The Fragile Self:
Heteronomy in Foucault and Augustine

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Abbreviations for Some of Foucault's Works

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Introduction

In *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, the Anglican theologian Sarah Coakley remarks that it is unusual "to reflect on Augustine's understanding of sexual relations while studying his magisterial theological reflections on trinitarian analogies." Yet, "this omission is odd," given that Augustine himself "saw these points of connection and discoursed upon them explicitly."[1] Without pretending to do a work of a *théologie totale*, I share Coakley's intuition that, from the perspective of Ancient Christian writers, like Augustine, theology and anthropology are intertwined. Early Christians did not think of one without the other.

In recent times, the unlikely figure of Michel Foucault (1926–1984) appeared as someone who took a special interest in the works of the Church Fathers. If I referred to this as "unlikely," it is because of the nature of Foucault's philosophical concerns. These stand out even after a cursory glance over the titles of some of his works: *The History of Madness* (1961), *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963), *Archeology of Knowledge* (1969), *Discipline and Punish* (1975), and *The History of Sexuality* (1976-2018).

As these titles suggest, Foucault pays close attention to history. But, he does not do so as a professional historian. Rather, he proceeds more in the manner of Friedrich Nietzsche. In his *Genealogy of Morals* (1887), Nietzsche examines the origins and evolution of Western moral values to show that the traditional moral concepts of good and evil have their roots in the will to power. Though he refined his methodology throughout his life, Foucault, in one way or another, practiced a similar kind of genealogy with regard to the notions of madness, penology, sexuality, and even knowledge itself. In a way, Foucault takes the Kantian inquiry into the conditions for

[1] Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay on the Trinity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 3.

the possibility of knowledge and displaces them to the socio-historical level. Seen in this light, Foucault's central question becomes: what are the historical conditions of possibility for a certain body of knowledge to be taken as legitimate and authoritative within a given epoch?

Foucault is concerned with how certain discourses and practices emerge. He defines *discourse* as "the group of statements that belong to a single system of formation; thus I shall be able to speak of clinical discourse, economic discourse, the discourse of natural history, psychiatric discourse."[2] Now, discourse is not limited to the verbal; there is a performative dimension to it. *Discursive practices* "must not be confused with the expressive operation by which an individual formulates an idea, a desire, an image;" rather, "it is a body of anonymous, historical rules, always determined in the time and space that have defined a given period, and for a given social, economic, geographical, or linguistic area, the condition of operation of the enunciative function."[3] Discourses are governed by a *historical a priori*, which "is not a condition of validity for judgments; but a condition of reality for statements … not a question of rediscovering what might legitimize an assertion, but of freeing the conditions of emergence of statements."[4] In short, Foucault examines the historical conditions that shape our knowledge claims and the emergence of discourses across different periods.

Given this philosophical approach, Foucault's reception by theologians has been predominantly negative. The Radical Orthodox theologian John Milbank "deliberately treat[s] the writings of Nietzsche, Heidegger, Deleuze, Lyotard, Foucault and Derrida as elaborations of

[2] Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1972), 107-08.
[3] *AK*, 117.
[4] *AK*, 127.

a single nihilistic philosophy."[5] According to him, all these philosophers partake in an *ontology of violence*. By *ontology of violence*, Milbank basically means that, regardless of their approach, whether it be genealogical or deconstructivist, all these philosophers present an account "of a human world inevitably dominated by violence."[6] Milbank is not entirely wrong in what he says about Foucault's problematic interpretations of Christianity.[7] Yet, Milbank's analyses suffer from his blurring all the differences between otherwise opposing philosophers, such as Derrida and Foucault,[8] and lumping them together.

The Eastern Orthodox theologian David Bentley Hart does a similar move as that of Milbank. He also criticizes all these "postmodern" philosophers. Though he largely agrees with Milbank, he admits that "Milbank's [assessment] is too hasty a summary of a complicated issue." [9] Hart himself creates a taxonomy of postmodern philosophers based on different approaches toward the Kantian sublime, which, to simplify Hart's argument a bit, means different approaches toward the unrepresentable. This yields a differential sublime (Derrida), an ontological sublime (Jean-Luc Nancy), an ethical sublime (Lévinas), and a cosmological sublime, where he places Foucault alongside Gilles Deleuze. By "cosmological sublime," he means "the form the discourse of the unrepresentable can take when the Nietzschean impulse predominates."[10] This essentially means that, for Foucault, according to Hart, "power is the *ratio* of the world."[11] In his treatment of Foucault, Hart offers many keen observations. He even

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[5] John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd ed. (Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 278.

[6] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 278.

[7] See Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 292-95.

[8] For an instance of Derrida's critique of Foucault see Jacques Derrida, "Cogito et histoire de la folie," in *L'écriture et la différence* (Paris, FR: Éditions du Seuil, 1967), 51–98.

[9] David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 42.

[10] Hart, *Beauty of the Infinite*, 56.

[11] Hart, *Beauty of the Infinite*, 67.

concedes that Foucault can be seen "as an unwitting phenomenologist of original sin" who "seems to say no more than what theology already assumes: that the world lies in the grip of thrones, dominions, principalities, authorities, and powers."[12] However, like Milbank, Hart's overall assessment remains largely negative.

On a more popular level, Bishop Robert Barron has spoken on how Foucault is crucial for "understanding the present moment," insofar as he is "the most influential [figure] on the postmodern woke mentality."[13] His argument is that Foucault is one of the main contributors to contemporary forms of moral and epistemological relativism.

As for this thesis project, my goal is not to disprove all these criticisms. There is, after all, some validity in these critiques. My purpose is rather to attempt a more nuanced theological dialogue with Foucault. Theologians have tended to respond to Foucault with the same hermeneutics of suspicion they fault him for. My intention is to try to offer a more charitable interpretation, to practice a hermeneutics of retrieval. I obviously cannot cover every single aspect of Foucault's thought in this project. I will then limit myself to Foucault's engagement with with Saint Augustine in order to see what theological insights can be retrieved.

Before proceeding, it is important to note that "Foucault was an atheist and that his work on religion does not sustain a traditional theological worldview."[14] Though "rumors circulate that Foucault asked for a Catholic burial,"[15] I do not dwell on this. It is important to state this because, in his analyses of Christianity, Foucault privileges *praxis* at the expense of theology,

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[12] Hart, *Beauty of the Infinite*, 68.

[13] *Understanding the Present Moment #4: Michel Foucault*, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Py_4NBfCDnU.

[14] Jeremy R. Carrette, *Foucault and Religion: Spiritual Corporality and Political Spirituality* (London, UK; New York, NY: Routledge, 2000), xi.

[15] Angela Franks, "Foucault's Principalities & Powers," *First Things*, 2021, https://www.firstthings.com/article/2021/03/foucaults-principalities-powers.

doctrines, and beliefs. This is a problematic distinction given that, since the times of Augustine, the Church has understood that the law of prayer establishes the law of belief.[16] The Catholic notion of *lex orandi, lex credendi* implies that one cannot draw such a clear distinction between belief and practice. They both inform one another and this is something Foucault pays little attention to.

In a way, Foucault should have known better. Part of what makes reading him so fascinating is his ability to draw connections between discourses and practices. In what follows, I do not attempt to Christianize Foucault or make him out to be a theologian against his will. Foucault is interested in Christian practices and Christian practices, whether Foucault was aware of them or not, presuppose a theology. My aim is to draw out some of this implicit theology, make it explicit, and see what can be learned from it.

In the first chapter, I will focus on four aspects of Foucault's philosophy: the soul, power, finitude, and the outside. The second chapter will be dedicated almost entirely to Foucault's interpretation of Augustine. In the third chapter, I will import some philosophical resources from Charles Taylor, Jean-Luc Marion, and Jean-Louis Chrétien in order to facilitate a theological dialogue with Foucault. In the concluding chapter, I will propose that Foucault's interpretation of Augustine can be useful for a theological anthropology of fragility. In a few words, this means that, by being a fragile subject, the Christian account of the self is marked by conversion, openness towards others, and gratuitousness.

[16] "*...ut legem credendi lex statut supplicandi*" in Prosper Aquitanus, *S. Prosperi Aquitani Liber Cui Titulus Praeteritorum Sedis Apostolicae Episcoporum Auctoritates, De Gratia Dei Et Libero Voluntatis Arbitrio*, vol. 51, Patrologia Latina (Paris, FR, 1846), col. 209C.

Chapter 1

Foucault

Introduction

In this chapter, I will explore four Foucauldian themes: the soul, power, finitude, and the outside. All this will gravitate around an examination of the concept of the modern subject as analyzed by Foucault, which is characterized by a tension between the empirical and transcendental. Foucault understands the subject as a construct. Towards the end of this chapter, I will delve into Foucault's exploration of the notion of the outside and how it challenges the discourse of reflection and interiority. The purpose of analyzing these themes is to draw out the implications they have for Foucault's understanding of power, subjectivity, and knowledge production.

Soul

In a sense, it could be said that Foucault is a philosopher of the soul.

In *DP*, Foucault traces the history of the penitentiary system as it moved away from corporal punishment. The book begins with a lengthy and brutal description of the torture of Robert-François Damiens in 1757 for the attempted regicide of King Louis XV.[17] The contrast between this and our current mode of punishment leads Foucault to investigate "the disappearance of torture as a public spectacle"[18] and, more specifically, to ask why "the body as the major target of penal repression disappeared"?[19]

[17] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1977), 1.

[18] *DP*, 7.

[19] *DP*, 8.

A full recapitulation of *DP* is beyond the scope of this thesis. What is relevant, however, is one of the conclusions Foucault draws from his investigation. "The expiation that once rained down upon the body," writes Foucault, "must be replaced by a punishment that acts in depth on the heart, the thoughts, the will, the inclinations."[20] He then quotes the eighteenth-century French philosopher Gabriel Bonnot de Mably who articulates "once and for all" the modern principle of punishment: "Punishment … should strike the soul rather than the body."[21] In other words, the modern penitentiary system differs from its antecedent in that it seeks to punish the soul rather than the body.

This "history … of the punitive power would then be a genealogy … of the modern 'soul.'"[22] But, what does Foucault mean by *soul*? "It would be wrong to say that the soul is an illusion, or an ideological effect." Foucault explains that "on the contrary," the soul "exists, it has a reality, it is produced permanently around, on, within the body by the functioning of a power that is exercised on those punished." For example, "in a more general way," the soul is produced "on those one supervises, trains and corrects, over madmen, children at home and at school, the colonized, over those who are stuck at a machine and supervised for the rest of their lives." Foucault's understanding of *soul* is different from Christian theology in that it "is not born in sin and subject to punishment, but is born rather out of methods of punishment, supervision and constraint."[23]

The soul is thus an effect of power-knowledge. "This real, non-corporal soul is not a substance; it is the element in which are articulated the effects of a certain type of power and the

[20] *DP*, 16.
[21] *DP*, 16.
[22] *DP*, 29.
[23] *DP*, 29.

reference of a certain type of knowledge, the machinery by which the power relations give rise to a possible corpus of knowledge, and knowledge extends and reinforces the effects of this power." [24] Power-knowledge means that power cannot be separated from certain claims of knowledge. The modern soul exists as a specific historical configuration of this power-knowledge dynamic. Foucault sums it up by saying: "A 'soul' inhabits him and brings him to existence, which is itself a factor in the mastery that power exercises over the body. The soul is the effect and instrument of a political anatomy; the soul is the prison of the body."[25]

Foucault's use of Jeremy Bentham's idea of the panopticon helps to illustrate some of this. The panopticon is a prison designed in such a way that the guards can monitor the inmates at all times. The prison cells encircle a surveillance tower placed in the middle from which the guards can see them, but they cannot see the guards. Later in the book, Foucault argues that other institutions, such as factories and schools, also follow the panopticon's design.[26]

The main point for us, however, is that the panopticon "automizes and disindividualizes power."[27] I will expand more on Foucault's understanding of power in the next section. The point that I want to make right now is that, for Foucault,

> the individual is … a reality fabricated by this specific technology of power that I have called 'discipline'. We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it 'excludes', it 'represses', it 'censors', it 'abstracts' it 'masks', it 'conceals'. In fact, power produces; it produces reality … The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production.[28]

In other words, the soul, which Foucault talks about, is an effect of power.

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[24] *DP*, 29.

[25] All the quotes in this paragraph come from *DP*, 29-30.

[26] "Is it surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons?" in *DP*, 228.

[27] *DP*, 202.

[28] *DP*, 194.

Commenting on Foucault's understanding of the soul, Judith Butler sees a connection with Aristotle. In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler writes, "for Aristotle the soul designates the actualization of matter, where matter is understood as fully potential and unactualized." To support this, Butler quotes the following passage from Aristotle's *De Anima*: "we can dismiss as unnecessary the question whether the soul and the body are one: it is as though we were to ask whether the wax and its shape are one, or generally the matter of a thing and that of which it is the matter."[29]

With regard to this, Butler points out that the Greek word for *shape* is *σχῆμα* or *schema*. Butler explains, "*schema* means form, shape, figure, appearance, dress, gesture, figure of a syllogism, and grammatical form." Butler goes on to argue that "if matter never appears without its schema, that means that it only appears under a certain grammatical form and that the principle of its recognizability, its characteristic gesture or usual dress, is indissoluble from what constitutes its matter." From this, Butler concludes that "in Aristotle, we find no clear phenomenal distinction between materiality and intelligibility."[30] Butler goes on to write that

> we might historicize the Aristotelian notion of the schema in terms of culturally variable principles of formativity and intelligibility. To understand the schema of bodies as a historically contingent nexus of power/discourse is to arrive at something similar to what Foucault describes in *Discipline and Punish* as the 'materialization' of the prisoner's body.[31]

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[29] Aristotle, "On the Soul," 412a27-412b9 in *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, trans. J. A. Smith, Past Masters, vol. 1, 2 vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 656. Greek text reads: "*Διὸ καὶ οὐ δεῖ ζητεῖν εἰ ἕν ἡ ψυχὴ καὶ τὸ σῶμα, ὥσπερ οὐδὲ τὸν κηρὸν καὶ τὸ σχῆμα, οὐδ' ὅλως τὴν ἑκάστου ὕλην καὶ τὸ οὗ ἡ ὕλη*" in Aristotle, *De l'âme*, ed. A. Jannone, trans. E. Barbotin (Paris, FR: Les Belles Lettres, 1966), 30.

[30] All the J. Butler quotes in this paragraph come from Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits Of "Sex"* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1993), 32-33.

[31] Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 33.

According to Butler, Foucault suggests that the meaning of the body is not reducible to its materiality; the body is also shaped by power and control. The soul – as an effect of power – is used to control and shape the body and becomes a way of controlling and molding the body.[32] Butler sees here a similarity between Aristotle and Foucault. Like Aristotle, the soul is, for Foucault, a *σχῆμα*. "The soul described by Foucault as an instrument of power, forms and frames the body, stamps it, and in stamping it, brings it into being."[33] The Foucauldian scholar Jeremy Carrette sums it up by saying that "what Butler enables us to see through her comparative study of Aristotle and Foucault is the way the materiality of the body is not separable from the 'schema' of power relations that form it … The idea of the soul is the recognition that a conceptual world shapes life."[34] For Foucault, the soul cannot be thought apart from subjugation. To be a subject is to be subjugated.

In summary, *DP* traces the history of the penitentiary system from corporal punishment to a system of punishment that "acts in depth on the heart, the thoughts, the will, the inclinations." According to Foucault, the soul is produced by the functioning of a power that is exercised on those punished. The modern soul exists as a specific historical configuration of power-knowledge.

[32] "At times it appears that for Foucault the body has a materiality that is ontologically distinct from the power relations that take that body as a site of investments. And yet, in *Discipline and Punish*, we have a different configuration of the relation between materiality and investment. There the soul is taken as an instrument of power through which the body is cultivated and formed. In a sense, it acts as a power-laden schema that produces and actualizes the body itself." in Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 33.

[33] Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 34.

[34] Carrette, *Foucault and Religion*, 125.

Power

It is worth considering now what Foucault means by *power*. For Foucault, power is not only prohibitive, but productive.[35] In fact, he is predominantly concerned with the latter. "Let us not, therefore, ask why certain people want to dominate, what they seek, what is their overall strategy. Let us ask, instead, how things work at the level of ongoing subjugation, at the level of those continuous and uninterrupted processes which subject our bodies." He is not interested in "how the sovereign appears to us in his lofty isolation," but in discovering "how it is that subjects are gradually, progressively, really and materially constituted through a multiplicity of organisms, forces, energies, materials, desires, thoughts etc." In short, Foucault views "subjection in its material instance as a constitution of subjects."[36]

The subject is "a result of the effects of power."[37] Again, "power is not to be taken to be a phenomenon of one individual's consolidated and homogeneous domination over others" but rather "as something which circulates … It is never localised here or there … Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organisation." Power, according to Foucault, is amorphous and without a subject. Instead of being wielded by an autonomous subject, it creates subjects by producing certain kinds of subjectivities. "The individual … is not the *vis-à-vis* of power; it is, I believe, one of its prime effects."[38] Different conditions of power create different kinds of self-understanding.

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[35] "I would like to … search instead for instances of discursive production … of the production of power (which sometimes have the function of prohibiting)." in Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality 1: The Will to Knowledge*, trans. Robert Hurley (London, UK: Penguin Books, 2020), 12.

[36] All from Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, trans. Colin Gordon et al. (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1980), 97.

[37] *Power/Knowledge*, 98.

[38] The preceding quotes come from *Power/Knowledge*, 98.

Michel Foucault's understanding of power goes beyond the traditional notion of domination and control. Foucault sees power as a productive force that shapes and creates subjects, rather than simply repressing them. His focus is not on the intentions of those who might be said to have power, but on the continuous and ongoing processes that subject our bodies to power. The soul is an effect. Subjugation creates subjectivity.

Finitude

With regard to subjectivity, some attention needs to be paid to Foucault's "analytic of finitude."[39] Jean-Luc Marion provides a decent approximation of Foucault's argument.[40] In philosophy, from Kant onwards, "the *I* can legitimately exert its noetic primacy only by assuming a transcendental status, but this status necessarily separates it from its empiricalness."[41] In other words, the notion of the modern post-Kantian subject (which Foucault calls "man" in *OT*) is the contradiction between a transcendental subject (the *I* as the unity of apperception) and an empirical subject/object (the *I* as an observable entity in the world). The contradiction lies in that the separation between the transcendental and the empirical means that the transcendental *I* "would not individualize me, would no longer exist in space and time and would not open onto any other subjects." From this, it follows that "the transcendentality of the *I*, on the one hand, leaves it without ontic determination (*I* is nobody) and, on the other hand, separates it from itself (an *I* foreign to the empirical *I*)." This division between the transcendental and the empirical is present, in one way or another, throughout modern philosophy from Kant to Heidegger.

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[39] See Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1994), 312-43.

[40] Jean-Luc Marion, "The Other First Philosophy and the Question of Givenness," trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky, *Critical Inquiry* 25, no. 4 (1999): 789-90.

[41] Marion, "The Other First Philosophy," 789.

Furthermore, there is another problem: "knowledge," according to this model, "would be deployed according to an anonymous process, with neither origin nor subject." "In an empirical mode," the subject would only be able to think "what is proposed to thought, formally or structurally."[42] This means that "the empirical ego is limited to repeating the thinkable … It is thought in me, who officiates behind the scenes, without initiating or mastering the thought."[43] According to Marion, this argument "is as much Nietzsche's as Foucault's."[44]

In *OT*, Kant exemplifies the epistemic change that took place in the Modern era. "The Kantian critique," according to Foucault, "marks the threshold of our modernity"[45] by grounding our capacity for representation on the transcendental subject. Kant opened the door for a modern subjectivity in which the human being can be understood both as an empirical object and a transcendental subject. For Foucault, this places the modern subject in a state of tension. The "human sciences are based on a paradoxical relationship to man's finitude, because the subject is ultimately dispossessed in language and social practices which exceed him, yet his concrete, lived and socially situated experiences constitute the grounds for the positivity of knowledge."[46] In other words, the modern subject is limited as an object of study, yet is, at the same time, what makes such a field of study possible. The modern subject inhabits the tension of being both constructed by discourse and the constructor of discourse. According to Foucault, "man," in this modern sense, "is an invention of recent date" and maybe one day will "be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea."[47] This argumentation leads Foucault to reject

[42] Marion, "The Other First Philosophy," 789.
[43] Marion, "The Other First Philosophy," 790.
[44] Marion, "The Other First Philosophy," 790.
[45] *OT*, 242.
[46] Dominika Partyga, "Foucault, Truth and the Death of God," *Four by Three*, 2016, https://christine-jakobson.squarespace.com/issue/nihilism/foucault-truth-and-the-death-of-god.
[47] *OT*, 387.

phenomenology and along with it any philosophical system that posits some form of human essence.

"The Thought of the Outside"

"The Thought of the Outside" (1966) is the title of one of Foucault's early literary essays. It is devoted to the French author and literary theorist Maurice Blanchot. In many ways, the title of this essay encapsulates Foucault's philosophical gesture: thinking the outside, such as the outside of reason (madness) or the outside of normalcy (deviancy).

Yet the outside Foucault is concerned with is not just this. The outside he invokes is the opposite of the discourse of reflection and interiority. In this essay, he speaks of "the necessity of converting reflexive language. It must be directed not toward any inner confirmation – not toward a kind of central, unshakable certitude – but toward an outer bound where it must continually content itself."[48] This is what he finds in Blanchot's works. "To negate one's own discourse, as Blanchot does, is to cast it ceaselessly outside of itself, to deprive it at every moment not only of what it has just said, but of the very ability to speak."[49]

A brief recourse to Stéphane Mallarmé (who is also mentioned in the essay) might help to clarify some of what Foucault means here. The French poet Paul Valéry once recounted a conversation he had with Mallarmé, in which the latter said: "It is not with ideas that one writes verses… It is with words."[50] What is meant here is that language (in this case poetic and literary language) is not about expressing one's interiority (or ideas). Rather, in a somewhat

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[48] Michel Foucault, "The Thought of the Outside," in *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, trans. Brian Massumi, vol. 2, Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984 (New York, NY: The New Press, 1998), 152.

[49] Foucault, "Thought of the Outside," 152.

[50] "*Ce n'est point avec des idées que l'on fait des vers… C'est avec des mots.*" in Paul Valéry, "Degas, danse, dessin," in *Œuvres II*, ed. Jean Hytier, EPUB, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris, FR: Gallimard, 1960). My translation.

counter-intuitive way, poetry is the vehicle for language to speak itself. Words do not derive their meanings from a subject's intentions. Foucault interprets Blanchot along the same lines as Mallarmé's phrase. The outside is the outside of the subject:[51] "a language spoken by no one: any subject it may have is no more than a grammatical fold."[52] Blanchot, among others,[53] gave Foucault the impetus to think outside the language of subjectivity.

It is worth noting that, in this same essay, Foucault talks about Pseudo-Dionysius. Regarding this thought of the outside, Foucault says: "one might assume that it was born of the mystical thinking that has prowled the confines of Christianity since the texts of Pseudo-Dionysus."[54] Foucault briefly considers that this thought of this outside might be a form of "negative theology." But he quickly discards that connection by saying that "nothing is less certain: although this experience [negative theology] involves going 'outside of oneself,' this is done ultimately in order to find oneself, to wrap and gather oneself in the dazzling interiority of a thought that is rightfully Being and Speech, in other words, Discourse, even if it is the silence beyond all language and the nothingness beyond all being."[55] This passing reference to Pseudo-Dionysius says a lot about Foucault's early (and perhaps even later) views of Christian

[51] "A thought that stands outside subjectivity, setting its limits as though from without, articulating its end, making its dispersion shine forth, taking in only its invincible absence; and that, at the same time, stands at the threshold of all positivity, not in order to grasp its foundation or justification but in order to regain the space of its unfolding, the void serving as its site, the distance in which it is constituted and into which its immediate certainties slip the moment they are glimpsed – a thought that, in relation to the interiority of our philosophical reflection and the positivity of our knowledge, constitutes what in a phrase we might call 'the thought of the outside." in Foucault, "Thought of the Outside," 150.

[52] Foucault, "Thought of the Outside" 166.

[53] See his essay on Georges Bataille: Michel Foucault, "A Preface to Transgression," in *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon, vol. 2, Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984 (New York, NY: The New Press, 1998), 69-88.

[54] Foucault, "Thought of the Outside," 150.

[55] Foucault, "Thought of the Outside," 150.

theology. According to Foucault, theology, even in its apophatic strand, is a discourse of interiority, of finding oneself.

Conclusion

Foucault's insights challenge traditional notions of power as domination and control, showing how power is a productive force that shapes and creates subjects. For Foucault, the modern subject is a contingent construct and an empirico-transcendental contradiction, incapable of accounting for its own finitude. Foucault's philosophy is concerned with exploring the outside of modern subjectivity, challenging the notion of a ready-made inner self. The next chapter will focus on how Foucault's analysis of power, subjectivity, and the construction of the self plays out in his engagement with Augustine.

Chapter 2

Foucault and Augustine

Introduction

In this chapter, I will explore Foucault's writings on Christianity, specifically his interest in the theme of confession and its connection to his *History of Sexuality*. Foucault argues that confession produces a particular kind of subjectivity within a power relationship all the while challenging the notion of an inner self. Despite largely omitting Augustine's *Confessions*, Foucault engages deeply with Augustine's other works in his fourth volume of the *History of Sexuality*. In this book, *Confessions of the Flesh*, Foucault analyzes Augustine's moral theology of sexuality, exploring the concept of sexual desire and the kinds of subjectivities it creates.

Confession

Confession (*aveu*) is a constant theme throughout Foucault's writings on Christianity. It is connected to his *History of Sexuality*. "I would like to … look at the history of the confession of sexuality Under what conditions and according to what ritual was a certain obligatory and forced discourse, the confession of sexuality, organized amid other discourse on sexuality?"[56] This he largely treats in *HS1*. There, he gives a lengthy description of how he understands *confession*.

> The confession is a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement; it is also a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile; a ritual in which the truth is corroborated by the obstacles and resistances it has had to surmount in order to be formulated; and finally, a ritual in which the expression alone, independently of its external consequences, produces intrinsic modifications in the person who articulates it: it

[56] Michel Foucault, *Abnormal*, ed. Valerio Marchetti and Antonella Salomoni, trans. Graham Burchell, Lectures at the Collège de France 1974-1975 (London, UK: Verso, 2003), 170-71.

> exonerates, redeems, and purifies him; it unburdens him of his wrongs, liberates him, and promises him salvation.[57]

In short, confession is a practice that produces a certain kind of subjectivity within a power relationship. Due to its confessional practice, in *HS1*, Foucault attributes to Christianity "the transformation of sex into discourse."[58] This matters because it fits within the larger scope of *HS1*, which is to undermine the notion that there is an inner self to which sexuality gives expression.

Foucault considers the notion of a *nature within* as an illusion that arose with the Christian practice of confession.[59] This is partly what is behind Foucault's critique of the "repressive hypothesis" in *HS1*.[60] By "repressive hypothesis," Foucault refers to the discourse that social norms repressed sexuality before the twentieth century, specifically during the Victorian era. Furthermore, this hypothesis contains the discourse that we, moderns, live in an age of freedom from sexual repression. If Foucault objects to this hypothesis, it is because it postulates an inner self that needs to be liberated. Against this, Foucault views subjectivity, not as an essence, but, along the lines of power, as a product or creation. An inner essence whose truth must be expressed leads the modern subject to view herself as an enigma to be deciphered. Sexology, as a field of knowledge, exists to help modern subjects decipher themselves as sexual beings. "What is the response on the side of power?" asks Foucault.

> An economic (and perhaps also ideological) exploitation of eroticisation, from sun-tan products to pornographic films. Responding precisely to the revolt of the body, we find a new mode of investment which presents itself no longer in the form of control by repression but that of control by stimulation. 'Get undressed – but be slim, good-looking, tanned!'[61]

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[57] *HS1*, 61-62.
[58] *HS1*, 61.
[59] Paraphrase of Charles Taylor, "Foucault on Freedom and Truth," *Political Theory* 12, no. 2 (1984): 160.
[60] See *HS1*, 10-12.
[61] Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 57.

Charles Taylor sums up Foucault's argument by stating that "the notion that we have a sexual nature is itself a product of those modes of knowledge designed to make us objects of control." We become objects of control because we need to find our authentic sexual nature "and finding it requires the help of experts, requires that we put ourselves in their care, be they the priests of old or the psychoanalysts or social workers of today."[62]

In short, Foucault's analysis is concerned not so much with finding an inner essence, but with how different subjectivities are fashioned. Another way of stating this is that he is interested in interiority insofar as it is produced by the discursive practices of a given epoch. The Christian practice of confession is responsible, according to Foucault, for "transforming sex into discourse."[63] This eventually led to the "medicalization … of confession … recodified as therapeutic operations."[64] In other words, confession paved the way for therapeutic practices, such as psychoanalysis, that use sexuality to uncover some form of truth within. The history of these practices and discourses is what Foucault interrogates in *HS1*.

Foucault continues his analysis of confession throughout the *History of Sexuality* to the point that the last volume is subtitled *Confessions of the Flesh*. The word *flesh* in the title refers to the "formation of a new experience" understood as a "mode of knowledge and transformation of oneself by oneself, depending on a certain relationship between a nullification of evil and a manifestation of truth."[65] In other words, the early Church Fathers developed a series of

[62] These last two quotes come from Taylor, "Foucault on Freedom and Truth," 160-61.
[63] *HS1*, 20.
[64] *HS1*, 67
[65] Michel Foucault, *Confessions of the Flesh: The History of Sexuality 4*, ed. Frédéric Gros, trans. Robert Hurley (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2021), 36.

techniques, based upon an interrogation of the flesh, in order to discover the truth of oneself and to reject what hinders that. The flesh became a place of knowledge.

HS4 begins by stating that the Church Fathers did not really invent any new restrictions in matters of sexuality.[66] They largely inherited Stoic and Ancient Greek regulations. "The *aphrodisia* regime, defined in terms of marriage, procreation, a disqualification of pleasure, and a respectful and intense bond of sympathy between spouses … would have migrated, as it were, into Christian thought and practice, from pagan milieus whose hostility Christians needed to disarm by displaying forms of conduct that pagans already recognized and valued highly."[67] He mentions Justin Martyr and Athenagoras as examples of this.[68] With this background, Foucault is interested in the specific transformations carried out by the early Christians in their appropriation of these "pagan" norms.

Much of the first part of *HS4* concerns the ritual of baptism as a rupture within one's life. *Μετάνοια* (lit. change of mind) is another way of understanding this life rupture. *Metanoia* "constitutes a complex act that is the soul's movement acceding to truth, and the manifested truth of this movement."[69] Baptism manifests this passage by bringing together conversion and repentance. "As many as are persuaded and believe that what we teach and say is true, and

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[66] The following paragraphs owe some of their content to José Dueño, S.J., "A New Academic Opus from a Once-Familiar Name: Foucault," *America Magazine*, 2018, https://www.americamagazine.org/arts-culture/2018/10/10/new-academic-opus-once-familiar-name-foucault.

[67] *HS4*, 3.

[68] To support this, Foucault quotes the following passages: (1) "Whether we marry, it is only that we may bring up children; or whether we decline marriage, we live continently" in Justin Martyr, *The First Apology*, § 29, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. Marcus Dods and George Reith, vol. 1, Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885), http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0126.htm. (2) Addressing the Stoic emperor Marcus Aurelius, Athenagoras writes: "We despise the things of this life, even to the pleasures of the soul, each of us reckoning her his wife whom he has married according to the laws laid down by us, and that only for the purpose of having children." in Athenagoras, *A Plea for Christians*, § 33, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. B.P. Pratten, vol. 2, Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885), http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0205.htm.

[69] *HS4*, 41.

undertake to be able to live accordingly, are instructed to pray and to entreat God with fasting, for the remission of their sins that are past," writes Justin Martyr, "then they are brought by us where there is water, and are regenerated."[70] "The text is clear," writes Foucault, commenting on this passage, "he who receives baptism, who becomes a child of choice and science, and whose sins are pardoned, is one who has not only received the teaching and desires rebirth, but also repents."[71] "*Metanoia* and *paenitentia*," concludes Foucault, "are central in baptism."[72]

But, what happens to those already baptized who, nonetheless, sin again? Foucault answers this by closely reading a passage from *The Shepherd of Hermas* where Hermas tells an angel that "some teachers maintain that there is no other repentance than that which takes place, when we descended into the water and received remission of our former sins." To which the angel replies: "That was sound doctrine which you heard; for that is really the case. For he who has received remission of his sins ought not to sin any more, but to live in purity." However, the angel later adds a qualification.

> For the Lord, knowing the heart, and foreknowing all things, knew the weakness of men and the manifold wiles of the devil, that he would inflict some evil on the servants of God, and would act wickedly towards them. The Lord, therefore, being merciful, has had mercy on the work of His hand, and has set repentance for them; and He has entrusted to me power over this repentance. And therefore I say to you, that if any one is tempted by the devil, and sins after that great and holy calling in which the Lord has called His people to everlasting life, he has opportunity to repent but once.[73]

Commenting on this passage, Foucault writes: "This text has long passed as proof that, in early Christianity, no other repentance existed than that of baptism, and as evidence that in the middle

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[70] Justin Martyr, *The First Apology*, § 61.
[71] *HS4*, 39 .
[72] *HS4*, 39.
[73] These quotation of Hermas come from The Shepherd of Hermas, *The Shepherd of Hermas*, Book II, Commandment 4, chap. 3, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. F. Crombie, vol. 2, Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885), http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/02012.htm.

of the second century a second recourse was established for already-baptized sinners: a single, solemn, unrepeatable recourse, from which would arise, through successive transformations, the penitential institution."[74] A second penance is thus required for those who, after having been baptized, fall into grave sins again.

Foucault traces the development of this "second penance" into two models. The first one is known, in Greek, as *exomologesis* and as *confessio* in Latin. This was a highly ritualized public manifestation of one's sins. The second model, *exagoreusis*, arose in the monastic milieu and entailed the practice of disclosing one's thoughts and actions to one's superior or spiritual director.[75]

One technique that became important within monastic *exagoreusis* was the examination of conscience. Once again, this is a practice that Christians inherited from the Stoics. Foucault mentions Seneca's *De ira* as the clearest formulation of this. "This was Sextius's practice," writes Seneca, "when the day was spent and he had retired to his night's rest, he asked his mind, 'Which of your ills did you heal today? Which vice did you resist? In what aspect are you better?"[76] This practice, as Foucault points out, was well-known to Christians. "It's at night," writes John Chrysostom, "when we are in bed, and no one is there to distract and bother us – that we need to bring our own conduct to account."[77]

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[74] *HS4*, 58-59.

[75] "L'*exagoreusis* signifie la mise en discours perpétuel de soi, de chacun de ses actes, mais aussi et surtout de chacune de ses pensées qu'il faut s'empresser d'aller dire, en privé, à son supérieur ou à son directeur." in Philippe Chevallier, "Michel Foucault et le « soi » chrétien," § 11, *Astérion* 11 (2013), https://doi.org/10.4000/asterion.2403.

[76] Seneca, "On Anger," 3.36.1 in *Anger, Mercy, Revenge*, trans. Robert A. Kaster (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), 91.

[77] Foucault quotes this on Foucault, *Confessions of the Flesh*, 101. It is from a homily of Chrysostom that does not seem to be translated into English. Here is the reference along with the French translation Foucault uses. "*C'est le soir, après notre repas, lorsque nous sommes couchés, et que personne ne nous trouble et ne nous inquiète, c'est alors qu'il faut nous demander compte à nous-mêmes de notre conduite, de ce que nous avons fait et dit pendant le jour; et si nous trouvons quelque chose de mal, il faut juger et punir notre conscience, attrister notre*

Despite its similarity, *exagoreusis* introduces a specifically Christian difference with regard to this Stoic practice. "The most salient aspect of *exagoreusis* is that it focuses not on past *acts* but on the *thoughts* that occur – which may happen to be the memory of an act committed or an act to be carried out."[78] In the Stoic examen, the emphasis was on exterior actions: what was done right or wrong. "if he takes up each of his weaknesses in turn, this is so that he might become fully in control of himself and no longer need to resort to another's help at a difficult time."[79] In other words, self-mastery was the goal.

In its Christian variant, the examen emphasizes the recognition and confession of one's thoughts. It seeks to uncover the nature of these thoughts: Where do they come from? What actions do they encourage? Am I being deceived? Foucault pays special attention to John Cassian in this context who says, for example, that "it is impossible for the mind not to be troubled by thoughts, but accepting them or rejecting them is possible for everyone who makes an effort;"[80] and, later on, also says, "we should know what the three sources of our thoughts are: They come from God, from the devil, and from ourselves."[81] Foucault characterizes this discernment as a spiritual combat in both an athletic and bellicose way: "insofar as it is athletic, the combat requires a certain way of relating to oneself. Insofar as it is warlike, it is a relation to

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coeur coupable, le reprendre avec une telle force, que, sensible à nos réprimandes, il s'en ressouvienne le lendemain, et n'ose plus nous précipiter dans le même abîme de péché." in John Chrysostom, "*Qu'il est dangereux pour l'orateur et pour l'auditeur de parler pour plaire, qu'il est de la plus grande utilité comme de la plus rigoureuse justice d'accuser ses péchés,*" in *Œuvres complètes*, trans. M. Jeannin, vol. 3 (Bar-le-Duc, FR: L. Guérin & Cie, 1864), https://www.bibliotheque-monastique.ch/bibliotheque/bibliotheque/saints/chrysostome/homt3/plaire.htm.

[78] Foucault, *Confessions of the Flesh*, CF 101.

[79] HS4, 82

[80] John Cassian, *Conferences*, 1.17.1, trans. Boniface Ramsey, O.P., Ancient Christian Writers 57 (New York, NY; Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1997).

[81] Cassian, *Conferences*, 1.19.1.

an irreducible element of otherness."[82] Christian self-examination and confession are thus not only a practice in self-mastery, but, more importantly, it is a practice of alterity.

But, who is this other? Cassian inherits from Evagrius of Ponticus the categories of the eight adversaries (or seven deadly sins as they are later known in Christian tradition). These outside thoughts come from demons or evil spirits of sorts. Foucault interprets this kind of discernment as "the need to detect the Other in the secrets of the soul."[83] This other can be God or demons. But the other can also be the figure of the spiritual director. "If *exagoreusis* recommends that one examine oneself without respite, this is not so that one might establish oneself in one's own sovereignty … It is always conducted in relation to the other."[84] This practice takes the "general form of a direction that submits the subject's will to that of the other; with the aim of detecting the presence of the Other, the Enemy, deep within oneself; and having as its final end the contemplation of God, in a complete purity of heart."[85] Whether they are evil spirits or the presence of the director, Foucault sees Christian subjectivity as constructed by discourses and practices outside the subject. Without reference to some figure of alterity, the subject cannot articulate, and thus create, the truth of herself.

Foucault further explores these themes of the construction of the self in relationship to the other in his treatment of Augustine.

[82] *HS4*, 174.
[83] *HS4*, 178.
[84] *HS4*, 110.
[85] *HS4*, 110.

Foucault's Augustine

Foucault's Omission of Augustine's Confessions[86]

Foucault's engagement with Augustine is, for lack of a better word, strange. Though he wrote extensively about the practice of confession, Foucault rarely cites Augustine's *Confessions*. In 2015, La Bibliothèque de la Pléiade released an edition of all the works Foucault published in his lifetime. According to this authoritative catalog, Foucault cited the *Confessions* only once. Beyond this, Foucault mentioned Augustine a mere seven times. In short, Augustine barely appears in Foucault's antemortem oeuvre.

However, references to Augustine abound in his posthumous texts, e.g., in his Collège de France courses. Almost a third of *Confessions of the Flesh* is devoted to Augustine. Yet, even in this book, which contains the idea of *confession* (*aveux*) in its title, Augustine's *Confessions* is absent from its bibliography. Aside from the *City of God*, Foucault tends to focus on Augustine's "minor" works about marriage, celibacy, and his controversy with the Pelagians.

The only time, in his main books, that Foucault cites the *Confessions* is in *HS2*. Here is the text:

> The *aphrodisia* are the acts, gestures, and contacts that produce a certain form of pleasure. When Saint Augustine in his *Confessions* recalls the friendships of his youth, the intensity of his affections, the pleasures of the days spent together, the conversations, the enthusiasms and good times, he wonders if underneath its seeming innocence, all that did not pertain to the flesh, to that 'glue' which attaches us to the flesh.[87]

To support this connection to *aphrodisia*, Foucault cites, in a footnote, Augustine's *Confessions*, book IV, chap. 8-10. In Book IV, Augustine covers many themes ranging from his

[86] This section draws from Ákos Cseke, "Foucault lecteur de saint Augustin," *Materiali Foucaultiani* 7, no. 13–14 (2018): 253–72.

[87] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality 2: The Use of Pleasure* (London, UK: Penguin Books, 2020), 40.

cohabitation with an unnamed woman to his critique of astrology. Most of it, though, is consecrated to his reflections on friendship. Augustine here talks about a longtime friend, the beauty of this friendship, and the sadness of his death.[88]

As Cseke points out,[89] Foucault only cites one word ("glue") from the *Confessions*. The full sentence, as it appears in *Confessions*, reads:

> Let my soul use these things to praise you, O God, creator of them all, but let it not be *glued* fast to them by sensual love, for they are going whither they were always destined to go, toward extinction; and they rend my soul with death-dealing desires, for it too longs to be, and loves to rest in what it loves.[90]

Here, Augustine reflects on the transcience of things in light of his friend's death.

Foucault, however, interprets it differently. As mentioned in the passage at the start of this subsection, Foucault interprets this *glue* as that "which attaches us to the flesh." He goes on to conclude from this that "it will be one of the characteristic traits of the Christian experience of the 'flesh,' and later of 'sexuality,' that the subject is expected to exercise suspicion often, to be able to recognize from afar the manifestations of a stealthy, resourceful, and dreadful power."[91] In other words, suspicion is at the heart of the Christian understanding of sexuality and "there is no similar suspicion inhabiting the experience of the [Greek practices of] *aphrodisia*."[92]

A full exploration of this enigmatic interpretation of the *Confessions* and of Foucault's overall avoidance of this text exceeds the scope of this thesis. Suffice it to say this serves as an example of Foucault's problematic use of Augustine. There are times, such as this instance, when

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[88] "[Augustin] y évoque un ami de jeunesse, la tendresse et la beauté de cette amitié … et surtout la profonde douleur que la mort de cet ami a causée dans son âme, une douleur que Dieu même ne pouvait consoler." in Cseke, "Foucault lecteur de saint Augustin," 259.

[89] See Cseke, "Foucault lecteur de saint Augustin," 259.

[90] Augustine, *The Confesssions*, 4.10.15, trans. Maria Boulding, O.S.B., Past Masters, vol. I.1, The Works of Saint Augustine (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1997).

[91] *HS2*, 41.

[92] *HS2*, 41.

Foucault treats Augustine almost as a straw man for all of Christianity. Moreover, Foucault's interpretation of this passage seems to imply that Augustine was suspicious of the "sensual" joys he felt with his friends. Be that as it may, read in its full context, the passage Foucault cites has less to do with being suspicious of forbidden pleasures than with the suspicion over the pains and sorrows of grief. Augustine says so almost explicitly: "Black grief closed over my heart … I had become a great enigma to myself, and I questioned my soul, demanding why it was sorrowful and why it so disquieted me, but it had no answer."[93] Grief sparks the soul to question itself because it poses a problem for memory. "He alone loses no one dear to him, to whom all are dear in the One who is never lost. And who is this but our God? … No one loses you unless he tries to get rid of you."[94] Foucault's lack of theological interest prevents him from seeing that Augustine wants to commit his friend to memory.

This is a theological issue because, as Jean-Louis Chrétien writes, "we are not unforgettable for ourselves and by ourselves, and to seek this for ourselves would be to render ourselves idolatrous; it would be to conduct ourselves into pure loss. But we are unforgettable for God, for his faithfulness is unwavering."[95] Memory for Augustine is not an act of self-will or self-assertion. It is rather the opposite. The "trinity of the mind," says Augustine, "is not really the image of God because the mind remembers and understands and loves itself, but because it is also able to remember and understand and love him by whom it was made."[96] As Chrétien says, "the alterity of God is inscribed unforgettably at the heart of our inwardness."[97] Returning to

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[93] *Confessions* 4.4.9.

[94] *Confessions* 4.9.14.

[95] Jean-Louis Chrétien, *The Unforgettable and the Unhoped For*, trans. Jeffrey Bloechl (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2002), 97.

[96] Augustine, *The Trinity*, 14.12.15, trans. John E. Rotelle, O.S.A., vol. I.5 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1997).

[97] Chrétien, *Unforgettable*, 95.

Foucault, Augustine is not really talking about forbidden pleasures, but about memory. It is unfortunate that Foucault misses this since memory, for Augustine, belongs to the outside of the subject, to the other, specifically, to God as the unforgettable.

All this to say, Foucault's exegesis of Augustine is at times flawed. Notwithstanding this, his exploration of some of Augustine's lesser known works does prove to be more insightful.

Augustine in the Confessions of the Flesh

As an aid to enter into *Confessions of the Flesh*, it might be worth looking into a 1980 seminar Foucault gave in New York with Richard Sennett (in English) titled *Sexuality and Solitude*.[98] Here, Foucault lays out the basic themes he will later develop in *Confessions of the Flesh*.

Foucault starts by focusing on Augustine's "horrifying description of the sexual act" seeing it "as a kind of spasm" which "paralyses all power of deliberate thought." Having said this, Foucault is surprised at Augustine's admission "that sexual relations could have taken place in Paradise before the Fall. This is all the more remarkable since Augustine is one of the first Christian Fathers to admit the possibility." This is important because it shows how humans lost control of their will after the Fall. In Paradise, humans, presumably, would have been able to exercise full control of their sexual relations. Adam "wanted to acquire an autonomous will, and lost the ontological support for that will." In wanting self-control, Adam lost the very self-control God had already given him.

[98] Since this edition of the seminar lacks page numbers, all the following citations from this seminar come from Michel Foucault and Richard Sennett, "Sexuality and Solitude," *London Review of Books*, 1981, https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v03/n09/michel-foucault/sexuality-and-solitude.

For Augustine, according to Foucault, the involuntary movement of the body, then represents a problem. "Sex in erection is the image of man revolted against God," explains Foucault. "The main question is not, as it was in Artemidorus, the problem of penetration: it is the problem of erection. As a result, it is not the problem of a relationship to other people, but the problem of the relationship of oneself to oneself, or, more precisely, the relationship between one's will and involuntary assertions." In other words, according to Foucault's summarization in *HS2-3*, Greek sexuality was more concerned with one's relationship with others via practices of moderation, *aphrodisian* usage of pleasures, or Stoic self-mastery. Augustine departs from all of this by focusing on the involuntary within the body.

This leads Foucault to conclude that the libido, or sexual desire, is the central problem for Augustine because it raises "the main issue of one's will." Foucault continues to explain,

> Libido is the result of one's will when it goes beyond the limits God originally set for it. As a consequence, the means of the spiritual struggle against libido do not consist, as with Plato, in turning our eyes upwards and memorising the reality we have previously known and forgotten. The spiritual struggle consists, on the contrary, in turning our eyes continuously downwards or inwards in order to decipher, among the movements of the soul, which ones come from the libido. The task is at first indefinite, since libido and will can never be substantially dissociated from one another. And this task is not only an issue of mastership but also a question of the diagnosis of truth and illusion. It requires a permanent hermeneutics of oneself. In such a perspective, sexual ethics imply very strict truth obligations. These do not only consist in learning the rules of a moral sexual behaviour, but also in constantly scrutinising ourselves as libidinal beings … In Augustine's analysis we witness a real libidinisation of sex.

"The Libidinization of Sex" is how Foucault titled the last section of *HS4*, devoted to Augustine. What he said in "Sexuality and Solitude" summarizes much of this section. To recapitulate, Augustine entertains the theological hypothesis that there were sexual relations in paradise. Adam (in particular) and Eve would have had, however, complete mastery over their bodies during sexual relations. There would not have been any libido (sexual desire). Because

they disobeyed God, their fallen lives will be marked by the disobedience of their bodies, specifically the sexual organs. The libido then poses a problem to the will. On the one hand, it gives rise to the involuntary and, on the other, it raises the question of whether one willfully consents to one's sexual desire or not. Hence, Augustine's moral theology of sexuality is ultimately a hermeneutics of the self where the task is to decipher and verbalize the truth of oneself and one's desire.

So far "Sexuality and Solitude" and *HS4* coincide. In "Sexuality and Solitude," however, Foucault does not quote Augustine. In *HS4*, Foucault quotes Augustine extensively and adds some nuances. In what follows, I will retrace Foucault's argumentation in this last section of *HS4*.

Foucault begins by briefly recapitulating what came before in the book. In Augustine, "the physical union of the sexes, when it takes place in marriage with procreation as its end, is, therefore, free of fault."[99] As Augustine writes, "it is wrong to have any doubt about the sinlessness of marriage."[100] If this is the case, says Foucault, can marriage "not be considered a good itself – a good originally placed by God and maintained after the Fall?" Can one "pass from the *bonum conjugale* to a *bonum sexuale*?"[101] In other words, can sexuality be considered wholly good within marriage?

What complicates things for Augustine is that sexual relations are always marked by the involuntary. Marriage itself does not eradicate involuntariness. As mentioned earlier, Augustine describes the sexual act as "a physical paroxysm that one cannot control."[102] For example, "so

[99] *HS4*, 256.

[100] Augustine, *The Excellence of Marriage*, 10.11, trans. Ray Kearney, Past Masters, vol. I.9, The Works of Saint Augustine (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1999).

[101] *HS4*, 256.

[102] *HS4*, 256.

possessing indeed is this pleasure, that at the moment of time in which it is consummated, all mental activity is suspended."[103] In his debate with the Pelagians, particularly with Julian of Eclanum, Augustine tackles the question of how to understand sexual relations within marriage in light of this problem.

According to Augustine, the Pelagians approached this problem by constructing a false alternative "between a Manicheism that denounces the evil inherent in the Creation, and their own thesis that sees relations between a man and a woman after the fall as simply the effect of a natural appetite."[104] In other words, Augustine sees the Pelagians as accusing him of being a crypto-Manichean of sorts, while they believe that sex in marriage is always good. The Pelagians thus have no need for the terms *libido* or *concupiscence*. Augustine rejects this dichotomy. As Foucault puts it, Augustine wants to answer: "Where is the dividing line once it's not a question of refusing all sexual acts because they're considered bad, and when it's not enough to say that one tolerates them as long as they take place within marriage?"[105] Augustine is interested in what separates both positions.

According to Julian of Eclanum, the "genus [of concupiscence] lies in the fire of life, its species in the movement of the genitals, its moderation in the marital act, and its excess in the intemperance of fornication."[106] Foucault expands Julian's argument. By genus and species, this concupiscence is created by God and therefore good. If the will follows God's design by getting married, then sexual desire remains innocent. "Only in regard to its excesses, that is when the

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[103] Augustine, *The City of God*, 14.16, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. Marcus Dods, vol. 2, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers 1 (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887), https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/120114.htm.

[104] *HS4*, 257.

[105] *HS4*, 258.

[106] Augustine, *Answer to Julian*, 2.13.26, trans. Roland Teske, S.J., Past Masters, vol. I.24, The Works of Saint Augustine (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1998).

intention is bad, can one speak of evil. So it is excess that defines what is blameworthy."[107] Two remarks: first, in a Foucauldian move *avant la lettre*, Augustine accuses Julian of resorting to a "clinical gaze" of sorts: "You divide, define, and discuss like a physician the genus, species, moderation, and excess of concupiscence."[108] Second, Augustine disagrees with Julian's account of excess, i.e. "that there can be a naturalness that, when it remains non-excessive, cannot be called bad."[109] In other words, Julian of Enclanum advocates for an ethics of non-excess: an act is good so long as it is not excessive. Augustine disagrees with this. Even in situations of (apparent) non-excess, there is still an excess of sorts (which Augustine locates within the will).

To develop his critique Augustine needs to account for how evil, as an excess, enters the sexual act and how this came to be after the fall. For this reason, he finds it necessary to reflect on Paradise as the "metahistorical event that reshaped the sexual act in its original form" prior to excess. This leads Augustine to develop a "theory of concupiscence" and morality "predicated on the notions of consent and use."

Foucault reconstructs the rest of Augustine's argument by focusing on Augustine's polemics with Julian of Eclanum and the Pelagians.[110] According to Augustine, sex in Paradise could only have taken four forms.[111] (1) Humans have sex whenever they desire it. (2) Humans

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[107] Paraphrase of *HS4*, 258.

[108] *Answer to Julian*, 2.13.26.

[109] *HS4*, 258.

[110] All quotes in this paragraph come from *HS4*, 259.

[111] "But decide for yourselves, you Pelagians, the sort of life that you would picture for those human beings in paradise, if no one had sinned and the goodness and fruitfulness of marriage had been preserved. Choose one of these four possibilities. Undoubtedly, they either would have had intercourse as often as they desired, or they would have held desire in check when intercourse was not necessary. Or passion would have arisen at a sign from the will, when chaste prudence foresaw that intercourse was necessary. Or without any passion present there at all, the sex organs would have in their proper activity obeyed without any difficulty the commands of the will, just as the other members do for their respective activities. Choose which one of these four you want. I suspect, however, that you will reject the first two in which passion is obeyed or resisted. For the moral excellence of that couple does not admit the first alternative, and their great happiness does not admit the second." in Augustine, *Answer to the Two Letters of the Pelagians*, 1.17.34, trans. Roland Teske, S.J., Past Masters, vol. I.24, The Works of Saint Augustine (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1998).

restrain their desire until the appropriate time. (3) Humans will their desire at the appropriate time. (4) Humans have sex without sexual desire in complete control of themselves. Augustine rejects the first two: the first because it makes the first humans the slaves of their own passions which would contradict the logic of Paradise; and the second because the pains of restraint would have deprived them of their paradisiacal happiness. Augustine concedes at times the third option, but it remains for him just that: a concession to his opponent.[112] Augustine prefers the fourth option which defines "the sexual relation in paradise as an act from which *libido* is excluded."[113] According to Augustine, "before sin those two human beings were able to control and command their genital organs for the procreation of children in the same way as their other limbs, which the soul moves for all kinds of action."[114] Commenting on this, Foucault says, "the sexual relation without *libido* is completely occupied by the volitional subject."[115] Sexual desire is thus the excess that enters into sexual relations after the fall and marks the "decisive point … where the involuntary suddenly usurps the place of the voluntary."[116] Sexual desire is the excluded excess.

Using Kantian terminology, Foucault sums up thus far by saying that the libido is *synthetically*, not *analytically*, tied to the sexual act. It is the "supplement that emerges beyond volition." In other words, for Augustine, sexual desire is not intrinsic to the sexual act as such, rather it was added on after the fall. By separating sex from desire, Augustine sketches out "the

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[112] That Augustine makes this concession is evident from the following passage: "I have never condemned all arousal of the genital organs 'categorically,' as you [Julian of Eclanum] say. But I condemned that arousal caused by the concupiscence as a result of which the flesh has desires opposed to the spirit." in *Answer to Julian*, 4.13.62.

[113] *HS4*, 160.

[114] Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, 9.10.18, trans. Edmund Hill, O.P., Past Masters, vol. I.13, The Works of Saint Augustine (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2002).

[115] *HS4*, 260.

[116] *HS4*, 262.

possibility of a 'government' of behaviors on a completely different basis than the alternative between abstinence and a more or less acceptance of sexual relations."[117]

Now, Foucault notes that this raises a crucial question: if sexual desire is independent, "how can this *natura* be imputed to the subject?"[118] In other words, if the *libido* comes from outside the subject, how can the subject be blamed for what happens within her? To answer this, Augustine has to clarify two relationships: first, the relationship between sexual desire and the soul ("which satisfies the principle of imputability") and, second, the relationship between sexual desire and sin ("which makes it possible to establish what can be imputed").[119]

With regard to the relationship between sexual desire and the soul, Augustine writes, "Our first parents fell into open disobedience because already they were secretly corrupted; for the evil act had never been done had not an evil will preceded it."[120] In other words, there was something (which Augustine calls "pride" or "undue exaltation") already in the will – and therefore in the soul – which led to the fall. Augustine continues,

> By craving to be more, man becomes less; and by aspiring to be self-sufficing, he fell away from Him who truly suffices him. Accordingly, this wicked desire which prompts man to please himself as if he were himself light, and which thus turns him away from that light by which, had he followed it, he would himself have become light — this wicked desire, I say, already secretly existed in him, and the open sin was but its consequence.[121]

Commenting on this, Foucault insists that "one mustn't imagine two regions separated by a border" within the subject, "what is involved is a will whose voluntary deviation from what maintains it in being allows it to exist in the element that tends to destroy it – the involuntary."[122]

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[117] The allusion to Kant and all quotes in this paragraph come from *HS4*, 266.
[118] *HS4*, 268.
[119] *HS4*, 268.
[120] *City of God*, 14.13.
[121] *City of God*, 14.13.
[122] *HS4*, 270.

Foucault points out that many Christian and Pagan authors had already associated sexual desire with the involuntary. But this involuntariness was usually catalogued as a kind of *pathos* "which, coming from the body, risked compromising the sovereignty of the soul over itself."[123] However, what makes Augustine unique is that he does not reduce concupiscence to a mere *pathos*, but rather makes it "the very form of the will, which is to say, of that which makes the soul a subject."[124] In other words, "it is not the involuntary as against the voluntary, but the involuntariness of volition itself: that without which the will cannot will, except precisely with the assistance of grace, which alone can liberate it from that 'infirmity' which is the very form of its willing."[125]

For Augustine, the will, even in paradise, is always *akratic* and fragile. The will is always already marked by a certain involuntariness insofar as it sometimes fails to will what it wants to will. It is not that there is the voluntary on one side and the involuntary on another, but that they are intertwined. For Augustine, the involuntary is the condition for the possibility of volition. Concupiscence and sexual desire are imputable to the subject in that they come from the ambiguity of the will, which is in the soul. Our will can escape concupiscence only by ceasing to be independent and by recognizing that it can will the good only due to the strength of something outside itself, which Foucault rightly names as grace. "The 'autonomy' of concupiscence is the law of the subject when it wills its own will. And the subject's powerlessness is the law of concupiscence."[126] In short, the quest for control results in its loss.

[123] *HS4*, 271.
[124] *HS4*, 271.
[125] *HS4*, 271.
[126] *HS4*, 271.

With regard to the relationship between sexual desire and sin, Foucault explains it by recourse to Augustine's teachings on original sin. "There cannot be … any birth without the sexual union of the parents," writes Foucault, "and that union, even when it takes place within marriage and in pursuit of ends that have been set for it, cannot be carried out without the involuntary movements that constituted, as we've seen, the first stigma of the fall."[127] By being the "chain linking all the sexual acts that cause the generations to be born," sexual concupiscence "is the medium for actualizing the original sin in every man."[128] Sexuality and subjectivity are connected for Augustine. "If every individual coming into the world is a concupiscent subject, this is because they spring from a sexual relation whose form necessarily includes … the involuntariness that bespeaks the punishment of the first transgression."[129] From this Foucault concludes that "the truth of man's subjective being is manifested in the very form to which every sexual act is submitted."[130]

Foucault contrasts this kind of concupiscent subjectivity with that of the Platonic tradition. In Platonism, "desire carries the mark of a division that sends everyone in search of a partner … so that the defect is the lack of the other."[131] For Augustine, the defect is "the degradation and the diminished being that are due to the transgression and that are marked in the subject itself by the physically involuntary form of its desire."[132] The libido is thus "how the involuntary form of the sexual act and the 'infirm' structure of the subject are bound together."[133]

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[127] *HS4*, 272-73.
[128] *HS4*, 273.
[129] *HS4*, 273-74.
[130] *HS4*, 274.
[131] *HS4*, 274.
[132] *HS4*, 274.
[133] *HS4*, 274.

Foucault extracts two concepts from his reading of Augustine: consent (*consensus*) and usage (*usus*).[134] Augustine's understanding of consent differs from that of other Church Fathers, like John Cassian for whom consent is the acceptance or rejection of a foreign object into one's mind. For Augustine, consent concerns the subject itself, whether one wills in a concupiscent way or not. Negatively phrased, non-consent is not the refusal of an object, but willing differently, in a non-concupiscent way.[135] Commenting on Romans 7:15[136] in *Answer to Julian*, Augustine says that "the desires of the flesh are not brought to completion in evil when the assent of our will is not given to them, and our will is not brought to completion in good, as long as there remains the movement of those desires to which we do not consent."[137] Foucault explains that "however strong the pressure of concupiscence, and precisely insofar as the latter is the form of the will … it cannot become an act without the very act of the will."[138] In other words, the will is marked by a certain *akrasia* or, in Augustine's language, concupiscence. Yet, the will is not merely a disposition. It is also our consent. Consent, understood as willing concupiscently, is what makes it possible to impute culpability to a subject. As an aside, even the current *Catechism of the Catholic Church* uses this Augustinian language of consent as a condition for imputability when it states that "mortal sin … implies a consent sufficiently deliberate to be a personal choice."[139] For Foucault, Augustinian consent "makes it possible to

[134] *HS4*, 277.
[135] See *HS4*, 279-80.
[136] "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate."
[137] *Answer to Julian*, 3.26.62.
[138] *HS4*, 278.
[139] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, § 1859, (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2003), https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM.

designate the subject of concupiscence as a subject of law."[140] In other words, it produces a juridical kind of self-understanding within the subject.

Other Christian writers had already employed the notion of *usus*, usage. For example, the "*usage of marriage*" referred to the legitimacy of "sexual relations between spouses."[141] However, Augustine complicates matters a bit. "In the sexual act between spouses, one doesn't simply use the right of marriage and the body of the other, one makes use of one's own concupiscence."[142] The problem then becomes how "can one avoid deducing that all marital sex is bad in itself" given that postlapsarian sexual relations "cannot take place without … concupiscence"?[143]

Augustine utilizes the notion of *usus* to save both propositions: that marriage is good and concupiscence bad. He does this by separating the movement of the libido and the act of will. "In the marital relation, while the unfolding of the sexual act is not modifiable in its concupiscent structure, the consent is modifiable."[144] This means that, during the sexual act, one can either consent to the satisfaction of one's concupiscence (i.e., "will that fallen form of willing") or "intend instead to engender children, intend to keep one's partner from falling into fornication."[145] As Foucault interprets it, *"usus* is thus a certain modality of the dynamic between consent and non-consent. It can set ends that are such that the subject won't will itself as a concupiscent subject at the moment it is committing an act whose conditions of accomplishment involve concupiscence."[146] In other words, sexual desire can be legitimately used as a means to an end,

[140] *HS4*, 280.
[141] *HS4*, 280.
[142] *HS4*, 280-81.
[143] *HS4*, 281.
[144] *HS4*, 281.
[145] *HS4*, 281.
[146] *HS4*, 281.

so long as one does not consent to it. In an interview with France Culture,[147] the editor of *Confessions of the Flesh*, Frédéric Gros, explains that using sexual desire without consenting to it, in a way, means for Augustine the refusal to reduce the other person to an object of sexual self-satisfaction. It is a way of saying that there is more to a sexual relationship than just sexual desire.

Foucault draws the following conclusions from this. In Augustine, a self-understanding based on desire (the subject of desire) and a juridical self-understanding based on imputation (the subject of law) coexist. Yet, "despite this unity of the subject, desire remains an evil and its usage remains independent," i.e., "it is possible to make an utterly non-concupiscent use of concupiscence, but the latter will not be done away with for all that."[148] If sexual relations were good in themselves, (as in Julian of Eclanum), then sex would be codified in a "morality of nature," whereby moderation is natural and behavioral excess counter-natural.[149] If sexual relations were intrinsically evil (as in Manicheism), then this would be an "ethics of purity" based on "complete continence."[150]

Augustine carves a different path. Sexual relations become a matter of self-examination. As Foucault writes:

> The problematization of sexual behaviors … becomes the problem of the subject. The subject of desire, whose truth can be discovered only by the subject itself in its innermost being. The subject of law, whose imputable actions are defined and separated into good or bad according to the relations it has with itself.[151]

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[147] Adèle Van Reeth, "Les aveux de la chair," Les Chemins de la philosophie, 2018, https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceculture/podcasts/les-chemins-de-la-philosophie/les-aveux-de-la-chair-5000317.

[148] *HS4*, 282-83.

[149] *HS4*, 283.

[150] *HS4*, 283.

[151] *HS4*, 284-85.

Though Ancient Christianity inherits many of the ascetical practices of the Stoics, Christianity departs from Stoicism by creating an "analytic of the subject of concupiscence," in which "sex, truth, and law are bundled together, by ties that our culture has tended to draw closer rather than loosen."[152] This last sentence from *Confessions of the Flesh* implies that Augustine's hermeneutics of the self paved the way for the confessional culture centered on the decipherment of one's sexuality which he criticizes in *HS1*.

Conclusion

Salvation in Non-Perfection

In his Collège de France course, *On the Government of the Living*, Foucault states that "Christianity is a religion of salvation in non-perfection."[153] He points out that "this was an extraordinarily difficult endeavor to realize at a time when, precisely, for most of the religious movements of the ancient world, of the Hellenistic and Roman world, the promise of salvation and access to perfection were profoundly and fundamentally linked."[154] This has some implications. First, Christian subjectivity is not reducible to self-mastery. Ascetical techniques certainly abound in Christian monasticism that resembles the quest for perfection. But this work of perfection operates within "a system of salvation in which Christ's sacrifice has already been accomplished."[155] Perfection is realized by Christ. Second, the Christian self is open and vulnerable. Christian subjectivity is marked by constant ruptures: baptism, confession, and constant self-examination.

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[152] *HS4*, 285.

[153] Michel Foucault, *On the Government of the Living: Lectures at the Collège De France 1979-1980*, ed. Michel Senellart et al., trans. Graham Burchell (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 259.

[154] Foucault, *On the Government of the Living*, 259.

[155] Foucault, *On the Government of the Living*, 259.

Whether it is confession or *parrhesia*, Michel Foucault is concerned with the practice of telling (creating) the truth of oneself. "There is no establishment of the truth without an essential position of otherness (*altérité*).[156] Truth is produced, never an inner essence, for Foucault. Yet, truth entails an other much like confession presupposes an addressee, i.e., someone to whom the confession is addressed. This means that the truth that one produces about oneself is made in relation to another person. The goal of this truth-telling is self-transformation. Foucault also sees this truth of oneself as conditioned by contingent social norms and discourses. This ties in with his larger denial of a transhistorical and transcendental subject. The modern, post-Kantian, subject "is a strange empirico-transcendental doublet, since he is a being such that knowledge will be attained in him of what renders all knowledge possible."[157] Foucault thinks this account of subjectivity is contradictory since it cannot reconcile how human beings have a history (the empirical subject) yet are at the same time what constitutes and found that history (the transcendental subject). Confession does not express a self, but rather creates it.

[156] Michel Foucault, *The Courage of the Truth: The Government of Self and Others II*, ed. Frédéric Gros, trans. Graham Burchell, Lectures at the Collège de France 1983-1984 (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 356.

[157] *OT*, 318.

Chapter 3

Philosophical and Theological Assessment of Foucault's Interpretation of Augustine

Having explored Foucault's understanding of subjectivity and power (chap. 1), and having seen how that informs his reading of Augustine (chap. 2), in this chapter, I will introduce three voices in order to extract some theological insights from Foucault's engagement with Christianity. These three voices are Charles Taylor, Jean-Luc Marion, and Jean-Louis Chrétien.

Charles Taylor is a Canadian philosopher who is best-known work for his historical analysis of secularism in his book *A Secular Age* (2007). Another of his important works is *Sources of the Self* (1989). Here he traces the history of modern subjectivity and devotes an entire chapter to Augustine. For Taylor, Augustine inaugurated what eventually became the modern turn towards inwardness, even though modernity has not always been that faithful to the full extent of Augustine's gesture.

Jean-Luc Marion is a French philosopher known for his phenomenology of givenness, which explores how we experience phenomena as being given to us. His phenomenological approach emphasizes the priority of love and gratuitousness in our encounters with the world. Within this chapter, I will pay special attention to his book titled *In the Self's Place*: *The Approach of St. Augustine* (2008).

Augustine figures prominently in the writings of another French philosopher, Jean-Louis Chrétien (1952–2019). By his own admission, his work concerns the "*excess* of the encounter

with things, other, world, and God."[158] He will be used here to reflect on Augustine's understanding of fragility.

The choice of these three might seem somewhat arbitrary and, to an extent, it is. The list of philosophers that have grappled with Augustine throughout the centuries is seemingly endless. Having said this, what guides my inclusion of these three philosophers is their openness to transcendence – an openness that Foucault's philosophy lacks. Due to this lack, a dialogue with other philosophical approaches becomes almost necessary if one wants to glean theological insights from Foucault. All three of them notice some of the same aspects that Foucault studies in Augustine. Yet they draw insights that Foucault, perhaps due to his lack of theological imagination, misses. I have chosen these three philosophers to (1) make explicit the implicit theology within some of Foucault's claims and (2) signal the theologically missed opportunities in Foucault.

A final note: there will be no formal conclusion to this chapter. The final chapter of this thesis will serve as a conclusion to this chapter and the rest of this thesis.

Charles Taylor

Taylor's most extensive treatment of Augustine is found in *Sources of the Self*.[159] He situates Augustine's picture of human subjectivity as a stepping stone between those of Plato and Descartes.

Taylor sees Augustine taking over Platonic themes such as the immateriality of the soul. The Ideas become the thoughts of God. The Platonic notion of participation is used to reinterpret

[158] Chrétien, *Unforgettable*, 121.

[159] See Taylor, Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 127-42. A lot of what follows in this section is a summary of these pages.

the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. "Created things receive their form through God, through their participation in his Ideas."[160] In other words, creation exists in an ontological dependence on God. This order of creation "merges with the great Johannine image of creation through the Word."[161] That the rational order of things is an expression of God means that, against Manicheanism, creation is fundamentally good and everything is oriented towards the good.

Augustine begins to diverge from Platonism in his treatment of love. Love replaces Plato's vision of the good. "A person's love determines the person's quality. Do you love the earth? You will be earth. Do you love God? What shall I say? That you will be God."[162] In other words, we become what we love. For Augustine, "there are two loves, that of the world and that of God."[163] These he names elsewhere as charity and concupiscence.

Taylor sees Augustine as taking the Platonic binaries of "spirit/matter, higher/lower, eternal/temporal, immutable/changing" and subsuming them into that of "inner/outer."[164] For Augustine, there is a distinction "between the outer and the inner man."[165] As Taylor explains, "the outer is the bodily, what we have in common with the beasts, including even our senses, and the memory storage of our images of outer things. The inner is the soul."[166]

The soul becomes the privileged way of encountering God. "Do not go outside, come back into yourself. It is in the inner self that Truth dwells."[167] As Taylor puts it, "inward lies the

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[160] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 127.
[161] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 127.
[162] Augustine, *Homilies on the First Epistle of John*, 2.14, trans. Boniface Ramsey, O.P., vol. I.14 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2008).
[163] Augustine, *Homilies on the First Epistle of John*, 2.8.
[164] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 128-29.
[165] Augustine, *Trinity*, 12.1.1
[166] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 129.
[167] Augustine, *True Religion*, 39.72, ed. Boniface Ramsey, O.P., trans. Edmund Hill, O.P. et al., vol. 1.18, The Works of Saint Augustine (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2005).

road to God."[168] God is not an object out there that we strive to see. Rather, God is the one who allows us to see the world in a certain way. God is "the basic support and underlying principle of our knowing activity."[169]

Philosophically, this marks a shift from a focus on objects in the world to the activity of the knower. Taylor calls this shift "radical reflexivity,"[170] which he contrasts with another kind of Ancient reflexivity. Augustine's approach differs from the Stoic care of the self, preferred by Foucault. The care of the self, whether Foucauldian or Stoic, amounts to a form of *ascesis* (e.g. detaching from worldly things to focus on "one's moral condition"[171]). Taylor recognizes the importance of this, even for Augustine, but he stresses that Augustine goes a step further.

Augustinian radical reflexivity is not so much an ascetical inventory of one's ethical behavior, but the development of a philosophy of the first-person perspective, almost like a proto-phenomenology. Instead of focusing on the things experienced, Augustine focuses on the act of experience itself. Taylor describes it in terms of "become aware of our awareness, try to experience our experiencing, focus on the way the world is *for* us."[172] This is different from the ancient or modern care of the self which is ultimately concerned with a form of health: the health of "our soul for the ancients," that of "the body for the modern."[173] Radical reflexivity is not necessary for these practices. One can presumably engage with these ascetical practices almost in a mechanical way, whether simply following the instructions of an ancient sage or modern

[168] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 129.
[169] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 129.
[170] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 130.
[171] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 130.
[172] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 130.
[173] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 131.

wellness expert. For Augustine, the deeper issue is not so much what we do, but the very way we see.

Taylor anticipates a sort of Foucauldian critique of this radical reflexivity. Augustine paved the way for the modern notions that there are "inner objects" only available to the first-person observer or that the "vantage point of the 'I think' is somehow outside the world of things we experience."[174] As seen in chapter one, Foucault is suspicious of these philosophies of the transcendental subject. However, Taylor argues that this critique misses the point of Augustine's originality which is that attention to the first-person perspective does not have to culminate in a reified subject. Rather, attention to the first-person point of view ultimately reveals another perspective, that of the second-person, that of the other, which in Augustine's language is God. For Augustine, "the step to inwardness … is a step towards God."[175]

Taylor shows that Augustine anticipates Descartes in many ways. I will depart a bit from Taylor's analysis and list two that are nonetheless related to his main argument. The first is the *Cogito*. Before Descartes, Augustine used the possibility of deception to formulate an argument for the certainty of one's existence.

> I am not at all afraid of the arguments of the Academicians, who say, What if you are deceived? For if I am deceived, I am. For he who is not, cannot be deceived; and if I am deceived, by this same token I am. And since I am if I am deceived, how am I deceived in believing that I am? For it is certain that I am if I am deceived. Since, therefore, I, the person deceived, should be, even if I were deceived, certainly I am not deceived in this knowledge that I am.[176]

One thing that Taylor does not point out and that is worth mentioning is the follow-up to this quote.

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[174] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 131.
[175] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 132.
[176] Augustine, *City of God*, 11.26.

> I add to them a certain third thing, namely, my love, which is of equal moment. For neither am I deceived in this, that I love, since in those things which I love I am not deceived; though even if these were false, it would still be true that I *loved* false things.[177]

In other words, the possibility of error cannot disprove the fact that there is a first-person perspective aware of that error. Even more so, falsity cannot disprove the act of loving. Love requires the first-person perspective.

This leads to the second aspect that Augustine anticipates from Descartes: the attention to alterity. In the third of his *Metaphysical Meditations*, Descartes brings God into his reflection. He does so by considering the notion of infinity. By surpassing all possible empirical conceptualization, infinity is a concept that could only have been given to us. This giver is God. "I must conclude that there is a *God*; for tho the *Idea* of *substance* may arise in me, because that I my self am a *substance*, yet I could not have the *Idea* of an *Infinite substance* (seeing I my self am finite) unless it proceeded from a *substance* which is *really Infinite*."[178] Standard interpretations of Descartes tend to focus on the validity of this proof of God's existence or whether this means there are innate ideas or not. However, contemporary philosophers such as Emmanuel Lévinas are right in pointing out the centrality of the other in this meditation. For Descartes, according to Lévinas,[179] God is the infinite and infinity shatters Western philosophy's tendency to think within the totality of closed systems. Infinity is irreducible to the sameness of the thinking subject. God, as irreducible infinity, appears as something/someone other than the thinking subject. This otherness grounds exteriority for Descartes. Lévinas uses this Cartesian

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[177] Augustine, *City of God*, 11.26.

[178] René Descartes, *Metaphysical Meditations*, III, trans. William Molyneux (Project Gutenberg, 2023), https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/70091/pg70091-images.html.

[179] Lévinas reflects on Descartes throughout *Totality and Infinity*, for instance: "The *cogito* in Descartes rests on the other who is God and who has put the idea of infinity in the soul." in Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague, NL: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1979), 86.

intuition to propose that ethics (understood as the relationship with the Other) is the point of departure, the first philosophy (*prima philosophia* as Descartes titles his *Meditations*), and not ontology.

Augustine anticipated this ethical turn. As Taylor puts it, "Augustine's proof of God is a proof from the first-person experience of knowing and reasoning. I am aware of my own sensing and thinking; and in reflecting on this, I am made aware of its dependence on something beyond it."[180] The self depends on the other who ultimately is, for Augustine, God. In the chapter following his proto-cogito argument, Augustine writes about God as "that spiritual light with which our mind is somehow irradiated, so that we can form right judgments of all things. For our power to judge is proportioned to our acceptance of this light."[181] God is the ground of self-knowledge.

God is, as Augustine writes in his *Confessions*, "more intimately present to me than my innermost being."[182] Taylor sees in this the "basis of Augustine's attempts to discern the image of the Trinity in the soul and its activity."[183] Though this assertion of Taylor needs to be qualified a bit,[184] it is true that Augustine frequently uses the triad of memory, intelligence/understanding, and will to explicate the Trinity. As Taylor explains,[185] by *memory*, Augustine refers to the unspoken knowledge of oneself that exists within the soul. Memory stores what the soul knows even if it is not currently being focused on or actively thought about. In order to fully understand

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[180] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 134.
[181] Augustine, *City of God*, 11.27
[182] Augustine, *Confessions*, 3.6.11.
[183] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 136.
[184] Augustine uses the triad of memory, understanding, and will as an *analogy* for the Trinity. But he explicitly resists any *literal* connection between the two. For example, "I don't say memory is the Father, understanding is the Son, will is the Spirit. I don't say it, however it may be understood, I don't dare to." in Augustine, Augustine, *Sermons, (20-50) on the Old Testament*, 52.23, trans. Edmund Hill, O.P., vol. 3.3, The Works of Saint Augustine (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1991).
[185] The remainder of this paragraph is a paraphrase of Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 136.

this knowledge, it must be consciously formulated. *Intelligence* refers to the process of making this inner knowledge explicit. To understand oneself it to love oneself, and this is where the *will* comes into play by engaging our desires.

Augustine's notion of the will deserves some attention as it is important both to Taylor and Foucault. As Taylor explains it,[186] for Augustine, the will both *determines* what we perceive and is *shaped* by what we perceive. This circularity of will is so that *akrasia*, often translated as *weakness of the will*, represents our human condition. Thus, alluding to Romans 7:15 ("I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate."), Augustine writes: "though a person may be delighted with God's law as far as his inmost self is concerned, how is he to deal with that other law in his bodily members which strives against the law approved by his mind."[187] Shaped as it is, "the perversity in the will can never be sufficiently explained by our lack of insight into the good; on the contrary, it makes us act below and against our insight."[188]

By treating our condition as an *akratic* one, Augustine diverges from his Greco-Roman predecessors. For the Ancient Greeks, *akrasia* was a philosophical problem. Socrates/Plato denied that one could ever act against one's perception of a good.[189] Aristotle devotes the entirety of book VII of his *Nicomachean Ethics* to *akrasia*, which he treats, among other possibilities, as an error of practical judgment. Augustine circumvents this by treating *akrasia* not as an empirical problem, but as a volitional one.

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[186] See Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 137-39.
[187] Confessions VII.21.27, pp. 181-82
[188] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 138.
[189] "(Socrates) It must follow that no one willingly goes to meet evil or what he thinks to be evil. To make for what one believes to be evil, instead of making for the good, is not, it seems, in human nature, and when faced with the choice of two evils no one will choose the greater when he might choose the less." in Plato, *Protagoras*, 358d, trans. Edith Hamilton, Plato: The Collected Dialogues (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961).

Taylor rightly points out that the Stoics already had introduced an aspect of this conception of the will.[190] The Stoic notion of *προαίρεσις* could be variously translated as *will*, *choice*, or even *consent*. For example, Epictetus writes, "the tyrant says to a man, 'I will chain your leg,' he who values his leg says, 'Do not; have pity:' but he who values his own **will** (***προαίρεσιν***) says, 'If it appears more advantageous to you, chain it.'"[191] The implication of this passage is that though one may be physically coerced, the will (*προαίρεσις*) need not consent. The will, here, is full voluntary assent. What is absent, however, as Foucault highlighted, is the notion of a fragile will where the voluntary and the involuntary coexist. This separates Epictetus from Augustine.

To recapitulate, Taylor's treatment of Augustine focuses on the relationship between human subjectivity and God. We encounter God inside. Our self depends on the other. Augustinian interiority differs from the Stoic one in that it interrogates the very act of seeing. This is also different from Platonic contemplation of the good. For Augustine, love is more fundamental than vision. Unlike Plato, Augustine does not attribute evil to a mere failure to see the good. Rather, evil inhabits the tension between both accounts of the will: as consent and as an *akratic* disposition. As the previous chapter showed, Augustine is very concerned about what we consent to. Though Taylor mentions Augustine's indebtedness to the Stoic conception of the will as consent, he dwells more on the will as *akratic* disposition.

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[190] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 137.

[191] Epictetus, *Discourses*, 1.19, trans. George Long, The Discourses of Epictetus, with the Enchiridion and Fragments (London, UK: George Bell and Sons, 1890), https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0236%3Atext%3Ddisc%3Abook%3D1%3Achapter%3D19.

For Augustine, there are two kinds of love: love of God and a misdirected kind of love. This misdirected love "allows for the possibility that our disposition may be radically perverse."[192] As Augustine writes,

> The will could not become evil, were it unwilling to become so … For its defections are not to evil things, but are themselves evil … The defection of the will is evil, because it is contrary to the order of nature, and an abandonment of that which has supreme being for that which has less. For avarice is not a fault inherent in gold, but in the man who inordinately loves gold.[193]

Self-enclosed radical reflexivity gives rise to evil and "healing comes when it is broken open, not in order to be abandoned, but in order to acknowledge its dependence on God."[194] In other words, for Augustine, we are heteronomous beings and the pretense of radical autonomy would be something to be suspicious of.

[192] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 138.
[193] Augustine, *City of God*, 12.8
[194] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 139.

Jean-Luc Marion[195]

Confession

Following Jean-Luc Marion's *In the Self's Place* can be helpful for assessing Foucault's interpretation of Augustine.

First, Foucault operates with a poor understanding of *confession*, reducing it to the role of confession of sins. This is true for Augustine, but, more than that, he means *praise*. In fact, Augustine himself explicitly says it: "The word 'confession' covers not only confession of sins but the offering of praise too."[196] Moreover, the *Confessions* begins with an act of praise. "Great are you, O Lord, and exceedingly worthy of praise."[197] An interesting feature of beginning in this way is that these words of praise are themselves taken from Psalm 47:2 ("For the LORD, the Most High, is Awesome").

Citations matter for Augustine as he himself says, commenting on Psalm 26:

> With regard to the words of this psalm … we cannot say simply that they are our words, because then we would need to be concerned whether we were telling the truth, for they are more properly the words of the Spirit of God than our own. On the other hand, if we deny that they are ours, we are lying … In this sense both statements are true: that it is our voice here and not our voice, that it is the voice of the Spirit of God and not his voice.[198]

In other words, this introduces a dimension of givenness into the act of praise. The words we use to praise are not self-created, reducible to an individual interiority. They are given to us from outside and we learn to praise with them, we find our voice with them. Again, the opening lines

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[195] This section follows Marion's interpretation of Augustine to extract certain insights from his writings on Augustine that are relevant for our assessment of Foucault's interpretation of Augustine.

[196] Augustine, *Exposition of the Psalms,* 144.13, ed. Boniface Ramsey, O.P., trans. Maria Boulding, O.S.B., vol. 3.19, The Works of Saint Augustine (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2003).

[197] Augustine, *Confessions*, 1.1.1.

[198] Augustine, *Exposition on the Psalms,* 26.2.1, trans. Maria Boulding, O.S.B., vol. 3.15, The Works of Saint Augustine (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2000).

of the *Confessions* exemplify this. "For to us ***you have indeed been preached***. My faith calls upon you, Lord, this faith ***which is your gift to me***, which you have breathed into me through the humanity of your Son" (emphasis added).[199]

Confession as praise is thus addressed to someone (God). This address is, however, a response to a word that has already been given us (by God): "praise as the hearing of a call."[200] Where does this leave the confession of sins? For Augustine, confession of praise and confession of sins are both connected. "Let me confess my disgraceful deeds to you, and in confessing praise you."[201] Confession of sins also implies a givenness, the reception of forgiveness. "In a spirit of thankfulness let me recall the mercies you lavished on me, O my God; to you let me confess them."[202]

Foucault is thus wrong in reducing the confession of sins to a mere juridical practice. Moreover, he ignores the fact that whenever Christians have been persecuted for their faith, they have been tortured not to make them confess, but rather "to make them *not* confess this faith."[203] Tertullian, a source Foucault deals with extensively in *HS4*, says so himself "When Christians, however, confess without compulsion, you apply the torture to induce them to deny."[204] Tertullian contrasts Christian confession with the non-Christian version. "Their [non-Christian] change from innocence to an evil disposition they even attribute to fate. They cannot say that it is not a wrong thing, therefore they will not admit it to be their own act."[205] Non-Christians do not

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[199] Augustine, *Confessions*, 1.1.1.

[200] Jean-Luc Marion, *In the Self's Place: The Approach of Saint Augustine*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), 27.

[201] Augustine, *Confessions*, 4.1.1.

[202] Augustine, *Confessions*, 8.1.1.

[203] Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 29.

[204] Tertullian, *Ad Nationes*, 1.2, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. Peter Holmes, vol. 3, Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885), https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/03061.htm.

[205] Tertullian, *Ad Nationes*, 1.1.

like to confess their faults or take responsibility for them. "As for the Christians, however, in what does their case resemble this? No one is ashamed; no one is sorry, except for his former (sins). If he is pointed at (for his religion), he glories in it; if dragged to trial, he does not resist; if accused, he makes no defense. When questioned, he confesses; when condemned, he rejoices."[206] Thus Marion writes, "the Christian usage reverses this juridical acceptation by constructing the sense of a glorious admission, not a shameful one, the voluntary proclamation of faith in Christ."[207] He continues: "the confession of faith of Christians thus offers the sole case of a testimony against oneself that nevertheless remains free and therefore honorable."[208] Augustine uses confession in both senses, of sins and of praise. To confess God is to confess oneself already addressed by God's mercy. "Even before confessing my sin, in fact, it is my finitude I must confess, so as to praise God on that basis."[209] The practice of confession signals our relational dependence on God. This notion of alterity is something Foucault only hints at but fails to develop fully.

Will

In Foucault's account of the will in Augustine, the notion of love, which Taylor stresses, is missing or at least not fully developed. If it is present, it is as erotic love between spouses. This is fine as a first approximation, but other facets are missing.

> Augustine does not think the will isolated from love.
>
> The foot of the soul is properly understood as love. When it is misshapen it is called concupiscence or lust; when it is well formed it is called love or charity. Love moves a thing in the direction toward which it tends. But the dwelling-place of the soul is not in

[206] Tertullian, *Ad Nationes*, 1.1.
[207] Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 28.
[208] Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 29.
[209] Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 30.

> any physical space which the form of the body occupies, but in delight, where it rejoices to have arrived through love.[210]

Love is a movement of the soul. Concupiscence and lust are misdirected forms of love; while charity is properly oriented love. Interestingly, Augustine says that the dwelling-place of the soul is not so much the localizable body, but delight. Rather than being some inner, immutable thing or substance, Augustine conceives the soul in more open terms, as a relationship, as a movement of love.

Now, for Augustine, "evil has no positive nature; but the loss of good has received the name 'evil.'"[211] Evil is not a substance, but privation. This means that evil has no efficient cause or causal agent. "Let no one, therefore, look for an efficient cause of the evil will; for it is not efficient, but deficient, as the will itself is not an effecting of something, but a defect."[212] Taylor is right when he distinguishes Augustine from Socrates/Plato and Aristotle. The problem is not so much moral ignorance or a failure in practical reasoning, but is located in the will itself. The problem is not one of a confused subject, but of a deficient subject. With regard to this, Foucault is correct. It is not that there are two mechanisms: the voluntary on one side and the involuntary on the other. It is that the will wills (in the sense of consenting to) that which it cannot fully control (what Foucault calls the involuntary within the voluntary).

The episode of the theft of the pears in the *Confessions* illustrates the dynamic between love and will. "I wanted to steal, and steal I did … There was no other **motive** (***causa***) for my malice except malice. The malice was loathsome, and I loved it. I was in love with my own ruin, in love with decay: not with the thing for which I was falling into decay but with decay itself."[213]

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[210] Augustine, *Exposition on the Psalms*, 9.15.
[211] Augustine, *City of God*, 11. 9.
[212] Augustine, *City of God*, 12.7.
[213] Augustine, *Confessions*, 2.4.9.

There was no outside cause, like hunger or need, for stealing the pears. The cause itself was love, albeit a misdirected one: love of malice. "Out of this scandal a light shines, however: willing, truly willing, whether it be the good or evil, means in the final analysis loving."[214] This will that truly wills (Foucault speaks more in terms of the will that fully consents) is love.

Truth

That Foucault misses this dimension of love matters because it is connected to the notion of truth. In the *Confessions*, Augustine asks, "why, though, does 'truth engender hatred?'"[215] He continues:

> Why does a servant of yours who preaches the truth make himself an enemy to his hearers, if the life of happiness, which consists in rejoicing over the truth, is what they love? It must be because people love truth in such a way that those who love something else wish to regard what they love as truth and, since they would not want to be deceived, are unwilling to be convinced that they are wrong. They are thus led into hatred of truth for the sake of that very thing which they love under the guise of truth. They love truth when it enlightens them, but hate it when it accuses them.[216]

Augustine associates truth with the desire for and the love of the happy life. "When they love the happy life, which is nothing else but joy in the truth, they are unquestionably loving truth also."[217]

The truth that Augustine refers to here is not truth in an objective, dispassionate, factual sense. Rather, truth is a relationship with a Person (Christ). It elicits a response, whether it is of love or hate, it illuminates and accuses.

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[214] Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 181.
[215] Augustine, *Confessions*, 10.23.34.
[216] Augustine, *Confessions*, 10.23.34.
[217] Augustine, *Confessions*, 10.23.33.

Subject

In a sense, Foucault is right in his skepticism concerning the discourse of inner essence. He is to an extent right in interpreting confession as producing subjectivity. However, his interpretation that Augustine leads to a subjectivity of desire (confession as articulating/creating the truth of oneself) and a juridical subjectivity of law (confession as a juridical mechanism of normalizing one's behaviors), both of these do not do full justice to Augustine.

Confession of sins cannot be separated from confession of praise. Foucault is correct in that confession implies alterity. For Foucault, we create ourselves by confessing to another. But, Augustine is not really creating his truth by confessing it. For Augustine, confession is not an act of creative self-assertion. Rather, it is first and foremost a response to the other (God). Foucault is right in that confession does not reveal an inner essence; but he redefines confession as a form of self-making. Augustine might agree that talk of an inner essence does not make much sense since, in isolation, we are unknowable to ourselves. However, what we are, our subjectivity, our sense of self, is given to us, from outside ourselves.

"The ego," for Augustine, according to Marion, "is not itself therefore by itself – neither by self-apprehension in self-consciousness (Descartes, at least in the common interpretation) nor by a performative (Descartes, in a less commonly accepted reading), nor by apperception (Kant), nor even by autoaffection (Henry[218]) or anticipatory resoluteness (Heidegger). The ego does not even accede to itself *for* an other (Levinas) or *as* an other (Ricoeur); rather, it becomes itself only

[218] Marion references here Michel Henry (1922-2002), a French philosopher whose phenomenological investigations centered on the topics of life, auto-affection, and, later on, Christianity.

by an other – in other words by a gift."[219] Augustine himself says so: "this too is your gift to me – that I exist."[220]

Augustine's insight is that we do not create ourselves. Rather, our self is a gift from God. In this sense, Marion is right when he says that, with regard to the *Confessions*, "we should no longer speak of autobiography but, strictly speaking, of heterobiography."[221] The *Confessions* is not so much the narrativizing of a pre-existing self, but the response of a lover to the beloved's call.

Jean-Louis Chrétien

Jean-Louis Chrétien offers another avenue with which to dialogue with Foucault's interpretation of Augustine and that is through the notion of fragility.

Chrétien points out that Augustine defines *flesh* in terms of *fragility*. "By the term 'flesh' we should understand human fragility."[222] Commenting on this, Chrétien explains that "the identification of the 'flesh' with human fragility manifests that it is not about the body, but about one's own will separated from that of God."[223] Augustine himself says so in the sentence following the citation above. "In this way one builds up the flesh of his arm who thinks that fragile and weak powers, that is, human powers, are sufficient unto themselves for acting well and who does not hope for help from the Lord."[224] Overall, Augustine's definition of flesh as

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[219] Jean-Luc Marion, *In the Self's Place: The Approach of Saint Augustine*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), 285.

[220] Augustine, *Confessions*, 1.20.31.

[221] Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 45.

[222] Augustine, "Grace and Free Choice," 4.6, in *Answer to the Pelagians, IV: To the Monks of Hadrumetum and Provence*, trans. Roland J. Teske, S.J., vol. 1.26, The Works of Saint Augustine (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1999).

[223] Paraphrase of "*L'identification de la « chair » et de la fragilité humaine manifeste qu'il ne s'agit pas du corps, mais de la volonté séparée de celle de Dieu.*" in Jean-Louis Chrétien, *Fragilité* (Paris, FR: Les Éditions de Minuit, 2017), 199.

[224] Augustine, "Grace and Free Choice," 4.6.

human fragility highlights the importance of relying on God's will rather than on one's own fragile power.

For Augustine, fragility is inscribed within our nature.[225] "And so I ask whence this nature has the ability to be broken (*fragilitas*) or to be bent (*flexibilitas*) before it is either broken to consent to evil or bent to it by persuasion."[226] The context of this sentence is Augustine's debate against the Manicheans who posited evil as a self-subsisting principle. Augustine believes that this cannot account for how a good person can become corrupted, unless that person were already corruptible. One must be *changeable* (fragile, flexible) in order to be changed. As Foucault and others have pointed out, for Augustine, only the will can consent to evil, even if it comes from outside.[227]

Christ assumed our frail condition to heal our fragility. "For now our Lord willed to come in humility to our weakness (*fragilitatem*) and the deep night-darkness of our hearts"[228] Now, having said this, Augustine was well aware that our fragility continues even after baptism (something Foucault notes without using the language of fragility). For Augustine the remedy for this fragility is the practice of forgiveness as exemplified in the Our Father. "If, however, your

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[225] "*Saint Augustin réfléchit sur la fragilité comme possibilité inscrite dans la nature même de l'être que l'on qualifie de « fragile ».*" in Chrétien, *Fragilité*, 189.

[226] Augustine, "Answer to Secundinus, a Manichean," 19.1, in *The Manichean Debate*, ed. Boniface Ramsey, O.P., trans. Roland J. Teske, S.J., vol. 1.19, The Works of Saint Augustine (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2006). The Latin original reads: "*Sic quaero, in ista natura unde sit quaedam uel* ***fragilitas*** *uel flexibilitas, antequam ad malam consensionem uel ui frangatur uel suasione flectatur.*"

[227] In this paragraph I paraphrase the following: "*L'horizon du débat est de montrer qu'aucun principe du mal, posé comme existant par lui-même, ne peut rendre compte, comme le pensent les manichéens, de la corruption d'un être bon, à moins d'admettre en ce dernier, comme une dimension préalable de son être, une corruptibilité. Pour changer sous l'action d'autrui, il faut être « changeable », et toute mutation suppose une mutabilité. Et c'est ma volonté propre, et ma volonté seule, qui me fait consentir au mal, vînt-il d'ailleurs, et lui donner en moi attention, accès, ouverture, puissance*." in Chrétien, *Fragilité*, 189-90.

[228] Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, 35.6, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. John Gibb, vol. 7, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1888), http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1701035.htm. The original Latin reads: "*modo enim ad* ***fragilitatem*** *nostram nocturnasque cordis nostri intimas tenebras humilis uoluit uenire dominus noster.*"

consciousness of frailty (*fragilitatis*) is biting you, and the abundance of iniquity everywhere in this life, then say, Forgive us our debts."[229] This "[demonstrates] clearly enough that in this life, all of which is a trial, no one should pride oneself on being entirely free from sin."[230] In other words, "the worst fragility is the pride that denies our fragility."[231]

Fragility is connected to confession of sins. "Begin by admitting your ugliness, the deformity of soul that results from sins and iniquity. Initiate your confession by accusing yourself of this ugliness, for as you confess you become more seemly. And who grants this to you? Who else but he who is fairer of form than any of humankind?"[232] In Chrétien's words, "the acute consciousness of fragility, which already belongs to grace, goes hand in hand with the *confessio peccati*, the recognition of one's injustice, where the vision of one's own ugliness is the beginning of a new and unprecedented beauty, which arises only in the naked exposure to the other, and not in the enchantment of one's own reflection."[233] In short, embracing one's fragility and confessing one's sins leads to a transformation that allows for a new kind of beauty to emerge through the vulnerable interaction with others.

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[229] Augustine, *Sermons, (184-229Z) on the Liturgical Seasons*, 211.3, trans. Edmund Hill, O.P., vol. 3.6, The Works of Saint Augustine (New Rochelle, NY: New City Press, 1993). "*Si autem mordet conscientia* ***fragilitatis*** *et in hoc saeculo ubique abundantia iniquitatis, dic ergo: «dimitte nobis debita nostra ».*"

[230] Augustine, *Holy Virginity*, 48.48, ed. David Hunter, trans. Ray Kearney, vol. 1.9, The Works of Saint Augustine (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1999).

[231] "*La pire fragilité est l'orgueil qui dénie notre fragilité*" in Chrétien, *Fragilité*, 198.

[232] Augustine, *Exposition of Psalms*, 103.1.4.

[233] "*La conscience aiguë de la fragilité, qui relève déjà de la grâce, va de pair avec la confessio peccati, la reconnaissance de son injustice, où la vision de sa propre laideur est le commencement d'une beauté neuve, inédite, laquelle ne se produit que dans l'exposition nue à l'autre, et non pas dans l'enchantement de son propre reflet*." in Chrétien, *Fragilité*, 199.

Conclusion

I will begin this final chapter by recapitulating the journey thus far.

In the first chapter, I singled out four aspects of Foucault's philosophy: soul, power, finitude, and outside. There I showed that Foucault conceives power in productive terms. Power creates subjects. He describes the modern subject as constructed by discourse and characterized by a tension between the empirical and the transcendental. All in all, Foucault is concerned with the outside, i.e., the outside of a discourse of reflection and interiority.

The second chapter deals almost entirely with Foucault's interpretation of Augustine. Here, Foucault's lack of theological imagination becomes visible. For a philosopher so concerned with confession (*aveu*), he mostly ignores the *Confessions*. Moreover, when he does cite it, his interpretation is arguably askew. Nonetheless, his engagement with the *City of God* and with some of Augustine's less read works proves to be insightful. His interpretation attempts to show that (1) for Augustine, the experience of the flesh is tied to the problem of desire – desire as distinct from the pagan emphasis on pleasure and the sexual act itself; (2) desire, as a problem, gives way to the obligation to decipher oneself, to verbalize the truth of oneself; (3) the other is located, not so much in the realm of the sexual act itself, but within the confessional practice.[234] Foucault ultimately attributes to Augustine the conjunction of two kinds of subjectivities that will mark the rest of Western history: a one based on desire and another based on the law. In the first, sexual desire leads to the desire to find the truth of oneself and verbalize it. In the second, norms and regulations lead to self-interrogation. In both instances, the self that is "discovered" is a product of these discursive practices and not a retrieved inner essence.

[234] For a breadown of these three points see Cseke, "Foucault lecteur de saint Augustin," 268.

Foucault does argue that Christianity is a religion of salvation in non-perfection, where subjectivity is marked by constant ruptures and open vulnerability. The truth of oneself is produced through telling, never an inner essence, and is made in relationship to others, conditioned by social norms and discourses. Confession creates the self rather than expressing it.

In chapter 3, I used Charles Taylor, Jean-Luc Marion, and Jean-Louis Chrétien to open up avenues for a possible theological dialogue with Foucault.

To conclude, I propose as my main thesis that: *Foucault's interpretation of Christianity (broadly) and of Augustine (specifically) can be useful for developing a theological anthropology of fragility*.

I will develop this in the following subsections.

1. Modernity and Finitude

Throughout his writings, Foucault remained an ardent critic of modern subjectivity. In his philosophical works, he questions the notion of an autonomous subject conscious of her own inner essence. Though Taylor classes Foucault as a representative of expressive individualism (partly for his implicit endorsement of the Ancient care of the self),[235] Foucault is, nonetheless, aware of the porosity of the self.

This distinction between the buffered and the porous self can be explained in light of *Ethics of Authenticity*. The porous selfhood of premodernity understood itself as open to transcendence and to others. The modern buffered self is more concerned with individual freedom and expressivity. Buffered selfhood is atomistic and views religious belief as just another individual choice. For the porous self, belief always involves others in a broader cosmic

[235] See Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 66-67.

relationship. Taken to the extreme, the buffered self views other people as an impediment to its self-fulfillment. "*L'enfer, c'est les autres*,"[236] wrote Sartre and said elsewhere: "*l'homme existe d'abord ... il se définit après*."[237] To define oneself, even against others, is the ultimate mark of the buffered self.

Not unlike Taylor, Foucault is also critical of what the former calls the buffered self. This shows in Foucault's critique of the empirico-transcendetal doublet. The modern self has a hard time accounting for how he is both the ground and the product of knowledge. In other words, without reference to an outside, the modern self cannot account for itself.

2. The Outside and the Other

Foucault's philosophy tends to proceed by way of reference to an outside: madness as the outside of reason, deviancy as the outside of normalcy.

In her book *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Judith Butler reflects on the ethical implications that can be extracted from Foucault.[238] The terms outside the subject shape the framework within with the subject is constituted. "What I can 'be', quite literally, is constrained in advance by a regime of truth that decides what will and will not be a recognizable form of being."[239] Even the Foucauldian self-crafting "takes place in the context of the norms at issue and, specifically, negotiates an answer to the question of who the 'I' will be in relation to the these norms."[240] Foucauldian self-reflexivity (if there is such a thing) would be a questioning of the outside, of "the norms of recognition that govern what I might be, to ask what they leave

[236] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Huis clos: suivi de Les mouches* (Paris, FR: Éditions Gallimard, 1947), 93.
[237] Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'existentialisme est un humanisme* (Paris, FR: Nagel, 1966), 21.
[238] The following paragraphs in this subsection draw heavily from Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2005), 22-26.
[239] Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 22.
[240] Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 22.

out."[241] Now, "the norms by which I recognize another or, indeed myself are not mine alone," but this does not mean that one should "collapse the notion of the other into the sociality of norms and claim that the other is implicitly present in the norms by which recognition is conferred."[242] Rather, "the very unrecognizability of the other brings about a crisis in the norms that govern recognition."[243] In short, according to Butler, any ethical relationship with an other is "caught up in a struggle with norms," but, at the same time, "I would not be in this struggle with norms if it were not for a desire to offer recognition to you."[244]

Butler is right in suggesting that there is an implicit ethical dimension in Foucault's philosophical gesture. To think from the outside is to think outside the same, to think from where I am not. This can be a destabilizing move for the self-sufficient individual. By concerning a relationship with the other, ethics unsettles the social norms we rely upon for recognition.

3. Givenness

For Foucault, the subject is constituted from the outside, via discourses and practices that exceed the subject. Foucault concludes from this that there is no transcendental subject founding knowledge. He approaches this from outside the subject. Christian subjectivity, according to him, is the response to an other (the confessor) to whom one must articulate one's truth and, in so doing, create said truth.

This interpretive procedure succeeds in undermining any view of the subject as self-sufficient. But it does not do full justice to Augustine's text, partly due to Foucault's refusal to think in terms of givenness.

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[241] Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 23.
[242] Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 24.
[243] Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 24.
[244] Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 26.

Foucault – like much of modernity – has a problem with gratuitousness. If there is any givenness in Foucault's philosophy, it is in the form of power. For Foucault, there is no puppeteer pulling the strings behind the scenes. It is within the amorphous network power, that different kinds of subjectivities are possible. This, however, clouds some of Foucault's analyses: Greek ethics becomes for him a usage of pleasure; Augustine becomes an usage of one's willful consent and a hermeneutic of the self.

As insightful as these analyses might be, there is more than what Foucault sees. In spite of all their differences, Foucault, Marion, and Taylor all might agree that the self that Augustine discovers is ultimately found outside. Where both Taylor and Marion would differ from Foucault is how they understand that outside. For Foucault, the outside is defined with regard to the boundaries of social norms. Yet both Marion and Taylor, in different ways, show that, for Augustine, the self is given by an other (God).

For Augustine, confession is ultimately about praise more than about sins. Confessional praise is addressed to someone using their words. It is about love; and true love is not forced or self-fashioned. It is gratuitous.

Because of his failure to consider gratuitousness, Foucault focuses on what can be measured, cataloged, and demarcated: confession of sins, usage of the will, limits of consent.

4. Fragility as Heteronomy

At the risk of oversimplification, it can be said that Foucault (at least with regard to his interpretation of Christianity) is more on the side of heteronomy than of autonomy. He is skeptical of the idea that a subject can give itself its own *νόμος*. Rather, the *νόμος* is given by the *ἕτερος*.

Heteronomy unsettles. The Church Fathers, following Foucault's interpretations, can be seen as trying to fully think the consequences of heteronomy. Salvation is not about perfection, that is, it is not *exclusively* about self-mastery, but about self-giving.[245] As Foucault reads in Augustine, it is by craving self-control that Adam and Eve lost all control they had.

The anthropology that can be gleaned from Foucault's interpretation of Augustine is one of fragility. The aspects of Augustine that Foucault emphasizes the most have to do with the involuntariness of the will as a disposition and the ambiguities of willful consent. This self is fragile in that it porous, susceptible to outside influences.

Foucault, however, does not develop this fragility in any theologically meaningful sense. Yet, as Chrétien, pointed out, it is by embracing this fragility that change comes about. There can be no conversion without fragility; no conversion without flexibility, without openness to the other.

[245] "What reveals subjectivity to itself is not an irrational break … it is self-mastery for the purpose of self-giving." in Jacques Maritain, *Existence and the Existent*, trans. Lewis Galantiere and Gerald B. Phelan (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1957), 89.

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