Discussing the Discipline

Foucault's Christianities

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The publication of Michel Foucault's *Les Aveux de la chair* (*History of Sexuality, Volume 4: Confessions of the Flesh*) thirty-four years after his death highlights and complicates the relevance of Christian texts—notably from the second through fifth centuries—to Foucault's forms of critical analysis between 1974 and 1984, as his interests migrate from monastic disciplines to pastoral power to governmentality to the care of the self. What begins as suspicion towards confession as a tool of Catholic power anticipating modern psychoanalysis becomes a critical genealogy of subjectivity from western antiquity to modernity. To frame Foucault's dynamic engagement with forms of Christianity, I establish three stages over his last decade as he moves from diagnosing mechanisms of power to analyzing ethics as care of the self. Tracing Foucault's textual and critical developments enables better analysis of *Confessions of the Flesh* and affirms methodological possibilities in the study of religion today.

TOWARD the last hour of the last lecture of the last year of his life, on March 28, 1984, Michel Foucault takes his auditors at the Collège de France back to early Christianity. His 1983 and 1984 lectures had until then focused on παρρησία (*parrēsia*) as truth-telling in antiquity. Plato, Foucault's 1983 exemplar of speaking truth to power, protests the tyranny of Dionysius II even as such counsel puts his life at risk ([Foucault 2010]).

Diogenes the Cynic, the 1984 exemplar, contests norms with his very way of life, chiding Alexander the Great and relieving himself in public (Foucault 2011).

Foucault's urgent attention to *parrēsia* develops as he comes to articulate ethics as a domain of experience alongside domains of power and knowledge (Foucault 2001b, 1516). His 1982 lectures at the Collège elaborate an "ethics of the subject defined by the relationship of self to self" (Foucault 2005, 252). Though he emphasizes this language of "ethics" publicly in 1982, in unpublished drafts in the archives at the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Foucault refers to the "ethical" (as well as *parrēsia*) back in the autumn of 1980 (Foucault 28730, XL.1.1, 13).[1] Foucault here engages the two questions that have haunted him for decades: "Why are we obliged to tell the truth about ourselves? Which truth?" (Foucault 28730, XL.1.1).[2] As a counter to the institutionalized compulsion to tell the truth about oneself, ethics as a self-relation enables the *parrēsiast* to communicate the truth, both as spoken critique of forms of domination (with Plato) and embodied critique of social norms (with Diogenes). Foucault spends his last years considering the ethical force of ancient "care for the self" (Foucault 1988a, 4) and "practices of freedom" (Foucault 1988a, 3)—concerns that James Bernauer describes Foucault as coming to through his "reading of the Christian experience" (Bernauer and Rasmussen 1988, 50).

On March 28, 1984, Foucault completes this arc through western antiquity by moving from the radical force of Cynic philosophy to the Stoic philosophy of Epictetus, arguing that this establishes the groundwork—albeit in "a certain, no doubt impure and mixed form" (Foucault 2011, 316)—for the practices that constitute early Christian experience. Stressing continuities over differences between pagan and Christian forms of life, Foucault suggests:

> Maybe I will try to explore these themes a little next year—but I cannot guarantee it, I confess that I still don't know and have not yet decided. Maybe I will try to pursue this history of the arts of living, of philosophy as form of life, of asceticism in its relation to the truth, precisely, after ancient philosophy, in Christianity. (Foucault 2011, 316)

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[1]In an earlier draft of his 1980 Howison Lectures, Foucault writes an extended treatment on "technologies of the self" (Foucault 28730, XL.1.6–7) that reappears in his first 1982 lecture at the University of Vermont (Foucault 1988b), with a shorter treatment in 1980 (Foucault 2016a). "Parresia was the opening of the heart," Foucault notes in an archived English tapuscript, framing it as "a question of an ethical and technical rule concerning verbal relationships" (Foucault 28730, XL.1.13). For *parrēsia*, see also Foucault 2010; 2011; 2016b.

[2]Foregrounding these questions in his 1981 Louvain lectures, *Wrong-Doing, Truth-Telling: The Function of Avowal in Justice* (Foucault 2014b), Foucault describes these as the questions animating his academic research since 1963 in his first publication on Dr. Leuret, confession, and water-torture, "L'eau et la folie" (Foucault 2001a, 296–300).

Foucault presents his analysis of Christianity as incomplete in his final lecture, "—*mais sous toute réserve, j'avoue que je n'en sais encore rien, je suis pas encore décidé*" (Foucault 2009a, 290). Yet Foucault's confession (his "*j'avoue*") is even more striking when considering how central "Christianity" becomes to his work from 1974 to 1984 as he moves from modern disciplinary apparatuses to ancient arts of living.

The posthumous release of Foucault's fourth volume in the History of Sexuality, *Les Aveux de la chair* (*Confessions of the Flesh*), intensifies the need for such an analysis, illuminating the ethical potentials of Foucault's arts of living and the Christian forms of life that loom so large in his final years. Edited by Frédéric Gros and published by Gallimard in France on February 8, 2018, this fourth volume was written over thirty-four years before and is a far cry from Foucault's most influential work, *Discipline and Punish*. Media channels had a difficult time addressing this somewhat odd and dated work on Christian sexual ethics, with English-language headlines declaring, "'Key' fourth book of Foucault's History of Sexuality published in France" (Flood 2018), "Michel Foucault's Unfinished Book Published in France" (Libbey 2018), and "The Final 'Final Foucault'?" (Tanke 2018).[3] Situating *Confessions* in the context of Foucault's March 1984 avowal suggests that this volume is not Foucault's "final" word on Christianity or ethics, even as it demonstrates the textual and theoretical nuance with which he comes to engage ancient Christian texts.

Analyzing Foucault's decade-long grappling with forms of Christianity as a fulcrum for his shifting emphases from power-knowledge to including ethics also helps contextualize *Confessions of the Flesh*. *Confessions* highlights but complicates the relevance of Christian texts—notably from the second through fifth centuries—to Foucault's deepening forms of critical analysis between 1974 and 1984, as his interests migrate from monastic disciplines to pastoral power to governmentality to the care of the self. What begins as a suspicion towards confession as a tool of Catholic power that anticipates modern psychoanalysis—"Why are we obliged to tell the truth about ourselves?"—becomes a critical genealogy of subjectivity from western antiquity to modernity. Foucault's continued influence across academic and cultural domains requires that scholars both in and beyond the study of religion appreciate his dynamic engagement with forms of

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[3]A lack of historical sense is evident in a thousand-year misdating with Alison Flood reporting: "Gallimard, which released *Confessions of the Flesh* last week, said the volume tackled the doctrines of Christianity between the 11th and 14th century" (Flood 2018). Gallimard's catalogue indicates that *Les Aveux de la chair* treats the second to fourth centuries, which is also inaccurate, as Foucault spends much of the text discussing the fifth-century texts of Augustine and Cassian. "III s'attachait aux règles et doctrines du christianisme élaborées du IIIe au IVe siècles par les Pères de l'Église" (Gallimard 2018). The "key" designation comes from the crucial study Elden 2016.

Christianity.[4] In Part I, I establish Foucault's archival and conceptual engagement in three stages, as he moves from diagnosing mechanisms of power to analyzing ethics as care of the self. Having periodized Foucault's textual and critical developments enables better analysis of *Confessions* in Part II, where I affirm methodological possibilities alongside critiques of Foucault in the study of religion.

PART I. FOUCAULT'S LAST DECADE: FROM CHRISTIAN DISCIPLINE TO THE ASCETIC *PARRĒSIAST*

Surprise or confusion over Foucault's engagement with Christianity is part of a broader question: what happens between Foucault's 1976 monograph *History of Sexuality: Volume 1, An Introduction* and his 1984 monographs—*History of Sexuality: Volume 2, The Use of Pleasure* and *Volume 3, The Care of the Self*? Foucault announces the reorganization around "the slow formation, in antiquity, of a hermeneutics of the self" (Foucault 1990b, 6) in the introduction of Volume 2, yet does not fully explain how he comes to the ethical task to "think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known" (Foucault 1990b, 9). Tracing Foucault's engagement with Christianity, however, helps us analyze how his nuancing of questions of power contributes to his attention to forms of ethics. Despite a still-too-limited view of Christianity's importance to Foucault (Raffnsøe 2018), works by Averil Cameron (1986), Elizabeth Clark (1988), James Bernauer (1990), John Behr (1993), Jeremy Carrette (2000), Daniel Boyarin and Elizabeth Castelli (2001), James Bernauer and Jeremy Carrette (2004), J. Joyce Schuld (2004), Philippe Chevallier (2011), Jonathan Tran (2011), Valérie Nicolet (2012), Michel Senellart (2013), Mark Jordan (2014), Petra Carlsson Redell (2014), Sergey Horujy (2015), Stuart Elden (2016), Patrick Stefan (2019), and myself (Clements 2020), have both developed the critical possibilities Foucault finds in Christianity and posed challenges to his readings.

Daniele Lorenzini, Ariane Revel, and Arianna Sforzini correlate scholarly engagement with Foucault's last decade with the publication of his texts in three phases (Lorenzini et al. 2013, 9–11): (1) the 1984 monographs *History of Sexuality, Volumes 2 and 3* provide primary materials

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[4]As of August 2020, Foucault was quantified as the #1 most-cited researcher in the world across all disciplines (excluding high energy physics) with an h-index of 296 and 1,026,230 citations in the 12th edition of Highly Cited Researchers (h>100) according to their Google Scholar Citations (2020) public profiles. (http://www.webometrics.info/en/hlargerthan100 accessed August 15, 2020 at 7:45pm). NB: The authors changed their ranking methodology, counting only living researchers for the 13th edition onwards, so Foucault (along with many theorists important to the academic study of religion) is no longer listed on the site.

(1984–1993), (2) Foucault's interviews from the 1980s and the chronological collection *Dits et écrits* published in 1994 open the scope beyond "a history of sexuality" (1994–2001), and (3) the complete Collège de France lectures foreground content and Foucault's 1978 shift towards sharing works in progress as Michel Senellart notes (1997–2015). In 2021, we can add two additional phases, including (4) the publication of *Les Aveux de la chair* and other major lectures (2016–2021), and (5) the unpublished archives at the Bibliothèque nationale de France, which provide precious evidence of Foucault's meticulous research and drafting processes (acquired 2013, inventory in process) (see Table 1). Expanded access to Foucault's work enables an increasingly thorough assessment of his last decade, and on the basis of both published and archival textual evidence, I schematize three stages in his year-to-year conceptualizations of "Christianity." In Stage 1, 1974–1978, Foucault's work on power turns his attention towards constructions of Christianity and confession. Stage 2, 1979–1982, charts the period when Foucault engages early Christian texts most centrally and drafts *Confessions of the Flesh*. Stage 3, 1983–1984, links *parrēsia* as practices of truth-telling (differing from confession) in Greek, Roman, and early Christian ethics.

Stage 1: From the Prison to the Pastorate (1974–1978)

Foucault's most cited work, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (*Surveiller et punir, naissance de la prison*, 1975), interestingly telegraphs many of his critical moves over the next decade (Foucault 1997a). In this work on disciplinary power and carceral society, Foucault's references to Christianity are notable if spare, split between the general ("Christian theology" [Foucault 1997a, 29]) and the institutional ("the Brothers of the Christian Schools" [Foucault 1997a, 166]). His eleven references to sixteenth-century educational reformer Jean-Baptiste de La Salle are consistent with his rigorous archival engagement throughout the text. In the first of seventeen references to Christianity (including: *le chrétien*, *chrétienne*, *chrétiennes*, *christianisme*, *le catholicisme*, *les catholiques*, *catholique*, *christianisme*), Foucault famously describes "the historical reality of this soul" as the "prison of the body" born "out of methods of punishment, supervision and constraint" (Foucault 1997a, 29). He also ties Christianity centrally to confession as a public ritual (in the flesh-torn yet verbally pious Damiens) and the cell as a technique of Christian monachism (for the reconstitution of "both *homo oeconomicus* and the religious conscience" [Foucault 1997a, 123]).

Foucault suggests that the very logic of disciplinary power has historical antecedents in the monastic communities that made discipline,

Table 1. The mismatches between Foucault's lecture delivery dates, original publication dates, and translation dates contribute to confusion over how to follow his last decade. For ease of reference, the reader can follow this chronological table and my interactive visualizations of Foucault's citations of early Christian texts at www.nikiclements.com/foucault.

Chronology of Foucault's Monographs and Selected Lectures from 1974–1984

Year delivered	French title & original publication date	English translation & original publication date
1973–1974	*Le pouvoir psychiatrique. Cours au Collège de France* (2003)	*Psychiatric Power: Lectures at the Collège de France* (2006)
1974–1975	*Les anormaux. Cours au Collège de France* (1999)	*Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France* (2003)
1975	*Surveiller et punir, naissance de la prison* (1975)	*Discipline and Punish: Birth of the Prison* (1977)
1975–1976	*« Il faut défendre la société ». Cours au Collège de France* (1997)	*"Society Must Be Defended": Lectures at the Collège de France* (2003)
1976	*Histoire de la sexualité I. La Volonté de savoir* (1976)	*History of Sexuality, Vol 1: An Introduction* (1978)
1977–1978	*Sécurité, Territoire, Population. Cours au Collège de France* (2004)	*Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France* (2007)
1978	*« Sexualité et pouvoir », Gendai-shisô* (1978)	*"Sexuality and Power"* (1999)
1978–1979	*Naissance de la biopolitique. Cours au Collège de France* (2004)	*The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France* (2008)
1979	*« Omnes et singulatim: vers une critique de la raison politique », Dits et écrits* (1994)	*"Omnes et Singulatim:* Towards a Criticism of 'Political Reason'" (1981)
1979–1980	*Du gouvernement des vivants. Cours au Collège de France* (2012)	*On the Government of the Living: Lectures at the Collège de France* (2014)
1980	*L'origine de l'herméneutique de soi. Conférences prononcées à Dartmouth College* (2013)	"Subjectivity and Truth" and "Christianity and Confession," *Political Theory* (1993), *About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self* (2016)
1980	*« Sexualité et solitude », Dits et écrits* (1994)	"Sexuality and Solitude," *London Review of Books* (1981)
1980–1981	*Subjectivité et Vérité. Cours au Collège de France* (2014)	*Subjectivity and Truth: Lectures at the Collège de France* (2017)

Table 1. Continued

Chronology of Foucault's Monographs and Selected Lectures from 1974–1984

Year delivered	French title & original publication date	English translation & original publication date
1981	*Mal faire, dire vrai. Fonction de l'aveu en justice* (2012)	*Wrong-Doing, Truth-Telling: The Function of Avowal in Justice* (2014)
1981–1982	*L'Herméneutique du sujet. Cours au Collège de France* (2001)	*The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France* (2005)
1982	« Les techniques de soi », *Dits et écrits* (1994)	*Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault* (1988)
1982	« Le combat de la chasteté », *Communications* (1982)	"The Battle for Chastity," *Western Sexuality* (1985)
1982	*Dire vrai sur soi-même: "Speaking the Truth about Oneself: Lectures at Victoria University, Toronto* (2021)" *conférences prononcées à l'Université Victoria de Toronto* (2017)	
1982–1983	*Le gouvernement de soi et des autres. Cours au Collège de France* (2008)	*The Government of Self and Others: Lectures at the Collège de France* (2010)
1983	*Discours et vérité*, précédé de *La* parrèsia (2016)	*Discourse and Truth* and *Parrēsia* (2019)
1983–1984	*Le courage de la vérité. Le gouvernement de soi et des autres II. Cours au Collège de France* (2009)	*The Courage of Truth: Lectures at the Collège de France* (2011)
1984	*Histoire de la sexualité II. L'Usage des plaisirs* (1984)	*History of Sexuality, Vol 2: The Use of Pleasure* (1985)
1984	*Histoire de la sexualité III. Le Souci de soi* (1984)	*History of Sexuality, Vol 3: The Care of the Self* (1986)
--	*Histoire de la sexualité IV. Les Aveux de la chair* (2018)	*History of Sexuality, Vol 4: Confessions of the Flesh* (2021)

self-regulation, and subjection a way of life. "Discipline is a political anatomy of detail" (Foucault 1997a, 139), he states, relating Christianity to disciplinary power through three techniques of subjection. A focus on (1) *detail* renders training comprehensive and totalizing in the lives of its subjects. Such institutionalized techniques do not impose a singular model on its subjects, but instead (2) *individuate* them according to their strengths and aptitudes, rendering each subject a site of continuous inspection and "a whole field of knowledge" (Foucault 1997a, 186). Relations of "strict subjection" (Foucault 1997a, 138) lead to (3) *vitiation* of subjects through an exhausting optimization of efficiency that also preempts revolt.

Foucault contrasts medieval and early modern "'disciplines' of a monastic type, whose function was to obtain renunciations" ([Foucault 1997a](), 137) with their seventeenth- and eighteenth-century corollaries where such disciplinary mechanisms came out from the monastery and "became general formulas of domination" ([Foucault 1997a](), 137). These figurations expand from Foucault's November 1973 Collège de France lectures on psychiatric power, establishing the soul as "projected behind disciplinary power" ([Foucault 2006b](), 52) and identifying the disciplinary apparatuses in monastic "religious communities" ([Foucault 2006b](), 64) that in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries "appear and are established which no longer have a religious basis" ([Foucault 2006b](), 70). The correlation between monastic discipline and renunciation becomes a central theme in Foucault's readings of Christianity and a key foil in his turn to ancient ethics. In *Discipline and Punish* (his most-cited text), however, Foucault defaults to generalizations of Christianity and offers little textual detail of monastic discipline.

On August 26, 1974, Foucault completes *Discipline and Punish* after four years of work ([Foucault 2001a](), 61). That same day, according to his partner, Daniel Defert, he starts writing the first volume in a projected six-volume series on the *History of Sexuality* ([Miller 1993](), 240). In *History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction* (*L'Histoire de la sexualité I. Volonté de savoir*, 1976), Foucault correlates the emergence of the knowing, confessing subject with the proliferation of discourses concerning sexuality ([Foucault 1990a]()). Both monographs focus on the discursive production of modern subjects, even as Foucault moves in Volume 1 towards more specific analyses of the mechanisms of domination in the history of Catholic confession.

In the twenty-odd references to Christianity, Catholicism, mysticism, or asceticism in Volume 1, Foucault discusses Christianity in relation to the imposition of confessional practices since the Lateran Council (1215 CE) and the Council of Trent (1545–1563 CE), tethering his thematic reading to particular historical anchors. He develops his focus on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century practices of confession, the pastoral, and the flesh from his 1974–1975 Collège de France lectures *Abnormal* (*Les Anormaux*) ([Foucault 2003a]()).[5] Foucault considers the development of the

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[5]By contrast, Foucault references Christianity just twice in his 1975–1976 lectures at the Collège de France, *Society Must Be Defended* (*Il faut défendre la société*), noting how "secret societies" of "useless erudition" "formed in the early Christian era, probably at the time of the first monasteries, on the fringes of invasions, fires, and forests" ([Foucault 2003b](), 5). In these lectures elaborating biopolitics, modern racism, and "the murderous function of the state," Foucault describes the force of "the counterhistory of races" from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as the shift to "a society whose historical consciousness centers not on sovereignty and the problem of its foundation, but on revolution, its promises, and its prophecies of future emancipation" ([Foucault 2003b](), 80). Although Foucault does not develop this attention to race, revolution, and emancipation at length in his later work on ethics and contesting power, their intersection can be pursued. See [Taylor 2011]().

sacrament of penance in Volume 1 as a means of analyzing how "the scope of the confession—the confession of the flesh—continually increased" (Foucault 1990a, 19). Claiming the connection between Christian confession and the modern incitement to discourse, he professes: "This scheme for transforming sex into discourse had been devised long before in an ascetic and monastic setting. The seventeenth century made it into a rule for everyone" (Foucault 1990a, 20). Out from the monastery into the everyday, the confessional impulse becomes a condition of modern western subject formation.

The 1976 publication of Volume 1 announces five more volumes in the *History of Sexuality*. Volume 2, *La Chair et le corps* (*The Flesh and the Body*), would develop how "the reformed pastoral also laid down rules, albeit in a more discreet way, for putting sex into discourse" (Foucault 1990a, 21fn4), expanding Foucault's argument that the history of sexuality has "its beginnings in the technology of the 'flesh' in classical Christianity" (Foucault 1990a, 113). Although Foucault largely destroyed this draft of Volume 2, Philippe Chevallier notes archival evidence of a later 1978 manuscript on confession and concupiscence in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Chevallier 2011, 149–50).[6] In Volume 1, Foucault projects the last four volumes would move to "the four great strategies that were deployed in the nineteenth century" (Foucault 1990a, 114): Volume 3, on masturbating children; Volume 4, on hysterical women; Volume 5, on the medicalization of "perverse" men; and Volume 6, on the Malthusian couple and biologization of race.[7] He starts and then diverts his research on these deviant subjects who become privileged sites of social and medical regulation.

Foucault thereby begins his analysis of the "Christian pastoral" and "confession of the flesh" in his *Abnormal* lectures, Volume 1 (*An Introduction*), and the originally conceived Volume 2 (*The Flesh and the Body*). He connects the Christian pastoral—which "discovers" the flesh and places it into a juridical framework—to the production of institutional forms whose rationalities he problematizes in his earlier works: psychiatry and the asylum (*History of Madness*) (Foucault 2006a), medicine (*The*

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[6]In Foucault's archives, Dossier No XX "Reforme/Contre Reforme" includes 539 pages of Foucault's notes on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century confessional manuals that likely figured into this volume's production. See also Dossiers No XXVII "Direction de conscience" and LXXXIX "La Chair et le corps." Dossier No LI "Histoire de la sexualité" and Dossier No LXIV "La volonté de savoir et La croisade des enfants" both have material on masturbation perhaps intended for Volume 3, *La Croisade des enfants*. For analysis of early modern confessional manuals relevant to Foucault, see Peterson 2016.

[7]These titles include: *III: La croisade des enfants* (3: *The Children's Crusade*); *IV: La femme, la mère et l'hystérique* (4: *Woman, Mother, and Hysteric*); *V. Les pervers* (5: *Perverts*); *VI. Population et races* (6: *Population and Races*) (Foucault 2018, I).

Birth of the Clinic) (Foucault 1994a), the "human sciences" of economics, biology, and philology (Foucault 1994b), and incarceration (*Discipline and Punish*) (Foucault 1997a). As he notes in Volume 1, each of these areas "went back to methods that had already been formed by Christianity, but of course not without modifying them" (Foucault 1990a, 117). Regulating behavior within clinical/political/juridical frameworks, "Christianity" in Foucault's developing fascination produces the mechanisms of power that prove effective means of subjection for modern discipline and social regulation. In interviews from 1977, Foucault continues to connect the Christian procedure of confession (*l'aveu*) to sexuality as at the heart of human existence and to its eventual expansion beyond rituals of penance (Foucault 2001b, 230, 257, 412). Though provocative, Foucault's analyses in these years rest largely on caricature, claiming a general, epochal Christian prehistory of subjection unmoored from analysis of particular years, individuals, or texts.

In August 1977, according to Defert, Foucault starts to read and write on early Christians—moving back at least a millennium in the process (Foucault 2001a, 71). After a year of sabbatical (from 1976 to 1977), Foucault's 1977–1978 lectures for the Collège de France, *Security, Territory, Population* (*Sécurité, territoire, population*), begin to engage textual resources in antiquity to develop his conception of "pastoral power" more robustly (Foucault 2009b, 169). Foucault explains the "Christian pastoral" through the relation of shepherd and flock as the primary metaphor for governance, in contrast to the maritime metaphor of ancient Greek city-state governance as a piloted ship (Foucault 2009b, 122–23). The shepherd (elder, bishop, authority) watches over the well-being both of the flock and of each sheep; *omnes et singulatim*, the whole and the individual, defines both "the techniques of power in Christian pastorship, and of the, let's say, modern techniques of power deployed in the technologies of population" (Foucault 2009b, 128). Via the organizing logics of biopower with which he opens these 1978 lectures (and which was to feature in the originally conceived Volume 6 on population), Foucault connects the mechanisms of detail, individualization, and vitiation articulated in *Discipline and Punish* to those of subject formation: "The individualization of Western man throughout the long millennium of the Christian pastorate was carried out at the price of subjectivity. By subjectivation. To become individual one must become subject" (Foucault 2009b, 231).

In what Foucault notes should have been called "a history of 'governmentality'" (Foucault 2009b, 108), his 1977 and 1978 research on early Christian writers hones in on "the origin of the idea of a government … first, in the idea and organization of a pastoral type of power, and second, in the practice of spiritual direction, the direction of souls"

(Foucault 2009b, 123). Foucault refers to a number of Christian texts from the third through the sixth centuries, including John Chrysostom's *De sacerdotio*, Cyprian's *Epistles*, Ambrose's *De officiis ministrorum*, and Gregory the Great's *Liber pastoralis*. With increased textual diversity and temporal specificity, Foucault in 1978 analyzes "Christianity" in more historically particular constructions. Nevertheless, he presents few examples of textual evidence, he refers very generally to the "Christian pastoral," and he does not adequately cite what he labels the "more dense, more intense form of the pastoral" (Foucault 2009b, 166) in the monastic texts of John Cassian, the letters of Jerome, and the *Rules* of Benedict. Foucault continues to characterize Christianity sweepingly (e.g., as "absolutely unique in history and no other example of which is found in the history of any other civilization" [Foucault 2009b, 148]) and to insist on the lasting influence of these mechanisms (e.g., "pastoral power in its typology, organization, and mode of functioning, pastoral power exercised as power, is doubtless something from which we have still not freed ourselves" [Foucault 2009b, 148]). In these 1978 Collège lectures, he also begins to articulate counter-conduct as contesting dominant structures, noting Martin Luther and even early Christian ascetics as examples of resistance to pastoral power.

As Foucault nuances his analysis of Christian texts, his problematization of power undergoes transformations, with attendant changes to his engagement with questions of critique and resistance. Foucault's six-volume format for the *History of Sexuality* series shifts as he intensifies his readings of early Christian texts. Mark Jordan notes of Foucault's April 1978 lectures at Tokyo University: "In Tokyo, the turn to Christianity is presented as the next step in a search for some beginning of the distinctively Western science of sexuality" (Jordan 2014, 126). In an opposition drawn out in Volume 1 between *ars erotica* (the erotic arts Foucault identifies largely with Asian religious traditions) and *scientia sexualis* (the "science of sexuality" identified with modern western mores), in Tokyo Foucault specifies of the latter: "The West introduces to sexuality, it develops, starting with sexuality, an entire complex mechanism in which it is a question of the constitution of individuality, of subjectivity; in brief, of the manner in which we behave and in which we become conscious of ourselves" (Foucault 1999, 129). As forms of Christianity accrue social and political force in the Roman Empire of the third and fourth centuries, Foucault reads Christianity as rejecting the erotic potential of pleasure in the *ars erotica* and developing a "science of sexuality" tied to "flesh, the subjectivity itself of the body" (Foucault 1999, 126).

To analyze the emergence of the *scientia sexualis* and its rendering of sex into discourse, Foucault moves away from his originally conceived

six-volume series. He abandons his Volume 2 on Reformation and Counter-Reformation practices of confession as he seeks the roots of such practices in the second- through fifth-century texts that he anticipates will expose the emergence of the mechanisms that link sexuality and subjectivity. In this first stage from 1974 to 1978, Foucault moves from early modern Catholic disciplinary apparatuses to ancient Christian pastoral power in the genealogy of the desiring subject he will develop over the decade. Even as his project and methods develop over what I below characterize as the next two stages (1979–1982 and 1983–1984), certain foci remain core to his analysis: above all, the mechanisms of power forged through relations of obedience, detail, and individuation. Despite these continuities with the subsequent stages, this first stage differs in three notable ways: (1) methodologically, Foucault rarely cites Christian texts directly in his analyses; (2) archivally, he does not engage ancient philosophical or medical texts to a pronounced degree; and (3) thematically, his inquiry is focused on the operations of power, its mechanisms, and, less frequently, possibilities for "a resistance to the power that wishes to dominate it" as he notes in *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault 1997a, 219).

In Stage 1, Foucault shifts his attention from diagnosing modern disciplinary formations to analyzing their pre-modern antecedents. As his *History of Sexuality* research shifts, so too does his focus move from the biopolitics regulating modern subjects to ancient forms of pastoral power that developed many practices of governmentality. Yet while foregrounding the discipline of subjects, Foucault gradually unfolds the resistance of "convulsing bodies" (Jordan 2014, 199) and of other forms of life (Chrulew 2014). Subjects are not just produced through the disciplinary apparatuses forged by Christian monasticism that govern modern institutions (e.g., the hospital, the asylum, the school, or the prison); they might also challenge forms of power through counter-conduct.

Stage 2: Eliciting Confessions of the Flesh (1979–1982)

With Foucault's explicit shift away from the six-volume *History of Sexuality* and its modern focus, the second volume becomes the textual fulcrum for the four-volume series eventually published. Foucault abandons *La Chair et le corps* as the second volume, and, according to Defert, starts to write *Les Aveux de la chair* (*Confessions of the Flesh*) on ancient Christianity in January 1979 (Foucault 2001a, 77). Foucault delivers his 1978–1979 lectures at the Collège de France that spring, *Birth of Biopolitics* (*Naissance de la biopolitique*), on neoliberalism in Germany with no mention of this concurrent research (Foucault 2008). Later in 1979, he accepts the offer from Michel Albaric to change his longstanding research locale from the

Bibliothèque nationale de France to the Bibliothèque du Saulchoir, a small Dominican library in the 13th arrondissement of Paris (Perrin 2019, 1). From November 5, Foucault would make this library home.

That October 1979, Foucault presents "*Omnes et Singulatim*: Towards a Criticism of Political Reason" at Stanford University, with Lecture 1 on Christian pastoral power ("the individualising power") (Foucault 1999, 136) and Lecture 2 on *raison d'état* ("the political form of a centralised and centralising power") (Foucault 1999, 136). Foucault stresses how the pastorate's "techniques of examination, confession, guidance, obedience, have an aim … a renunciation of this world and of oneself: a kind of everyday death" (Foucault 1999, 143). Exposing these renunciatory effects, Foucault begins to theorize "liberation" as possible only by attacking "political rationality's very roots" (Foucault 1999, 152) in both Christian pastoral power and *raison d'état*. Unmasking the mechanisms of pastoral power and state power becomes the condition for their subversion, developing possibilities for more robust resistance and counter-conduct.

In his 1980 Collège lectures *On the Government of the Living* (*Du Gouvernement des vivants*), Foucault completes analytical moves from power to governmentality and from knowledge to truth. In the emergence of "reflexive truth acts" (Foucault 2014a, 82), he contrasts an ancient Greek form—metonymized by Oedipus who comes to recognize himself in relation to a cosmic truth—with forms of truth-telling in Christianity where one seeks the truth of oneself. Foucault reads second- to third-century Christians like Tertullian as reorganizing the relation between subjectivity and truth through ἐξομολόγησις (*exomologēsis*) as a ritual disclosure of one's converted identity, performed in practices of baptism and ecclesial penance. Foucault stresses ἐξαγόρευσις (*exagoreusis*) as a corollary practice connecting truth acts and remission of sins in fourth- to fifth-century monasticism through obedience, incessant examination of conscience, and exhaustive confession. Notably in the works of John Cassian, Foucault sees the subject as turning inwards as "Christianity autonomized knowledge of self as an endless task, an always unfinished labor of perfection" (Foucault 2014a, 310).

Foucault considers his 1980 analytical shift to the relation between subjectivity and truth vital, contrasting alethurgy in Oedipus with procedures of truth-telling in *exomologēsis* and *exagoreusis*. Methodologically, he engages texts and concepts with an increasingly nuanced parsing of the third and fourth centuries, declaring that he reads these ancient texts not for their dogmatic systems but for their construction of truth acts. Philippe Chevallier further argues how, between February 20 and March 26, Foucault shifts his reading of the "truth of the soul" as no longer

essential to baptism and penitence but vital to self-examination and confession (Chevallier 2020). Two shifts in his 1980 Collège course come to define Foucault's final work: (1) a thematic reframing of subjectivity and truth as foregrounding practices of truth-telling, and (2) an analytic contrast between ancient Greek self-relations as active and tied to the pursuit of truth and monastic Christian self-relations as bound by obedience and renunciation. As Jeremy Carrette notes, Foucault's rethinking of *Les Aveux* and his original work on Christian confession occurs explicitly in his retrospective Collège course summary for 1980 (Carrette 1999, 45).

With people beating down the doors to hear his October 1980 Howison Lectures at the University of California, Berkeley, Foucault synthesizes his research over the year. Developing the relation between subjectivity and the two forms of the "obligation of truth" proper to Christianity, *exomologēsis* and *exagoreusis*, he argues: "This organization, this Christian organization, so different from the pagan one, is something which I think quite decisive for the genealogy of the modern self" (Foucault 2016a, 37). Recapitulated in November 1980 at Dartmouth College, these lectures stress technologies of the self as important forms of self-activity by which subjects are shaped in different times and contexts. Foucault reads early monastic Christian technologies of the self as relying on a hermeneutics of the self, which constitutes subjectivity through a constant suspicion towards oneself and unconditional submission to one's superiors. Continuing his Spring 1980 Collège argument that "the subjectivation of Western man is Christian, not Greco-Roman" (Foucault 2014a, 236), Foucault articulates western subjectivation as a process that derives its mechanisms from early Christianity (notably through Cassian's confession), not pagan antiquity, and genealogically links to modern disciplinary subjectivity.

Foucault's focus shifts from Cassian and confession to Augustine and sexuality for his November 1980 James Lecture and seminars at the New York Institute for the Humanities; this shift takes place after Foucault and Peter Brown discuss Cassian and Augustine in Berkeley that October.[8] In

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[8]Foucault and Brown discussed mainly Cassian for over two hours after Foucault's lecture on October 21, and Brown gave materials to Foucault (including Brown 1978; Brown 1980; Rousseau 1975). Foucault's archives at the Bibliothèque nationale de France and a box at the University of California, Berkeley (Foucault 90/136Z 1, 13) indicate engagement with these texts. Thanks to Peter Brown for illuminating this interaction in personal correspondences from August 12, 2019, and October 1, 2019.

In the November 20, 1980 manuscript upon which "Sexuality and Solitude" is based, Foucault notes: "Few weeks ago, Dr Peter Brown told me: 'What we have to understand is why sexuality became in the Western Christian culture the seismograph of our subjectivity.'" (Foucault 28730, XL. 6.1.29). The influence between Foucault and Brown requires further analysis and raises important disciplinary questions.

a comparison of Artemidorus's *Oneirocritica* on dream interpretation and Augustine's *City of God* (Book 14), Foucault contrasts the Greco-Roman problem of penetration with the problem of erection in Augustine's conception of libido as "Christianity proposed a new type of experience of oneself as a sexual being" (Foucault 1999, 184). In his second of three seminars in New York, Foucault argues how Christian sexual ethics are rooted in Roman practices even as something crucial changes in the two centuries between Clement of Alexandria and Augustine: "not the code itself, but something more difficult to analyse and to decipher: what I'd like to call the relation one has to oneself through sex or through sex experience, or more precisely through an experience Latin authors called: concupiscentia" (Foucault 28730, XL.6.3.17). As Michel Senellart connects Foucault's 1980 Collège lectures' focus on monastic self-examination and discourses of sexuality in the New York lectures, "It is against the background of Augustine's 'libidinisation of sex' that the monastic activity of control of thoughts, analyzed in March 1980, finds its significance" (Senellart 2013, 34). Foucault's reading of the history of confession and the hermeneutics of desire links the history of concupiscence—the relation one has to oneself through sex experience—to the genealogy of modern western subjectivity.

Foucault's early 1981 Collège lectures, *Subjectivity and Truth* (*Subjectivité et Vérité*), amplify both continuities and deviations in his engagement with western antiquity. Although he opens these lectures with the Counter-Reformation bishop Francis de Sales' account of elephant mating to illustrate principles of monogamy in Christian sexual ethics, from January 21 to April 1, Foucault primarily attends to texts from the Hellenistic and Roman periods, folding Christian comparisons therein. This shift can mislead readers into thinking that Foucault changes his project radically in spring 1981. Considering Foucault's April to May 1981 Louvain lectures as a synthesis "across the entirety of his work in the 1970s, alongside the work on Christianity in the 1980 course" (Elden 2016, 130), Stuart Elden claims there is very little overlap with the Collège lectures despite their temporal propinquity. Elden sees in the Louvain lectures Foucault's last gasp of interest in Christianity "as if, realizing he had now embarked on a new historical period that would take his work in novel and challenging directions, he wanted to have one last chance at providing the history of confession he had promised for so long" (Elden 2016, 130).

Foucault certainly intensifies his engagement with ancient Greek and Roman philosophical and medical texts, and in June 1981 indicates his intent to publish a work under a title that comes to be known as *The Care of the Self* (*Le Souci de soi*). We can see this third volume in the *History of*

Sexuality series germinate in the 1981 Collège lectures as Foucault asks: "What took place in the first century CE, at the turning point of what is called pagan ethics and Christian morality?" (Foucault 2017b, 18). Pursuing an answer through pagan sexual ethics, Foucault parses how "the arts of living, on the art of conducting oneself" emerge with such prominence in antiquity "lasted for a very long time and has now disappeared" (Foucault 2017b, 27). In a notable terminological shift to "the arts of living" (ἡ τέχνη τοῦ βίου), Foucault frames how from the Hellenistic period to late ancient Christianity there is a "focus less on the question of doing … than on the question of being, on the way of being … one learns to change one's being, to modify or model one's being to give oneself an absolutely specific type of experience" (Foucault 2017b, 30). The arts of living in antiquity rely on the critical ability of subjects to actively conduct themselves instead of being subjected to others.

But this signals a continuity more than a break: Foucault does not oppose "pagan ethics" to "Christian morality"—indeed his interest in the former stems from his recognition of the dialectical development of these histories. Throughout his 1981 Collège lectures, Foucault develops his readings of early Christian texts with attention to the eroticization of marriage, codification of sexual relations between man and wife, and "the big question in Christian thought, Saint Augustine's question, but also our question: 'What in truth is our desire?'" (Foucault 2017b, 167). Augustine comes to play a key role in how Foucault sees the relationship between subjectivity and sexuality shift in Christianity, both in these 1981 lectures and in *Les Aveux*, notably in the imperative of procreation (as the human τέλος or "goal") and the marital obligation of sexual intercourse (as using *concupiscentia* or "desire"). Although such practices are common to Hellenistic sexual ethics, Foucault sees "the relationship to truth that is changed" (Foucault 2017b, 157), differentiating "the Christian experience of the flesh from the Greek experience of the *aphrodisia*" (Foucault 2017b, 156). Foucault's conceptualization of this shift in experience highlights how early Christianity remains vital to his 1981 lectures and informs his ongoing project, for "that relationship of subjectivity and of the truth regarding desire was formed that is so characteristic not only of Christianity but of our whole civilization and way of thinking" (Foucault 2017b, 158). Indeed, this argument in favor of continuities between ancient and Christian ethics signals his concern with nuancing his reading of early Christian texts in relation to arts of living, relations to truth, and subjectivity.

In his 1982 Collège lectures, *Hermeneutics of the Subject* (*L'Herméneutique du sujet*), Foucault continues to engage early Christian texts as a foil for defining Greek and Roman ethical texts. The lectures

foreground Hellenistic subject matter, focusing on the care of the self (Gk. *ἐπιμελεία ἑαυτοῦ*, Lt. *cura sui*) as anchoring the Delphic injunction to know oneself (*γνῶθι σεαυτόν*). Foucault shifts the form of self-relation from "arts of living" in 1981 to the "care of the self" in 1982 as he asks: "Why did Western thought and philosophy neglect the notion of *epimeleia heautou* ("care of the self") in its reconstruction of its own history?" (Foucault 2005, 12). Framing modern philosophy as splitting the care of the self from the knowledge of the subject (since at least Descartes), Foucault extols ancient philosophical attention to their integration. In a striking continuity between ancient Greek and early Christian texts, he describes Socrates and Gregory of Nyssa as bookends in an eight-century span for whom "attending to the self is not therefore just a brief preparation for life; it is a form of life" (Foucault 2005, 494).

Of this vast span of philosophical thought and practice, Foucault in 1982 sees merely formal differences in the care of the self until Christian monastic practices and the "examination of conscience" in the fourth to fifth centuries. Like other Athenian elites, Alcibiades "understood that he had to take care of himself if he wished to take care of others later" (Foucault 2005, 494). Foucault contrasts the Greek ruler with the Christian monastic who suspiciously inspects their own thoughts and desires; instead of caring for oneself, one becomes the object of continuous observation. Foucault highlights Cassian in particular as inaugurating the "decipherment of interiority, the subject's exegesis of himself" (Foucault 2005, 301). For Foucault, early Christian confession as *exagoreusis* involves novice monastics submitting to elders, confessing every shameful movement of their thoughts, and renouncing those thoughts as part of their selves. The mechanisms of confession are connected to different forms of subjectivity, where the incitement to tell the interior truth about oneself correlates with the injunction to disavow that very self.

Foucault, in these 1982 lectures, foregrounds "the self" (*le soi*) and explicitly reframes "governmentality" in relation to the "ethics of the subject defined by the relationship of self to self" (Foucault 2005, 252). Although he drafts the language of ethics as early as 1980 in his unpublished and archived Berkeley lectures (Foucault 28730, XL.1), ethics becomes an explicit orientation in his work only in 1982. In these lectures, Foucault also publicly introduces the concept of *παρρησία* (*parrēsia*) as free speech that "establishes a certain pact between the subject of enunciation and the subject of conduct" (Foucault 2005, 406). On May 18, 1982, he dedicates his lecture at the University of Grenoble to *parrēsia*, stressing the ethical structure of the obligation to tell the truth about oneself in ancient Christianity as differing from the obligation in Greco-Roman philosophy (Foucault 2016b). From May 31 to June 26, Foucault delivers lectures at

the University of Toronto on the hermeneutics of the subject in antiquity, which bifurcate between ethical care of the self in Greco-Roman philosophy and truth-obligations in Christian monasticism (Foucault 2017a, 37, 135).

Meanwhile, Foucault continues to draft *Les Aveux de la chair*, which he submits to Gallimard in October 1982. That year, he publishes the only excerpt from *Les Aveux*, "The Battle for Chastity," on Cassian and the spirit of fornication (Foucault 2001b). Carrette notes that Foucault's October 1982 lectures at the University of Vermont relate to "the final volume of Foucault's *History of Sexuality* as located in techniques of the self and ethics" (Carrette 1999, 45). Yet part of these 1982 Vermont lectures are actually drafted by Foucault in 1980, calling this timing into question.[9] What is clear is that between 1979 and 1982, Foucault carefully attends to early Christian texts and contexts conceptualizing the arts of living, care of the self, and monastic production of disciplinary mechanisms in the genealogy of modern western subjectivity.

Stage 3: Foucault the Confessor: Speaking Truth to Power (1983–1984)

Foucault's final two years feature ancient Greek and Roman materials and the ethical relation between government of self and government of others. His 1983 Collège lectures, *The Government of Self and Others* (*Le Gouvernement de soi et des autres*), turn to *parrēsia* as a philosophical practice for governing others: "*Parrēsia* as form of life, *parrēsia* as way of behaving, *parrēsia* even in the philosophers' style of dress, are constitutive elements of this monopoly" (Foucault 2010, 320). Through Plato's engagement with the tyrant of Syracuse, Dionysius II, Foucault elaborates the ethical necessity of the care of the self—one cares for oneself not only to lead a beautiful philosophical life but also to contest unjust forms of domination. The *parrēsiast* exemplified by Plato challenges tyrannical behavior by telling the truth (however unpopular) to the ruler. Importantly, the *parrēsiast* does not dictate what should be done, instead functioning "as critique, and as restive exteriority to politics" (Foucault 2010, 354). A check safeguarding the people from authoritarian orders, "*parrēsia* founds democracy and democracy is the site of *parrēsia*" (Foucault 2010, 300).

In 1983, Foucault frames *parrēsia* as a "site of truth telling" that endures through "the great Christian spirituality of the fourth to fifth century" (Foucault 2010, 47). Between ancient Greece and late ancient

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[9]See footnote 1 of this article.

Christianity (where care of the self remains important), Foucault articulates enduring "relations between truth and courage, or between truth and ethics" (Foucault 2010, 306). He highlights Plato, Euripides, Plutarch, Epictetus, and John Chrysostom as boldly treating "the relationship between truth-telling and the risk of death" (Foucault 2010, 57). In his October 24 through November 30 lectures at the University of California, Berkeley, Foucault situates *parrēsia* at the intersection of the genealogy of modern subjectivity and the genealogy of the critical attitude in the problematization of truth (Foucault 2016b, 109, 297). He then frames the institutionalization of the Christian pastorate in monasticism as changing this courageous relation. Instead of a critical practice, monastic truth-telling subordinates novice to advisor and produces the mechanisms reinforcing institutional domination and dogmatic truth-claims (through new forms of scriptural revelation, authority in the church, and asceticism as stressing renunciation). Foucault's treatment of Christianity this year is textually minimal yet vital to how he conceptualizes human experience as constituted through "forms of knowledge," "normative matrices of behavior," and "the subject's mode of being" (Foucault 2010, 4). Whereas ancient self-relation allows subjects to be both shaped and self-shaping in order to govern others, monastic subjects are constituted through subjection and obedience to others.

Opening his 1984 Collège lectures, *Courage of Truth* (*Le Courage de la vérité*), Foucault specifies that by examining *parrēsia*, "we can see how the analysis of modes of veridiction, the study of techniques of governmentality, and the identification of forms of practice of self interweave" (Foucault 2011, 8). Examining *parrēsia* enables analysis of all three domains constitutive of experience that correlate with Foucault's constructions of knowledge, power, and ethics. The *parrēsiast* both contributes to their own shaping through practices of self *and* critiques political and social formations. Foucault's 1984 analysis of *parrēsia* might even suggest a way to challenge the twin roots he described in 1979—countering mechanisms of individualization and totalization through forms of truth-telling that critique (instead of reinforce) the Christian pastorate and state power.

Foucault closes his 1984 lectures by extending the radical potential of Cynic *parrēsia*, exemplified by Diogenes, who engages "the idea of a mode of life as the irruptive, violent scandalous manifestation of the truth" (Foucault 2011, 183), to ancient Christianity, notably martyrs who speak the truth of the world even when risking death. He particularly stresses continuities between early Christian asceticism and "the themes of scandal, of indifference to the opinion of others and to the structures of power and its representatives that are found in Cynicism" (Foucault

2011, 318). In contrast to positive *parrēsia*'s "unrestrained and free aspect" (Foucault 2011, 318) in the truth-telling of martyrs and ascetics, pastoral power becomes the negative form of truth-imposition as the success of its institutionalization annuls critical, liberatory potential. Foucault comes to suggest possibilities for articulating forms of *parrēsia* in Christianity, hoping for the next year: "Maybe I will try to pursue this history of the arts of living, of philosophy as form of life, of asceticism in its relation to the truth, precisely, after ancient philosophy, in Christianity" (Foucault 2011, 316).

That day, March 28, 1984, Foucault delivers his last lecture at the Collège de France, apologizing for not having the energy to go on. He forces his analysis to close with the transition from ancient (critical, positive) *parrēsia* to the Christian pastoral's forms of (subjugating, negative) *parrēsia* that voids critical power by institutionalizing dogmatics as truth. Nevertheless, Foucault also recognizes that positive forms of *parrēsia* endure in medieval mystics' challenges to church authority. Poignantly, Foucault speaks about the imperative for philosophy to remain external to politics, to critique its movements, and to have figures—like Socrates, Diogenes, and we can add Foucault himself—who not only speak truth but live the truth that they speak as a challenge to oppressive norms and forms of domination.

PART II. CONTEXTUALIZING *CONFESSIONS OF THE FLESH* AND "FINAL" FOUCAULT

As Foucault pursues his *History of Sexuality* series in what I establish as Stages 1 and 2 of his last decade, he moves from very schematic readings of "Christianity" from 1974 to 1978 to careful analyses of ancient Christian texts from 1979 through 1982, concurrently expanding their genealogical stakes for understanding modern subjectivity.[10] Starting January 1979, Foucault actively works on *Les Aveux de la chair*, submitting a draft of the manuscript to his editor, Pierre Nora, at Gallimard in October 1982 (Foucault 2018, VII). During this time, through the influence of Paul Veyne, Foucault comes to consider his original introduction to *Les Aveux* as rife with clichés of pagan ethics. Engaging source material on ancient Greek and Roman sexual ethics in greater detail, from 1980

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[10]The caveat for Stage 1 is that this includes material Foucault delivered in monographs or lectures. Foucault's research notes are also meticulous and require further analysis in order to more precisely date and understand his navigation of secondary and primary sources; Dossiers No XX, XXVII, LV, XXI, XXII, LXXIX, LXII, LXX, XXIV, XXIII, and XXVIII are particularly important for Foucault's notes over the last decade that my ongoing study, *Foucault the Confessor*, addresses (Foucault 28730).

through 1984 (as Stages 2 and 3 frame above), Foucault develops his readings of western antiquity and comes to the ethical possibilities of arts of living and political critique. His rigorous conceptualization of ethics as its own domain of experience comes a mere two years before his death—moving from loose constructions of resistance (1974–1976) to counter-conduct (1977–1978) to governmentality (1979) to subjectivation (1980; see Davidson 2016) to arts of living (1981) to care of the self (1982) to the ethical relation of self to self (1983–1984).

In the months before his death, Foucault publishes his first monographs since 1976 with *History of Sexuality, Volume 2: The Use of Pleasure* (*Histoire de la sexualité II: L'Usage de plaisir*) on ancient Greek appreciation for ἀφροδίσια (*aphrodisia*) in sexual ethics (Foucault 1990b) and *History of Sexuality, Volume 3: The Care of the Self* (*Histoire de la sexualité III: Le Souci de soi*) on Roman moralities' tightening forms of sexual austerity (Foucault 1990c).[11] Despite its antecedent composition, *Les Aveux de la chair* (*Confessions of the Flesh*) becomes deferred first to Volume 3 and ultimately to Volume 4 in the revised four-volume series. From March to May 1984, Foucault continues to hand-edit the tapuscripts for *Les Aveux*, with an anticipated publication in October foreclosed by his death on June 25, 1984, and the request "Pas de publication posthume" (*no posthumous publications*) (Foucault 2018, VII; 2001a, 90). Periodizing Foucault's "Christianities" in three stages enables contemporary readers to (1) understand theoretical and archival contexts for *Confessions of the Flesh*, (2) recognize disciplinary and methodological possibilities in "late" Foucault, and (3) reckon with the limitations of Foucault's constructions of subjectivity.

Reading Confessions of the Flesh

With Frédéric Gros editing *Les Aveux de la chair* from Foucault's manuscript, tapuscript, and other notes, *Confessions of the Flesh* is not the production of a single author.[12] Yet the similarities between the volumes in

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[11]Two other notable volumes edited by Foucault during this time are *Herculine Barbin, dite Alexina B.* (Foucault 1978) and *Le Désordre des familles: Lettres de cachet des Archives de la Bastille au XVIIIe siècle* (Foucault 1982) with Arlette Farge.

[12]I agree with Philippe Chevallier (2020) that the published title for Volume 4 corresponds better to Foucault's earlier work on Christian confession from the twelfth through seventeenth centuries than it does the second through fifth centuries treated in *Les Aveux*. In the archives at the Bibliothèque nationale de France, I could glean four different tables of contents drafted by Foucault, which perhaps correspond to successive reconceptualizations of *Les Aveux* as Foucault moves from early modern to ancient forms of Christianity (Foucault 28730, Dossier No LXXXVI *Les Aveux de la chair*, Chemise 1; Dossier No XC *Les Aveux de la chair* / *L'Usage des plaisirs*, Chemise 1).

In *Les Aveux*'s table of contents as published, most of the titles are chosen by Gros with the four of thirteen exceptions noted with "MF." As with the rest of this article, all translations not attributed are my own.

the *History of Sexuality* series are striking. Like Volume 3, Volume 4 starts in detailed textual analysis without a formal introduction, and Foucault's introduction to Volume 2, which resituates the whole series in antiquity, acts as the introduction to Volumes 3 and 4 as well.[13] Even though Foucault wrote much of Volume 4 before the other two, Volumes 2, 3, and 4 share a similar structure with attention to the body, social status, and sexual desire. What in Volumes 2 and 3 appear as sections on the body, the wife, and erotics towards boys shifts in Volume 4 to the flesh, the virgin, and the use of concupiscence in marriage (Foucault 2018, 427). All three volumes engage diverse textual sources and social histories from ancient Greece to Roman late antiquity yet with limited attention to their broader historical contexts. Page to page, *Confessions* performs nuanced exegesis of ancient Christian texts even as Foucault weaves a genealogical narrative of the continuities and divergences between pagan and Christian sexual ethics (e.g., Foucault 2018, 194–95). For scholars of Foucault, *Confessions* is a feast of readings drawn from different years of his lectures as well as some surprises—notably the prevalence of Augustine and the dearth of Tertullian. For scholars of early Christianity, Foucault's selection of texts can be as mystifying as his sometimes idiosyncratic readings and invites critical rereadings.[14] For scholars engaging critical theory, Foucault's

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Part I: 'The formation of a new experience'
1. Creation, procreation [MF]
2. Baptismal labor
3. Second penance
4. Art of arts
Part II: 'Being a virgin'
1. Virginity and continence
2. On the arts of virginity
3. Virginity and knowledge of self
Part III: 'Being married' [MF]
1. The duty of the spouse [MF]
2. The Good and the goods of marriage [MF]
3. The libidinisation of sex
Annexes 1–4: related texts found with the main manuscript

[13]I take as a mark of continuity with his treatment of *aphrodisia* in Volumes 2 and 3, Foucault changes the first sentence from "Ce regime des Aphrodisia" to "Le regime des Aphrodisia" (Foucault 28730, Dossier No LXXXIV Les Aveux de la chair, Chemise 1 "Première partie. Introduction," Feuillet 1), where "Ce regime" as "This regime" becomes "Le regime" as "The regime."

[14]Elizabeth Clark's "Foucault, the Fathers, and Sex" critiques Foucault's readings of late ancient desert ascetics Evagrius Pontus and John Cassian for occluding the role of humility in the care of the self, the recognition of self-examination as a counterproductive practice, and the relation between self-knowledge and the question for truth as the quest for God (Clark 1988, 629–30). Clark's readings remain brilliantly accurate, even with the trove of publications made available since 1988, and I am indebted to her and her work.

Michel Senellart critiques Foucault's reading of the pastoral as an individualizing power, stressing instead its incorporative power (Senellart 2017, 214), Philippe Chevallier corrects Foucault's reading of Tertullian on the role of shame in penitence (Chevallier 2020), Béatrice Han critiques Foucault's reading of Cassian as too reliant on an overly voluntarist and reflective understanding of obedience as an exercise of will (Han 2020), Qiwei He offers a careful critique of Foucault's reading of Cassian that complements my own and Clark's (He 2019; Clements 2020), and Chris deWet both engages Foucault's reading of John Chrysosthom and shows the need to keep constructions of sexuality and theology open to reconstruction (deWet 2020).

genealogy of subjectivity helps illuminate the importance of forms of Christianity for the conditions of modern subjectivity and the disciplinary institutions producing it.

Foucault clearly affirms the continuities in practices common to "pagan" and "Christian" contexts. It is not the codes or practices that change but the *experience*—the way that one relates to oneself, the other, and the "truth"—that shifts (Foucault 2018, 50–51). And Foucault frames the developing mechanisms of the self-to-self relation in the early Christian period through texts and practices that shift from the second through fifth centuries. From Clement of Alexandria taking up pagan sexual ethics without essential modification in the second century (Foucault 2018, 9–51) to Tertullian's innovation of Christian baptism as a ritual production of one's status through *exomologēsis* in the third century (Foucault 2018, 52–77), Foucault stresses rites of penitence and transformation in part I. Much of his analysis proceeds temporally with the figures of the third through fifth centuries occupying a privileged place in parts II and III. In part II, Foucault lauds virginity in Cyprian and Methodius' third-century texts as a recommendation embraced as opposed to compelled, enabling "the relationship of the individual to himself, in thought, soul, and body" (Foucault 2018, 152). Foucault admires fourth-century Gregory of Nyssa in particular for considering virginity as a "care of the self" continuous with pagan practices (Foucault 2018, 177–205). Such emphases on arts of living and care of the self are at a striking remove from pastoral power, which is conspicuously absent from *Confessions*, except for in Annex 2 (Foucault 2018, 380–95).[15]

Foucault contrasts Nyssa's attention in the fourth century to Cassian's in the fifth, whose monastic practices stress confession, the subject of knowledge (instead of a subject of action), and totalizing obedience as a condition of subjectivity. Foucault reads the relation of self to self as increasingly mediated by institutional authorities and defined in and through technologies of domination like obedience and submission (Foucault 2018, 121–35), thereby inaugurating the mechanisms of disciplinary power. Most salient is *exagoreusis*, the submissive practice of monastics who confess everything to their spiritual director in a relation of complete and unending obedience (Foucault 2018, 143–45). As I discuss in Stage 2 above, Foucault reads Cassian as stressing self-examination where one suspiciously applies a hermeneutics of purity to all thoughts (as *cogitationes*) by rooting out interior desires and telling their truth

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[15]This section correlates with the *Sécurité, Territoire, Population: Cours au Collège de France: 1977–1978* lectures, especially the end of the February 8th lecture, and suggests to me earlier composition than the majority of *Les Aveux*.

(Foucault 2018, 136–39). Cassian, like Nyssa on virginity, requires chastity as a condition of knowledge in "a form of life within which renunciation of all forms of sexual relations already operates" (Foucault 2018, 216). Foucault is correct about chastity as basic to Cassian's ascetic form of life, yet he overreads chastity as compelled and virginity as chosen.

The unexpected heart of *Confessions* is Augustine—even as Foucault does not cite Augustine's own *Confessions*. Foucault dedicates the majority of part III to analyzing texts from Augustine's later period, showing interest in even the Pelagian treatments of human agency to which Augustine responds (Foucault 2018, 327–32). Foucault declares reliance on Peter Brown's framing of "why sexuality became in the Western Christian culture the seismograph of our subjectivity" (Foucault 28730, XL.6.1.29). With the "'libidinisation' of sex," sexuality becomes the very condition of being human (theologically) and of becoming a subject (socially) (Foucault 2018, 328–29).[16] Sin and sexuality are not extricable from human nature as a form of concupiscence to root out; since sexual desire is part of being human, it should be focused within marital relations in this reading. Yet as Elizabeth Clark argues, Foucault reads Augustine overgenerously as praising marriage when Augustine's own texts evince not praise for the married man but the desire to socially bind all Christians together (monk and married alike) (Clark 2021).

From the use of pleasure to the subject of concupiscence, Foucault articulates a shift from ancient philosophy to late ancient Christianity that "recomposes itself no longer around pleasure and the relation, but around desire and the subject" (Foucault 2018, 361). Synthesizing themes from 1974 to 1984 (traced in Stages 1 through 3 above), Foucault articulates his excursus into antiquity as a genealogical analysis of the modern subject produced through Augustine's attention to concupiscence and Cassian's attention to self-examination. He stages in this history of the present "the ties that our culture has extended rather than denounced between sex, truth, and law [*droit*]" (Foucault 2018, 361). As Daniele Lorenzini frames, the collusion of "the subject of desire" with "the subject

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[16]I thank Margaret Mitchell for raising the vital question of how Foucault selected and read his source material, for I am now tracing how the change in his source materials correlates with his deepening analysis of ancient texts. Of Foucault's important interlocutors, the 2018 *Les Aveux* only cites Paul Veyne's *Le Pain et le cirque* (Veyne 1976) in Annex 2 and only Pierre Hadot's "Théologies et mystiques de la Grèce hellénistique et de la fin de l'Antiquité" (Hadot 1970) from Hadot's many works as well as those of Ilsetraut Hadot. The 2018 *Les Aveux* does not cite Peter Brown at all, odd because of Foucault's knowledge of *Augustine of Hippo* (Brown 1967) as well as central references to Brown in his 1981 "Sexuality and Solitude" and his 1982 "The Battle for Chastity" (an excerpt from *Les Aveux*). Interestingly, Brown's 1983 Princeton Rabbi Irving Levy Lecture "Augustine and Sexuality" is found in Chemise 11 "Chemise trouvée sur le table de Michel" of Dossier No LXXXIV in the archives, suggesting it was ready-to-hand as Foucault edited *Les Aveux* in 1984.

of law" in Augustine is vital to Foucault's genealogy of disciplinary and biopolitical mechanisms of power (Lorenzini 2019, 469). *Confessions* analyzes early Christian arts of conducting oneself and others, techniques of examination, and procedures of confession as continuous with practices in Foucault's own time, notably in the incitement to tell the truth about oneself.

Decades later, what does the 2018 publication of *Les Aveux de la chair* show us about how Foucault moved from the relations of power, the history of sexuality, and governmentality (Stage 1) to an emerging project on the technologies of the self (Stage 2) to his final interest in arts of living and parresiastic promise (Stage 3)? Annex 1 of *Confessions* reiterates how it is not the moral laws or practices concerning sexual acts that change from Greek and Roman to early Christian contexts, but the *experience* and the *relation* between subjectivity and truth that changes from knowledge in general to knowledge of self (Foucault 2018, 365). Foucault locates the dangers of Christianity within the structures of authority developed in the fourth century, "increasingly clearly in the fifth and sixth centuries" (Foucault 2011, 333), that lead subjects to mistrust themselves, to submit to constant interior inspection, and to come to a knowledge of self that requires its very renunciation. Foucault seems to worry that truth-telling no longer enables ethical and political critique of authorities but becomes a strategy of subjection where one blindly obeys pastoral authorities as "this theme of *parrhēsia*-confidence will be replaced by the principle of a trembling obedience, in which the Christian will have to fear God and recognize the necessity of submitting to His will, and to the will of those who represent Him" (Foucault 2011, 333).

Disciplinary and Methodological Implications

Decades after Foucault's death, there is the temptation to read *Confessions* as an event by which to evaluate the "final Foucault" and his completion of the *History of Sexuality* series. Yet my analysis of Foucault's last decade shows that no one work or event stands in for his dynamic and ongoing engagement with forms of Christianity and their relation to power, resistance, subjectivity, and truth. Neither straightforwardly adulatory nor condemnatory, Foucault—in *Confessions of the Flesh* and in his lectures, interviews, and monographs from the 1970s and 1980s—frames Christianity both as continuous with the ancient world and as importantly inaugurating mechanisms and technologies that will come to define modern subjectivity—notably through regimes of truth and forms of governmentality predicated on obedience and confession, on individuation and totalization, on desire and law. As Daniel Boyarin and Elizabeth

Castelli argued in 2001, Foucault's ability to trace continuities and differences across contexts relies on both his rigorous historical-textual archeological analyses and his capacious genealogical theorizing of experience.

My reading of Foucault relies on both historical and theoretical approaches to his last decade and to the ancient texts he engages. This two-fold engagement sets the methodological stakes for situating *Confessions* in relation to Foucault's shifting analyses of "Christianity." On the one side, if we only approach Foucault's texts for their historical descriptions, then we are liable to point out errors in his interpretations and say he got details or readings wrong without taking into account the theoretical and political importance of his work. And on the other side, if we only attend to his theorizing, then we are liable to accept his historical accounts uncritically and to apply his frameworks without sufficient attention to texts and contexts. To appreciate the theoretical stakes that come with Foucault's own historicizing practices and genealogical analyses requires unfolding the bibliographic shifts in his work as I did in Part I. Here, we can consider the theoretical implications for (1) how Foucault's attention to Christianity as productive of the mechanisms of disciplinary power leads him to ethical questions in antiquity, (2) how his attention to ethics is continuous with his attention to power and knowledge, and (3) how "Christianity" as a historical fulcrum in his work requires a critical eye towards Foucault's changing "Christianities."

First, tracing Foucault's engagement with Christian texts as a spur to his engagement with Greek and Roman texts helps to mitigate the surprise that Foucault's shift in focus between Volume 1 (1976) and Volumes 2 and 3 (1984) often evokes and that the release of Volume 4 amplifies the need to understand. In *History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, Foucault establishes the theoretical stakes of critique, arguing that "power is tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms" (Foucault 1990a, 86). Foucault gradually works from constructions of Christianity in modernity to antiquity to uncover the mechanisms instantiated by pastoral power and covered over through disciplinary apparatuses, in order to make such power intolerable today. As Mark Jordan beautifully argues, by turning to ancient Christian texts to unmask these mechanisms, Foucault explores forms of resistance in counter-conduct that then opened up the possibility for liberatory practices by considering ancient arts of living and care of the self (Jordan 2014).[17] Foucault then comes to see Christian

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[17]Engaging ethics in antiquity, Foucault's well-known if provisional articulation of "spirituality" in 1984 is "that which precisely refers to a subject acceding to a certain mode of being and to the transformations which the subject must make of himself in order to accede to this mode of being" (Foucault 1988a, 14).

texts like those of Cassian as inaugurating forms of interiority and confession that would dangerously shore up the dominating power of Catholic institutions and its violent Inquisition as well as the modern incitement to truth-telling (Foucault 28730, XL.1.9; see also Zachhuber 2020). Yet Foucault's attention to early Christian arts of living and care of the self (as well as the disruptive potential of mystics) should be seen as continuous with his interest in forms of resistance enacted by mystics, ascetics, and *parrēsiasts* through modernity.

Second, Foucault's historicization of Christianity largely changes how he analyzes and apprehends power in subject formation, coming to recognize how "forms of a possible knowledge (*savoir*), normative frameworks of behavior for individuals, and potential modes of existence for possible subjects" (Foucault 2010, 3) together constitute experience. In the ancient Greek practice of *parrēsia*, for example, the government of self and others is not a productive form of domination but a "practice of freedom" and enables the *critique* of dominant forms of power and regimes of truth that have covered over their own contingency and constructedness. Subjects are discursively shaped, yet they can also participate in forms of ethical self-shaping. This reading confirms how—as Daniele Lorenzini, Ariane Revel, and Arianna Sforzini argue—Foucault's work can no longer be understood as having "three distinct and mutually exclusive steps, or 'phases'" (Lorenzini et al. 2013, 8): first, archeology and discourse analysis in the 1960s; second, genealogy and analysis of power in the 1970s; third, forms of ethics and subjectivity in the 1980s. On February 1, 1984, at the Collège, Foucault describes his broader theoretical aim through the interrelation of these three axes: "Connecting together modes of veridiction, techniques of governmentality, and practices of the self is basically what I have always been trying to do" (Foucault 2011, 8). Far from mutually exclusive, questions of knowledge, power, and "the self"—engaged through archeology, genealogy, and ethics as Arnold Davidson has long described (1986, 221–33)—are co-imbricated in Foucault's work, or, as Gilles Deleuze notes, "are irreducible, yet constantly imply one another" (1988, 114).[18]

Third, recognizing his methodological shift towards rigorous textual and historical analyses *and* theoretical exploration of arts of life and radical asceticism, Foucault's constructions of "Christianity" still require a critical eye because of their privileged positions in his genealogy of modern subjectivity. In his readings of early Christian texts, Foucault comes to

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[18]This reading also troubles Brent Pickett's 2005 distinction between "postmodern Foucault" (largely correlated with my Stage 1 above) and "modern Foucault" (correlated with Stages 2 and 3 above).

account for how technologies of the self can function in relation to technologies of domination, production, and signification as rigorous forms of resistance. He widens his frame in the history of sexuality to include virginity as an art of life in Gregory of Nyssa as a practice of care of the self inaugurated by Socrates eight centuries prior. Foucault stresses how practices of obedience, interiorizing interpretation, and self-renunciation produce the mechanisms of disciplinary power (rendered dangerous in the ties between desire, truth, and law). And although I share critiques of Foucault's readings of Cassian and Augustine, Foucault's assessment of how self-inspection and truth-telling forge the mechanisms of modern western subjectivities invites further historical analysis (which can have implications for theoretical analyses such as that of Butler 2004). Foucault celebrates how Augustine recognizes the use of concupiscence in marriage because sexuality is not renounced but is central to subjectivity. And in his final lecture, he prospectively charts an inquiry into the arts of living in Christianity (terminology he traces to Gregory of Nazianzus in *Les Aveux* as well), holding space for his analysis of *parrēsia* to extend to forms of Christianity that might also contest political power in word and deed. Although Foucault critiques the normalizing forces of the institutionalized Christian pastoral, he opens the ethico-political range of possibilities for transformation of self and social norms in the history of Christianity.

Contemporary Critiques

Tracing Foucault's engagement with forms of Christianity shows his readings' mutability and indicates the need, in turn, to engage with their historical accuracy. So too do his genealogical analyses of subjectivity and sexual ethics require critical engagement (Falzon et al. 2013; Cremonesi et al. 2016). Although published in 2018, *Les Aveux* should be both appreciated for Foucault's grappling with the relation between subjectivity and truth in the early 1980s and challenged for the limitations of the forms of subjectivity engaged. Now over thirty-five years have passed since Foucault's death, and as the most cited academic researcher, his work continues to influence work in anthropology, history, literary theory, philosophy, political theory, the study of religion, and sociology, as well as academic discourses including queer theory, cultural studies, gender studies, critical race theory, postcolonial theory, ecocriticism, and animal studies (Faubion 2014; Downing 2018). Foucault's turn to western antiquity also influenced historians, redefining social and cultural inquiry in late ancient studies through the field-defining influences of Peter Brown (Brown 1988; Cameron 1999) and Elizabeth Clark (Clark 1999; Clark 2004; Clark 2008), among others.

Critical theoretical advances and political problematizations since Foucault's death prompt us to insist on analyzing how gender, race, class, sexuality, ethnicity, age, and ability play into who counts as a normative subject able to engage in the ethical possibilities Foucault describes (Allen 2008; McNay 1992). We can see Foucault's shift in attention as he reconceptualizes the *History of Sexuality* series: he moves from critical analyses of the nineteenth-century subjection of children (Volume 3), women (Volume 4), men medicalized as "perverse" (Volume 5), and the biopolitical reliance on racism (Volume 6) in the originally conceived series *to* the subject of ethics as a man with significant economic or cultural capital who governs others from his position of authority in societies reliant on enslavement and militarism in the published Volumes 2, 3, and 4. Volumes 2 and 3 feature the philosophical and medical works of Plato, Xenophon, Aristotle, Seneca, Epictetus, Plutarch, Marcus Aurelius, and Galen, where the subjects capable of governing themselves are the male, free-born, land-holding elites who legislate themselves in order to govern subjected others, including "slaves" and women discussed as "wives," who are yoked to household economies, whereas "boys" are tied to economies of pleasure. Foucault certainly recognizes that his ancient subjects are tied to dissymmetrical conceptions of "virile society," which he calls "quite disgusting!" (Foucault 1997b, 258), and he is both theoretically and politically opposed to any nostalgic recuperations in this care of the self.

Yet, for contemporary needs, Foucault does not adequately problematize how structural hierarchy is the condition of ancient elites being able to care for themselves as ethical exemplars, as they govern others as their economic, social, and political subjects (Faubion 2011). This raises the question: how radically must we rethink ethics along the lines of a cultivation of an art of life in order to divorce it from a politics of dominion over others and indeed to realize it as opposed to such? In Volume 4, for example, Foucault's selections from the historical record occlude the role that other subjects played in the very forms of life that interest him, contributing to longstanding feminist critiques of his limitations as well as possibilities in promoting radical change (Sawicki 1991; Hekman 1996; Taylor and Vintges 2004). Although Foucault refers to women in John Chrysostom and Augustine's views of marriage and the use of concupiscence, for example, the problem to be dealt with is the male erection, and the subject of sexual ethics is the man who puts his desire to work within the bonds of marriage. Foucault also disregards women as ethical exemplars even in the texts that he privileges. For example, Foucault's appreciation for Gregory of Nyssa's *On Virginity* (read in Michel Aubineau's 1966 edition) strikingly does not include how Nyssa extols his sister Macrina as best embodying the care of the self as a Socratic philosopher, dissolving

slavery in their household, and scandalously engaging in labor practices of bread making that break social norms (Nysse 1966, 1971; Elm 2000).

One wonders how Foucault might have developed his views on ethics in tandem with his attention to biopower where, as Achille Mbembe stresses, "the function of racism is to regulate the distribution of death and to make possible the state's murderous functions" (2019, 71; see also Foucault 2003b, 256). It is necessary to recognize state violence and anti-Black racism as refusing the subjectivity of enslaved people and to reckon with how "the conditions of domination and subjugation determine what kinds of action are possible or effective" as Saidiya Hartman frames the double bind (1997, 55). Rey Chow considers Foucault's work as enabling contemporary transnational critique, asking "what if struggles against racism are waged alongside a historical analysis of vestiges of the Christian hermeneutics of the self" (2018, 119). How then might such analyses contribute to Foucault's 1976 suggestion that the biopolitical production of hierarchical taxonomies be met with the counter-forces of "revolution, its promises, and its prophecies of future emancipation" (Foucault 2003b, 80; see also Stoler 1995)? How might the conditions of possibility for ethical self-shaping and critical truth-telling that Foucault leaves us with in 1984 be cultivated today? Recent years have underscored the ethical imperative of reckoning with how "failures" of state power to protect the structurally disenfranchised have been the historical condition of its dominating success—from grotesque wealth inequality to elevated rates of infection and death of Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and the working poor to COVID-19 to ongoing abuse of asylum seekers to the police murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, among too many other Black people, in the United States.

It is not enough to theorize ethics and practices of the self in socially, culturally, and historically particular forms when contemporary forms of domination vis-à-vis state violence regulate whose lives matter (Gray Forthcoming). Foucault himself lived this ethos in word and deed, whether protesting the penitentiary system, fighting for refugees' rights in France, or supporting Solidarity in Poland (Eribon 2011; Macey 1994). How, then, do we expose the mechanisms of state violence and demand structural conditions that enable the ethical care of the self extend to all instead of the few? Foucault's methodological approaches and theoretical constructions reflect the status of critical discourses in the early 1980s, boldly exposing the structural violence of medicalization, moralization, racialization, and criminalization even as he was killed by related mechanisms through another public health disaster. Countering systemic oppression in the twenty-first century can use Foucault's tools and ethos to

analyze forms of ethics without reinscribing normative subjectivity as male, wealthy, and elite. This field made fallow can now be cultivated, appreciating the stress on the "transformative work on the self" (Castelli 2004, 235) for all people, particularly those whose subjectivity has been too long denied. Disrupting normative figurations, Lynne Huffer names the possibilities that open up at this intersection of ethics and biopolitics: "If bios is a life form captured by modern power, eros names biopolitical life's transfiguration into new possibilities for living" (Huffer 2013, 438; see also Huffer 2020). Critique need not chasten but instead can amplify the possibilities for engaging Foucault's work—and the ethico-political stakes for critique so central to his own work.

CONCLUSION

With the publication of *Les Aveux de la chair* comes the ability to assess Foucault's "last decade" through his engagement with forms of Christianity, alongside the chronological collections *Dits et écrits*, his interviews, and his published lectures at the Collège de France and abroad. With access to his unpublished archives at the Bibliothèque nationale de France, the nearly 40,000 pages of notes and drafts illuminate Foucault's meticulous research practices and rigorous readings of texts—both primary and secondary—through this last decade. This unprecedented access to Foucault's published and unpublished work allows contemporary scholars to more fully appreciate and analyze Foucault's work in its decades-long, complex transformations.

Contextualizing *Confessions* of the Flesh in relation to his last decade helps to clarify Foucault's sense that the volume was not complete. Rather than thinking of his reading of Christianity as culminating in 1980 in a Nietzschean opposition of Christian renunciation to ancient forms of life, it makes more sense to think of his reading of ethics as underwritten by his extended grappling with and internally rich attempts to understand the shifting relation of subjectivity to truth. In the framework of stages, Stage 1 follows Foucault from 1974 to 1978 as he works to diagnose the problem that dominating power poses, identifying mechanisms of pastoral power produced in ancient and early modern forms of Christianity. Stage 2 follows Foucault from 1979 to 1982 as he writes *Les Aveux* and moves from power to governmentality, from knowledge to truth, as he works to unmask the mechanisms of confession that give rise to institutional forms of disciplinary subjectivity in the modern period via their more nascent forms in antiquity. Stage 3 frames Foucault from 1983 to 1984 in terms of the liberatory possibilities that emerge once the premodern mechanisms

constitutive of modern subjectivity are exposed and ethical alternatives for arts of living and social contest are proposed. The intensification of Foucault's reading of Christianity in 1981 and 1982, as well as the opening up of ethical potential in the arts of living in 1983 and 1984 (that arguably starts in 1980), show that Foucault's engagement with Christianity does not end in 1980, nor even in 1984.

I urge us readers to both charitably appreciate and critically engage Foucault's views of Christianity and forms of subjectivity for their insights and potentialities. Training a critical eye on Foucault's readings of Christianity from antiquity to the eighteenth century, historians help parse the rigor of his various readings and evaluate the strength of his overarching genealogy. Far from a historical pedantry, such critique can help expose the enduring assumptions that Foucault's readings inherited but that ours need not. When periodizing Foucault's readings, we can attune ourselves to how his more flawed readings are linked to particular and evolving frameworks he adopted in the course of his extended research program and do not reflect his practiced and extensively demonstrated ability to think differently. Contemporary theorists and philosophers also help parse his history of sexuality from his genealogy of the modern subject. Far from ahistorical speculation, the theorization of truth, forms of governmentality, and practices of the self in particular contexts enables analysis of the constitution of subjectivity and political and social critique. This might challenge modern constructions of sexuality as the "seismograph of subjectivity" and open Foucault's genealogical narrative to consider other indices of subjectivity, including attention to gender, race, class, and ability, categories that are still philosophically decentered today.

Although there are limitations to a model that imputes "stages" to Foucault's dynamic thought, I consider such a framework helpful when gleaning continuities and differences in his developing conception of Christianity and his genealogy of modern subjectivity.[19] Such a staging allows readers—scholars, students, activists alike—to gain purchase on the complexity of Foucault's shifting views, from historical, archival, and theoretical perspectives. To flatten his characterization of Christianity is to miss the historiographic nuance of Foucault's later work—and this means

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[19]Jeremy Carrette, for example, declares: "There are other fragments from interviews and lectures in the early 1980s which further supplement these central texts but on the whole the other pieces only replicate or elaborate material contained in this selection" (Carrette 1999, 44). Although I largely agree with Carrette's organization and analysis of materials in the 1970s, I have argued that Foucault's work from the 1980s is not a mere replication or elaboration since his readings of Christianity, ethics, and subjectivity continue to change. For the limitations of heuristic schematizations of Foucault's work, see also Raffnsøe et al. 2016, 58.

we not only fail to understand Foucault's own analyses but also fail to appreciate the methodological rigor of his later work.

There is ethical promise in Foucault's readings of ancient Christian texts, and perhaps he would have been less attentive to the dangerous flesh and more to the ethical force of the art of living were he able to return to his proposed inquiry—and perhaps even integrate it with the violent realities of modern biopolitics. To assess the promise of his theoretical engagement and to expose some of his own biases regarding subjectivity requires the historical critique of Foucault's readings of ancient texts and the normative subjectivities stressed therein. And this is a methodological task that I invite scholars to take up together, embracing the critical possibilities he himself wrestled with in his last years. The work of Foucault's last decade offers possibilities for theorizing forms of resistance to domination as well as the formation of subjectivity through and beyond that struggle.

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