engaged in such practices. Since ancient times, women have been members of relatively independent philosophical schools and circles that offered self-techniques to develop an ethical life trajectory. They created a personal ethical life project that challenged the dominant gender patterns of their time. In what follows, I mention only some women who became famous role models. However, they stand for many others who developed a critically creative ethical life project within the context of such circles, but who never made it into history books.24

24 Historical research today shows the existence of women philosophers from ancient time onwards. In what follows I especially make use of Carolien Ceton et al. (2012), a volume comprising 65 entries on women philosophers throughout times and cultures, composed by a range of scholars.
Examples of women philosophers in Western antiquity are Hipparchia (c. 300 BCE) – member of the Cynic school of philosophy – and Leontion and Hypatia. Leontion (c. 300 BCE), commonly described as a hetaera, was a member of the Epicurean philosophical school that had slaves and women among its pupils. The members of this school, founded by the philosopher Epicurus, lived in a community a few miles outside the centre of Athens, away from the hectic life of the city. They bought a garden near their home, the famous Garden of Epicurus, where they together practiced the hedonist Epicurean lifestyle of friendship and pleasure. The Epicureans strived for tranquility of the soul and bodily health. Death to them is a natural phenomenon, nothing to be afraid of. We should, moreover, only strive for the fulfilling of simple natural desires, and abstain from unnecessary ones like ambition, wealth and power: man needs little to be happy and free. Leontion’s works are lost, but she is praised for her sharp writing style – and especially for her treatise against the reputed leader of the Peripatetic school, Aristotle’s successor, Theophrastus. Leontion thus carved her own path as a woman within the context of the Epicurean school, endorsing its values of cultivating friendship, philosophical contemplation, and living in harmony with nature.

Hypatia of Alexandria (355-415 CE), a skilled philosopher, mathematician, and astronomer, was a member of the Neoplatonist movement. This was a group of scholars, pupils, and friends that practiced an ascetic ethical lifestyle, marked by the study of theology, mathematics, astronomy, and oriented to higher forms of goodness and harmony. Some fragments and themes of Hypatia’s work are known, such as her ideas on friendship. As the first female head of the Alexandrian Platonic school, she developed and passed on her own philosophical way of life to her students.25

Dutch seventeenth-century philosopher Anna Maria van Schurman (1607-1678) created a personal ethical life project as a woman within the context of philosophical as well as religious circles.26 Born in a wealthy Reformed family, and educated in the fine arts and literature, she became a very accomplished scholar, artist, and linguist, fluent not only in European languages, but also in Hebrew, Chaldean (Throat), Aramaic, Ethiopian, Arabic and Syriac, Latin and Greek.27 She was the first woman in the Netherlands permitted to attend a university – seated behind a wooden

26 The following is based on Jeannette Bloem (2004) and (2012).
27 Museum Martena in Franeker, the Netherlands, shows some of her artistic work and her collection of insects, as well as diaries and correspondence, and the self-portrait inserted in the text.
partition so the other students could not see her. Van Schurman wrote several public treatises, including a dissertation on the suitability of the female mind for scholarship and literature (1641), in which she argues that women who have the means to do so can, and should be allowed to study. She travelled widely, corresponded with prominent male philosophers of her time, including Descartes, and became something of a celebrity, due to her erudition.

Later in life she joined the religious community of preacher Jean de Labadie. When he was dismissed from the Reformed Church for his ‘heretical’ views, and founded his own house church in Amsterdam, Van Schurman made a radical decision. She sold her house and part of her library and joined his community, a choice that caused great commotion among her friends, admirers, and theologians, not least because she lived as a single woman under one roof with men. The attack on her reputation resulted in Van Schurman writing the Eucleria – published in 1673 in Latin, in 1684 in Dutch – in which she justifies her new way of life.

Van Schurman had always carved her own path as a Christian woman, and refused to be guided by others, hence her joining the Labadist community is often seen as a betrayal. This pietist movement, however, similarly refused to be guided by church institutions. Van Schurman’s membership of this community, moreover, allowed her to share her life with like-minded peers on a daily basis, inspired as she was by the prototype of the first Christian communities.

Rather than as a betrayal, her life qualifies as a freedom practice, as an effect of multifactorialism, i.e. its being overdetermined by the five different factors specified earlier. She: (1) developed a personal ethical life project; (2) expressed in actions in the world such as attending university, publishing, corresponding; (3) in an explicit critique of the stereotype of the silent and humble Christian woman; (4) creating and inventing a way of life as a woman that challenged the dominant gender patterns of her time; (5) within philosophical circles, and later, within a relatively independent, religious community, both offering her self-techniques and models for a personal ethical self-creation.

Eighteenth-century philosophers Belle van Zuylen, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Caroline Schlegel, to name but a few, all belonged to philosophical circles that resisted traditional dogmas and conventions. Within these contexts, they consciously created their own personal ethical life project, in an explicit critique of the traditional roles for women. Their ethical ways of life comprise alternative models for self and society that challenge the dominant gender patterns of their time.
Anna Maria van Schurman: Self-Portrait (1640)

Copy provided by Museum Martena, Franeker
The life of Anna Julia Cooper (1858-1964), who is generally considered the first black feminist, similarly comprises alternative models for self and society in relation to dominant patterns of race and gender. Cooper was an American scholar who participated in circles of abolitionist intellectuals. In her book *A Voice from the South: By a Woman from the South* (1892), she advocated the rights of African American women and girls to higher education. She created her own ethical life trajectory, by acting in the world, lecturing and publishing widely on racial and gender equality and setting up black communities and cultural organizations, in a challenge to the prevailing ideas about black women.

Russian born activist Emma Goldman (1869-1940), who participated in the international anarchist movement, likewise ‘lived’ her political philosophy. While Goldman initially sympathized with the Russian revolution, after a few years she became one of its sharpest critics. She also changed her initially positive attitude towards political violence. As an activist, she created a lifestyle that combined an anarchist political ‘spirit’ with passion, commitment, creativity, and courage. Goldman’s personal ethical life project, comprising her actions in the world, can be seen as political philosophy in action. As such, it contains a set of cultural alternatives for self and society, on micro-, meso-, and macro level, such as the necessity of improving the social condition and rights of workers, of access for women to birth control, of new forms of direct democracy, and of resistance against patriotism and war, militarism, and nationalism. Emma Goldman (E.G.) made her life into ‘an example’ (Ferguson 2011: 283).

Simone de Beauvoir, within the philosophical ‘school’ of existentialism, not only conceived of ethics as a freedom practice, but created a personal ethical life project along these lines as well. She cultivated a personal life trajectory as a woman intellectual, against the conventions of her time, by carefully stylizing her acting in the world, in concrete commitments against sexism, colonialism, and racism, within the collective setting of an existentialist circle of friends that she often called her ‘family’. Although she did not elaborate a concept of ethical self-techniques, and merely spoke of the necessity of permanent ethical effort, her autobiographies give us an account of the concrete self-techniques that she and other existentialists developed, such as the establishing of daily routines of work and leisure, living in hotel rooms, and eating in restaurants. Other self-techniques that she developed include undertaking long walking trips on her own

28 Kathryn Gines (2010) characterizes Cooper as forerunner of an intersectional approach.
29 The following is based on Kathy Ferguson (2004) and (2011).
(cf. Hesp 2015), and the writing of five autobiographies, which can be seen as 'hypomnemata', i.e. writing exercises to create herself as the ethical subject she aspired to be (cf. Vintges 2004b, 1996).

In her introduction to *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir positions herself as living in a time of transition, when women, for the first time in history, could develop a critically creative ethical life project. In the next chapter, we will see that many women in past and present did so, in ways that neither Beauvoir, nor Foucault have imagined.