# The Individualist Power and Adaptive New Religious Movement: Scientology Individual as an Ethical Subject

Ofer Parchev

Correspondence: Ofer Parchev, Haifa University, Israel.

## Abstract

New religion movements are one of the most interesting social phenomena in recent decades. As an alternative communal and individualist way of life, these movements offer a transcendental, non-secular way of life that challenges the values of liberal society while remaining within its legal and normative boundaries. In the course of this paper, and by using an analytical description of Foucault's assumptions, I will examine the discursive and practical operation of the Scientology Church as a new religion movement that transcends the individual subject. I will describe the themes of Scientology as pastoral techniques, and its neo-liberal subjective constitution as a part of the conservative, normative mechanism of modern Western society, while arguing that they pose, at the same time, a potential ethical alternative that subverts the epistemological boundaries of Western liberal society.

**Keywords:** pastoral techniques, neo liberalism, scientology, individualism, new religion movements

## 1. Introduction

New religious movements (NRMs) are one of the most interesting social phenomena to capture the attention of the sociological literature in recent decades. NRMs have assumed a prominent place in this literature under the sociological perspective that sees religion as a part of the human project of reality construction, which is being conducted in contemporary historical conditions that serve as a transcendental authority for social relations in a phenomenal world (Bromley, 1997). NRMs developed during the 1960s and 1970s as countercultural movements operating in the legislative and social conditions of modern liberal society, while at the same time suggesting a transcendental, non-secular life form that challenges the values and epistemological boundaries of that society. The initial orientation of this area of study was heavily influenced by the cult controversy, which did not take into proper consideration the cultural influence of NRMs (Bromley, 2012). However, in recent decades a significant amount of research has attempted to go beyond the myths, rituals, conversion processes, and institutional organization of NRMs in order to uncover their increasing influence on their members as a particular group, but also on the values and the experimental construction of society as a whole.

Some of the sociological researchers of NRMs attempt to evaluate their complex relationship with the hegemonic normative reason and the established order. A widely used approach to this issue focuses on how new movements represent alternative responses to the same structural conditions (Bromley, 2012). Some NRMs have extended the dominant societal logic by creating radical forms of individualism, achievement, self-actualization, and material success, while others are seeking to build spiritual communities rooted in family and religion, as an alternative logic that resists the dominant social order. As David Bromley argues, the former should be described as world-affirming or adaptive movements, and the others as world-rejecting or transformative movements.

In the course of this paper, I wish to describe the sociocultural order that has conditioned the production and dissemination of knowledge by these world-affirming/adaptive movements, through the way in which the Church of Scientology, one of the prominent movements of this kind, constituted its knowledge and beliefs and the subjective character of its individual members. The analytical description of pastoral power in Michel Foucault's genealogical project, as it passed from the Christian Church to modern society, will be used to described the production of knowledge which determines the conditions of the sociocultural order and that serves as the epistemological boundary of Scientology. This sociocultural issue will be discussed as a political problem. Here, I will argue that the way in which Scientology duplicates the expectable norms and values as a world-affirming, adaptive movement has tied their members to an internalized constraint which limits their contingent existential experience. This limitation may be described not as a dominating political mechanism, but as a productive process which enables the Scientology subject to create an alternative way of life as an ethical subject. Here, under Foucault's well-known description of neoliberalism, I

will present the Scientology individual as a neoliberal subject operating within the sociocultural order, while possessing the ability to undermine the internal logic of this order.

The goal of this paper is to describe the way in which Scientology, as one of the prominent world-affirming/adaptive movements, operates within the constitutive condition of modernism to offer a new and refreshing way of life as part of the neoliberal subjective condition. To achieve this goal I will, first, present some of the central themes of Scientology, as an introduction necessary for understanding the process of knowledge production. However, in this paper I aspire only to present some key themes that represent this process; I will not present a comprehensive review of Scientology thought. In the second and third parts, I aim to expose the affiliation with the Scientology Church as a modern force based on control of the individual through pastoral techniques. Subsequently, I will discuss the place of the individual within the neoliberal subjective constitution. Finally, I will suggest the possibility of resistance within the sociocultural order, which adds a new perspective to the ethical position of the adaptive/world-affirming individual, as a subjective constructive agency.

## 2. Scientology: Basic Relevant Themes

Scientology is first and foremost a unique, transcendental, individualistic way of thinking and practice. The new-religion function of the movement is defined by two conceptual foundations that are linked to each other. The first is that human faith is not limited to a set of institutional precepts that demand blind submission; instead, it can be used as a therapeutic scientific method to save individuals from the frustrations and miseries of modernity. The second is that transcendentalism is not established with an anonymous god, but through the individual himself. Here Scientology anchors itself in the process of auditing, which involves intense scrutiny of individual life for the purpose of removing the traumatic pain of "engrams" in order to "to produce a state of Clear" (Locke, 2004, p. 112). A Clear is a person in full control of his actions and possessed of an analytical mind described by a computational metaphor involving thorough storage and access to data, perfect computation, swift, precise learning, and so on. Ron Hubbard, the well-known father of Scientology, developed the doctrine from Dianetics. In this earlier, initial stage, the analytical mind did not have a transcendental function, but in Scientology it reflects a superior, godless, natural power that operates within the worldly life.

The knowledge production of Scientology is based on historical conditions that determine the translation of the transcendental themes to a modern consumer society. Thus, the sociocultural environment represents a mode of epistemic thinking that limits the constitutive function of statements and practice to the centrality of the individual, who represents Scientology's transcendental subject. In *The Subject and Power*, Foucault (1997a) presented this sociocultural condition as a central form of modern political power. I wish to present this form of power as the main constitutive function of the sociocultural order that generates the world-affirming/adaptive movement. I think that we can use it as a first step for signifying the knowledge production of the Scientology Church and its subjective establishment as such.

## 3. Knowledge, Individuality and Adaptive NRMs

One of the most prominent contributions of Michel Foucault to political and social criticism lies in exposing a new angle of the question of domination and resistance. Foucault (1997a) argues that in a modern state, political power shifts from strategies of control based on domination and alienation to a personal adherence to a homogeneous identity. Here, effective resistance against the political apparatus is focused less on the essential function of legislation and governmental decision making, and more on the complex dissemination of knowledge production that binds individuals to their own identity. Thus, the critical analytical perspective extends beyond the legal discursive analysis to the inner logic of the social and political institution as a productive and wide-spread realm of modern knowledge.

In *The Subject and Power*, Foucault (1997a) describes the operative form of this resistance. The struggle against subjective domination is global, diffused, focused against the operation of power itself, and limited to the struggle against "power individuality," which has two dimensions as stated by Foucault (1997a, p. 331): "They assert the right to be different and underline everything that makes individuals truly individual, and on the other hand they attack everything that separates the individual, breaks his links with others, splits up community life, forces the individual back on himself and tie him to his own identity in a constraining way." Here, political resistance is established against privileged knowledge, not as a class or nationalist instrument, but as a structural operative mechanism that is based on normativity and conformity—a structure that abolishes individual uniqueness using internal truthful statements and that cuts individuals off of their contingent, communal social body. This is a result of the functional identity of individuals within the discourse of identities. Heterosexuality and homosexuality, for example, do not reflect a natural sexual tendency but function as an arbitrary typology that categorizes individuals into binding categories of experimental existence that reflect their functional, constructive identity (Foucault, 1978; Halperin, 2002).

The typology formulated by Roy Wallis and David Bromley defined an important part of the new religion movement by

using a flexible category that manifests the centrality of the individual (Bromley, 2012). According to them, the social organization is established through constitutive knowledge and practices that view individuality as the source of social power. Foucault's analytical point of view concerns individuality as a subject of domination and freedom, which is expressed in the complex organization of these movements. Thus, we have to examine the place of the individual under the constitutive reason of the new movement religions and their connection to the external sociocultural order.

Bromley (2012) argues that most of the adaptive religion movements relate to individual rights and especially the right to one's life style and the right to be different. The narratives of these movements are established through a basic assumption that views human beings as naturally and inherently possessing attributes and abilities of "true selves" that greatly transcend those they are presently able to express. As Bromley (2012, pp. 127-8) puts it, "The ultimate reality thus is I – ness, and from this perspective, the self is creator. Full and natural expression of individual essence existed in the primordial past, but that essence has reached such a seriously degraded state that individuals have lost awareness of their spiritual essence." According to Wallis, most modern communities lack any obligatory traditions and customs and recognize the individual as an autonomous agency that is responsible for his experimental existence and choices (Wallis, 1984). Religion possesses the means to enable people to release themselves from their physical, mental and spiritual shortcomings so that they can fulfill their individual powers and faculties. In this case, God is not an impersonal deity imposing a set of ethical prescriptions upon human society; rather, the deity is represented most particularly within oneself. Thus, the operative techniques establish the will of God by fulfilling to its utmost the powerful energy of the One.

If Wallis and Bromley agree with each other concerning the state of the individual, they judge differently the sociocultural environment that determines its constitutive field. According to Wallis (1984), notwithstanding that the social order is predictable and the individual transformation is limited to oneself and does not extend to the social space, the social environment does possess many highly desirable characteristics, which the tools of religion may lead individuals to gain through their personal, spiritual, existential journey. Bromley, on the other hand, sees the relationship between individuals in adaptive movements and their sociocultural environments as characterized by tension as "The objective of these movements is to psychologically free the participants temporarily from all relational networks and enhance voluntarism, autonomy, and rational control so that all subsequent relationship are freely chosen (Bromley, 1997, p. 127)." Thus, Bromley continues, "Deconstruction of the legitimacy of dominant institutions is effected through a narrative that fundamentally challenges conventional understandings of private troubles (pp. 127-8)."

Wallis and Bromley present both the dominant and the resisting forms of power regarding individuality: On one hand, the adaptive/world-affirming movements challenge the established organizations that operate within the sociocultural order in order to constitute a new way of life that separates individuals from others and makes them unique. Thus, they aspire to free individuals from sociocultural dictation. But, if the sociocultural environment is a desirable space, the individual is captured within a system of statements that he is supposed to challenge. If financial success, for example, is a lofty ideal that reflects the value of enterprise, then the religious therapeutic process, such as in Scientology, may duplicate conformist social and cultural values such as entrepreneurship or materialism. Indeed, Bromley argues that these religious movements establish an alternative narrative to the conformist sociocultural order. But the antagonism between the meta-religious narrative and the prevailing norm is not a given. Furthermore, the way in which the individual reflects noble and transcendent qualities may turn the religious ideas and practices into a technology of power that subordinates the individual identity solely to their internal logic. In fact, what we have here is not an alternative narrative but a duplication of the prevailing technology of power.

Foucault presented the shift of pastoral power from the Christian Church to modern society as the constituent function of emphasizing the power of individuality over other forms of power, as the inner reason of the modern Western state (Foucault, 2007). Scientology is one of the prominent adaptive/world-affirming movements. Thus, the way in which the ideas and practices of Scientology are commensurate with the pastoral technology of knowledge production can expose the operative process of individual power and its contingent reason. I will discuss this issue in the next section.

## 4. Pastoral Power and Scientology: Power, Technology and Constitutive Knowledge

According to Foucault, the growth of pastoral power in the modern state relies less on the sovereign power based on territorial rule under legislative principles and more on two different and unique forms of power endemic to modernity. The first form is governmentality, which is based on the art of government, "that is to say, the correct manner of managing individuals, goods and wealth within the family and of making the family fortunes prosper, how to introduce this meticulous attention of the father toward his family into the management of the state (Foucault, 1997b, p. 92)." The second form is biopower, which replaces the sovereign reason of life-taking in the administration and management of life through an intensive and meticulous control of biological needs (Foucault, 2007). Here, the passing of pastoral power from the Christian Church to the contemporary historical condition emerges as a systematic method which encompasses the entire life of every citizen in a powerful establishment that "ensures, sustains, and improves" (Foucault,

1997a, p. 337) the lives "of each and every one"(Foucault, 1997c, p. 402).

The power structure based on the element of care changed its form in modern Western society from a technology for recruiting and controlling believers in the Christian Church into a power mechanism that is the foundation of the production and dissemination of scientific and institutional knowledge. It is based on a form of power whose ultimate goal is to assure the salvation of the individual not just as a part of the community (Foucault, 1997a), but also as a particular individual. This process of salvation is managed through external obedience to a personal authority and the exercise of power in order to force individuals to reveal their innermost secrets (Foucault, 2007). The shifting of pastoral power from the Christian Church to modern life transferred the content and the context of salvation from the promise of a place in the afterworld to issues such as health and well-being in the contemporary world. This process also deconstructed the institutional structure of Christian forms of authority and shifted them to the state and civil society organizations, as a mode of immanent reason that conditions the dissemination and production of truthful statements of individuals regarding themselves and others.

Foucault sees in pastoral power a technological operation of a certain kind of individualization    (Dean, 2007; Foucault, 2007). The theme of salvation places individuals under a constant analytical examination of their merits and faults. The question of obeying places individuals in a position of absolute servitude to another, in a kind of complete subjection. And lastly, the individual is made to produce an internal, secret and hidden truth that reflects his truthful nature. Thus, the shift of pastoral technology to the modern historical condition functions to constitute subjectivity in the terms of scientific knowledge and in the context of the modern historical and social conditions.

Foucault presented the individualization of pastoral power as the immanent constitutive reason of the modern state, which structured the process of scientific production of knowledge and its institutional dissemination. Thus, although every social apparatus operates under diverse and sometimes contradictory goals, the structural mechanism of all knowledge production is based on individual salvation, calculated obedience, and the production of subjectivities through binding, truthful statements (Foucault, 2007). This is manifest especially in psychiatry, psychology, pedagogy, demography, biological medicine, and law enforcement (Foucault, 1997a).

Nikolas Rose argues that in the modern state, there is a real shift in knowledge production from the institutional mechanisms of the state to civil society (Rose, 2001). This is not to say that the former have lost their power, rather that the complex processes of normalization that applies disciplinary techniques, bio-political reason, and pastoralist interpellation have been prominent in the family cell, the workplace, and voluntary communal organizations. The way in which the pastoral techniques have conditioned the production of knowledge by the Scientology Church has defined some of its sociological functions as a pastoral social agent in modern consumer society, thereby reflecting the original characterization of Scientology as a synthesis between religion and science. Some scholars see this connection through the superiority of science over religion, with the former used only for coping with human modern misery with therapeutic tools, while others see in religion an expression of a charismatic and transcendental structure that was internalized as an immanent part of modernism and science (Locke, 2001; Whitehead, 1987; Wilson, 1990). This dispute is very important for understanding the tension between the two, but I think that the conditions in which knowledge is produced in the Scientology Church cannot be understood as a privileging of religion over science or vice-versa; rather, they must be understood as a religious belief that is inherent to the pastoral power that penetrated modern society—a belief that is manifest in this case in the eternal existence of the individual. Thus, the pastoral conditions that produced scientific knowledge in various fields such as criminality and sexuality, also created Scientology's therapeutic tool. Consequently, the religion of Scientology produces a network of objects, subjects, and concepts that are subordinated to pastoral elements that are part of the religious faith that causes them to be realized.

The first pastoral component adopted by Scientology is the interpellation of truth. Pastoral reason and techniques see the individual as a barrier to his own truthful nature, his authentic identity. The goal of the pastoral techniques is to establish this identity as deep, inner knowledge of the individual through the interpellation process. The basic assumption of Scientology, as formulated by Hubbard, is that every individual has a core of authentic identity that reflects his nature as a transcendental creature (Foucault, 2007). The representation of the thetan as the immortal god that ruled his physical and mental environment in the primordial age is manifest in the individual's worldly existence as the core identity of every individual. However, the relationship between the individual and other people, such as his parents for example, have tied him to a false identity–mother, father, close friend—that represses his truthful identity (Hubbard, 1968). Scientology suggests an interpellation method that aspires to uncover this truthful identity as a central part of the auditor–pre-Clear relationship: The auditor aspires to replace the behavioristic reactive mind with the fully aware mind (Hubbard, 1987). The former reflects a stimulus-response mechanism that is triggered automatically when stimulated by events similar to those that produced the trauma, while the latter reflects the immortal function of the individual in the worldly condition, as a crucial step for establishing his truthful identity. Here, the discovery of one's truthful identity is based on an interpellation process that identifies negative thoughts and memories through sets of

questions. Scientology does not necessarily link the faith in one's truthful identity and the interpellation techniques, as they operate independently. Nonetheless, both of them are commensurate with the pastoral techniques and do not transgress them.

If the process of producing truthful statements in Scientology is elaborated through pastoral techniques that are part of the modern institutional reason, the question of obeying is more complex. The obedience relationship in the monastic technique is based on the obedience of one individual to another and its goal is nothing other than the obedience itself (Foucault, 2007). Here, the monastic pastoral techniques differ from those of Ancient Greek, as obedience is established entirely through submission to the other and regardless of any goal apart from the submission itself. The relation between the auditor to the pre-Clear is established as the auditor makes the pre-Clear aware that reality is a matter of consideration and changing his consideration will change the nature of reality (Wallis, 1977). On the one hand, the submission process is not beholden to any exterior law; it is a monolithic submission to a personal authority that is based on the wisdom of Scientology. On the other hand, the goal of the therapy is to provide a subjective view of reality for the purpose of directing the individual to fulfil diverse goals, such as happiness, which does go beyond obedience itself. This duality expresses the link between Scientology and the scientific therapeutic attitude, especially psychoanalysis, where the therapist is the interpretative authority that is authorized to repair subjective thinking and feeling in order to direct the individual to the proper way (Foucault, 1977-8). Despite the struggle of Scientology against psychoanalysis as a secular non-transcendental practice (Lock, 2004), pastoral obedience determines the feasibility of Scientology's knowledge production, even if its pastoral form corresponds somewhat to the version of Ancient Greece (which is also manifest in a significant portion of the modern Western scientific fields).

The process of producing truthful statements as a result of obedience is a mode of salvation that is applied to the believers as a whole and to the individual as such (Foucault, 2007). The pastoral guide sacrifices himself in order to save the entire community as a whole and each individual separately. The therapeutic process in Scientology saves the pre-Clear from his misery by revealing his truthful nature as an immortal thetan. The salvation established in every individual is the thetan embodiment. But it does not remain in the private realm, where every individual represents the same thetan immortal force. Here, religious faith compromises between collectivity and individuality, and the pastoral reason of salvation resolves the tension between the public and the private as a constitutive and necessary component of Scientology as a religious community.

Reading scientological therapy as a pastoral technique may reveal another aspect of Stark and Binbridge's (1985) well-known division of religious movements and illuminate the place of Scientology in this division. According to Stark and Binbridge (1985), the difference between cult and sect is that the former is a deviation from the norm that represents for its believers only one of many salvation options, while the latter is not commensurate with the expectable norm and views its faith as the sole compulsory option. Wallis's analysis of Scientology described the development of Scientology from cult to sect, detailing the institutional development of their organization from an individualist cult to an authoritarian sect that has become a world-affirming movement. While the question of an authoritarian organization of faith has been discussed and has even been raised in the public debate on Scientology (Stafford, 1980), the discussion concerning religious and social normalization, especially in the Scientology Church, is far more neglected and in some way is seen as obvious. Thus, the way in which the scientological therapy is conditioned by pastoral techniques determines its immanent reason as a part of the normalized production of human knowledge in modern Western society. Indeed, the connection between transcendentalism and science has challenged the division between secular reason and religious faith. But scientological practice is a part of the complex process which produces the social norm under pastoral reason, and thus it functions as part of the sociocultural reason, within its individualist, transcendental elaboration. Here the world-affirming conceptualization is established as a duplication of the immanent sociocultural reason, as another agent of knowledge production and dissemination that questions its contingency under this relative condition.

## 5. The Neoliberal Scientology Subject

The centrality of the individual lies at the heart of the modern power relations established under the technology of subjectivity, as an elaboration of individuality under a set of normalized behaviors, thoughts, and practices (Foucault, 1997a). Nonetheless, individuals are characterized by prior truthful statements that determine their experience through sexual or medical citizenship and other kinds of identities. Thus, if pastoral power determines the process of the production of subjectivity in the scientological individual, the result of this process also establishes the limits of the individual's existence.

In *The Birth of Bio Politics*, Foucault (2008) delineates the development of the neoliberal subject in the context of the historical fracture which constituted neoliberal reason. Reading the German Ordoliberal literature and the Chicago American School, he described the difference between liberalism and neoliberalism so that the former refers to the market

as a natural economic reality with an intrinsic order that the government must follow, while the latter defines market survival only under state intervention (Lemke, 2010). In this view, competition is the basic liberal mechanism, but it does not exist as a natural entity; rather, it only can function thorough a series of conditions laid down in legislation and directed by public policy. One of the main constitutive conditions of the neoliberal ideology is the establishment of a neoliberal subject. The programmatic strategy of rending individual subjects responsible for their own activity is realized by constructing subjects whose moral quality is based on the fact that they rationally access the costs and benefits of a certain act as opposed to other alternative acts (Foucault, 2008; McWhorter, 2012).

The move from classical liberalism to neoliberalism established subjectivity in the anthropological realm by shifting from homo economicus, who was assessed only through the quality of exchange in the free market, to subjects who are realized as "enterprise units". The economic calculation rationalized society and its individual beings. As Ladelle McWhorter (2012) argues, neoliberalism shifted the central economic calculation from labor to income acquisition, and thus human labor became a pure form of income in itself, just like rent, interest, and profit, part and parcel of an entrepreneur's consequences. Here, the individual body and mind are used as another form of income. Individuals invest in their human capital, market themselves and sell their time, skills and energy. Every individual governs himself and others through the judgment of the relative cost of his inner quality, level of cognition and mental capacity, natural traits such as race and sexuality and so on, as a scarce means which must be maximized in order to gain the maximum amount of profit. The economization of the social sphere has extended the subjective enterprise unit beyond individual economic choices; it has reduced every human preference into terms of profit, including the intimate relations between the subject and his parents, spouse, children, and even his own intimate thoughts concerning his deepest needs and feelings.

The growth of Scientology as a new religious movement occurred within the neoliberal sociocultural environment (Locke, 2004; Wallis, 1977). In other words, it emerged in a wider social context marked by a growing bureaucratization associated with a competitive market economy that encourages efficacy of production in meeting consumer demand. Here, the transcendental cosmological motive is less a function of the need for metaphysical solutions and more a solution to human psychological problems. The presence of Scientology agents in the media and their mercantilist aggressive strategy reflects the connection between market demand and Scientology's therapeutic, transcendental goals (Lewis, 2012). But as far as we are concerned here, the important neoliberal function of Scientology lies not in the value of the psychological therapeutic process in the market economy, but mainly in the way in which the therapeutic consequences reduce the psychological problem to an entrepreneurial, neoliberal production of a subject. Here, the Scientology Church reflects an interesting facet of the new, world-affirming religious movement, as it is a unique agent that realizes the neoliberal ethic by disseminating it as part of the civil society, and doing so at a time in which the prevailing governmental strategy is one of "withdrawal of the state", in other words, without any kind of state involvement.

Bryan R. Wilson (1990) presented the process and goals of Scientology as a part of the competitive entrepreneurial production of the subject. According to his view, Scientology places a utilitarian, pragmatic, and instrumental emphasis on religion as an agency of self-improvement, which is subordinate to technical specifications, standardization, and re-utilization of procedures with the aim of achieving replicability of outcome. The goal of the pragmatic self-improvement therapy is to direct individuals to achieve self-determination and self-responsibility, by providing them with pragmatic tools of control. Hubbard presented this process in his analysis of the location of the thetan beneath the skull and the body and its establishment in relation to the therapeutic goal: "The usual residence of the thetan is in the skull or near the body. A thetan can be in one of the four conditions. The first would be entirely separate from a body or bodies, or even from the universe. The second would be near a body and knowingly controlling the body. The third would be in a body (the skull) and the fourth would be in an inverted condition whereby he is compulsively away from the body and cannot approach it …. One of the many goals of processing in Scientology is to exteriorize the individual and place him in the second condition above, since it has been discovered that he is happier and more capable when so situated (Hubbard, 1968, 57 -8)."

The shift from the thetan that is captured in the body to externalization leads the pre-Clear to control his bodily behavior and emotions. The individual learns to overcome the stimulus-response that contains the traumatic painful engram and increase the self-determination of the thetan to restore its ability control its environment. Here, Scientology lays the foundation for a neoliberal subject under structural conditions that can be analyzed using Foucault's criticism of neoliberal literature. Thus, Hubbard limited the goal of Scientology to the worldly life, not by neglecting the transcendental aspiration, but in order to establish it in the experience of the individual. Therefore the goal of the therapeutic process is to liberate the individual from his dependency on the social and the economic environment by providing him with pragmatic tools to control it (Hubbard, 1968, 126-9). The neoliberal personality of self-responsibility and non-dependency is not analyzed as a pure abstraction, but as the immanent goal of Scientology, which provides a constitutive method of constructing neoliberal, entrepreneurial subjectivity.

The constitution of subjectivity is expressed not only through the creation of a responsible and controlling individuality,

but also through improving the individual faculties and enhancing the economic and social value of the subjects. According to Hubbard, Scientology processes are able to improve IQ, communication capabilities, social attitude, fertility, creativity and health. As Wilson argues, the moral context of Scientology moves away from the stereological function of religion to the articulation and achievement of human potential (Wilson, 1990). Here, pastoral salvation is established through a rational path of enhancing human capital. Thus, Scientology operates within the neoliberal assumptions regarding human capital: first, the marketing efforts and power are established on techniques of capability-enhancement and empowerment that improve the situation of the individual in modern society. Second, the cognitive and mental capabilities of the individual are not limited to the economic realm, as they are in classic liberalism; instead, they exist throughout the entire social field, from the family to the intimate evaluation of the self, as the central indication that determines the ethical thinking and practice of the Scientology subject. Consequently, Scientology can be seen as another neoliberal social agent, such as the family which invests heavily in its children's cognitive capabilities, as described by Foucault (2007), or the medical institutions with their intensive investments in genetics and fertility, and so on.

## 6. Scientology and the Ethical Problematic: From Domination to Freedom

At first sight, Scientology as a world-affirming/adaptive movement challenges the logical values of the sociocultural environment. However, it fails to offer a real solution to its inherent problems, as it in fact subjugated its members to the modern power mechanism, which is concentrated within the individual. Indeed, Scientology offers an interesting alternative to the Western division between science and religion, with the transcendental themes determining the therapeutic goals, and the scientific therapeutic reason establishing the transcendental individuality. Here, the sociocultural reason of individuality is elaborated in transcendental terms, replacing the secular modern paradigm (Wallis, 1984). But the process of scientological knowledge production and the status of the subject within it turn Scientology into a sectarian institution that confines its individual members to behaviors, thoughts, and actions that reproduce the conformist, normative order. Thus, the individual "can't assert the right to be different and underline everything that makes individuals truly individual (Foucault, 1997a, p. 333)."

By subordinating individuality to transcendentalism, Scientology represents the essential dogmatic shortcoming of a world-affirming/adaptive movement, a shortcoming that Foucault recognized also in Marxism and psychoanalysis (Foucault, 1970). The essential theme concerns limiting the thoughts and practices of people to sets of values that serve a contingent historical condition. Like Marx who can swim only in Western waters by reducing human nature to praxis and social interaction, and like psychoanalysis, in which sexual energy determines human nature under essentialist principles, Scientology produces a social agent who is defined as pure, analytical mind and an entrepreneurial entity. Perhaps this is the foundation for a new identity that has not yet meshed with other sociocultural identities. However, the construction of scientological knowledge under the same historical conditions indicates that its subject is no more than another derivation of the discourse of identities, such as heterosexuality, homosexuality, sanity formation, citizenship ethnic identity, and so on.

But this critical assessment is too pessimistic, as it does not take into consideration the full capacity of the production of power as it emerged in poststructuralist thinking in general and in Foucault's analytical description in particular (Foucault, 1977-8; Rose & Miller, 2008). Power, here, is not a barrier to the fulfillment of needs and essential physical drives; instead, it regulates and manages them, rendering human experimentation more efficient, validating, nurturing, enriching, and even constituting it. Thus, the pastoral operative reason of Scientology's sectarian neoliberal organization does not block the individual by limiting his contingent experience. It constitutes a set of thoughts, behaviors and practices which produce Scientology's subject as a self that is responsible, analytical, and pure-minded and that shapes his choices and will under the same fundamental conditions. In other words, the neoliberal Scientology subject cannot be understood only using criteria of control, as he is a part of a productive power relationship.

However, the analytical perspective concerning the Scientology subject that is created under the modern conditions of knowledge production raises some critical question regarding the world-affirming/adaptive movements in general, which must be considered, in my opinion, the main problematic issues concerning their relation with the sociocultural order. First, how does Scientology, which is a product of the current historical conditions, challenge the existing sociocultural order, rather than merely reproduce it? Second, and as a result of the first question, how can the Scientology agent, as part of the world-affirming/adaptive movement, transgress his functional identity under the neoliberal regime, in order to increase his contingent experience as a free subject?

I think that the first step is to pose these questions in the context of the existing research literature, using Foucault's well-known discussion concerning the tension between morality and ethics. Foucault set up two types of moral systems: The first emphasizes the moral codes in a system that enforces the code in a quasi-juridical manner and examines the subject's adherence to a law or sets of laws. The second emphasizes ethical practice less as a formative structure of

subjectivity created by explicit codes of behavior, instead paying greater attention to the methods, techniques, and exercises used to form the self within a nexus of relationships. The main reason that led Foucault to examine Ancient Rome and Greece in his later intellectual period was the fact that most analytical and theoretical researchers of the history of thought focused on the former, while ethical practice is necessary for examining the way in which the individual forms himself as a subject under institutional power through his relation to exterior codes (Foucault, 1984). Thus, any examination of a contingent form of subjective freedom has to be conducted by linking the ethical practice to the structural knowledge that shaped the themes of subjectivity in the historical contemporary condition.

This ethical practice is established through "the way that the individual has to constitute this or that part of himself as the prime material of his moral conduct (Foucault, 1984, p. 14)." The self-work of the individual is conducted in the context of his relation to a set of rules as a fragile limitation, specific and historical, which has to be crossed-over by challenging its principles, and at the same time by operating within its terms (Foucault, 1997d). Here, the ethical work is characterized as non-universal and pragmatic. Its goal is not to create a new subject on the ruins of the old one, but to suggest a critical insight that enhances the contingent experience of the individual.

The way in which Foucault recognizes the act of thinking as the establishment of ethical work determines the practical expression of this crossing over: "Thought is not what inhabits a certain conduct and gives it its meaning; rather, it is what allows one to step back from this way of acting or reacting, to present it to oneself as an object of thought and to question it as to its meaning, its conditions, and its goals. Thought is freedom in relation to what one does, the motion by which one detaches from it, establishes it as an object, and reflects on it as a problem (Foucault, 1997d, 315-316)." Foucault sees ethics as a practice of freedom established through thought (Foucault, 1997e). Thought represents the way in which the individual detaches himself from the historical processes that created his feeling, thinking, memories, and so on. This detachment is expressed only by possessing the capability to criticize the constitutive historical condition, and especially by suggesting a new way of thinking and practice (Foucault, 1997d). For example, in the context of this paper, pastoral techniques determined the historical condition of knowledge production and dissemination in some of the central institutions of the West. But they are no more than a relative, historical production. Thus, as Foucault suggested, the function of resisting them is manifest through counter-conduct (Foucault, 2007), i.e., the way in which the individual refuses to accepts their boundaries, not by ignoring their implications and restrictions of his life, but by conducting himself and others in a way that is not commensurate with its reason.

Neoliberalism is a way of contingent ethical thinking and practice in which individuals are tied less to a binding system of knowledge that determines their identity, and more to operating within a calculated consideration of profit. This reduces the internal constraints that preclude the individual's capability to criticize. McWhorter (2012) recognized this ethical potential in the homosexual neoliberal subject: the homosexual subjectivity was judged under normative terms through a concept of right and wrong as an expression of negative sexuality. In neoliberal society, the homosexual tendency occupies an equivalent place in consumer society in terms of profit. Thus, it is not judged as part of a holistic identity, but according to its positive values in the consumer market. The Scientology subject, as another form of neoliberal subjectivity, determines his preferences and desires not according to an arbitrary identity—sexual, national, rational, and so on—but in order to improve and enhance his inner capabilities. Thus, the individual's social functional identity is judged under more flexible terms as part of the human capital market, and therefore the individual is allowed to examine and change it.

I do not intend to develop here a systematic argument concerning the way in which the Scientology Church is able to function as an ethical, programmatic institution. But I think that its affiliation with the institutional process of producing the neoliberal subject shows that the therapeutic process is a contingent mode of ethical practice. First, belief in the thetas is not based on obedience to a rule or law; instead, it is based on social relations and flexible rules intended to promote self-realization and improvement. Second, the individual's painful and traumatic past may include the same components that bind him to his functional social identity. This process may lead the individual to re-examine them and thereby remove these shackles. For example, the pain may reflect the process in which a sexual identity is produced that limits the individual to certain physical experiences, and exposing this identity may enable transcending it. This is speculative but it seems possible that the scientological subject can detach himself from the disposition that binds him to a specific identity. And last, Scientology is open to a heterogeneous identity. It is not limited to any kind of detrimental conceptualization of identity, whether racist, ethnic, religious, and so on (Wilson, 1990). This opens the door to a discursive practice that does not limit the way in which one judges oneself and others within the limits of experience, which is based on expectable normative identities.

But this neoliberal analysis of Scientology as a mode of gaining freedom has to be accompanied by several methodological and skeptical warnings, which correspond to the way in which Butler sees Foucault's critique, i.e., not as a condemnation or rejection of a specific governmental strategy but as an engagement or disengagement with the rationalities and practices of a certain kind of subjectivity. This criticism is faithful to Foucault's basic assumption that

one must relate to any form of social construction, not in positive or negative terms, but as a critical tool to recognize the dangers they pose (Foucault, 1997d). Here, criticism of the tension between domination and freedom in the Scientology subject is intended to point out its problematic nature and indicate the need for a critical reassessment of the empirical evidence presented by Scientology concerning this problem.

First, it is not obvious that the transcendental Scientology Foundation does not function as an immanent juridical component in the Scientology Church. The well-known description of Wallis concerning the authoritarian transition from Dianetics to Scientology may have shifted the movement from a free interpretation of external rules of self-care to obedience to an institutional authority that interprets the therapeutic process under binding rules. I think that an examination of the development of the movement from the neoliberal subjective perspective can provide a new point of view concerning the tension between freedom and authority in the Scientology Church. Second, as some scholars have recognized from Foucault's interpretation of neoliberalism, any ethical paradigm that is based on rationality has to take into consideration its immanent moral and ethical risks (Hamann, 2009; McWhorter, 2012; Winbust, 2012). First of all, the transfer of responsibility exclusively to the individual may justify any form of inequality by blaming the poor and the different for their economic and social situation. Second, the neoliberal subject may assess his cognition and mental state in terms of profit and loss, which are based on the normative and conformist criteria inherent to his functional identity. The Scientology Church may fall prey to this ethical shortcoming, as an esoteric movement of egoistic selfhood that disseminates truthful normative statements in the framework of a class-based consumer culture that draws its ideas from metaphysical assumptions. The focus of the Church on the struggle against drugs and psychiatric medical assistance has to be judged from this point of view, not rejected and condemned but according to the function of the subject as a resisting agent. The rejection of drugs, for example, may duplicate the values of biopower concerning bodily wholeness and somatic fertility, thus strengthening disciplinary and biopower techniques.

And last, the pastoral problem. As we saw in the second section, Scientology developed as a part of pastoral production. In recent decades, quite a lot of scholars have attempted to extract from the pastoral conduct a new critical method and practice (Dean, 2007; Mayes, 2009; Parchev, 2019; Rose, 2001). In *Security Territory and Population*, Foucault (2007) presented counter-conduct techniques in the Christian Church, which on the one hand operated within the inner logic of Christianity and on the other hand offered a new form of thought and practice that contradicted the main components of the pastoral techniques. However, governmental counter-conduct practices are able to challenge a truthful statement by presenting a counter-production of knowledge that supports their principles. The way in which Scientology is able to walk this line critically determines its place between domination and freedom: both the independence of the individual in forming his own judgment beyond blind obedience and a reduction in his interpellation in order to produce an inner truth for salvation are necessary for separating the individual from his artificial identity. Indeed, pastoral techniques are necessary for creating and duplicating the ideas of Scientology, as well as much of modern knowledge. However, techniques of resistance to the pastoral power may increase the ethical probability of thought that subverts its foundations.

## 7. Summary

As Trent H. Hamman argues (2009), it may be too early to determine the viability of neoliberalism as a form of governmentality, as we still lack the tools to understand its subject. The Scientology Church sheds light on this difficulty and at the same time draws a sociological portrait of neoliberal individual existence by pointing out the structural conditions of the production of a subject as an object of domination and freedom: In the first level, by revealing the historical mechanism of the production and dissemination of knowledge through the connection between transcendentalism and human problem solving, and second, by suggesting a neoliberal mode of existence as a critical perspective on the way in which the subject is constituted in these conditions.

This critical perspective reexamined the sociological characteristics of the new religious adaptive/world-affirming movements, and determined their place in the sociocultural order by revealing them to be one of the outcomes of the neoliberal pastoral production of knowledge and identity. Thus it presents, I hope, the way in which these movements belong to the sociocultural environment and provide an effective tool to cope with the impediments of modern human life. Second, it revealed the dominant political function of the social order and its fixed identities not as an oppressive governmental mechanism or as a call for liberation, but as a description of a new problem that the adaptive/world-affirming movements explicitly address in order to expand the boundaries of the individual beyond the current system of statements that limit him.

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