Though Michel Foucault certainly was not the first to write about the primacy of the market within capitalism, few have been able, with such precision, to provide the grounds with which to begin a radical and fundamental critique of it. This paper takes as its point of departure Foucault’s analysis of liberal ideology and the free market found in *The Birth of Biopolitics*—the series of lectures Foucault delivered at the Collège de France between 1978 and 1979. That this analysis, I argue in this paper, can be profitably related to his later seminar, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* (1981-1982), is central to Foucault’s overall concern with subjectivity, truth, and the market. Foucault’s analysis draws its strength from the particular focus on the intertwinement of ontology and subjectivity with the market: if the market, as Foucault argues, has become the site of veridiction *par excellence* within capitalism, then not only will we look to the market to understand economic phenomena—we will also look to the market to understand ourselves. Indeed, the market’s ability to comprehend the subject depends upon the market’s having captured the logic of the subject within it: that is to say, subjectivity has been cast into the same category as economic phenomena, such that we are, as much as something like production reports and tax schedules, essentially economic beings.

And yet any critique of capitalism or capitalist ideology must at some point contend with Karl Marx. At first glance, it may appear that Foucault and Marx have very different projects in mind: while Foucault in the *Birth of Biopolitics* emphasizes the market, Marx, at least as he has been typically received and understood, focuses on production. Moreover, as Marx demonstrates in *Capital*, it is bourgeois ideology that has obscured the site of production in the first place. By continuing to focus our critical gaze on the market, Marx would likely say, we are in fact reifying the relations that have made the market so important in the first place. Marx thus shifts his focus to the site of production as a corrective to the emphasis that capitalism places
on the market. In doing so, he demonstrates how subjectivity is in fact produced during and through the process of production. Ontology is therefore based entirely in production—not the market—according to Marx.

In this paper, I aim to bring these two seemingly opposing propositions into contact with one another: that is, Foucault’s subject dominated by market forces and Marx’s subject dominated by the forces of production. As I will demonstrate, political economy relies on the production of a specific type of subjectivity—*homo oeconomicus*—in order to properly function. Within the regime of truth as determined by the market, *homo oeconomicus*, who—as Louis Althusser argues—is a material by-product of the process of production, becomes the crystallization of Marxist alienation in the form of the sole type of subjectivity possible within our society. The issue of *homo oeconomicus*, I argue in this paper, is essentially an issue of value: for Foucault, value and truth link up in a type of truth-effect, where value can be found in the force of the truth; for Marx, value is created in the sphere of production. While these two conceptions of value seem starkly opposed to one another, I argue that Marx and Foucault, while inherently critical of the system, both share the concern of seeking to expound the logic of capitalism on its own terms. Primarily in *Capital*, but in other places as well, Marx wants to demonstrate how according to capitalism’s own economic laws it is destined to consume and exhaust itself. Foucault, on the other hand, lays out the shifting discourses and logics that circulate and have circulated within society, and by implication, within capitalism. Both are thus concerned with how the system manages to work—how it produces and reproduces itself, and, moreover, how the system’s own logic operates.

While other scholars such as Wendy Brown and Jacques Bidet have recently undertaken similar studies pertaining to Foucault’s rapprochement with neoliberalism, Marx, and the capitalist system, I am interested here in centering my discussion on the ontological determination that emerges through the conceptions of value and alienation in Marx and Foucault. At the center of this common problematic is subjectivity and the type of being that is made to appear within the capitalist episteme. The beings of capitalism are dependent upon a notion of justice that renders all of its subjects as equal creatures of having: that is, within capitalist logic, people are reduced, phenomenally and ontologically, to possession. Like the commodities that they possess, capitalist subjects are defined by a logic of equivalence. Capitalism requires that subjects approach themselves and each other merely as
possessors or potential possessors of commodities to ensure the legitimacy of its self-defined system of justice. The notion of the just here works to concretize and make ubiquitous the logic of capital, which discounts any notion of the possibility of change. Rather, the truths of capitalism are presented as immutable and eternal; capitalism’s truths accept their own conditions as the only conditions, which are therefore just and right, and which determine subjectivity while simultaneously prohibiting anything other than the capitalist subject of having. Nevertheless, as I will argue, subjectivity is something that is always produced—something that is always a process: capitalist logic merely seeks to obscure its own techniques of subjectification by offering its own subject as the only subject possible.

Before getting to the discussion of subjectivity, we must first outline how value functions for Foucault in order to define more specifically how the market produces truth. In *The Birth of Biopolitics* seminar, Foucault traces the beginnings of a critical shift in governmental reason. In these lectures, Foucault argues that the middle of the eighteenth century saw the first appearance of what would become “a characteristic feature of . . . modern governmental reason”: the *raison d’État* shifted toward the “internal limitation of governmental reason,” which was aimed at “the objective of the state’s enrichment.” Here, Foucault is marking off an epistemological shift in the logic of governmental rationality. The new *raison d’État* deals with a different set of questions and concerns from the *raison d’État* of both the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which was rather to ensure the “maximum strength” of the state. This limitation of government that began in the eighteenth century then becomes what Foucault calls a “regime of truth,” which when coupled with a set of practices, makes “what does not exist . . . nonetheless become something” that then must be submitted “to the division between true and false.” In other words, and more concretely, liberalism—which Foucault defines as “the principle of the self-limitation of government”—and all the specific practices of the self, government, etc., that come along with it, are simultaneously brought into existence and forced to be determined as either true or false. What gets to exist, and what is true or false, therefore, must be filtered through the knowledge-power apparatus of liberalism.

Within the liberal paradigm, the realm of government is reduced in order to make way for an alternative truth-producing machine that stems from the new aims of government brought about by political
economy. Though governmental reason is to be driven by the express economic goal of the enrichment of the nation, this does not mean that “statesmen . . . began to listen to the economists” or that “the economic model [became] the organizing principle of governmental practice”; rather, the new site from which truth is generated is the market. Moreover, this shift to the truth producing market is at the same time a move away from the market as a site of justness—a site of jurisdiction. Though there has been a marked shift away from the regime of justice, we still find leftovers of this logic within the market: for example, when left alone, the market determines not only the true price of a commodity but also the “just price.” However, Foucault makes clear that this conception of the just “no longer has any connotations of justice.” Justice is merely a remainder from an epistemological set of issues from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that now gives way to a concern with the production of truth, which finds its place of production in the market. Shifting from justice to truth raises a significant point that I will return to towards the end of this essay in our discussion of subjectivity: if the set of concerns is only whether things are “true” or not true, whether they exist or do not exist, the question of whether something should exist drops out entirely. As I will argue, for Foucault and Marx subjectivity is always a process: this shift from the just to the true effectively makes impossible the production of a subjectivity that does not conform to capitalist logic. Instead, only the capitalist subject—the subject of having—is produced ad infinitum. In this regime, what exists or is allowed to exist is presented as a given—a truth—which then carries only an implication of the just: but, as Foucault argues, that sense of justice is only an idea, empty of all content.

To be clear, the type of truth that Foucault is discussing is not truth in an immutable or static sense. Truth, for Foucault, functions as a truth-effect, and ultimately is a question of legitimacy: truth is subjectively generated or historically contingent. Objective truth is not Foucault’s concern here—he is rather focused on articulating what gets to count as true—and why—in a given epistemological framework. Thus, truth within the liberal paradigm is “a standard of truth” generated by “the natural mechanisms of the market.”

This specific type of truth, which emanates from the market, extends to encompass everything seemingly outside of it as well: while it is quite commonsensical that “prices are determined in accordance” with market
logic, it is less so that the market too determines “which governmental practices are correct and which are erroneous.” This outward tendency of the market to make decisions on how government is to function is entirely new. What moreover works in government, in addition to other spheres, is always weighed by what is true according to the market—this weighing of truth against the logic of the market is what leads Foucault to call the market a “site of veridiction”: “In this sense, inasmuch as it enables production, need, supply, demand, value, and price, etcetera, to be linked together through exchange, the market constitutes a site of veridiction, I mean a site of verification-falsification for governmental practice.”

I would like to note in passing—as an issue that I will shortly take up in more detail in Marx—the way in which the market, although the site of veridiction, is simultaneously a non-site. While Foucault places great emphasis on the fact that though an economic model begins to determine governmental practice, it is not an economic model dictated by a particular group of people: “in no way did I mean that there was a formation of a scientific and theoretical discourse of political economy on one side, and then, on the other, those who governed who were either seduced by this political economy, or forced to take it into account by the pressure of this or that social group.” Earlier in the lecture, Foucault argues a very similar point: “This site of truth is not in the heads of economists, of course, but is the market.” We immediately notice a slight modification in Foucault’s method: though he asserts in these lectures that he is handling the market in much the same way as he did “madness, disease, delinquency, sexuality, etcetera” in his earlier work, there is here the marked difference that the institution that Foucault focuses on always begins as an ideal space. While physical spaces that function as markets undoubtedly do exist, both Marx’s and Foucault’s discussions of the market imagine a non-localized setting. This is not to point towards a weakness in Foucault’s work on the market as a site of veridiction, but rather to lead us into our discussion of Marx and the idealized space of the market as a discursive construct vs. the material space of the place of production.

Even for Marx the materialist, the market is an idealized space. Of course, to reveal the market as an idealization as such is part of Marx’s point: only in *Capital Volume II* does the sphere of circulation get its full treatment. Yet, even when Marx directly discusses the sphere of circulation, he is less interested in the market per se and more concerned with
issues such as turnover time, circulation time, and fixed and circulating capital—in short, he focuses on what happens when capital begins to move around and how the capitalist strives to line up in perfect time all the various obstacles to his receiving back his profit. Moreover, these obstacles both originate from and give rise to the need for capitalist expansion and pave the way for the establishment of a credit system. Thus, in Volume I of *Capital*, where the focus is on the place and process of production as opposed to the sphere of circulation, the market itself is even more elusive. While Marx writes that “Commodities cannot themselves go to market and perform exchanges in their own right,” the actual place to which commodities go seems to spontaneously arise every time two “guardians” of commodities “recognize each other as owners of private property” and decide to engage in an exchange.\textsuperscript{16} The market, as a place of exchange of commodities, works very much in the same way that the process of exchange itself works: it is highly symbolic, where real products of human labor—“every commodity”—is forced to function as “a symbol, since, as value, it is only the material shell of the human labour expended on it.”\textsuperscript{17}

While the exchange of what we think of as traditional commodities such as Marx’s examples of linen, coats, and iron, still conjure up images of a physical marketplace, Marx goes on to entirely dispel the myth of the market as being a real, existing space. Part Two of *Capital* Volume I begins to move us away from a general yet fundamental discussion of the commodity and the commodity structure, and towards work, labor, and the process of production. In this section, Marx writes that the capitalist, the possessor of money, “must be lucky enough to find within the sphere of circulation, on the market,” a special type of commodity which could impart value on other commodities in the first place.\textsuperscript{18} This commodity must be unlike all other commodities, as its use-value must possess “the peculiar property of being a source of value.”\textsuperscript{19} As luck would have it, “The possessor of money does find such a special commodity on the market: the capacity for labour [Arbeitsvermögen], in other words labour-power [Arbeitskraft].”\textsuperscript{20} We see here that the market is not a place, but rather an occurrence, an event: the market occurs whenever commodities meet one another where the owners of those commodities have the intent to sell, whether it be linen or labor-power. For example, Marx writes that “labour-power can appear on the market as a commodity only if, and in so far as, its
possessor, the individual whose labour-power it is, offers it for sale or sells it as a commodity.” Although the intangibility of the market is certainly not the thrust of Marx’s point here, we nevertheless see how the market occurs only when a certain set of requirements have been met.

Another one of these crucial requirements for the market to occur, in the case of labor-power as commodity, is a set of ontological presuppositions. Central to the functioning of capitalist exchange is the existence of a subject, who, though produced through specific mechanisms of power, naturally requires and is fulfilled by the mode of social relationality offered up by capitalism: “In order that [labor-power’s] possessor may sell it as a commodity, he must have it at his disposal, he must be the free proprietor of his own labour-capacity, hence of his person.” The would-be worker who wishes to induce the market to appear and the capitalist who wishes to purchase the worker’s labor-power must “meet in the market, and enter into relations with each other on a footing of equality as owners of commodities, with the sole difference that one is a buyer, the other a seller; both are therefore equal in the eyes of the law.” In this section, Marx is explicating the standard logic of capitalist exchange, though his critique is fairly self-evident. We immediately note a discourse of freedom, equality, and justness in which all parties must meet each other on a supposed equal grounding, and by virtue of this equal ground, are therefore free and unbounded. Freedom in this context, however, is a very particular type of freedom: it is, as Marx points out, based on an equality in the eyes of the law. This logic of justice is precisely the leftover notion of the just that Foucault describes as persisting within the capitalist moment: while there are intimations of justice within this common leveling of all difference within the space or event of the market, this type of justice is absolutely devoid of all notions of the just. There is, therefore, a supposed juridical equality, emptied of all justice, but which nevertheless provides the ontological ground upon which the market can be made to occur. We see at this moment how value for Foucault and value for Marx are beginning to come together. The market can only occur under the conditions of this juridical “equality”—that is, all parties must be made to appear as equals in order for an exchange to take place. For Marx, the actualization of value requires that the market and the exchange take place: while value is produced or extracted during the process of production, without the market, the capitalist could never receive that value back in the form of profit, of money.
And yet, following Foucault, the equality and justness on which the market depends are in fact values produced by the market itself. Therefore, when Marx describes the occurrence of the market, it is essential that we read these productive qualities into the moment of exchange, where value is both produced and realized while simultaneously interpelling a specific subject within the bounds of the law.

Embedded within Marx’s ventriloquizing of capitalist logic we note the way in which both capitalists and laborers appear within this law—they both appear, merely, as possessors of commodities. Only insofar as they both possess commodities—the worker possesses his labor power and the capitalist a sum of money—are they equal. Capitalist logic and the laws of capitalism therefore call for a very specific type of subject to appear whose qualities are defined primarily by the ability to possess something and perhaps by the number of possessions one has. Nevertheless, the creatures of capitalism are clearly “having” creatures: creatures who are defined by possession both legally and socially, and even whose senses, as Marx writes in the 1844 Manuscripts, are all reduced to “the sense of having.”

Within capitalist logic, this sense of having, this primary definition of the subject of capitalism, appears at its strongest in the non-place or during the event of the market: it is during the market that subjects of capitalism are able to most fully express their subjectivity, which Althusser will go on to define as homo oeconomicus. In “The Object of Capital,” Althusser argues that “Classical Economics can only think economic facts as belonging to the homogeneous space of their positivity and measurability on condition that it accepts a ‘naïve’ anthropology which founds all the acts involved in the production, distribution, reception and consumption of economic objects on the economic subjects and their needs.”

Classical economics’ empiricism requires the appearance of a positive subject who is defined by need and consumption. This focus on consumption is a part of the way in which, Althusser will argue, classical economics cannot clearly see its proper object and therefore takes its object to be distribution, consumption, and the market. The combination of the focus on consumption and the need for a positive subject who is the effect of this focus produces a very specific ontological basis on which subjectivity can then be built: “In the concept of the sphere of needs, economic facts are thought as based in their economic essence on human subjects who are a prey to ‘need’: on the homo oeconomicus, who is a (visible, observable) given, too.” To be clear, the
concept that Althusser is developing here has the status more of a truth-effect—a functional truth in Foucault’s sense—than an absolute truth. Indeed, as a good structuralist, Althusser is ultimately interested in the relationality between points within a structure, which in some ways is an attempt to discard the notion of hard truths both in terms of the present from a transhistorical viewpoint.

_Homo oeconomicus_ therefore is nothing like the culmination of a historical identity of man; nor is _homo oeconomicus_ an absolute expression of human nature or the realization of a hitherto concealed potential of man. As Foucault argues in _The Birth of Biopolitics_, “The subject is considered only as _homo oeconomicus_, which does not mean that the whole subject is considered as _homo oeconomicus_.” The subject that is made to appear within political economy is _homo oeconomicus_, which is emphatically not to say that there are no other possibilities for subjectivity. On the contrary, Foucault’s assertion here is essential if we are to work against _homo oeconomicus_ as being the primary expression of our subjectivity. Foucault goes on to further articulate his point: “In other words, considering the subject as _homo oeconomicus_ does not imply an anthropological identification of any behavior whatsoever with economic behavior”—which is to say, not everything we do or everything we might do immediately becomes economic, or necessarily relates to the economic sphere.”

“It simply means,” Foucault continues, “that economic behavior is the grid of intelligibility one will adopt on the behavior of a new individual.” What becomes intelligible as the basis of subjectivity is economic behavior, which then produces the effect of subjects who only function in an economic manner. To put it differently, while a subject may perform any number of actions, many of which would not fit within the category of economic behavior, the only behaviors, actions, opinions, and thoughts that come to bear on subjectivity itself will be expressions of the economic.

What gets expressed as economic also must be understood through the specific logic of political economy and liberal economics. _Homo oeconomicus_ himself is an articulation of the economic, and is moreover defined as having his home within the place or event of the market. Indeed, classical economics as a whole feels most at home in the market: Althusser, undertaking an archeology of knowledge of his own, traces how “The various definitions Lalande proposes, quoting Gide, Simiand, Karmin, etc., put the concept of _distribution_ in the forefront.” Althusser here is determining how political economy thinks itself—how, that is, political economy thinks of itself as a
discipline and what knowledge or truths are generated out of that thinking. Quoting André Lalande, Althusser notes that “Political economy deals with production and consumption; but only in so far as they are related to distribution, either as a cause or as effect.” If distribution for classical economics is its *primum movens*, then the type of subject recognized as economic will be a subject of distribution and a subject of the market. Moreover, the goal of the sphere of distribution will be consumption, which is of course only an effect of distribution. Distribution and the market are the focal point of this economic system, and everything therefore must establish itself in relation to the center. This is not to say that there is only distribution with the aim of consumption. Production does indeed occur in a world populated by *homo oeconomicus*, however, production takes a subordinate role to consumption: “The homogeneous positivist field of measurable economic facts depends on a world of subjects whose activity as productive subjects in the division of labour has as its aim and effect the production of objects of consumption, destined to satisfy these same subjects of needs.” While production is clearly still present, the emphasis is placed entirely on the market and consumption in the world of *homo oeconomicus*.

I would like here to return to Marx in order to bring us from the market to the site of production. But first, I would like to briefly look once more at the moment in *Capital* where the worker meets the capitalist. We recall that the unlikely pair are, by virtue of their both being owners of commodities, “equal in the eyes of the law.” After having explicated the concept of *homo oeconomicus*, this notion that both parties are equal can gain its full force: the law, which here completely falls in line with the “grid of intelligibility” that Foucault discusses, can only recognize that part of man—both the laborer and the capitalist—that connects up with the specific economic ontology as dictated by the logic of political economy. Man is thus reduced to mere ownership and possession; the proper place in which to express this ownership, this only possibility of economic activity and subjectivity is within the idealized non-space of the market. Yet, we noted earlier that at this moment in *Capital*, Marx was simply ventriloquizing capitalist logic with the aim of setting up the grounds for his own critique; here, I would like to move into what exactly Marx offers as a counter to this capitalist logic. Marx thus makes the crucial move of shifting the focus of his study from the marketplace, where political economy tends to remain, to the site of pro-
duction. The part of *Capital* in question occurs just after the previously
cited section upon the conclusion of a deal between the worker and the
capitalist: “Let us therefore, in company with the owner of money and
the owner of labour-power, leave this noisy sphere, where everything
takes place on the surface and in full view of everyone, and follow them
into the hidden abode of production, on whose threshold there hangs
the notice ‘No admittance except on business.’” We note here in passing
the positivist tendencies of the market—*the noisy sphere to which Marx
refers—which is what Althusser picks up on as political economy’s em-
piricist basis. By merely shifting the focus, Marx replaces the object of
political economy—distribution and the market—with production and
subsequently surplus-value. This absence of the place of production in
classical economics heavily contributes to the way in which the capitalist
mode of production is understood as a given, which is to say, immutable,
or perhaps transhistorical. If production is completely naturalized, then
the only place for truth, identity, and subjectivity to go is to the market;
if production is completely naturalized, we lose to a certain extent the
ability to both talk and think about it. Therefore, when Marx moves us to
the sphere of production, he asks us to rethink how we define subjectiv-
ity, and how the ontological presuppositions of capitalism may in fact be
historically contingent as opposed to transcendent.

We are here approaching what at first appears to be the starkest
difference between Foucault’s and Marx’s conceptions of the ontology of
the subject within capitalism. Marx is not only interested in getting us to
be able to think and speak about work: Marx wants us, through all the
ideological haze of the market, to see that subjectivity is generated in the
place of work—in the sphere of production. This notion of subjectivity
seems to be in contradiction with Foucault’s claim that the market
produces truth and therefore produces subjectivity. However, as Althusser
writes, by moving from consumption and the market to production, Marx
rejects, “the ideological anthropology of the *homo oeconomicus* (etc.) which
underlies it. . . . he therefore rejected the very structure of the object of
Political Economy.” A rejection of the object of political economy is a
rejection of the positivistic and empiricist basis on which political economy
depends and on which *homo oeconomicus* has been established according
to the value-producing truths of the market. We see then that Marx and
Foucault are indeed talking about a very similar issue concerning the grid
of intelligibility upon which *homo oeconomicus* is located. To dispense with *homo oeconomicus* is not to say economic man is a mere fabrication; rather, Marx wants to demonstrate how *homo oeconomicus* is not man *as such*. To replace *homo oeconomicus*, Marx instead offers “species-being”—which is developed in the 1844 *Manuscripts*: “Man is a species-being [*Gattungswesen*] not only in that he practically and theoretically makes his own species as well as that of other things his object, but also . . . in that as present and living species he considers himself to be a *universal* and consequently free being.”

If man produces himself, then the notion of human nature is freed from ideological determinism. Moreover, history is released from the teleological constraints placed on it by capitalist ideology; focusing on the mode of production of a given moment begins to take the logic of a period on its own terms. A concept of history that does not reify capitalist relations is an essential first step to uncovering new possibilities for human subjectivity. While Althusser would undoubtedly be suspicious of the young Marx’s humanism found within the concept of “species-being,” Althusser nevertheless builds upon the production-based ontology that it makes possible. As Althusser writes, “every operation of knowledge, starting from the present and applied to an evolved object, is merely the projection of the present onto the past of that object.”

Therefore, if we take as our object humanity in its present form—*homo oeconomicus*—then it is likely that all we will see, should we look to the past, are cruder, more undeveloped versions of economic man. Moreover, all behaviors, emotions, tendencies, etc. that fall outside of the economic register will never begin to signify to us as having an existential status. If we are even able to perceive such elements, they will certainly not bear at all on subjectivity.

Marx expresses this exact need for a new conception of history that does not depend on a Hegelian sense of development and teleological progression. Indeed, Hegelian history hides from us types of logic alien to our own, and, moreover, precludes the possibility of alternative epistemological logics. Marx, by shifting to production, wants to demonstrate how certain knowledges are forbidden from existing in the first place: “Political economy conceals the alienation in the nature of labor by ignoring the direct relationship between the worker (labor) and production.” Although this direct relation exists, the ideological functioning of political economy masks this relationship. Further, because of its concealment, the connection between laborer and production is rendered unable to enter into knowledge, which causes it to not exist in the Foucauldian
sense of a truth-effect. Of course there really is a worker and a machine, but
the question is about what is regarded as knowledge. From the perspective of
political economy, as we saw earlier with Althusser, the relationship between
worker and machine is subordinated, or perhaps, suppressed to the point of
not existing. Historically then, within the moment of political economy and
from the perspective of political economy, there is no relationship between the
worker and the machine—there is only distribution, the market, consumption,
and the needs of homo oeconomicus.

To place production first, as Marx does, allows us to see that the so-
called truths of political economy are not in fact transhistorical. If man
“makes his own species . . . his object,” then man’s productive activity is
what defines him as man, which works to profoundly upset the notion
of an essential human nature. Althusser seeks to push the notion of the
production of man’s essence—in other words, “species-being”—a step
further: “for,” he writes “to call ourselves Marxists it is not enough to
believe that the economy, and in the economy, production, govern all the
other spheres of social existence.” Included in this social existence would
be man’s essence and subjectivity. Althusser warns us that “by declaring
that labour constitutes both the ‘essence of man’ and the essence of political
economy, in short by developing an anthropological ideology of labour”
we run the risk of developing out of Marx “an idealist conception of the
economy and of production.” Althusser adds into the formula of the
constitution of social relations the specific shape that those social relations
and the process of production take: “the social relations of production are on no
account reducible to mere relations between men, to relations which only involve
men, and therefore to variations in a universal matrix, to inter-subjectivity
(recognition, prestige, struggle, master-slave relationship etc.).” This much
of Althusser’s point is evident within Marx himself, who famously writes
that the commodity-form causes social relations to appear as “material
[dinglich] relations between persons” while simultaneously causing
material relations to appear as “social relations between things.” There
can therefore never be anything like, within capitalism, a direct one-to-
one determination of the economic base on the superstructure: as soon as
the commodity-form takes hold, social relations have already begun to be
mediated through the process of alienation. Instead, Althusser argues, we
have to think about the process of production and the individuals engaged
in that process as part of a structure: “For Marx, the social relations of
production do not bring *men alone* onto the stage, but the *agents* of the production process and the *material conditions* of the production process, in specific ‘combinations.’” To say that the process of production—the productive activity of man—does not immediately spit out man’s essence is not to discredit the primacy of the process of production in the creation of subjectivity for Marx as a whole. Instead of a direct relation, we have here something more like an indirect yet determinate correlation between production and essence, between labor and ontology.

I have tried to show the way in which Marx’s concept of “species-being” is both less strictly determinate than it appears to be at first sight while still maintaining the importance of the concept for the issues of history and ontology. To say that production bears strongly on human ontology is not to say that the ontology produced is directly received and understood—if it were, we would here reach the ultimate aporia between Marx and Foucault: one proclaims that within political economy subjectivity is found in the place of production while the other argues that the market functions as the site of veridiction. This supposed impasse can only be broken through by our third major figure: Althusser. The move that Althusser makes to read alienation back into “species-being” pushes Marx further than he was able to go himself. Because alienation is indeed a product of the process of production, following Althusser, it must be considered in the formula of the creation of human subjectivity: “But the *relations of production* necessarily imply relations between men and things, such that the relations between men and men are defined by the precise relations existing between men and the material elements of the production process.” Things, laborers, theory, knowledges, and logics—and the relations and positions of all these elements—function together within a structure as “*agents of the production process*.” To insist, therefore, that simply the productive activity of the laborer—the strictly economic base—can determine subjectivity outright is to overlook not only Marx’s later work, but the entire direction of his project.

If what from a traditional Marxist perspective would be considered the superstructure comes to bear on other superstructural elements or on the economic base itself, then it is not too difficult to see how the market could begin to play such a prominent role in societies governed by liberal ideology. In fact, our answer has been right in front of us the entire time: while Marx makes it abundantly clear that “The structure [*Gliederung*] of distribution is completely determined by the structure of production,” as he does here in the *Grundrisse*,
there is nothing to stop the structure of production from being hidden by the ideology created out of production. Exchange too “appears as independent of and indifferent to production,” especially when we are examining exchange destined “directly for consumption.” To force production to disappear and to highlight the market works in capitalism’s favor, as it relegates to the shadows the atrocities of capitalist practices. Moreover, at the ontological level, the primacy of the market reinforces the relations of private property and makes it impossible to perceive the inherently social direction of human labor: “Thus is the social character the general character of the whole movement; as society itself produces man as man, so it is produced by him. . . . The human essence of nature primarily exists only for social man” who cannot not appear within the relations dictated by private property. Ideology is therefore a material practice generated out of the economic base which then positions itself as truth—as what Foucault will call a truth-effect. We need only go a few steps further to see how the market becomes the site of production of subjectivity within capitalism and how homo oeconomicus becomes the functional truth of human nature for classical economics.

Within this scheme, production maintains its prominent position. Ideology, the market, subjectivity—all these now register as secondary productions that reinforce those original relations of production. At this point, it would be prudent to return to our earlier discussion of value to extend the ontological basis of subjectivity beyond a loose notion of homo oeconomicus. For the last section of this essay, I would like to demonstrate how we might advance a more Marxist reading of Foucault’s market-based subjectivity by once again focusing on the role of value within production. Specifically, I want to show how spirituality for Foucault links up with the type of production of subjectivity that we have been discussing. That is, if we want to understand something about Marxism and the subject, we have to understand what Foucault means by spirituality. Moreover, what we find within a productive subjectivity is the possibility of a radical alternative subjectivity that would be unconstrained by the logic of capitalism. I therefore propose to draw out through another text—Foucault’s lectures titled The Hermeneutics of the Subject—the most essential connection between Marx and Foucault for the concepts of ontology and subjectivity.

In The Hermeneutics of the Subject, Foucault traces how process-as-such directs subjectivity. In this set of lectures, Foucault wants to show how “the principle that one must take care of oneself”—the epimeleia heautou—
“became the principle of all rational conduct in all forms of active life” in Hellenistic and Roman society. The principle of the epimeleia heautou, Foucault argues, “constitutes within the history of thought a decisive moment that is still significant for our modern mode of being subjects.”

Foucault’s focus on the care of the self comes out of the more commonly known gnōthi seauton—“know yourself.” Foucault seeks to demonstrate how the epimeleia heautou provides the conditions of possibility for the gnōthi seauton: “everyone knows, says, and repeats . . . that the question of the subject (the question of knowledge of the subject, of the subject’s knowledge of himself) was originally posed in a very different expression and a very different precept: the famous Delphic prescription of gnōthi seauton (‘know yourself’).”

Foucault wants to uncover why “know yourself” became the favored notion in Western thought when “this notion of the care of the self . . . in actual fact, historically, when we look at the documents and texts, seems to have framed the principle of ‘know yourself.’” That is to say, the care of the self is a necessary precondition of the “know yourself,” and yet, the traditions of Western thought and philosophy have severely neglected “the notion of epimeleia heautou (care of the self) in its reconstruction of its own history.”

The major difference between the epimeleia heautou and the gnōthi seauton is the way in which each approaches truth and how that truth relates to subjectivity. After an explication of the care of the self, I will argue for a certain congruence between the epimeleia heautou and the Marxist conception of the production of subjectivity. Following this point, and to close out the essay, I will examine the ways in which the “know yourself” can only provide an empty, groundless subjectivity—akin to that type of subjectivity produced through the market and within alienation in the Marxist sense. The care of the self, on the other hand, provides us with the key to understanding subjectivity as process. Indeed, the care of the self too has been somewhat hijacked by capitalist logic. And yet, the generative capabilities inherent within the care of the self allow for both the production of the capitalist subject and the possibility for alternate subjectivities. A return to the epimeleia heautou therefore becomes necessary if we are to question the basis on which truth and subjectivity rest within the capitalist episteme.

The care of the self always involves a set of practices. While the care of the self certainly does imply “a certain way of attending to what we think and what takes place in our thought,” more importantly, “The epimeleia also always designates a number of actions exercised on the self by the self,
The Production of the Subject

actions by which one takes responsibility for oneself and by which one changes, purifies, transforms, and transfigures oneself. The major point to bring out here is how certain actions have the power to change a person in a rather fundamental manner: Foucault wants to emphasize a change “not of the individual, but of the subject himself in his being as subject.” Foucault therefore means a structural alteration in the constitution of the subject, in one’s “being as subject.” The change in the self is usually brought about through a given set of ritualized practices which are to prepare the subject for truth. Though taken up by the Greeks, the idea of attaining the truth through a “set of fully specified practices, which transform the subject’s mode of being . . . is a prephilosophical theme which gave rise to many more or less ritualized practices.” That is to say, even before the epimeleia heautou emerges in Plato’s thought, there is a long tradition of the “technology of the self”—that the self is in fact produced though these various techniques. Foucault provides many concrete examples of what a technique of the self might look like, of which I will highlight a few here: there are “rites of purification” to prepare for truth given by the Gods; there is the “technique of withdrawal” in which one breaks “contact with the external world, no longer feeling sensations, no longer being disturbed by everything taking place around the self”; there are “techniques of testing,” where one must “organize a tempting situation and test [one’s] ability to resist it.” All of these techniques involve a disciplining of either the mind or the body, but which nevertheless at some point incorporate both. The attainment of truth within this tradition comes only from these techniques of the self that involve extended periods of self-inflicted hardship. Epimeleia heautou extends this tradition of the technique of the self to specifically concern the care of the self. However, the point of the care of the self is very much the same: it is interested in truth and the preparation for the truth through the transformation of the subject.

If for Foucault truth is generated out of specific bodily and mental practices of discipline, we need only make a small leap to connect up with Marx. We recall that for Marx, the essence of humanity is produced within the process of production itself: as we produce our material reality, we also produce our nature, our being, and our subjectivity. Sticking closely to Marx, we must then also investigate who the subjects of capitalism are: until now we have only considered how those subjects are produced and the influence of the forces that produce them. I will here list a few key
indications of what subjectivity under capitalism looks like as discussed by Marx. As a result of private property and the capitalist mode of production, the subject is deprived of full sensory experience: “all the physical and spiritual senses have been replaced by the simple alienation of them all, the sense of having.” Instead of a sense of community through cooperation in the process of production, we only get competition: “mere social contact begets in most industries a rivalry and a stimulation of the ‘animal spirits,’ which heightens the efficiency of each individual worker.” Even the body itself becomes disfigured: manufacture “converts the worker into a crippled monstrosity by furthering his particular skill as in a forcing-house, through the suppression of a whole world of productive drives and inclinations.”

Marx continues: “Not only is the specialized work distributed among the different individuals, but the individual himself is divided up, and transformed into the automatic motor of a detail operation, thus realizing the absurd fable of Menenius Agrippa, which presents man as a mere fragment of his own body.”

The mental capacity of the laborer becomes severely restricted: “Knowledge, judgement and will” all train themselves on the process of production, causing the possibility for intellectual engagement to “[vanish] in many other” spheres. To be clear, one need not even go to Marx to get to these ideas: Marx himself quotes heavily from none other than Adam Smith to make his point for him: “The man whose whole life is spent in performing a few simple operations . . . generally becomes as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become.” By quoting Smith, Marx wants to emphasize the particular effects of the repetitive nature of manufacture work within capitalism: “After describing the stupidity of the specialized worker, [Smith] goes on: ‘The uniformity of his stationary life naturally corrupts the courage of the mind . . . It corrupts even the activity of his body and renders him incapable of exerting his strength with vigour and perseverance in any other employments.’”

The truth these subjects are prepared for is clearly the truth of capitalism. Disfigured, sensitively impoverished, ruthlessly competitive, and entirely unidirectional, the subjects of capitalism live a truth generated directly out of the practices of the self in which they are forced to participate.

Marx is thus acutely aware of the generative connection between the techniques of the self and subjectivity. Foucault links Marx’s awareness to the basic principles of the care of the self to what he calls Marxism’s “structure of spirituality.” For Foucault, spiritual knowledge always
relates back to the notion that “there cannot be knowledge without a profound modification in the subject’s being.”

Foucault writes that nineteenth-century philosophy in particular attempts to “rethink the structures of spirituality” within the framework of Cartesianism and philosophy in general since the seventeenth century, which “tried to get free from these self-same structures.” In terms of Marxism, Foucault argues that “the problem of what is at stake in the subject’s being . . . and, in return, the question of what aspects of the subject may be transformed by virtue of his access to the truth . . . are found again at the very heart of, or anyway, at the source and outcome” of this type of knowledge. That is to say, Marxism, by means of its critique of political economy, understands that, through the practices of the self, one produces and gains access to the truth in the process of a radical transformation of the subject’s being. I want to put a particular emphasis here on the transformation of the subject’s being: if Marxism recognizes that the constitution of the subject is always dependent upon transformation, then we see that even political economy must transform the subject—political economy creates a specific type of subject that is well-suited to the needs of capitalist production and a society defined by capitalism. Subjects are not naturally prepared for the subjectivity required by capitalism—rather, they must be transfigured and radically altered in order to properly fit the mold.

The obverse of this last point would be to suggest that there is some other economic or political arrangement into which subjects would fit naturally. This notion would indeed lead us down the wrong route—Foucault’s argument about subjectivity is that subjects are only ever created or produced through these channels of power. Communism is not a natural or inevitable response to the artifice of capitalist production—it provides, only, another type of subjectivity into which subjects must be initiated through other modes of production and workings of power. Foucault acknowledges this last point when he writes that the techniques of the self are found at both the “source” (capitalism, political economy) “and outcome” (communism, classless society) of Marxism. Althusser makes a similar point when he writes that “certain other relations of production do not call for a political superstructure, but only for an ideological superstructure (classless society).” There is no natural or biologically determined ideological
superstructure or iteration of subjectivity—both are always necessarily representative of a set of material practices. Moreover, it would be a mistake to think that we could find, uncover, or move toward or back to such a conception of subjectivity: if Marx, Foucault, and Althusser tell us anything about history, it is that we have not departed from an ideal, edenic state, and that we are not progressing toward any type of necessary unfolding of spirit.

Indeed, other conceptions of subjectivity have existed. Foucault demonstrates how what he cautiously calls the “Cartesian moment” worked to forget the _epimeleia heautou_ in favor of a historically ungrounded version of the _gnōthi seauton_.\textsuperscript{73} Cartesian philosophy orients itself in relation to truth through knowledge: “what gives access to the truth, the condition for the subject’s access to the truth,” in the Cartesian _gnōthi seauton_, “is knowledge (connaissance) and knowledge alone,” Foucault argues.\textsuperscript{74} As opposed to generating truth and subjectivity through a practice and transformation of the self, “the philosopher . . . can recognize the truth and have access to it in himself and solely through his activity of knowing, without anything else being demanded of him.”\textsuperscript{75} This type of truth posits an already existing truth and an already existing subjectivity, both of which are established and stable. In the case of truth, it is only a matter of going out there and apprehending it. Within the Cartesian _gnōthi seauton_, “Knowledge . . . simply [opens] out onto the indefinite dimension of progress, the end of which . . . will only ever be realized in the course of history by the institutional accumulation of bodies of knowledge.”\textsuperscript{76} We are therefore very far from the type of history and the type of truth that Marxism privileges—the Cartesian “know yourself” can only provide for a subjectivity detached from a material practice. Moreover, any possibility for a new subjectivity is blocked: when truth is established as already existing “out there,” there is no way to generate truth. In the Cartesian “know yourself,” the subject is therefore restricted to the type of subjectivity that a given system of power has enforced.

From our reading of the market and capitalism through both Foucault and Althusser, we know exactly what type of pre-established subjectivity is made available: _homo oeconomicus_. A subject who is unable to perceive the sphere of production—the actual location of the production of subjectivity—_homo oeconomicus_ exists in the idealized non-space of the market, which precludes any possibility of a fundamental ontological shift. Although the market relies on the existence of two commodity owners, along with all the
implied ontological assumptions that allow one to become a commodity owner in the first place, an ideology of the primacy of the market itself remains ungrounded. That is, liberalism and neoliberalism understand the sphere of production as emanating from the market and consumption, and not the opposite. Therefore, if the ontology of the subject of political economy is located in the market, when in fact the subject of the market is generated through the techniques of the self of capitalism found in the sphere of production, then access to the practices that have the ability to alter subjectivity always remain out of reach. Any attempt to alter subjectivity within the sphere that political economy finds its subject will always fail: as Foucault argues, this understanding of economics “adopts the task of analyzing a form of human behavior and the internal rationality of this human behavior.”77 Instead of grasping what causes, from outside of the market, humans to behave a certain way—what in fact creates the conditions of possibility for market behavior—political economy accepts as a given the type of subjectivity that it has already produced. *Homo oeconomicus* recognizes itself not as a type of subjectivity or a specific iteration of what subjectivity might be, but rather as what subjectivity simply is. So long as *homo oeconomicus* remains unable to see the sphere of production, all that is possible are slight changes within an already given system.

In *The Birth of Biopolitics*, Foucault relates to us exactly what type of subject the system of neoliberal capital produces—that is, the subject who is the result of an ever-present *gnōthi seauton* who nevertheless remains grounded by a concealed *epimeleia heautou*. Indeed, much like Marx’s description, the subject becomes intertwined with work, where: the “Ability to work, skill, the ability to do something cannot be separated from the person who is skilled and who can do this particular thing.”78 But for Foucault, the worker and the machine do not overlap perfectly—instead, the subject is suffused with the techniques of the self that stem from the late capitalist moment: “the worker himself appears as a sort of enterprise for himself” because the enterprise has become the “basic element” of neoliberalism.79 In other words, the subject becomes an entrepreneur of himself: The subject is thus an “abilities-machine,” where one must work toward the realization of maximum satisfaction and therefore maximum income: to do this, the subject will make “what are called educational investments.”80 Within neoliberalism, we “invest” in ourselves to produce more of what we are innately capable
of producing: income, or, as Foucault puts it, an “earnings stream.”

Subjectivity is a constant unfolding of the self, or a constant growing into and investing in the self: subjectivity therefore falls on the side of the Cartesian gnōthi seauton, where all one must do is become more and more what one always already has been. Nevertheless, we see emerging from the neoliberal moment the possibility of a return to the epimeleia heautou, where production again begins to appear as the driving force of subjectivity. If the neoliberal subject must produce himself, perhaps that production can be subverted; perhaps, the production of the perfect neoliberal subject can help us relearn that all subjectivities must be produced. And, if all subjectivities must be produced, perhaps we can produce something better.

Marxism understands indeed that the subject is always produced, regardless of historical moment. Perhaps Marx said it best when he wrote in the 1844 Manuscripts that we must “not put ourselves in a fictitious primordial state like a political economist trying to clarify things.” This primordial state appears whenever the capitalist ideologue looks to the past and finds there a set of conditions ripe for capitalist exploitation. What was to be understood as history becomes rewritten as an extension of the present onto the past: all that is understood is the epistemic logic in which the political economist is entrenched. The entire past is read as leading up to our present moment without contradiction and without rupture. “In such a manner,” Marx continues, “theology explains the origin of evil by the fall of man. That is, it asserts as a fact in the form of history what it should explain.”

With in the logic of the market, subjectivity falls into this very same trap: the groundless ground upon which homo oeconomicus is built is revealed to be only a continuation of what had caused the ground to disappear in the first place. I hope to have shown in this essay that a close study of Marx and Foucault uncovers a remarkably similar set of concerns regarding truth and subjectivity. Within subjectivity, what these two thinkers seem to charge us with is something beyond a set of ethical issues that appear within a critique of capitalism. Of course, as we have seen, the subject produced in capitalism leaves much to be desired, and we should absolutely work toward ensuring progressive steps away from the horrors of capitalist production that Marx details in Capital and elsewhere. Nevertheless, Marx and Foucault present to us a much more fundamental task: we are forced to face head on the absolute alienation of ourselves from our subjectivity. We might begin by following
Foucault in thinking about where truth and the subject stand today, and through which circuits of power they are relayed to us. We may very well find that we have already been furnished with the tools to construct new possibilities for what subjectivity and truth might look like.

NOTES

3 Ibid., 14.
4 Ibid., 19.
5 Ibid., 19.
6 Ibid., 19.
7 Ibid., 29-30.
8 Ibid., 31.
9 Ibid., 31.
10 Ibid., 32.
11 Ibid., 32.
12 Ibid., 32.
13 Ibid., 33.
14 Ibid., 30.
15 Ibid., 19.
17 Ibid., 185.
18 Ibid., 270.
19 Ibid., 270.
20 Ibid., 270.
21 Ibid., 271.
22 Ibid., 271.
23 Ibid., 271.
26 Ibid., 315.
27 Foucault, *Biopolitics*, 252.
28 Ibid., 252.
29 Ibid., 252.
31 Ibid., 293.
32 Ibid., 293.
33 Marx, *Capital*, 271.
34 Ibid., 279-280.
36 Marx, *Manuscripts*, 293.
39 Ibid., 293.
41 Ibid., 326.
42 Ibid., 328.
43 Marx, *Capital*, 166.
46 Ibid., 328.
48 Ibid., 236.
49 Marx, *Manuscripts*, 305.
51 Ibid., 9.
52 Ibid., 3.
53 Ibid., 12.
54 Ibid., 12.
55 Ibid., 11.
56 Ibid., 16.
57 Ibid., 46.
58 Ibid., 48.
59 Ibid., 47-48.
60 Marx, *Manuscripts*, 308.
61 Marx, *Capital*, 443.
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