Foucault's Failure of Nerve:

From Genealogy to Ethics

by

Bronwyn Singleton

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Abstract

Michel Foucault described his work as "re-examination of knowledge, the conditions of knowledge and the knowing subject."[1] Foucault's work is commonly divided into three periods: archeology, genealogy and ethics. This thesis examines Foucault's transition from genealogy to ethics in an attempt to determine whether Foucauldian ethics are a logical consequence of genealogy. Genealogy represents Foucault's attempt to analyze systems of power, and follows from his archeological investigations of "systems of knowledge".[2] Genealogy permits Foucault to examine how discourse functions in practice, allowing him to focus on what he calls "power", a set of strategic relations whose operation determines the possibilities for human action. Power is a fluid medium in which all human creatures are inevitably situated. Genealogical power is depicted as determining the modern subject, who is unable even to reflect effectively on the extent to which this is true. Foucault's particular interpretation of ethics focuses on the self's relationship to itself and also on something Foucault calls the "aesthetics of existence", which amounts to an ongoing project of self-stylization. Foucault turned to ethics when he became concerned with the subject's own role in determining the self. His analysis of ancient Greek ethics, with its emphasis on the aesthetic of existence, is provided as a kind of prescriptive against the normalizing forces

[1] Paul Rabinow, "Introduction", *Michel Foucault: Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth.* Paul Rabinow ed. (New York: Penguin, 1997), p. xi.
[2] Arnold Davidson, "Archeology, Genealogy, Ethics", in *Foucault: A Critical Reader.* David Couzens Hoy ed. (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 221.

of power which constitute the modern regime of truth. This thesis questions the consistency of Foucauldian ethics in light of genealogy

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Preface

Michel Foucault's work is commonly divided into three periods: archeology, genealogy and ethics. This thesis will examine Foucault's transition from genealogy to ethics in an effort to determine whether Foucault's ethics are a logical consequence of genealogy. Is there anything in genealogy which demands the move to ethics, and if so, does Foucault provide the expected ethical sequel to his earlier philosophy? In the introduction to the posthumously published *Technologies of the Self,* L.H. Martin argues that "[i]n many ways, Foucault's project on the self was the logical conclusion to his historical inquiry over twenty-five years into insanity, deviancy, criminality and sexuality."[3] But was it indeed inevitable for Foucault to take up ethics—conceived as "the self's relationship to itself"?[4] How might Foucauldian genealogy lead to the particular study of the self which Foucault undertakes? I will argue that following genealogy, Foucault does not proceed as might have been expected.

Foucault depicts power as something that wholly determines the modern subject—without power relations the modern subject would not exist as such. Foucauldian genealogy repudiates "absolute" truth, arguing instead that truth amounts only to what "counts as true" within the particular "regimes of truth" structured through power relations.[5] Despite his endorsement of and seemingly desperate search for novelty

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[3] L.H. Martin, "Introduction" to *Technologies of the Self.: A Seminar with Michel Foucault.* (Amherst: University of Michigan, 1988), p. 3.
[4] Arnold Davidson, "Archeology, Genealogy, Ethics", In *Foucault: A Critical Reader,* David Couzens Hoy Ed. (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 221.
[5] For more on Foucault and truth see Chapter Six, "The Faces of Truth" in C.G. Prado's, *Starting with Foucault,* (Boulder: Westview, 1995), p. 119-150.

in "limit experiences", striving for liberation is rendered meaningless by our inability to reflect effectively on how power shapes and determines us. Because of the fluctuating nature of power relations and the endless possible genealogical interpretations of events informed by ever-changing regimes of truth, bestowing meaning on action becomes a polymorphous undertaking, so malleable and interpretation-based that it is reduced to a nearly futile endeavour.

Foucault's problematization of sexuality directed him unexpectedly historically backwards to an examination of the Greek perception of moral issues surrounding sex. Foucault characterizes the Greek response to such problems as the adoption of what he calls an "aesthetic of existence", which amounts to an ongoing project of self-stylization. Through the Greeks, Foucault came to understand ethics as a relationship of the self to the self. He presents his interpretation of ancient Greek ethics as providing something of a prescriptive against normalizing forces and power as they culminate in the modern regime of truth. Through the process of self-stylization the individual accepts a certain originative agency in attempting to shape the self like a work of art in order to create a beautiful self and a beautiful life.

Foucault's genealogical depiction of power rendered human beings largely unable to effect or combat the fluctuations of power, even robbing people of the ability to recognize that their perspectives are the products of power relations. Do Foucauldian ethics accurately reflect this analysis? Given genealogical power, whence the possibility of self-stylization according to an aesthetic of existence? This thesis will investigate the tenability of the Foucauldian ethical project in light of genealogy.

I will begin my investigation with an examination of Foucault's genealogical works *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality*, Volume I, along with some of the critical literature discussing genealogy. The expository analysis will involve a particular focus on Foucault's genealogical characterization of power. The second chapter will examine Foucauldian ethics, focusing on *The Use of Pleasure,* Volume Two of *The History of Sexuality,* the work in which Foucault makes the shift to the ethics. I will attempt to elucidate Foucault's conception of the "aesthetic of existence" and the notion of stylizing a self. In Chapter Three I will explore the significance of Foucault's shift from genealogy to ethics.

Chapter One

Genealogy: Foucault on the Subject, the Disciplines and Power

From Archeology to Genealogy

Arnold Davidson's article, "Archeology, Genealogy, Ethics", examines the three commonly accepted "domains of analysis" comprising Michel Foucault's life work.[1] Foucault himself described his work as "re-examination of knowledge, the conditions of knowledge and the knowing subject."[2] The distinctions between archeology, genealogy and ethics reflect Foucault's own division of his scholarship, corresponding to the different forms of inquiry and methodologies he employed during his career.[3] Each of these domains provided Foucault unique and specialized tools for meeting his changing objectives, and addressing the varying problems central during particular periods of his study. Foucault's evolving philosophical project demanded he adopt methods which allowed him scholastic flexibility and interpretive breadth while providing his unusual historical and philosophical investigations with an adequate degree of academic discipline and accessibility. This chapter will examine Foucauldian genealogy, which Davidson

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[1] Arnold Davidson, "Archeology, Genealogy, Ethics", in *Foucault: A Critical Reader.* David Couzens Hoy Ed. (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 221.

[2] Paul Rabinow, "Introduction", in *Michel Foucault: Ethics - Subjectivity and Truth.* Paul Rabinow Ed. (New York: Penguin, 1997), p. xi.

[3] Though Foucault himself and others like Davidson consider these domains fairly distinct, others like Paul Rabinow and Hubert Dreyfus see them as more of a piece, while Gary Gutting argues that each of Foucault's works should be examined as a unique example of craftsmanship. [cf Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics.* (Brighton, Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1983), especially pages xix-xxiii. Also Gary Gutting, "Introduction" in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 6.]

characterizes as concentrating on "modalities of power".[4] The Foucauldian conception of "power" which emerges from genealogy shall be of particular focus in this chapter.

Foucault adopted genealogy after beginning to doubt the complete efficacy of archeology, which was intended to allow "an analysis of systems of knowledge".[5] Archeology was a scholastic method which Foucault designed and adopted to identify discursive practices and isolate various discourses, a necessary task before one could undertake a thorough investigative analysis of the same.[6] Foucault conceived archeology in order to "define the elements that belong to a series, to show where a series begins and ends, to formulate the laws of a series, and to describe the relations between different series."[7] But while archeology aids in isolating how "epistemes" and discourse determine practice, it fails to show how practice affects discourse. Genealogy provides the necessary method for analyzing how practice molds discourse, allowing for interpretations of discourse which recognize its fluid and productive vitality. Genealogy's focus on movement and activity calls into play analyses of what Foucault calls "power".

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[4] Davidson, p. 222.

[5] Davidson, p. 221.

[6] C.G. Prado, in *Starting with Foucault*, characterizes discourse as a "vocabulary", but expands the normal understanding of this term to incorporate non-verbal systems of communication and practices which often go unrecognized as being directly associated with communication. For more on discourse see Prado's *Starting With Foucault.* (Boulder: Westview, 1995), p. 123-126. Foucault discusses his understanding of discourse in *The History of Sexuality* (Volume One), Robert Hurley Trans. (New York: Vintage, 1990), p. 100-102. He says that, "it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined... Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it... Discourses are tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations."

[7] Davidson, p. 223. Also note that the systematizing nature of archeology could be interpreted as betraying Foucault's often denied structuralism. In the Introduction to *The Order of Things*, Foucault writes, "In France, certain half-witted 'commentators' persist in labeling me a 'structuralist'. I have been unable to get it into their tiny minds that I have used none of the methods, concepts, or key terms that characterize structural analysis. I should be grateful if a more serious public would free me from a connection that certainly does me honour, but that I do not deserve..." [Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, (New York, Vintage, 1970) p. xiv] However, Dreyfus and Rabinow also discuss why Foucault cannot properly be grouped with the structuralists, largely because of his consistent rejection of the attachment of objective

Because genealogy was intended to complement archeology, archeology is never entirely abandoned, nor would Foucault abandon genealogy as he found a need to complement it with an analysis of the self's determining relation to the self—Foucauldian ethics.

Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow claim that Foucault:

> [u]ses Nietzsche's genealogy as a starting point for developing a method that would allow him to thematize the relationship between truth, theory and values and the social institutions and practices in which they emerge. This leads him to pay increased attention to power and the body in their relation to the human sciences.[8]

Genealogy advances archeology in moving beyond the simple isolation of discursive practices to facilitate a more trenchant inquiry into the complex functioning of discursive systems. Genealogy allows Foucault to examine archeological findings as systems in organic movement and flux, not simply as supposedly pre-determining structures. Davidson explains that, "[g]enealogy converges with archeology in placing 'everything considered immortal in man' within a process of development. It disturbs what is considered immobile, fragments what is thought to be unified, and shows the heterogeneity of what is taken to be homogeneous, "[9] exposing the unstable and morphing nature of power and knowledge.

The Nietzschean Influence on Genealogy

Genealogy works backwards, searching for unexpected beginnings. It probes the unexpected familial relations between the diverse and seemingly unconnected elements

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systemization and meaning to human activity. [cf Dreyfus and Rabinow's "Introduction" to *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*].

[8] Dreyfus and Rabinow, p. xxi.

[9] Davidson, 225.

which culminate in certain practices, institutions or artifacts. Although genealogy traces power relations in search of their origins, Foucault follows Nietzsche in disparaging the search for "Origins" as commonly understood, arguing that beginnings are much less decisive and homogeneous than traditional historical analysis purports. Foucault attempts to elucidate genealogy and to illustrate his indebtedness to Nietzsche in the article, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History".

Genealogy advocates historical investigation and analysis while eschewing many of the assumptions historians commonly take as law. Foucault repudiates traditional history's linear conception of progress and the conflation of origins as essences, in favour of Nietzschean "effective history". "Effective" history elucidates historical instability and caprice, disarming historians of pretensions of discovering immutable truth and non-existent essences or natures to facilitate what Foucault contends is a more productive means of interpreting history. Foucault says, "History becomes 'effective' to the degree that it introduces discontinuity into our very beings... [it] deprives the self of the reassuring stability of life and nature, it will not permit itself to be transported by a voiceless obstinacy toward a millenial ending."[10] The initial strangeness of effective history becomes comprehensible through genealogy. Foucault's genealogist rehabilitates historical investigation, becoming "the new historian".[11] He suggests, "The purpose of history, guided by genealogy, is not to discover the roots of our identity but to commit itself to its dissipation. It does not seek to define our unique threshold of emergence, the homeland to which metaphysicians promise a return; it seeks to make visible all of those

[10] Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History", in *The Foucault Reader*, Paul Rabinow, ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), p. 154.

discontinuities that cross us."[12] The myth of the historical project of discovering the essence of humanity is decentred by genealogy's ongoing commitment to reminding the effective historian that the human creature is a malleable historical construct which does not participate in an enduring transhistorical nature.

Foucault's acceptance of genealogy reflects his rejection of philosophy's metaphysical pretensions. This repudiation of metaphysics buttresses Foucault's belief that historical investigations do not uncover immutable truths. Indeed, Foucault's belief in effective history is indicative of his larger position on truth. To search for genealogical origins is not to look for germinal seeds from which all branches of truth and knowledge sprout—a Cartesian foundationalist position—but to look for more gnarled roots, surprising discoveries of the tangled and scattered starting points from which things grow. Foucault's pluralistic, Nietzschean conception of truth demands genealogy's interpretive flexibility. Genealogy appears a productive tool for examining "what we typically hold to be ahistorical, self-evident, and substantial in order to reveal its rootedness in history."[13] Abandoning the search for timeless and essential truth, genealogy provides a new method for evaluating history—and ourselves.

In the interview "Truth and Power", Foucault attempts to clarify the idea of power emerging in genealogy, tracing his original interest in power back to *Madness and Civilization* and *The Birth of the Clinic.* Focusing on power's productive aspects, Foucault aspires to revise the common understanding of power as domination and to

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[11] Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History", p. 160.
[12] Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History", p. 162.
[13] Michael Mahon, *Foucault's Nietzschean Genealogy.* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), p. 124.

answer the question at the heart of post-structuralism, which is how discourse is affected by practice. Power involves more than simple repression or domination—it is much more complex, efficient and productive than the structuralist understanding permits. Foucault says, "What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse."[14]

Foucault argues that power has undergone a significant fortification, dissemination and escalation since the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; that power is much more pervasive and "economic" than ever before. Far less visible than monarchial power, modern "disciplinary" power extends well beyond the limits of the state, increasingly infiltrating the most minute aspects of individual lives.[15] In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault identifies and examines the disciplines themselves, described as new "technologies" through which power is multiplied and disseminated like never before.

Despite Foucault's genealogical preoccupation with power, he never loses sight of his original inquiry into how the modern subject is created and formed. Truth and power share a crucial link because the productive forces of power in fact create what we call truths, and "truth" curtails what kind of subjects can emerge within particular "regimes of truth". Foucault explains how truth and power combine within such regimes:

> Each society has its regime of truth, its "general politics" of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and

[14] Michel Foucault, "Truth and Power" in *The Foucault Reader*, Paul Rabinow, ed. (New York: Pantheon, 1984), p. 61.
[15] Foucault, "Truth and Power", p. 64.

> procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.[16]

Foucault investigates the evolution of power from its monarchial form to its crystallization in disciplines, which amounts to an examination of changing regimes of truth. Monarchial and disciplinary regimes employ different techniques to discern and disseminate what counts as true—power functions differently in each of these regimes in order to produce accepted "truths". Foucault attempts to isolate these contingent truths (which we nonetheless take to be ahistorical), to identify the mechanisms which give them their force within particular societies. He unmasks an era's accepted truths, then attempts to discern the power relations which endow these "truths" with their authority. Power relations create and sustain truth, involving truth and power in a reciprocal relationship. Subjects are formed in keeping with the varying power relations and strategic tactics corresponding to disparate regimes of truth. Stressing power's positive effects, and avoiding a reduction of power to its operation at obvious legislative and social levels, Foucault demands a micro-cosmic examination of power—a "gray, meticulous, and patiently documentary"[17] genealogical probing of power relations.

Discipline and Punish

Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* provides a genealogy of penal practices from sovereign times to the modern age. The prison provides a microcosm, a case-study of how power relations function, but more importantly, Foucault situates punitive disciplinary tactics and strategies within a larger framework, indicating how all social

[16] Foucault, "Truth and Power". p. 73.

subjects are disciplined and controlled using such mechanisms. As C.G. Prado notes in *Starting with Foucault*, what Foucault really seeks to investigate in *Discipline and Punish* is the formation of subjects, how we learn to be the kind of people who function effectively within particular regimes of truth. Prado says, "what makes *Discipline and Punish* more than a study of penality is its portrayal of techniques employed in the manufacture of... subjects as those more widely used in the production of the contemporary norm-governed social individual."[18] The prison provides a useful test center for the observation of power relations at work, but the study is intended for extrapolation and application on a much broader scale. As Gilles Deleuze, Foucault's friend and colleague says, "the point was not to experiment with prisons, but to comprehend the prison as a place where a certain experience is lived by prisoners, an experience that intellectuals, or at least intellectuals as conceived by Foucault, should think about."[19]

Discipline and Punish begins with the grizzly and vivid recounting of the carnival-like "spectacle of torture" which was the brutal execution of a criminal known as Damiens the regicide. This sensational passage is followed by the daily schedule for the House of young prisoners in Paris—a regimen in full effect just eighty years after Damiens' horrific end. Foucault juxtaposes these scenes as indicative of a portentous shift in penal tactics and administration. The public spectacle of torture was replaced by a new, astoundingly efficacious strategy of "disciplinary techniques" exercised on more abstract levels of consciousness. Foucault argues that such disciplinary techniques

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[17] Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History", p. 139.
[18] Prado, p. 51.

indicate that the impetus of punishment has altered—morphing from a punitive force demonstrating and reasserting monarchial power to a curative practice for restoring damaged individuals to social utility and productivity.[20]

Disciplinary techniques sought the most efficient and effective means for transforming the human body—indeed the human soul. Foucault understands the soul as a modern creation. In contrast to the soul of traditional Christian thought, the modern soul is not a pre-given or natural ontological phenomenon, but a construct. It is a surface inscribed with all that we are, but is nevertheless real, because writ upon it *is* all that it is to be a person. Because the soul is not pre-existent, it is not required to take any particular shape. This malleability allows power to act upon the soul to transform individuals, their bodies, their behaviours, their very conception of what it means to be a self. Foucault says that "[t]his soul... unlike the soul represented by Christian theology, is not born in sin and subject to punishment, but is born rather out of methods of punishment, supervision and constraint."[21] The soul is a crucial feature of the modern individual, it is all that we understand ourselves to be, the very locus of our self-consciousness. The tractability of the modern soul facilitates the creation, discipline and management of the modern subject, making it the focus of disciplinary power. Foucault's biographer, James Miller, explains:

> [T]he "prison" at issue in Foucault's account is not only the kind patrolled by wardens and built out of bricks and steel; it is also the "prison" within—the kind patrolled by conscience and built out of aptitudes and inclinations. On this level, Foucault's work was, just as he said it was, an

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[19] James Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), p. 194.
[20] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, Alan Sheridan Trans. (New York: Pantheon, 1979), p. 11.
[21] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*,, p. 29

allegory about "the soul, effect and instrument of political anatomy; the soul, prison of the body."[22]

Before the advent of the modern disciplinary prison system, Foucault says punishment involved a "technique" described as the "spectacle of torture", also circumscribed by its own set of rules.[23] Torture was a public ritual which served as a "political operation". Hence, "[t]he public execution did not re-establish justice; it reactivated power."[24] Monarchial power was validated through confession, during which the criminal publicly declared the truth of his crime, bringing together truth and power in one ritual. Foucault argues that, "the truth-power relation remains at the heart of all mechanisms of punishment and... is still to be found in contemporary penal practice—but in a quite different form and with very different effects."[25] The scaffold's ceremonial production of truth required the direct participation of the people, who reaffirmed their subservience to monarchial power through their audience. However, this ritual became increasingly inefficient because the public aspect of the scaffold also provided an opportunity for acts of civil disobedience, violence and riot. Increasing abuse of monarchial power made the population suspicious of crown authority, and the spectacle of the scaffold provided a forum for the people to voice their discontents. Crowd reaction to public torture became uncertain, rendering such public spectacle inefficient in its ability to control and discipline human subjects. As the vengeful nature of public torture

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[22] Miller, p. 211. Note the typical Foucauldian up-ending of the Platonic and Christian view of the body as the "prison" of the soul.

[23] For example, torture must produce pain; to the extent possible such pain must be regulated, calculated and quantifiable; such quantification must be in keeping with rule-based practices; and punishment must mark the victim. For more see Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 34.

[24] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 49.

[25] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 55.

became unacceptable, a new strategy was required. Penality had to become less bold, retributive and obvious; it had to move underground.

Torture revealed a certain disdain for the human body,[26] yet an ever industrializing society was finding new economic uses for bodies which had previously been regarded as largely disposable. Improved material conditions were changing the way people lived. With large scale offences diminishing as creature comforts quelled the chaos of pre-industrial life, more attention was paid to minor offences. Foucault claims that crime itself "changed" during this period, moving from a "criminality of blood to a criminality of fraud".[27] With petty crime appearing on the rise, it was perceived necessary to streamline the penal system in the interest of economic efficiency. Foucault argues:

> The criticism of the reformers was directed not so much at the weakness or cruelty of those in authority, as at a bad economy of power... The reform of criminal law must be read as a strategy for the rearrangement of the power to punish... which increase[s] its effects while diminishing its economic cost... and its political cost. [28]

Punishment needed to be redistributed so that it was more regular and predictable; however, because individuals had become suspicious of overt monarchial power, new punitive measures required a legitimacy perceived as absent in the spectacle of torture. This led the new penal reformers to shift focus, arguing that penal tactics need be ever respectful of the criminal's "humanity".[29] This "humanity" is a key invention, corresponding to a shift in attention from the body and toward the soul.[30] "Humanity"

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[26] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 54.
[27] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 77.
[28] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 79-81
[29] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 74.
[30] Despite this shift, it should be noted that the body will continue to be an effective site for the execution of those disciplinary techniques which act upon this soul.

functions in a similar fashion to the "sexuality" which would later be invented as a nature, an essence, and hence something to be managed and controlled.

Punishment took on a new social meaning and purpose during the reform period. No longer intended simply to avenge the sovereign or restabilize a patrician order, punishment was intended to be instructive. To find acceptance during these changing times,

> [t]he publicity of punishment must not have the physical effect of terror; it must open up a book to be read... punishments must be a school rather than a festival; an ever-open book rather than a ceremony... [l]ong before he was regarded as an object of science, the criminal was imagined as a source of instruction.[31]

Depicted as a common enemy, the criminal was to be opposed by all members of society. Following from the argument that crime's far reaching effects made it not just an affront to the monarch, but injurious to an entire population, detecting and eliminating crime became a public preoccupation, a responsibility for the general population, who thus became inadvertently complicitous in endorsing the newly evolving disciplinary techniques. [32]

The first stage in the rehabilitation of penal practice involved a theory based on representation. With the ideological association of crime and punishment alleged to have a deterrent effect, punishment's objective was re-characterized as prevention of future crime, not simply wreaking retributive vengeance for past offences. Representational penal practices sought to forge a conceptual link between crime and punishment—the mere threat of punishment was intended to prevent criminal action. No longer dramatic

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[31] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p.111-112.
[32] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 90.

spectacle, punishment claimed only to fairly and humanely redress wrongs against society. To be effective, "[t]he punishment must proceed from the crime; the law must appear to be a necessity of things, and power must act while concealing itself beneath the gentle force of nature."[33] Punishment became part of the "common good" through its promise to prevent future civic disturbances. Slowly, power moves underground, increasingly constraining behaviour or "comportments" while remaining unseen.

The evolution of punitive practices was not a linear progression but emerged gradually, eventually culminating in a recognizably transformed system of penal reform—and power relations. Foucault's contention that "[a] penal system must be conceived as a mechanism intended to administer illegalities differently, not to eliminate them all,"[34] reveals his cynical view that the police and the courts *manage* criminality rather than work to eradicate it. The penal system in fact manufactures criminality; it is only within the context of a punitive regime that criminality becomes an identifiable issue, or the criminal a discernible kind of individual. Foucault argues, "the carceral archipelago assures... the formation of delinquency on the basis of subtle illegalities... and the establishment of a specified criminality."[35]

Once identified, criminals could become the proper objects of reform. Penality no longer focused on punishment, *per se*, but on transforming and rehabilitating criminals for their reintegration as useful members of society. Society punished "not to efface the crime, but to transform a criminal (actual or potential); punishment must bring with it a

[33] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 106.
[34] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 89.
[35] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 301.

certain corrective technique."[36] Within the prisons a variety of techniques were developed, involving what Foucault calls "corrective training", aimed at producing socially and economically useful "docile bodies" responsive to the power relations that shape and act upon them. Originally employed explicitly in institutional settings, disciplinary techniques were soon moved beyond the prisons, schools and factories to be disseminated across the entire social realm, effecting a scale of control Foucault claims to be quite new.[37] Living in a disciplinary regime became the norm not just for inmates, students and workers, but for everyone, everywhere and at everytime.

New disciplinary techniques and old practices of torture shared a certain focus on the body, but the disciplines had a heightened interior efficiency because of their concern with the soul. Prado says, "The new techniques continued to operate on the body... but they did so by imposing schedules, restrictions, obligatory comportment, and examinations... Instead of inflicting pain, the new techniques instilled controlling habits and value-sustaining self images."[38] Foucault identifies certain characteristic strategies employed by the disciplines. Individuals were carefully organized in space, which also resulted in their increasing fragmentation and isolation from one another. Space itself was hierarchized, with certain spaces becoming affiliated with specific functions. Time was carefully controlled through rigorous scheduling and timetables. Finally, "progress" itself was measured hierarchically, with individuals moving through various life-stations via prescribed echelons. Correct training involved progress in keeping with a particular curve facilitated by prescribed exercises. Such disciplinary strategies are remarkably

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[36] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 127.
[37] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 136.

familiar to the modern reader, who can immediately recognize the continuing utilization of such tactics. Both inside and outside of the prisons, disciplinary techniques became increasingly comprehensive, with mechanisms directed at controlling the most infinitesimal aspects of movement and behaviour. "What was... being formed was a policy of coercions that act upon the body, a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behaviours. The human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and arranges it."[39]

Correct Training

Disciplinary management of behaviour required an ever growing edifice of knowledge about human subjects. Warrants for disciplines were "found"—read "established"—and insights were claimed into "human nature". A process Foucault describes as "hierarchized surveillance" provided the data necessary to lend credence to naturalistic scientific claims regarding human subjects. Foucault argues that architecture itself manifests this preoccupation with hierarchized surveillance, focusing on designs which facilitate this kind of surveillance or "gaze". For instance, lecture halls were tiered so students were visible to instructors. Examinations, conducted in the name of efficiency and progress, made each individual a case study for collecting vast amounts of data for later classification, study and edification regarding human subjects. Combined, surveillance and the examination augmented the silent and invisible functioning of power, leading to what Foucault calls "normalizing judgment". The effect of

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[38] Prado, p. 52.
[39] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 138.

normalization was a situation where "[w]hat is specific to the disciplinary penality is non-observance, that which does not measure up to the rule, that departs from it. The whole indefinite domain of the non-conforming is punishable... "[40] Once procedures were developed for "discerning"—read "establishing"—a norm, individuals could be measured against this construct, and disciplined or penalized, whether explicitly or more covertly, for deviation. Normalization was desirable because normalized behaviour rendered subjects more predictable and hence economically utile.

Foucault cites Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon as paradigmatic of modern power. The Panopticon was a penal structure designed to facilitate the constant surveillance of inmates to ensure their continuous obedience and docility. A further advantage was that the Panopticon proved an apt "laboratory"[41] for human observation, allowing "experts" in the evolving sciences a unique opportunity to amass the knowledge that fuels modern power. A symbol of modern power, Foucault says, "[t]he Panopticon... must be understood as a generalizable model of functioning; a way of defining power relations in terms of...everyday life..."[42] The genius of the Panopticon was that actual surveillance could in fact be discontinuous while functioning as if constant. It was impossible for inmates to tell whether they were actually being monitored at any given moment, but the Panopticon provided the *threat* of constant surveillance, forcing inmates to refrain from unauthorized behaviour because of the possibility that they were being watched even when they were not. The Panopticon was designed to

[40] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 178-179.
[41] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 204.
[42] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 205.

> arrange things [so] that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action... [T]he perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary... [T]his architectural apparatus should be a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation independent of the person who exercises it... [T]he inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers.[43]

Offering self-administered, yet rigorous control, the Panopticon was the perfect model of a power that was invisible and yet pervasive, the subtle, covert strategies of which contribute to its easy acceptance.

Disciplinary tactics creep across the entire social network, with strategies effectively employed in punitive practices operant in shaping subjectivity in other aspects of human existence as well. Disciplinary mechanisms begin to weave together, forming networks of increasing stricture and control. *The History of Sexuality,* Volume I, is a further Foucauldian investigation into the shaping of modern subjects. While at first Foucault's analysis of penality may appear to have little in common with his examination of sexuality—except that they both employ genealogical analysis—the works are continuous in their investigation of the role of power relations in shaping human subjectivity. Examining power at work in the confines of the penitentiary, Foucault offers a genealogy of how an institution came to be developed which succeeds in turning out "docile bodies". He then turns to examining power at work in an arena demarcated by no more than the porous limits of the social world.

The History of Sexuality

[43] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish,* p. 201.

Foucault intended *The History of Sexuality*, Volume I, to be the first in a genealogical series on sexuality. Prado describes Foucault's project as an investigation of "how a norm-based sexuality was developed and made into the truth about sex."[44] Foucault characterizes sexuality as a cultural construct, denying its usual portrayal as the embodiment of natural instincts, drives and desires. While rejecting specific and determinate "human nature", Foucault argues that this myth has been strategically employed through power relations within the modern regime of truth to facilitate, restrain and mold human action, consciousness and subjectivity.[45] Foucault identifies sexuality as a construct which is propagated as a pre-existent fact about people. Power relations play a crucial part in "deploying" and sustaining this fiction. In the modern regime, sexuality is "deployed" as "a particular conception that, once adopted, first determines what is sexual and then regulates every aspect of thought, discourse, and behaviour regarding the sexual. The regulation of sexuality, then, is not through coercion but through the shaping of perceptions, desire, and agents themselves."[46] Foucault attempts to identify and analyze the modern conception of sexuality, questioning how this sexuality has shaped subjects, the truths created for and by such subjects, and the utility of such truths.

Dreyfus and Rabinow emphasize two ideas which figure prominently in *The History of Sexuality*, Volume I: the repressive hypothesis and bio-technico-power.[47] They define the repressive hypothesis as the idea that "through European history we have moved from a period of relative openness about our bodies and our speech to an ever-

[44] Prado, p. 85.
[45] Prado, p. 88.
[46] Prado, p. 90.
[47] Dreyfus and Rabinow, p. 127.

increasing repression and hypocrisy."[48] This idea encapsulates the common sense wisdom that sex is a forbidden subject, something taboo which is not to be spoken of in polite conversation, and that this censure has left people dysfunctionally distanced from this elemental aspect of ourselves. And yet, Foucault says, "[w]hat is peculiar to modern societies.. is not that they consigned sex to a shadow existence, but that they dedicated themselves to speaking of it *ad infinitum*, while exploiting it as *the* secret."[49] Foucault argues that although we are convinced that telling "the truth" about our sexuality will set us free, power relations actually operate such that the "truths" we inadvertently disseminate systematically and hegemonically constrain us, ultimately limiting individual possibilities. Although "speaking openly and defiantly about sexuality has come to be seen in and of itself as an attack on repression, as an inherently political act", we fail to realize the constricting and defining aspects of our own confessions.[50] Foucault derides the contention that discussions and confessions about sex are subversive, arguing that such sex talk perpetuates sexuality as an object of curiosity, and advances the perceived need for those laboratories of knowledge which *construct* truths about sexuality. In alleged reaction to the repressive hypothesis, individuals are actually enticed into confessing minute details regarding sexuality in the name of human benefit and liberation, however our defiant oratories actually create the truths which are later employed as self-defining "natures"—truth telling becomes another discipline.

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[48] Dreyfus and Rabinow, p. 128.
[49] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (Volume One), p. 35. (Foucault's emphasis)
[50] Dreyfus and Rabinow, p. 129. Modern talk shows provide an interesting case study of how exorbitant "confessions" actually serve to bolster the norms which define us through a contrived cathartic and self-righteous exercise. Television programs such as *Jerry Springer* or *Jenny Jones* serve as platforms for individuals to speak out in defiance of certain stereotypes which, ironically, they end up reinforcing through their own behaviour.

Growing from promises to improve living conditions, bio-power involves techniques which fragment and discipline individuals under the guise of identifying and assuaging the "needs" of human beings as living creatures. Foucault says:

> [p]ower would no longer be dealing simply with legal subjects over whom the ultimate dominion was death, but with living beings and the mastery it would be able to exercise over them would have to be applied to the level of life itself; it was the taking charge of life, more than the threat of death, that gave power its access, even to the body.[51]

With the rise of industrialism and capitalism, living human bodies came to have a new value, and the state assumed an increasing role in managing people in the arena of life. Whereas sovereign power had asserted itself through claiming the right to terminate life, government was increasingly aligned with the role of protecting and managing life. Bio-power allies with the emerging human sciences which quantify, classify, categorize and analyze people, contributing to a naturalistic understanding of what it means to be human. Such knowledge is applied to the management of individual human bodies and "populations". Mechanisms and techniques of discipline and power evolved focusing on regulating and directing both the individual human body as a useful mechanical apparatus, and "a species body" or "population" which served "as the basis for the biological processes".[52] Concern for human betterment initially appeared the impetus for bio-power, contributing to its easy acceptance in the same manner that concern for public safety and protection had fueled public interest in expanding punitive techniques and the associated disciplines.

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[51] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (Volume One), p. 142-143.

[52] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (Volume One), p. 139. The "biological process" to which Foucault refers include such concerns as births and mortality and life expectancy and longevity. For more see p. 139.

Foucault describes how a vast network of increasingly interrelated disciplinary technologies and human sciences evolved, entangling the modern subject in webs of power which the subject was at the same time ever-complicitous in expanding. The human sciences rendered sex politically and economically utile. So-called "problems of populations" legitimated the alleged need to move sex into the public domain. Individuals and governments construed themselves as intimately interested in management of bodies and populations. Science gained authority and common acceptance based on its self-proclaimed ability to inform and enhance such administration. Sex was problematized due to its purported impact on the well-being of individuals and populations, with the state assigned an important role in implementing science's "best" policies for managing sex and the population, hence the contention that:

> It was essential that the state know what was happening with its citizens' sex, and the use they made of it, but also that each individual be capable of controlling the use he made of it. Between the state and the individual, sex became an issue, and a public issue no less; a whole set of discourses, special knowledges, analyses, and injunctions settled upon it... [53]

Close scrutiny of sex was advised and warranted for the good of each individual and for the health and betterment of the entire population. Again, much like surveillance of criminality, surveillance of sexual behaviour became a common interest, as "properly" regulated sexuality would contribute to the overall good, and as with penality, the strategies and tactics for managing sex were soon distributed and implemented on a much larger scale, making these techniques an efficient method for overseeing and monitoring a multiplicity of behaviours.

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[53] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (Volume One), p. 26.

The medicalization of sexuality allowed the creation of a range of "normal" behaviour which was to be tolerated, also creating as a by-product of this construct a collection of undesirable "deviant" behaviours to be discouraged and eliminated. "Sexuality" was streamlined so that sex was predictable and useful, with so-called aberrant behaviour pathologized as a social ill much like that of criminality—an indication of a natural flaw within the individual which demanded correction for that individual to function "normally": that is, more predictably and economically efficiently. Buttressed by manufactured accounts of a sexual "nature", construction of sexuality became a hugely potent controlling device.[54] The laboratories of knowledge which collect the necessary data for body and population management organize this information around what is constituted as a "norm". This norm becomes the benchmark for acceptable human practice and a disciplinary tool for measuring, delineating and regulating the parameters of "acceptable"—read "normal"—behaviour. Foucault says,

> a power whose task is to take charge of life needs continuous regulatory and corrective mechanisms... it does not have to draw the line that separates the enemies of the sovereign from his obedient subjects; it effects distributions around the norm... the law operates more and more as a norm, and... the judicial institution is increasingly incorporated into a continuum of apparatuses (medical, administrative, and so on) whose functions are for the most part regulatory.[55]

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[54] Constructions of sexuality fuse with issues of personal identity, with our very conceptions of who we are as selves, as many individuals learn to characterize themselves as belonging to particular groups dictated by ideas linked to sexuality. Gay pride, for example, would not be possible were it not for our modern construction of homosexuality (Foucault notes that nothing like our modern idea of homosexuality existed in Greek times). Without certain constructed sexual norms it would not be possible to circumscribe sexual behaviours in order to fragment and isolate individuals, even pathologize them based on their sexual habits or preferences, all the while maintaining that such constructed categories actually correspond to something "natural" about that person's self.

[55] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (Volume One), p. 144.

Finally, Foucault says that bio-power and the repressive hypothesis become partners in that the information generated by putative attempts to supersede the alleged repression of sexuality is taken up and refined using bio-power's techniques, fortifying disciplinary control.

Power

How did constructed notions of "criminality" and "sexuality" come to have such force? How did these manufactured "natures" become so influential in shaping subjectivities and molding the modern subject? In order to explicate how the modern subject is formed, Foucault must investigate the subtler aspects of power. Foucault distinguishes modern disciplinary power from what he calls "juridico-discursive power". Juridico-discursive power is concerned with domination, force, repression, legality and government. It is highly visible, focusing on negation, censorship, prohibition and delineation of the licit and illicit.[56] Although our cultural history has made us suspicious of and resistant to power as law and domination, Foucault says, "[p]ower as a pure limit set on freedom is, at least in our society, the general form of its acceptability." The visible and identifiable nature of juridico-discursive power accounts for its easy acceptance, as the modern subject is comfortable with and accustomed to the overt power of government institutions and the law. Yet Foucault maintains that we commonly misunderstand power because of our insistence upon characterizing it using this

[56] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (Volume One), p. 84-85.

framework. In terms of our "political thought and analysis, we still have not cut off the head of the king... We must... conceive of... power without the king."[57]

The juridico-discursive model of power fails to acknowledge the finesse which renders disciplinary power relations particularly effective. Disciplinary power does not operate through establishing visible limits, but is instead a normalizing force. Continuing to conceptualize power juridico-discursively makes modern subjects oblivious to the more "real" threat of disciplinary power because the strategic relations constituting modern power remain largely unrecognized, making subjects vulnerable to their operations. In the modern era "[p]ower is tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms."[58] Foucault seeks to expose such mechanisms but demands that in order to do so the limiting juridico-discursive model of power must be replaced by a framework that acknowledges the normalizing impetus and disciplinary techniques of modern power.

Foucault never offers his reader a fully satisfactory definition of power, instead arguing that we must be nominalistic about power. Prado explains:

> A definition of power... cannot be precise in the sense of yielding or articulating an essence... To the extent that we can say what power is, it is the sum of sets of past and present comportments as they qualify sets of presently ensuing comportments. Power is the conditioning of ongoing actions by the totality of previous and concurrent actions.[59]

Power is difficult to explain because it lacks an "essence" or "nature". It appears that an understanding of Foucauldian power must be derived from an aggregate of many fractured, discontinuous comments on power, aphoristic fragments which gradually

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[57] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (Volume One), p. 88-89 and 91.
[58] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (Volume One), p. 86.

elucidate power. Foucault and his critics have characterized modern power as: "a complex strategical situation" or "moving substrate of force relations" (Foucault in *The History of Sexuality* [Volume One]) ; "a general matrix of force relations at a given time, in a given society" (Dreyfus and Rabinow); "a multiple network of diverse elements" (Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*); "a relational environment constraining actions" (Prado); and, "relations of forces functioning at the level of our cultural practices (Mahon)."[60] Power is a medium into which we are born, a kind of primordial fluid in which human creatures are inevitably swimming. Power describes a web of relations and interweaving forces which strategically delineate possibilities for human action, behaviour, identity and understanding. Power is inescapable and its relations wholly determine human subjects. It is impossible to move outside of power, nor is it even desirable, for power is not simply about establishing limits on conduct but also creates the very possibilities and opportunities for human action and existence, making power quintessentially productive.

Foucault's perhaps most ambitious attempt to describe power is found in *The History of Sexuality*, Volume 1. Modern power is characterized as operating from innumerable points, it is something that is immanent and cannot be evaluated from an exterior position, it "comes from below", it is intentional but not subjective, and never exists without the possibility for resistance.[61] Because power is an environment, a milieu in and through which subjects themselves are constituted, power is an inevitable aspect of

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[59] Prado, p. 67.
[60] These are characterizations of power described by Foucault and his commentators. The references are to be found as follows: Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (Volume One), p. 93; Dreyfus and Rabinow, p. 186; Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 307; Prado, p. 66-83; and, Mahon, p. 30.
[61] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (Volume One), p. 94-98.

social life, and as such it needs to be destigmatized of its negative connotations. Power is described as relational, impersonal and inescapable. It converges from a multiplicity of sources and does not function simply at the level of government or administration (which is the mistake of juridico-discursive analyses of power). Foucauldian power is intentional in its strategic and tactical orientation—power does appear to operate in order to facilitate certain ends and aims, yet power's strategies and tactics are non-subjective in that they are not the product of an invisible hand (or mind) which formulates these ends. Power is without the intentionality to be malignant, but it can operate strategically to produce effects of domination. Power relations determine conduct in creating possibilities for human action, but Foucault insists that individuals must also be free to choose between possibilities of action, allowing for resistance to power. Foucault argues that were there no spaces for resistance, power would be absolute and could no longer form the strategic relations which provide its fluid vitality.

Foucault links power and knowledge, claiming that the two are reciprocal and inseparable. Power and knowledge align in that "power produces knowledge... power and knowledge directly imply one another... there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations."[62] New "discoveries" of knowledge effect how power relations function because knowledge creates possibilities and in doing so alters existing power relations and creates new ones. Acting in tandem, power/knowledge can lead to new comportments, facilitating different options for individuals in terms of action or resistance. The normalizing impetus of modern power is

particularly fortified through the accumulation of knowledge which is collected and tactically employed to buttress the power relations which culminate in the normalizing forces characteristic of modern disciplinary power. Michael Mahon says, "[N]ormalizing sanctions forward the process of governing individuals by observing them; it is the locale at which knowledge of an individual dovetails with power over the individual."[63] Moreover, power/knowledge relations have a special hand in forming the modern subject in that "the individual is the effect and object of a certain crossing of power and knowledge. He is the product of the complex strategic developments in the field of power and the multiple developments in the human sciences."[64] The modern subject is nothing less than an artifact created through power relations.

One must never lose sight of Foucault's contention that power is in a constant state of flux:

> Like Nietzsche, his avowed model and precursor, [Foucault] understood power not as a fixed quantity of physical force, but rather as a stream of energy flowing through every living organism and every human society, its formless flux harnessed in various patterns of behaviour, habits of introspection, and systems of knowledge.[65]

Because power is not something fixed and static but an ever altering state of relations, it is constantly morphing and evolving, ever-changing, and, as products of power, so are human subjects and subjectivities. Foucault intends his analytics of power to provide the delicacy of analysis necessary to investigate modern power—and the modern subject.[66]

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[62] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 27.
[63] Mahon, p. 152.
[64] Dreyfus and Rabinow, p. 159-160.
[65] Miller, p. 15.
[66] Foucault argues that power cannot be described using a "theory" because of its historically contingent, fluid qualities. Instead, Foucault characterizes his project as an "analytics" of power, involving an examination of power which recognizes power's shifting temper; providing what we might call a "theory"

Power's fluidity makes it such that "[t]he mechanics of power cannot be predicted; they can only be traced through genealogical analysis..."[67] Genealogy is thus intrinsically retrospective. It offers no platform for future predictions. Nonetheless, while power fluctuations have a contingency which appears to open up a world of freedom and possibilities for human creatures, I shall argue in Chapter Three that there is a cumulative rigidity to power which needs be exposed and addressed.

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of power *in action*, inviting a conception of power beyond the commonly conceived juridical representation. For more, see Dreyfus and Rabinow's section on "Power", p. 184-188.

[67] Prado, p. 83.

Chapter Two

Ethics: Foucault on the Self and the Aesthetics of Existence

Foucault's Philosophical Re-orientation

The Use of Pleasure, Volume Two of Foucault's *The History of Sexuality*, marks a significant philosophical re-orientation as Foucault shifts from genealogy to ethics, conceived as "the self's relationship to itself".[1] Foucault's transition to the third of his "domains of analysis" is comparable to that necessitated by Foucault's desire to thoroughly investigate power—a strategic shift which spawned genealogy. The archeological and genealogical tools are not abandoned during this new phase, but Foucault finds that they are inadequate in and of themselves to expedite his task. Foucault explains that his original project to write a genealogy of the history of sexuality and "desiring man" grew to unexpected magnitude as he became convinced that a thorough investigation of his subject in fact demanded a retreat to classical times. *The Use of Pleasure* thus finds Foucault at an historical juncture far from "those Victorians" of Volume 1 of *The History of Sexuality*.

The Use of Pleasure reflects Foucault's continuing interest in "games of truth", characterized as "the interplay of rules, principles, and methods whereby people know themselves" and "games of power" which constitute "the ways people direct and influence behaviours". However, Foucault re-focuses his inquiry to examine how we are engaged in these games vis-à-vis ourselves, noting that "[s]elf-transformations arise from

[1] Arnold Davidson, "Archeology, Genealogy, Ethics", In *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, David Couzens Hoy Ed. (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 221.

and perpetuate the complex interplay of knowledge and power by which, for example, people determine what are acceptable, pleasurable and passionate relations with each other."[2] Foucauldian ethics examine how subjects are involved in their own self-formation. Foucault's foray into classical scholarship also prompts him to examine the ethical implications of what he calls an "aesthetic of existence", a process of active self-stylization which he characterizes as one of the motivations for ethical considerations among the ancient Greeks. *The Use of Pleasure* presents Foucault's unique interpretation of ethics and outlines his framework for understanding ethics and morality.

Foucault on Morality

Foucault explicates his understanding of morality and ethics in the Introduction to *The Use of Pleasure*. He describes morality as having three aspects: first, morality involves a set of prescriptions, rules and values set down through various agencies, culminating in a "moral code"; second, morality refers to the actual behaviour of individuals in response to these recommended rules—the acts of compliance with and defiance of the moral code which constitute a "morality of behaviours";[3] finally, Foucault conceives morality as having a third dimension concerned with the self's relation to itself. It is this third facet of morality which Foucault specifically labels "ethics". Foucauldian ethics investigate how individual subjects develop and understand themselves as moral beings or selves in and through what they perceive as their morally relevant actions,

[2] Charles E. Scott, *The Question of Ethics: Nietzsche, Foucault, Heidegger*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 88.
[3] Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 25-26.

thoughts and behaviours. Foucault further subdivides ethics into four areas of ethical experience.

First, *ethical substance* is "the way in which the individual has to constitute this or that part of himself as the prime material of his moral conduct,"[4] or, as Ian Hacking notes, "the sheer stuff you worry about if you are a moral agent."[5] Determining ethical substance involves identifying the parts of the human subject and/or her behaviour which are understood as relevant for ethical analysis, the parts of ourselves that we make compliant with the moral code. This involves distinguishing the pertinent focal point for examining ethical decisions and judgments, hence discerning how the moral code takes effect. Isolating ethical substance involves locating the imagined focus of our being as ethical subjects.

Second, the *mode of subjection* involves the "way in which the individual establishes his relation to the rule and recognizes himself as obliged to put it into practice."[6] The mode of subjection identifies how individuals or groups recognize moral responsibilities or obligations and how we determine their meaningfulness. Foucault acknowledges that two individuals could act in the same way, although motivated by entirely different considerations. For example, two individuals might refrain from stealing, one citing the edicts of divine law, the other fear of punishment at the hands of the state. The mode of subjection addresses how and why individuals realize their moral obligations. It tells how ethical rules take hold by questioning the motivating forces we

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[4] Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 26.
[5] Ian Hacking, "Self-Improvement", In *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, David Couzens Hoy Ed. (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 237.
[6] Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 27.

have created to ground ethics (i.e., foundations such as reason or divine law). This domain forges a link between the moral code and the self by creating a practical field appropriate to enacting moral guidelines.

Third, *ethical work* or *self-forming activity* is activity "that one performs on oneself, not only in order to bring one's conduct into compliance with a given rule, but to attempt to transform oneself into the ethical subject of one's behaviour."[7] These are the ways we change or work upon ourselves in order to become ethical subjects, the practices or techniques we employ in order to become moral beings. Self-forming activities are how we get ethics to "work", how we moderate our acts in keeping with perceived ethical tenets or imperatives. These are the practices or behaviours which we follow because we construe them as being morally relevant. Self-forming activity refers to the activities one employs to determine the self,[8] the kind of work undertaken in order to mold the self into the kind of being that one ultimately desires to be. Psychoanalysis could be regarded as a self-forming activity as could adherence to an exercise or dietary regimen.

Finally, *telos* provides the model for the kind of person one aspires to be when acting ethically. *Telos* indicates what kind of creatures we should be and may become by behaving morally. It provides an explanation as to why morally "desirable" action is construed as such, by supplying the model for that end state we strive to attain through ethical action.

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[7] Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 273.

[8] The closest Christian ethics come to this is Thomas à Kempis' *The Imitation of Christ*, in which à Kempis describes and details a regimen which, if properly followed, will *make* an individual into a good Christian. In good Christian form, development of good habits affects profound changes in the person.

Foucault allows that the different aspects of ethics may be examined separately or in conjunction with one another. Foucauldian ethics have a fluidity in that particular aspects of ethics may change while others remain the same, sometimes over long periods of time. This interpretation of ethics explains how different cultures can indeed share ethical practices, although certain manifestations of these practices might be brought to bear in entirely different ways or result in overall systems that are ideologically distant. The sophisticated and comprehensive characterization of Foucauldian ethics appears intended to allow for advanced study of ethics both across socio-temporal periods and within different individuals or groups situated within a single regime of truth. However, the categories which Foucault has delineated to elucidate his framework for understanding and interpreting ethics remain somewhat murky. Although critics such as Davidson and Hacking have attempted to make sense of Foucauldian ethics through employing this framework, it remains somewhat puzzling and unclear, and it might prove questionable how firmly committed to this framework Foucault might have been had he continued his ethical studies. Foucault's previous scholarship demonstrates his tendency to carefully delineate analytical systems and frameworks which he does not always adhere to rigorously in subsequent work. The somewhat inchoate tenor of Foucault's linear, introductory description of his ethical categories and his subsequent failure to habitually invoke such terminology in *The Use of Pleasure* makes it questionable how much stock should be put in the rather uncharacteristically strict framework initially outlining Foucault's ethics.

During the genealogical period Foucault argues that the self is an artifact constituted through exterior forces of power relations shaping the individual, however in

ethics Foucault says that the self is also determined by the individual's own exercises in self-formation. Foucault's concern with the self's relation to itself distinguishes Foucauldian from traditionally conceived ethics which are generally concerned with the self's relationships and conduct toward others.[9] Arnold Davidson notes the peculiarity of Foucault's ethical interpretation for the Anglo-American philosophical tradition, as "most Anglo-American moral philosophy is exclusively focused on the level of the moral *code* while the significance of one's relationship to oneself goes largely ignored."[10] Foucault's recognition of the ethical importance of the self's relationship to itself significantly augments and adds depth to traditional ethical thinking in that his approach also emphasizes that before engaging with others the subject must have a sufficiently developed notion of what it means to be a self. Without this prior understanding, it is not possible to meaningfully interact with other people or the world in which we live. Foucault notes that the Greeks appreciated how the individual's relationship to self was prior to other-directed relationships and indeed shaped the individual's orientation and conduct toward the world. He argues that to the Greeks, "[c]are for others should not be put before the care of oneself. The care of the self is ethically prior in that the relationship with oneself is ontologically prior."[11]

Freedom and Politics

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[9] There are notable exceptions; arguably ethical works where the formation of the self is paramount. For instance, the aforementioned Thomas à Kempis' *The Imitation of Christ* and Albert Camus' *The Stranger* both concern how individuals define themselves as selves.

[10] Davidson, p. 231. (my emphasis)

[11] Michel Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern of the Self as a Practice of Freedom," In *Michel Foucault: Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth*. Paul Rabinow Ed. (New York: Penguin, 1997), p. 287. (Interview conducted by H. Becker, R. Fornet-Betancourt and A. Gomez-Miller on January 20, 1984)

Focusing on ethics through the window of sexuality (*aphrodisia*), Foucault isolates not just what the Greeks considered problematic about sexuality, but how these concerns intersected with larger ethical considerations. Examining dietetics, economics, erotics and truth/philosophy as each intersects with the *aphrodisia*, Foucault attributes the problematization of these realms to concern for the dangers of excess and the maintenance of proper roles. Because the Greeks were particularly concerned with the virtue of *sophrosyne* or moderation, they considered excessive or indulgent behaviour an ugly trait antithetical to the creation of a pleasingly stylized self. Similarly, Greek focus on "proper roles" was structured to positively emphasize activity and deride passivity, so that a pleasing aesthetic of existence would focus on active conduct.

The impetus for Greek concern regarding excess and maintenance of proper roles intersects with the vision of the Greek *polis*. Politics are depicted as consistently aligning with Greek ethics, the needs of the *polis* ever in the background of ethical considerations. "[T]he setting up of a solid and stable state of rule of the self over the self" was considered significant not just for the individual, but also for the state. [12] Founded on a social stratification, the *polis* depended on its Citizens exemplifying certain virtues which demarcated them as leaders, buttressing Greek social organization, social stability and overall state fortitude. Foucault notes that "[t]he individual's attitude toward himself, the way in which he ensured his own freedom with regard to himself, and the form of supremacy he maintained over himself were a contributing element to the well-being and good order of the city."[13] Free men were strictly delineated from those who were

[12] Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 69.
[13] Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 79.

enslaved. The free man should not be enslaved by another individual, nor his own passions. Only the Citizen who could exercise self-mastery and act with virtuous moderation could be counted on to perform as a just and effective ruler.

The Citizen's capacity to govern himself was perceived as indicative of his larger political and leadership capabilities. Demonstrating self-mastery and moderation was important for the individual to carve out a beautifully styled existence, but also because exemplifying such qualities influenced one's standing as a citizen. Concerns centered around Foucault's four identified areas of problematization regarding sexuality were structured to facilitate work on the self in keeping with self-mastery and moderation, and affirming political leadership capabilities. On Foucault's Greek model, self directed conduct was fundamentally linked to other directed conduct, and individual ethics were directly connected to state concerns.

Foucault's Aesthetic of Existence

Foucault describes the Greek "arts of existence" as focusing on "those intentional and voluntary actions by which men not only set themselves rules of conduct, but also seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make their life into an *oeuvre* that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria."[14] He argues that the techniques involved in the Greek care of the self indicate that ancient subjects related to *themselves* and conceived of subjectivity in a manner quite different from modern disciplinary subjects. Foucault says that all societies have "technologies of the self", defined as:

> techniques that permit individuals to effect, by their own means, a certain number of operations on their own bodies, their own souls, their own thoughts, their own conduct, and this in a manner so as to transform themselves, modify themselves, and to attain a certain state of perfection, happiness, purity, supernatural power.[15]

As a malleable social construct, sexuality has become an important locus around which to organize technologies of the self. Arguing that sex itself is "boring", Foucault repeatedly insists that his interest is not in sex or sexuality *per se*, but in how the social problematization of sex provides a platform for investigating technologies of the self critical to subject formation.

In *The Use of Pleasure*, Foucault explores the Greek problematization of the *aphrodisia*.[16] He says the Greeks did not attach pejorative connotations to sex, instead conceptualizing sex as a natural appetite requiring fulfillment much like bodily needs for nourishment or rest. Sex became morally problematic because the energy and force behind sexual desire could prove difficult to control. This danger necessitated concerted management and regulation of the passions in keeping with the virtues of *enkrateia and sophrosyne.* [17] Employing the correct "use of pleasures" an individual could create a beautiful aesthetic of existence, a life crafted as a work of art, an artifact that could stand

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[14] Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 10-11.

[15] Michel Foucault, "Sexuality and Solitude", In *Michel Foucault: Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth,* Paul Rabinow Ed. (New York: Penguin, 1997), p. 177.

[16] Foucault employs the term *aphrodisia* as the Greek counterpart to our concept of sexuality. *Aphrodisia* addresses the dynamics of acts, pleasures and desires. It was the maintenance and management of the three intermingling forces in keeping with moderation which concerned the Greeks. For more on *aphrodisia* see *The Use of Pleasure*, Part One, Chapter 1.

[17] Foucault defines *enkrateia* as self-mastery and *sophrosyne* as moderation. He describes *enkrateia* as a precondition to *sophrosyne* because one need develop a sense of self mastery before one can exercise the control necessary to act with moderation. In order that one not act excessively—excessive behaviour being considered a very unbecoming trait—the individual need demonstrate *enkrateia* and *sophrosyne* in everyday conduct, including in and through the management of the passions. For more on *enkrateia* and *sophrosyne* see *The Use of Pleasure*, Part One, Chapters 3 and 4.

as an aesthetic example to be admired and emulated.[18] Increasingly interested in the idea of life as a work of art toward the end of his career, Foucault notes, "[w]hat strikes me is the fact that, in our society, art has become something that is related only to objects and not to individuals or to life. That art is something which is specialized or done by experts who are artists. But couldn't everyone's life become a work of art? Why should the lamp or the house be an art object but not our life?"[19] Foucault identifies the aesthetic of existence as an important impetus for Greek ethics, and personally interprets the idea of forming the self as a work of art as an inspiring ethical project.

The aesthetic of existence demanded active management of the *aphrodisia* as part of self-stylization. "*Ascesis*" refers to this process of working on the self through exercise and training, ideally implementing technologies of the self which contribute to a pleasing aesthetic of existence. Greek ethical texts differ from code-based Christian ethical texts in that instead of providing "rules" for ethical conduct, the Greek texts provided only "guidelines" to coach Citizens in individually oriented projects of self-stylization. A work in progress, the self is never a static totality but requires constant creative nurturing by the individual. Self-formation as creation of an aesthetic of existence involved a constant balancing act, a combative struggle with the passions which Foucault characterizes as "agonistic". He says, "one could behave ethically only by adopting a

[18] Foucault argues that "[t]he goal of moral reflection on the *aphrodisia* was much less to establish a systematic code that would determine the canonical form of sexual acts... than to work out the conditions and modalities of a "use"; that is, to define a style for what the Greeks called *chresis aphrodision*, the use of pleasures." See *The Use of Pleasure*, Part One, Chapter 2 for further discussion of need, timeliness and status, those general principles which Foucault argues were used to structure the use of pleasure, or *Chresis Aphrodision.*

[19] Michel Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics", In *Michel Foucault: Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth.* Paul Rabinow Ed. (New York: Penguin, 1997), p. 261. Foucault's comment comes from 1983 interview with Dreyfus and Rabinow conducted in Berkeley.

combative attitude toward the pleasures... [e]thical conduct in matters of pleasure was contingent on a battle for power."[20] A good life stood as an aesthetic creation born of struggle—the self was hard won.

Normalization

Foucault argues that failing to appreciate that self-formation might be a creative, ascetic process, the modern disciplinary subject instead accepts the hegemony of a "natural" self to be discovered and realized.[21] The normalizing ethic of the disciplinary regime of truth involves cultivating selves from something pre-given, simply refining the self according to a pre-determined, "ideal" form. Subject formation is reduced to a process of homogeneous manufacturing, losing its creative potential and robbing agents of originative agency. Passed off as an active process of self "discovery", the search for the natural, "true" self actually amounts to a scientific, industrial manufacturing of subjectivities quite antithetical to the Greek aesthetic of existence. Modern sexuality, perceived as a universal, pre-given "nature" to be managed in keeping with its generalizable fulfillment, provides an example of how normalizing influences shape subjects.

Foucault offers his study of ancient Greek ethical techniques associated with the aesthetic of existence as an instructive point of reference for exposing the normalizing techniques of the modern regime of truth. Disparaging normalization because of its

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[20] Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 66.

[21] Foucault clarifies his understanding of the term "ascetic" in an interview wherein he describes "ascetic practice" "not in the sense of a morality of renunciation but as an exercise of the self on the self by which one attempts to develop and transform oneself, and to attain to a certain mode of being." See Michel

tendency to curtail and impoverish human possibilities, [22] Foucault optimistically contends that "[t]he notion of stylization does remove ethics from the quest for universal standards of behaviour that legislate conformity and normalization, reducing men and women to a mode of existence in accordance with a least common denominator."[23] Attempting to elucidate alternatives to the prescriptive ethics of the disciplinary regime of truth, Foucault suggests a return to more active, creative participation in self-formation. Foucault aims to expose systems of domination and normalization which limit the selves we are "allowed" to be, through exposing the power relations and technologies of the self which circumscribe subjectivity. Ultimately, Foucault is redirecting his readers to conceptualize ethics as a creative process, and the self as a work of art, intending this focus on active self-formation to safeguard against disciplinary ethics with its rule-based strategies and normalizing drive.

Genealogy promotes awareness of the hegemony of normalizing forces through constantly challenging individuals to problematize given assumptions, attempting to reveal previously unforeseen fields of possibilities. Normalization limits possibilities for experiences and hence for productive self-development in ways that Foucault finds deeply problematic. Having "discovered" what kinds of selves we *should* be, the disciplinary tactics of a normalizing regime of truth ensure that those who transgress such norms are suitably punished. The modern subject learns to constitute himself vis-à-vis sexuality, for example, through normalcy and interdiction. Davidson maintains,

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Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern for Self as Practice of Freedom", p. 284. (Interview conducted by H. Becker, R, Fornet-Betancourt and A. Gomez-Miller on January 20, 1984.)

[22] Bernauer and Mahon, "The Ethics of Michel Foucault", In *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault.* Gary Gutting Ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 143.

[23] James W. Bernauer and Michael Mahon, p. 153.

> [m]odern knowledge and technologies of the self aim... to foster the emergence of a positive self; one recognizes and attaches oneself to a self presented through the normative categories of psychological and psychoanalytic science and through the normative disciplines consistent with them. Thus, like Oedipus, we become victims of our own self-knowledge... If the struggle with this modern power-knowledge-subjectivity formation is a politics of our selves, the key campaign in that struggle will be a new mode of fashioning an ethical way of being a self.[24]

Foucault seeks to detach self knowledge from its present scientific, manufacturing pre-occupations, instead offering possibilities inherent in a more creative conception of how subjects can arrive at self-awareness and self-knowledge through an aesthetic of existence.

Power, Truth and Self-Creation

Ethics demands navigation of the regimes of truth in which individuals find themselves enmeshed. Inevitably historically situated, humans are limited in their freedom of self-creation and understanding by social, cultural and temporal factors. Because Foucault understands truth as historically contingent, practices or technologies of the self are also historically circumscribed. Knowledge also has a role in determining subjects because "[o]ne cannot care for the self without knowledge. The care for self is of course knowledge of self... but it is also the knowledge of a certain number of rules of conduct or of principles which are at the same time truths and regulations. To care for self is to fit one's self out with these truths."[25] Truth is pivotal in creating individuals because what we understand to be human creatures are a result of power relations,

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[24] Arnold Davidson, "Ethics as Ascetics: Foucault, the History of Ethics and Ancient Thought" in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, Gary Gutting Ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 151.

products of systems and regimes of truth. Truth and power both determine subjects because truth is formed through, reinforced by and aids in fortifying and creating power relations. Truth, power and knowledge function as a creative triumvirate, determining not just the rules and regulations of a particular regime of truth, but the very subjects who inhabit that realm.[26] According to Karlis Racevskis, Foucault accounts for how truth "is ultimately political in nature and is predicated on knowledge/power strategies operative in a given society and age. Truth in this regard has not set humans free but has instituted subjection..."[27] Foucault perceives his genealogical task as exposing these cultural limitations in order to disarm perceived ahistorical truths of their hegemony and restrictive force. He provides a strategy for achieving more latitude in power relations, and more freedom of self-creation simply through unveiling and demystifying power structures and the sacred truths which characterize and fortify specific regimes of truth.

Foucauldian ethics suddenly appear to suggest that agents are actively involved in a teleological kind of self creation which would seem impossible to the subject of genealogy. Genealogy characterized truth as a by-product of strategic power relations, *not* something which could be purposefully manufactured through the strategic direction of power relations, if for no other reason than because the exigencies of power make the outcome of such efforts quite unpredictable. The Foucault of *Discipline and Punish* states that power functions intentionally, and power might be employed in an attempt to attain certain strategic ends; however, the multiplicitous factors which culminate in

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[25] Bernauer. *The Final Foucault*, p. 5.

[26] For a review of the inter-relatedness of truth, power and knowledge refer back to Chapter One of this thesis, particularly the final paragraph of the section "The Nietzschean Influence on Genealogy" and footnote 21.

modalities of power render such efforts quite hopelessly precipitous. Accidents, surprise and unexpected factors are constantly thwarting the genealogical subject's best efforts to control her own destiny. And yet Foucault's ethical emphasis on active self-formation suggests he is endowing individuals with meaningful self determining, originative agency, abilities to create themselves and direct power relations in a concerted manner which seems ultimately untenable for genealogy's subject. Given genealogical power, Foucauldian ethics promises agents much more creative capacity than could have been anticipated. Foucault seems either to be neglecting, forgetting or repudiating his earlier claims that power relations are actually much messier than even the fluidity and sophistication of Foucauldian ethics can accommodate. Power relations involve converging forces too complex to be meaningfully directed or predicted. The unexpected, accidental nature of events, as exposed through genealogy, is antithetical to the strategic formation of those artifacts known as selves as Foucault imagines they might be carved out through an aesthetic of existence. Foucault says, "Self-understanding is not a matter either of biological programming or of explicit, autonomous decision procedures. But self-understanding can be studied objectively through a matrix of social and discursive practices. To the extent that these practices turn out to vary historically, self-understanding will vary as well."[28] Of course, individuals do seem to be able to intentionally direct some of their actions in order to arrive at partially predictable outcomes, yet it is the subsequent interpretation of these actions, the necessary task of

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[27] Karlis Racevskis, "Michel Foucault, Rameau's Nephew, and the Question of Identity," in *The Final Foucault*, James Bernauer and David Rasmussen eds. (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1988), p. 25.
[28] Hoy, p. 18.

bestowing actions with meaning which makes self-creation and the aesthetic of existence problematic.[29]

Freedom and the Aesthetic of Existence

The very possibility of an aesthetic of existence depends upon the maintenance of freedom. Foucault says,

> power relations are possible only insofar as the subjects are free. If one of them were completely at the other's disposal and became his thing, an object on which he could wreak boundless and limitless violence, there wouldn't be any relations of power... for power relations to come into play, there must be at least a certain degree of freedom on both sides... in power relations there is necessarily the possibility of resistance because if there were no possibility of resistance (of violent resistance, flight, deception, strategies capable of reversing the situation), there would be no power relations at all.[30]

To have originative agency individuals must have choice in their actions. Self-creation involves choosing among possibilities, actively selecting the kind of self one becomes through struggling to overcome certain wills and desires while electing to gratify or indulge others. Foucault says that power relations never curtail freedom so that individuals are without choice and resistance. Choice, however, should not be conflated with the possibilities for freedom, originative agency or resistance. Simply because an individual has certain choices need not mean that the individual has significant freedom.

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[29] Consider the anorexic, who has the ability to intentionally mold and shape the body much like the plastic surgery patient; however, what this will be interpreted to "mean" will be a matter largely beyond her control, subject to historical interpretation based on present and subsequent socio-cultural factors beyond complete knowledge, anticipation or control. A subject's best efforts to carve out a meaningful aesthetic of existence may be thwarted through the unpredictability of subsequent interpretation. Whether attempts to create an aesthetic of existence actually serve to make an individual more beautiful, or what an aesthetic "says" seems historically contingent to an extent that such efforts are "meaningless" in any objective or enduring sense. Does it matter to the "artist" whether her work is "understood" or "correctly" interpreted? Should it?

On the Foucauldian picture, this is partially because the outcome of one's choices is so capricious given the fluctuations of power relations, that what look like choices do not amount to much because "intentional" outcomes are nearly impossible to facilitate. In fact, most of the time one does not know what one is actually facilitating through an alleged "choice". Also, choices can be so circumscribed or coercive that they cannot really be considered free. Historical situatedness, cultural circumstance and moral luck all curtail choices in ways that Foucault does not acknowledge. While Foucault might claim that individuals have certain "choices" in given situations, to conflate highly coercive choices between undesirable alternatives with acts of self-determination, freedom or resistance is nearly absurd. Politics curtail freedom, making what appear to be choices less than free, rendering certain choices extremely coercive. How limited or circumscribed might choices become before the philosopher starts to question whether such choices should really count as such?

Foucault says philosophy is inherently concerned with freedom, and should be responsible for warning of the dangers of power so that freedom is not unnecessarily curtailed. Because power relations curtail individual possibilities for self-creation, concerns with freedom align with the aesthetic of existence and the ability to be a self-creating individual. By exposing power relations, Foucault attempts to ensure that individuals will maintain maximum possible freedom in their self creative abilities and choices. And yet the limited choices or resistance strategies enabled by power relations may become so narrow that ultimately they do not actually seem like free choices at all. Foucault discusses how, in the most extreme situation, only the option of killing oneself

[30] Michel Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom", p. 292.

might exist as a form of resistance, and still he qualifies this option as enough of a free choice to qualify as possible resistance. Perhaps Foucault does not adequately acknowledge how coercion can curtail and qualify choice. His characterization of extremely limited "choices" as options and openings for freedom in fact becomes quite suspect. Examining how coercion impacts "freedom", many of the choices or acts of resistance which Foucault perceives may become questionable. Foucault acknowledges that power restricts choice but fails to concede power's "nature" or structure might actually render what he calls freedom a questionable notion.

The four areas of problematization which Foucault outlines surrounding the *aphrodisia* all contain prescriptions, which, while they might be somewhat fluid in terms of their individual implementation, nonetheless must conform to quite rigid ideals of beauty in order to "count" as successful within particular regimes of truth. In fact, the Greek aesthetic of existence is actually far less individually directed than Foucault suggests because the ideals considered beautiful and good are in fact quite carefully structured so that they are in fact good not just for the individual but for the polis. The individual forges a pleasing aesthetic of existence intended to stand as an example for all to see but the Greeks demanded that these examples be in conformity with very specific virtues. Hence, ultimately, "One trains in order to gain self-mastery for the successful practice of virtue in relation to oneself as well as to others."[31] The exercises of the self associated with forming oneself as "beautiful" are actually about conforming to a specific administration of power. The Foucauldian aesthetic of existence drawn from ancient history is in fact more conservative and less creative than it might initially appear in that

"pleasing" self-stylization is quite strictly curtailed by various rules and parameters in keeping with notions of beauty and good-ness. Socrates' condemnation for corrupting the youth of Athens stands as the perfect example of how a pleasing aesthetic of existence for the Greeks demanded more than just a beautiful, consistent or stylized life, but required adherence to larger ideals of beauty and good in keeping with quite rigid beliefs about what was good for society at large. "The individual fulfilled himself as an ethical subject by shaping a precisely measured conduct that was plainly visible to all and deserving to be long remembered."[32]

The Emancipatory Potential of Ethics?

Foucault argues that although we are inevitably situated within power relations, attempting to identify the structures that define power relations in order that we might "think differently" and create ourselves anew offers liberatory potential. Foucauldian ethics lead one to believe that power is suddenly much more predictable and malleable than previously characterized. However, Foucault's earlier, genealogical claims about power make it difficult to take seriously his ardent new contention that we can be actively involved in self creation. Power relations in the ethics take on a much more malleable character than they were allowed in genealogy; however, after genealogy, it appears that even if freedom of choice is conceded, the fallout from individual ethical choices remains extremely unpredictable. Ultimately the conception of power found in *Discipline and*

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[31] Scott, p. 90.
[32] Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 89.

Punish or even *The History of Sexuality*, Volume 1 appears quite at odds with the Foucauldian ethical project. Why might Foucault have altered his vision?

Perhaps Foucault had a certain self-interest in arguing for the creative capacity of ethics. Foucault confesses,

> [f]or me, intellectual work is related to what you could call "aestheticism", meaning transforming yourself... You see, that's why I really work like a dog, and I worked like a dog all my life. I am not interested in the academic status of what I am doing because my problem is my own transformation... The transformation of one's self by one's own knowledge is, I think, something rather close to the aesthetic experience. Why should a painter work if he is not transformed by his own painting?[33]

Despite Foucault's habitual reluctance to reveal too much about himself personally, despite his deliberately opaque answers to directly personal interview questions, perhaps this statement inadvertently reveals more about Foucault than he anticipated. Foucault perceives something positive and instructive in the idea of an aesthetics of existence. He says, "[f]rom the idea that the self is not given to us, I think that there is only one practical consequence: we have to create ourselves as a work of art."[34] The concept of an aesthetics of existence born of ethics actually allows Foucault himself a new project, personally and intellectually, in that now he is theoretically afforded the ability to set himself to this task of self-formation, of creating for himself a life as a work of art, of making himself a beautiful model to be admired and imitated.

The aesthetic of existence, and its focus on the possibilities of active self-formation and originative agency allow Foucault to perceive his previous life and struggle

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[33] Michel Foucault, "Michel Foucault: An Interview By Stephen Riggins", In *Michel Foucault: Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth*. Paul Rabinow Ed. (New York: Penguin, 1997), p. 130-131. (Interview conducted by Stephen Riggins, June, 1982)

[34] Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress", p. 351.

in a more positive, even inspirational light. Foucault can only argue for the emancipatory potential of ethics by acknowledging, through his own formulation of ethics, and through his analysis of the positive potential in Greek ethical practices, that individuals have a certain measure of volitional, originative agency in self-formation.

> Rather than a replacement of intellectual and moral values, Foucault's aesthetics of existence wishes to place at the center of both thought and action the imaginative creativity which has been exiled to the exclusive practice of art. For him, the formation of oneself as a thinker and a moral agent, which develops only through historical struggles must be understood as the creation of a work of art rather than the execution of a program.[35]

Should the Foucault of genealogy even be expected to show concern with how one formulates oneself as a thinker or as a moral agent? What is the ultimate significance of whether life is lived according to a self-designed aesthetic or a more programmatic disciplinary formulation? It might seem that whether subjects are formed in keeping with an aesthetic project or a disciplinary program should not ultimately make much difference for a Foucault still committed to the genealogical conception of power, because ultimately how either "choice" unfolds is too unpredictable and too difficult to discern reliably to constitute consequential originative agency or freedom of action. Whether Foucault's optimistic ethical interpretation of the possibility of directed self-stylization and a directed aesthetic of existence is warranted, given his earlier work in the genealogical period, will be the central question for the next chapter.

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[35] Bernauer, p. 71.

Chapter Three

Foucault's Failure of Nerve: On the Discontinuity between Genealogy and Ethics— What Went Wrong?

In his biography of Foucault, James Miller tells the story of an encounter between Foucault and a student which occurred shortly before Foucault's 1983 departure from Berkeley. The student, Philip Horvitz, questioned Foucault about the role of the artist in modern society, and the artist's continuing creative capacity in an increasingly technologized and disciplined world. Foucault was intrigued by the question, and asked Horvitz to return after a couple of days, during which Foucault would ponder the query. When the young student returned, Foucault provided him with the following reply:

> Freedom can be found, he said—but always in a context. Power puts into play a dynamic of constant struggle. There is no escaping it. But there is freedom in knowing the game is yours to play. Don't look to authorities: the truth is in your self. Don't be scared. Trust your self. Don't be afraid of living. And don't be afraid of dying. Have courage. Do what you feel you must: desire, create, transcend—you can win the game.[1]

These are inspiring words, no doubt, but are they the response one might have expected of Foucault? On one hand, Foucault's answer is quite in keeping with his personal beliefs regarding the importance of the philosophical enterprise and his own role as philosopher. Foucault often expressed concern with freedom and the ongoing struggles that occur within the structures delineated by power relations. And yet, if one takes seriously the Foucauldian *Weltanschauung* that emerges in his genealogical writings, *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality,* Volume 1, it is difficult to

see how Foucault's insistence on the self-determining, creative potential of the self could possibly follow. This is particularly true given Foucault's genealogical depiction of power. Perhaps Foucault's response to Horvitz appears more plausible in light of Foucauldian ethics; however, this reconciliation raises other problems, leading to questions about how continuous Foucault's ethical writings are with his genealogy. How, following genealogy, might one have expected Foucault to characterize ethics? Do these expectations cohere with the ethics that Foucault actually produced? If Foucauldian ethics are not in keeping with genealogy, what might account for this incongruity? Finally, can philosophical tensions between genealogy and ethics be reconciled without having to choose one of these approaches as authoritative?

Anticipating Foucauldian Ethics

Chapter Two addressed how and why Foucault found himself philosophically concerned with ethical questions. As Foucault explained, "After first studying the games of truth (*jeux de verite*) in their interplay with one another... and then studying their interaction with power relations... I felt obliged to study the games of truth in the relationship of self with self and the forming of oneself as a subject..."[2] Foucault perceived his investigations into the self's relationship with itself as a third domain of analysis in his ongoing study of how subjects are shaped and formed. Despite this alleged continuity linking Foucauldian ethics with his larger project, Foucault's treatment

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[1] James Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), p. 352-353. (Miller notes that Foucault's response is transcribed from Horvitz' own notes)
[2] Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 6.

of ethics precipitates some troubling changes and what may be inconsistencies in his ideological orientation.

Following genealogy, Foucault might have been expected to arrive at the ethical dilemma that individuals are without the substantive "originative agency" or self-determining ability to claim a significant role in self-development or subject formation. Moreover, Foucault could have emphasized the menacing threat of our own failure to recognize how power relations wholly circumscribe our interactions with ourselves and others. With subjects haplessly believing that we in fact do, or at least can act creatively and in concerted opposition to power structures and dominant ideologies, Foucault might have awakened us to the far reaching influences of power relations with respect even to our most interior activities. With no individual situated outside of power relations and no situation unaffected, resistance to power inevitably occurs within interstices which have also been created by and through power relations. Even attempts at resistance and creative action remain largely delineated and anticipated by the power relations which make possible such resistance and which determine the results of such actions.[3]

But Foucauldian ethics do not reflect this interpretation and raise several quandaries. First, the genealogist's ardent commitment to historical contingency and repudiation of origins as essences should make the aesthetic of existence suspect. Second, the very conception of what it is to be a human subject appears significantly different during Foucault's genealogical and ethical periods. Third, power itself seems to

[3] I do not intend to personify power, to attach to it a kind of self-conscious cognizance and intentionality. It must be recalled, however, that power is productive. As a complex set of strategic relations, resistance itself is a necessary aspect of power's continuous reproduction and functioning—not a liberatory gesture which "frees" subjects from power relations by allowing individuals to transcend or move outside the flux of power relations.

have been re-characterized in Foucault's ethics. Finally, Foucault's ethics render his previous writing on truth and freedom problematic. Of course, philosophers are entitled to, and indeed do change the direction and focus of their thinking during the course of their careers, but Foucault's philosophical re-orientation from genealogy to ethics is particularly problematic in that it ultimately appears less a change of direction, than a failure of nerve leading to serious tensions in the overall consistency of his writings.

The Nature of Genealogy

Prado characterizes genealogy as an attitude. He says, "Genealogy is...at base a problematizing *attitude*, and as such it draws its life from what it investigates and opposes."[4] Genealogy offers solutions only in providing plausible narratives, multiple interpretive schemes which it unearths and creates, while refusing to make the stronger claim that through its application deep meanings or hidden truths can be found. Genealogy is firmly anti-metaphysical. As Prado explains:

> Genealogy, then, is essentially a readiness to continually problematize established truths through the development of alternative accounts and critical analyses of targeted facts, concepts, principles, canons, natures, institutions, methodological truisms, and established practices. Genealogy cannot become the dominant truth of an age for it can only exist as opposition cashed out in table-turning construals bolstered by convincing historical detail and seasoned with startling, perspective-altering reversals and inversions of the familiar. That is how it enables us to resist power's otherwise inexorable tendency to become ever more restrictive and confining.[5]

Genealogy becomes an intellectual strategy for avoiding complete absorption into power structures by forcing us to recognize the reality of power, all the while also maintaining

[4] Prado, p. 152.

that power relations can never fully be anticipated or comprehended. According to genealogy, recognition of power, even if incomplete, enables a measure of alterity. Continuously problematizing given truths, genealogy prompts the intellectual to constantly question what might otherwise be taken as law.[6] It constantly reminds of the precariousness and historical contingency of everything deemed sacred, which should include those very selves we might attempt to create through an aesthetic of existence.

An individual's best attempts to create an aesthetic of existence, a life that stands as a work of art, will be thwarted by the contingencies of history and corollary perspectival interpretations and re-interpretations. Contrary to what Foucault argues in ethics, an aesthetic of existence cannot provide a prescription for providing any real resistance to power. Genealogy reminds that even given the exercise of creating a self there will be unaccountable, unpredictable forces at work as power relations acting on this "self" intersect in unexpected ways. The exigencies of power relations also make unpredictable subsequent interpretations or "meanings" attached to these *objects d'art* which Foucauldian ethics argue can be formed through the aesthetic of existence.[7] The self is as historically contingent as any other relation-set, with power relations circumscribing who we are in ways that inevitably impede attempts at self creation. The point is, whatever we *try* to do will have unanticipated results. As Foucault puts it, people "know what they do", and may "know why they do what they do", but what

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[5] Prado, p. 152.

[6] Foucault attributes a special role to the intellectual, whom he believes has a particularly ability and responsibility to combat power relations and protect freedom.

[7] This idea is easily demonstrated in the common sense wisdom that history is written by the victors. The interpretation of an historical event such as the Salem witch trials, for example, takes on extremely different significance and meaning given differing historical regimes of truth.

people *don't* know is "what what they do does."[8] The effort to create a meaningful aesthetic of existence which can actually stand as a recognizable, enduring monument seems foolhardy in light of genealogy. Foucault says, "The purpose of history, guided by genealogy, is not to discover the roots of our identity, but to commit itself to its dissipation... If genealogy in its own right gives rise to questions concerning our native land, native language, or the laws that govern us, its intention is to reveal the heterogeneous systems which, masked by the self, inhibit the formation of any form of identity."[9]

Having jettisoned the search for ahistorical truth, and rejecting the conflation of origins as essences, genealogy claims only to present alternative intellectual schemes for addressing historical and/or philosophical problems. Understanding is historically contingent and interpretation based, morphing with changing conditions and individual perspectives. With respect to the self, each of us is, as John Ransom puts it, only "a unique intersection point of a variety of forces and disciplines."[10] Each of these "intersection points" or selves is ultimately subject to multiple interpretations, differing according to the historical, social and cultural perspectives of the interpreter. The aesthetic of existence calls for the creation of the self as a work of art. It is surprising that Foucault would embrace this idea given his genealogical belief in the historical contingency of everything considered immutable and trans-historical. It seems more plausible that Foucault's allegiance to genealogy would lead him to argue that the idea of

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[8] Dreyfus and Rabinow, p. 187.
[9] Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History", p. 162.
[10] John S. Ransom, *Foucault's Discipline: The Politics of Subjectivity*. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997), p. 152.

an enduring, meaningful aesthetic of existence is a laughable fiction—not a model to be emulated.

The Modern Subject

Genealogy characterizes individuals as artifacts created through power relations which they cannot transcend and so depend upon for their continuing existence. Humans do not have determinate natures to be fulfilled, nor do they act in accord with a rational logos or in concert with an overarching teleology. The individual can have only minimal, if any, control over self-formation because although "[t]he individual is not a pre-given entity... The individual, with his identity and characteristics, is the product of... power exercised over bodies."[11] The manufactured subject of the modern disciplinary regime, as well as the ancient Greek subject concerned with the aesthetic of existence, are both ultimately products of power relations, regardless of how they are perceived or perceive themselves in terms of ethical orientation.

Yet the ancient Greek subjects whom Foucault invokes in his ethical studies are described as actively, self-consciously engaged in self-formation in a manner not simply foreign to the modern disciplinary subject because of her social situation within the modern regime of truth. Foucault's ethical subject appears able to teleologically navigate power relations. Only through allocating individuals significant innovative agency can Foucault's commitment to the idea of the aesthetic of existence become coherent. The aesthetic of existence depends upon free and purposeful attempts at self creation, yet if

[11] Michel Foucault, "Questions on Geography", in *Power/Knowledge*, Colin Gordon ed. (Brighton: Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1980), p. 73-74

power relations are as multi-faceted, complex and unpredictable as depicted in genealogy, individuals should not have the originative agency required to shape themselves as selves in a meaningful or predictable way. At the very least, as reflected in Foucault's remark about not knowing what what we do does, individuals could never be confident that the consequences of our actions will be the intended ones.

What it means to be a subject or a self is fundamentally different depending on how much innovative agency the subject possesses. The ethical subject is allowed a degree of innovative agency which makes it appear as if this subject is something more than the product of power relations, but is also, to a significant degree, a product of her own agency and self-determination. The implications of this analysis are more far reaching than genealogical analysis itself will allow. These extreme differences in human agency are not just the result of subjects being the products of particular and disparate regimes of truth. Such radical differences reflect a troublesome discrepancy in Foucault's genealogical and ethical interpretations of what it means to be a subject. Foucault's characterization of ethics indicates a belief that individuals have some meaningful role to play in creating themselves. But where is the wherewithal to do so? Genealogy tells us that any particular human subject (who, remember, is an artifact of power) has little to no control over the convergence of power relations. Nor does that subject have a standard to measure her interpretations of power-shaped events or her own actions. This all seems quite contrary to the ethical elevation of the aesthetic existence and the depiction of subjects—ancient or modern—as meaningfully engaged in such a task. Moreover, while Foucault acknowledges that power relations change from era to era, his radical re-formulation of power in his ethics involves a re-characterization dramatic enough that it

involves nearly a complete break from power as construed in genealogy—power's very nature is modified.

Power

Foucauldian ethics appear to significantly re-formulate "power". Genealogical power is described as intentional, non-subjective and highly unpredictable in that it involves sets of strategic relations converging from multiplicitous and unexpected points. In ethics, however, power takes on a malleable and predictable quality quite inconsistent with its former characterization. The subjects of Foucauldian ethics strategically and purposefully navigate power relations with a degree of accuracy and predictability quite antithetical to the genealogical depiction of how power relations operate. In the ethics, innovative agency is imputed to individuals who consciously resist power and apparently do so with some success. This *predictability of outcome*, in terms of attempts at the strategic manipulation of power relations, is what is most foreign to genealogical power. Foucault says that "power is not... a certain strength we are endowed with", yet his ethical subjects must effectively control power relations in keeping with their own purposes to facilitate an aesthetic of existence.[12] Foucauldian ethics allows for human agents to facilitate particular and anticipated ends in opposition to power. Genealogical power could not be strategically directed as such; in fact, this is why attempts to actively direct events often backfire, as in the case of the Victorian bourgeoisie who tried to use sexuality to free themselves, all the while actually constraining themselves with their artifice.

Foucault urges individuals to transcend the strictures of power relations by attempting to find spaces where they can partake in "limit experiences" which will provide enlightening and edifying ways of thinking and interpreting the world. It is in these interstices that Foucault claims one can find the potential to resist power. And yet, there could be no limit experiences at all if there were not those limits delineated by power relations themselves. Only power can make transcendent acts transcendent. Resistance to power relations inevitably occurs upon a field of already existing power relations. In keeping with Foucault's contention that agents cannot know what what they do does, genealogy suggests that only if acts of resistance play themselves out in certain ways upon the existing field of power relations will acts intended as resistance actually amount to that. Never being able to predict the ultimate outcome of a particular action, an intended act of resistance which actually results in impeding hegemonic influences as intended ultimately appears little more than lucky. Actions which actually result in their intended outcomes do not necessarily reflect strategies which "worked", but only appear as such because circumstances, for whatever reasons, bore things out as anticipated, although an opposite and unanticipated outcome could in the vast majority of cases just as easily have occurred.

Power thwarts attempts to get beyond the systems it constructs not by constraining *us*, but by constraining our "comportments"—that is, by enabling and inhibiting courses of action. Our ethical judgments are little more than nexi of the total of power relations vis-à-vis certain behaviours. It is infinitely difficult to "speak new

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[12] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (Volume One), p. 93-95.

words", because even the spaces where these alleged new words are voiced are part of power's structuring of our situations. Hence, as Miller points out,

> the field of possible transgression is always historically specific: every epoch forms what one can call a 'system of the transgressive.'... Properly speaking, this space coincides neither with the illegal nor the criminal, neither with the revolutionary, the monstrous nor the abnormal, nor even with the sum total of all these deviant forms; but each of these terms designates at least an angle... Acts of 'transgressions' may put a human being in touch with the chaotic power that Nietzsche calls the Dionysian; but no act of transgression can escape its origins in a historical field that, in crucial part, motivates, —and insofar as the object of transgression is to tap the untamed energy of transcendence—(de)forms it.[13]

Attempts at self creation will have consequences and ramifications that cannot be anticipated given the exigencies of power relations. Following genealogy, humans must accept that we can do little to control world history or the formation of our own selves.[14] Foucault's genealogical depiction of power indicates that individuals should not be expected to be able to employ the self-creative abilities which the Foucault of the ethics desires us to possess. Despite this, Foucault's words to Horvitz imply that there are ways in which we can outsmart or at least circumvent power relations so that we may become at least somewhat triumphant. Foucault describes the plurality of resistances which we can muster as affronts to power, yet the creative route he prescribes through ethics seems much less plausible upon recalling Foucault's earlier depiction of power. And surely his remarks to Horvitz and the whole of *The Use of Pleasure* were not intended as empty rhetoric advocating a psychologically comforting but hopeless striving toward an impossible goal.

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[13] Miller, p. 115.

Freedom and Truth

In keeping with his changing notion of power, Foucault's conceptions of freedom and truth also morph as he shifts from genealogy to ethics. In the genealogical works *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality*, Volume 1, freedom is quite circumscribed. The unpredictability of power relations and the strictures of disciplinary mechanisms, as well as Foucault's nominalistic characterization of power, all contribute to a freedom which is quite curtailed. Despite this, Foucault consistently maintains that freedom and the possibility of resistance are necessary preconditions for power relations to exist. Without a measure of freedom individuals would be in a position of abject slavery and power itself would be absolute, not relational. Without some allotment of freedom, individuals' actions would not be their own, and yet even if individuals have the ability to act, to do *something* within the structures of power relations, the outcome of such actions might still remain quite unpredictable according to the genealogical picture. The slight measure of freedom demanded by genealogical power may allow for potential action or attempts at resistance, however such action need not have any enduring meaning beyond its later historical context and subsequent interpretation. Genealogical freedom might allow for individual "choices" of action without allowing for innovative agency, while still denying that individuals possess the teleological, originative energy required for self-stylization in keeping with an aesthetic of existence.

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[14] As Heisenberg banished the dream of a wholly predictable and retrodictable universe when he enunciated his principle of indeterminacy, Foucault banished the possibility of detailed social and personal planning.

Addressing Horvitz, Foucault implies that individuals have creative potential, abilities to desire, create and transcend, which, on closer examination, are difficult to reconcile with his genealogical claims about power. The ethical re-characterization of power bestows on human beings a degree of freedom they were not previously afforded because the aesthetic of existence must endow the agent with a certain ability to teleologically manipulate power relations. For the aesthetics of existence to be sustainable individuals require enough freedom to create themselves to a significant degree. Without creative agency the aesthetic of existence would be a meaningless concept, and the Foucault of the genealogy might have been expected to argue as much. But the sheer capacity to create oneself to a significant degree is not enough. We also require the ability to *tell* when we are succeeding in some measure. We cannot accept believing that we are doing so because power may be shaping us to so believe. Meaningful creative agency entails discernment of success or failure.

According to the initial genealogical conception of freedom individuals are continuously hedged in by power relations beyond their recognition, anticipation or control. Given the exigencies of power relations genealogy must argue the impossibility of distinguishing other than—perhaps—retrospectively whether an action might be considered a revolutionary act of resistance or merely reinforce stricter hegemony. Because an aesthetic of existence *demands* freedom, late in his philosophical career Foucault compromised his original position on power in order to permit that freedom by allowing for originative agency. The issue of discernment remained moot.

Foucault's view of truth also required amendment in light of his ethics. Once again, this involves a changing perception of power. Whereas in genealogy truth

appeared to be a generally unpredictable by-product of power relations, truth in the ethics appears to be something much more strategically formulated and directed. In an early interview, Foucault says:

> The important thing here, I believe, is that truth isn't outside power, or lacking in power: contrary to a myth whose history and functions would repay further study, truth isn't the reward of free spirits, the child of protracted solitude, not the privilege of those who have succeeded in liberating themselves. Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraints. And it induces regular effects of power.[15]

On this view, truth is both born of power relations and perpetuates their regular effects. Truth and power materialize from nowhere and everywhere, the product of a multiplicity of seen and unseen forces. For the Foucault of the ethics, subjects are more actively involved in producing truth; furthermore, Foucault appears to allow individuals a certain ability to intentionally, knowingly manipulate and employ truths, often to their benefit. An aesthetic of existence involves actively creating truths about the self as the self is shaped like a work of art. Truths are still part of power relations, but deliberately crafting truths becomes part of self-formation given the attempt to produce an enduring self, an aesthetic of existence.

Attempting to step outside of regimes of truth through various limit experiences is something that Foucault comes to perceive as possible and desirable. In part, this is simply a continuance of Foucault's genealogical project of problematizing what we take for granted. However, given Foucault's newfound interest in the aesthetics of existence and the possibilities of creating the self as a work of art, truth also becomes a tool. Nonetheless, genealogy presents the production of truth as a by-product of power

relations, *not* something strategically manufactured and employed teleologically. Once again, the aesthetic of existence demands that Foucault allow individuals the potential to intentionally manufacture truths about themselves, because only if we are afforded this freedom can we stylize ourselves and create for ourselves the narratives which constitute us as distinct individuals and products of artful existence.

Ethical Expectations - Stoicism?

If Foucauldian ethics appear inconsistent in light of genealogy, how otherwise might one have expected them to be? That is, had Foucault not recast power and freedom, how might he have produced an ethics more consistent with genealogy? Harking back to Foucault's advice to Horvitz, we might have expected him to say something reminiscent of ancient Stoic ethics. Stoic ethics hold that proper ethical conduct is simply the appropriation of a correct attitude or disposition toward the world. While maintaining that human agents are unable to control the unfolding of events in a world that is entirely predestined, the Stoic argues that we do have the free will to choose the interior attitude with which to face such a world. While humans must accept that they have no control over exterior occurrences, they can act rightly by learning to command the interior self in keeping with a disposition of acceptance of worldly happenings. Only with this inner disposition of acceptance will one be not only ethical but happy in a world beyond one's control. Foucault's advice to Horvitz might have involved a prescription for adopting a certain "right" disposition toward the world. He might have warned against

[15] Michel Foucault, "Truth and Power", p. 73.

attempts to combat power, recommending instead that in willing compliance subjects can find peace and achieve a measure of triumph over power's unassailable influence.

Stoicism is a systematic philosophy based on logic, physics and ethics. Functioning according to rational order or logos, a divine energy permeates everything in the cosmos much like an immanent God. This divine logos was immanent in humans and everything corporeal. Stoic materialism conceived of a world as made up of dynamic matter, always changing in accord with this logos, the entire cosmos unfolded according to a prescribed natural order. But because the logos maintained a certain mystery in its operations, humans were advised to adopt a certain belief in fate or providence.[16]

The Stoics argued that each person has an unchangeable, pre-ordained place in the divine order. Events unfold according to a universal plan that humans cannot comprehend in all of its complexity. However, human rationality does allow for recognition that nature is unfolding according to an immutable order, rendering occurrences which might appear bad actually for the best in the grand scheme of things. Acquiescence to this grand scheme, then, is the only fitting—and possible—ethical act. One must learn to adopt an accepting attitude toward fate. For each individual, "[t]he external circumstances of his whole life are an episode in the life of universal Nature, and they are 'in his power' only to the extent that he can choose to accept them or not when they occur. If he is a convinced Stoic he will accept them all gladly, on the understanding that they contribute to the well-being of the universe as a whole."[17]

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[16] Enoch Stumpf, *Philosophy: History and Problems*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1989), p. 117.
[17] A.A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), p. 198.

Epictetus describes individuals as actors in a drama, functioning against the backdrop of a larger cosmos. One cannot engineer one's assigned part, nor does an individual possess any freedom to alter the script; the best that each person can do is adopt a passive and accepting attitude toward the world—to accept one's fate and to play out the assigned part with the most equanimity one can achieve. Hence, Epictetus advises "[d]o not seek to have events happen as you want them to, but instead want them to happen as they do happen, and your life will go well."[18]

The Stoic world view raises an obvious problem for human agency and freedom. Because individuals could choose the attitudes with which they faced the world, even though they could not alter their assigned roles, ethical attitudes or positions are epiphenomenal. They leave us powerless to affect events or even our own behaviour. For Foucault, it seems ethical freedom is curtailed in a similar fashion. At first the totally predestined Stoic cosmology might appear quite at odds with the historically contingent fluctuations of Foucauldian power. But ultimately the practical implications of the pre-destined Stoic cosmos are not all that different from those of the mercurial cosmos of power relations. Agents inhabiting the Stoic cosmos are helplessly limited by the fact that there are absolutely no historical contingencies in the well-ordered universe. The Foucauldian subject is hopelessly limited by the endless historical contingency of power relations. Either way, human agency and freedom amount to something so limited that the very concepts are quite problematic to common sense understanding.

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[18] Epictetus, "Encheiridion" in *Classics of Western Philosophy*, Steven M. Cahn ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company Inc., 1995),)p. 339.

With Stoic history already programmed to unfold a certain way, individuals are robbed of physical freedom and are left only with dispositional freedom in facing the world. As noted, Stoic "freedom" is only the ability to adopt a certain attitude or disposition in the face of events which unfold all around the agent, but which do not permit that agent to affect their unfolding in any meaningful way. For Foucault, everything we interpret as comprising what we understand as the world in which we live is the result of myriad power relations; of dynamic forces which act in seemingly arbitrary combinations to produce events or artifacts which are also subject to a nearly infinite number of interpretations. Foucault's cosmos does not unfold according to some well ordered plan as does the Stoic cosmos, yet in terms of its implications for individual agents, the Stoic and the Foucauldian social worlds unexpectedly converge. Foucauldian power relations are fickle; they are the result of chance and accident, and how power relations will converge at any particular point (which we might later interpret as an event) is, from an external perspective, a matter of complete surprise. We can never anticipate the factors which will combine to make something what it is because there are too many force "vectors" and too many possible ways they could converge. This is compounded by the fact that for each perceived modality of power's convergence, there are a multiplicity of interpretations which could be employed to bestow meaning on it as an event.

With all of these contingencies at play how could the Foucauldian agent have any more freedom than the Stoic? One can even argue that in the Foucauldian cosmos power relations wholly determine one's disposition as well, leaving Foucault's ethical subject in a predicament even more bleak than the Stoic subject, who at least is free to take up an attitude rather than having one imposed.

The Existentialist Alternative

The Stoics present one model for an anticipated Foucauldian ethic; however, existentialist writers also provide an indication of how Foucauldian ethics might have proceeded—a turn of events Foucault might find unsettling, given his often scathing comments on what he perceived as Sartre's misleading "humanism". Despite this, in the writing of such figures as Camus, Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, there appear elements which cohere nicely with Foucauldian genealogy and are instructive in indicating how Foucault might have been expected to treat ethics.

1. Camus

The Stoic ethic focuses on the attitude one might adopt in facing a world largely beyond individual comprehension or control. I have suggested that the genealogical conception of power leads to a world view comparable to the pre-destined Stoic cosmos in terms of the curtailment of freedom. However, the Foucault of *Discipline and Punish* might have "kept the faith" and turned not to Epictetus but to Camus for guidance in facing a power-determined world, though in doing so, he would have found an ethical response not entirely unlike the Stoics'. In *The Myth of Sisyphus,* Camus describes the hopeless absurdity of the human condition, and ponders whether suicide is a viable option to this absurd life. His solution, like that of the Stoics, amounts to adopting a certain disposition toward events largely beyond human comprehension or modification. Camus

claims that "revolt gives life its value"[19] and Foucault might have been expected to offer a similar prescriptive. Foucault might have stressed the Sisyphusian nature of our freedom, by instructing us to take on life as did Sisyphus, of whom Camus writes, "Sisyphus, proletarian of the gods, powerless and rebellious, knows that whole extent of his wretched condition: it is what he thinks of during his descent. The lucidity that was to constitute his torture at the same time crowns his victory. There is no fate that cannot be surmounted by scorn."[20] Camus advises individuals to take on the challenge of understanding and making something meaningful of our lives despite the absurdity of human existence. Foucault might have advised the same, telling us that although there is no promise of being ever able to effect any real control over events, no hope of escaping the bonds of power relations, we can affirm life through constantly re-engaging in the struggle as exemplified in the intellectuals' role of utilizing the novelty of limit experiences to diminish power's growing rigidity. Camus' focus on revolt and resistance coheres with Foucault's commitment to attempting to resist power relations. Given much that Foucault says about struggle, in interviews and his writings, the active, purposeful nature of Camus' Sisyphusian revolt is even more in keeping with the Foucauldian spirit than the more resigned Stoic ethic. But Camus proceeds without the presumption of effecting *real* change which makes Foucault's own ethics problematic.

2. Nietzsche

[19] Albert Camus, "The Myth of Sisyphus", in *Existentialism*, Robert C. Solomon ed. (New York: Random House, 1974), p. 184.
[20] Camus, p. 187-188.

The Nietzschean concept of *Amor fati* also provides something of a dispositional prescription for facing the world. Foucault's admiration of Nietzsche suggests that he was no doubt aware of this aspect of Nietzsche's thought, and it might have been anticipated that he would take up this idea in his ethics. Nietzsche and Foucault share a belief in historical contingency. They both repudiate the existence of a human nature to be fulfilled through right or good action. Instead of attempting to offer ethical imperatives which would expedite human fulfillment of such a nature, Nietzsche offers an attitudinal strategy for facing the world through *amor fati* or acceptance of fate. This noble acceptance of events, reminiscent of Stoicism and precursive of Camus, can help one to develop strength of character. Nietzsche says:

> I want to learn more and more to see as beautiful what is necessary in things; then I shall be one of those who make things beautiful. *Amor fati*: let that be my love henceforth! I do not want to wage war against what is ugly. I do not want to accuse; I do not even want to accuse those who accuse. *Looking away* shall be my only negation. And all in all and on the whole: some day I wish to be only a Yes-sayer.[21]

For Nietzsche, adopting a correct attitude toward an historically contingent world was a strategy for positively combating the vagaries of human existence. Foucault cannot have been untouched by this element in Nietzsche, and it might have been expected that he would adopt this position in his ethics.[22]

3. Kierkegaard

[21] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*. Walter Kaufmann Trans. (New York: Vintage, 1974), p. 223.
[22] It should be noted that it is a real question why the Foucault of *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality*, Volume 1, even felt it necessary to provide an ethics at all.

Foucault's concern with the aesthetic of existence and what he calls "limit experiences" leads to questions of what it means for an individual to engage in a self-defining act. Given the influences of power, how often do we really *act,* and what should count as morally relevant action? Here Kierkegaard provides some instruction. For Kierkegaard, morally relevant action must be contemplated and considered, and yet at the same time not be overly reflective. Circumstances must transpire in a very particular fashion to allow for a moment where a self-defining act is indeed possible. Kierkegaard says that self defining action cannot be reflected on and yet also demands it be personal. In *Fear and Trembling,* Kierkegaard employs the biblical story of God's challenge to Abraham as a case study in ethics. Kierkegaard argues that for Abraham to act rightly and become the esteemed Knight of Faith he should simply act on God's command to sacrifice Isaac. But questions arise about this imperative. Such action appears little more than blind obedience, making it somewhat absurd that such an act could really qualify as self-defining. It might be argued that Abraham's unshakable faith precludes his action from being substantially meaningful, because his unfailing faith precludes the belief that his action involves a genuine risk, given faith's conviction that with God everything is right.[23] Paradoxically, the faith which Kierkegaard cites as motivating Abraham to act "rightly" ultimately robs Abraham's act of moral value, rendering such action blindly obedient and devoid of genuine ethical responsibility. Kierkegaard argues that without faith the leap itself is impossible because there would be no creed as underlying motive for the action, and yet with such a motivating creed, how could the act itself be as free or

[23] Even if Abraham is unable to understand the divine plan, he must have the faith to accept that everything is happening as it should. This is not dissimilar to the ideal Stoic acceptance of the divine logos or

meaningful as Kierkegaard intends? The very faith served by the supposedly self-defining act seems to vitiate the autonomy of that act.

For Foucault, would the possibility of a genuine leap of faith, of a genuine self defining act, be vitiated by genealogical power? How could a given act even be considered one's own and not simply the result of power relations? Kierkegaard's leap of faith is akin to an act following on Foucault's limit experience; both are gambles, something done on the chance that it might be freely self-determining. But even if an act is self-determining, however it may be so, in Foucault's case it cannot be *known* to be so. Kierkegaard's Knight of Faith undertakes an act which supposedly is a teleological suspension of the ethical, moving the agent beyond the universal or ethical realm to act "absurdly", beyond ordinary comprehension. But is the fact of the opacity of the motivations underlying an act enough to make this kind of transcendence meaningless? However pressing the question is for Kierkegaard, it is still more serious for Foucault. What can Foucault mean by freedom, given the conception of power that he has sketched and the resulting opacity of actual motivation? It begins to look as if "freedom" is just a *desire* to act independently, coupled with an unconfirmable *chance* that an act might be free. Foucault's constant insistence that power only works because individuals are free and because they have choices among the "comportments" power enables looks more and more hollow.

Personal (and Sexual) Politics

Nietzschean *amor fati*.

It appears that ultimately, despite his arguments that through ethics we can determine means to escape or at least subvert power relations, Foucault will have difficulty making this claim convincing in light of his strong genealogical stance on power. Invoking the aesthetic of existence, Foucault argues for the capacity of creative self-definition. Foucault seems to require this possibility to lend significance to his own work and vision, if nothing else. What was Foucault's philosophical warrant or interest in relenting on the strictness of his previous position on power? Perhaps Foucauldian philosophy is, in the end, even more a personal endeavour than Foucault himself wished to acknowledge.

It is unquestionable that Foucault's lifestyle in California greatly influenced his philosophy. Foucault's activity at the leather bars of the San Francisco gay scene is quite well documented, particularly in Miller's biography. Miller illustrates how Foucault came to perceive sexuality as more than just an interesting aspect of how subjectivity was shaped, conceiving of sex acts themselves as a genuine outlet for creative thinking and political resistance. Regarding the most notable case in point, Foucault remarks that through S/M (sado-masochism), people "are inventing new possibilities of pleasure with strange parts of their body—through the eroticization of the body. I think it's a kind of creation, a creative enterprise, which has as one of its main features what I call the desexualization of pleasure."[24] S/M becomes for Foucault a personal case-study for investigating power relations, the aesthetic of existence and the possibility of self-stylization. Foucault invokes the invention of new possibilities of pleasure through S/M as a direct indication of the sort of creativity involved in meaningful self-formation and

creation of an aesthetic of existence. Foucault also sees power itself playing out through these relations, as he describes "[t]he S/M game" as itself a strategic and fluid relation.[25]

Foucault politicized what was happening in the San Francisco gay scene to an extent that ultimately seems somewhat exaggerated. He expresses his belief that by engaging in S/M one can challenge one's personal identity, create new possibilities in terms of who one is and how we can function inside the bodies in which we find ourselves. In an interview, Foucault says "I think that it is politically important... that sexuality is able to function as it functions in the bathhouses. You meet men there who are to you as you are to them: nothing but a body with which combinations and productions of pleasure are possible. You cease to be imprisoned in your own face, in your own past, in your identity."[26] Thus,"[i]t is as if Foucault wished to suggest that S/M was itself, in some way, a kind of Nietzschean game of truth—a game played with the body itself."[27]

Even if S/M can be understood as a game of truth, our own role in such a game is questionable. Foucault wants to argue that the agent has an originative and creative role in such games, but given power, it could just as easily be argued that such roles are circumscribed in ways which we fail to recognize. Even counterculture takes place according to a system and rules, and always against a determinate dominant culture. While S/M may offer a break from one's ordinary identity or the ordinary parameters of sexuality, genealogical conceptions of power prompt the argument that such

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[24] Miller, p. 263.
[25] Miller, p. 263.
[26] Miller, p. 264.
[27] Miller, p. 269.

countercultural construction is equally circumscribed, if in different ways. It follows, then, that the selves "created" through these games of truth are not truly any more "free" than the selves created using the alternative rules of mainstream discourses.

Larger than Life—the Foucauldian Ego

Perhaps Foucault's failure of nerve can be at least partially accounted for in light of his own egocentrism. Foucault had great faith in the ability of certain elite individuals to transcend the strictures of power, to speak new words and become strong poets, and, of course, he figured himself as one of these people. Toward the end of his life, philosophy became more than just an intellectual pursuit for Foucault—it had become very much a way of life, a vehicle for Foucault's own self-definition, the crux of his personal identity. In his late work, "What is Enlightenment?", Foucault claims:

> The critical ontology of ourselves must be considered not, certainly, as a theory, a doctrine, nor even as a permanent body of knowledge, that is accumulating; it must be conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical *life* in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them.[28]

For Foucault to come to the ethical conclusions which we might have expected, given his genealogical analysis, would require a profound admission regarding his own helplessness in the face of power. If power relations really function with the pervasive strength Foucault claims in genealogy, his own philosophical enterprises, his own life, are rendered largely meaningless. Foucault's full acceptance of his own genealogy would put him in the paradoxical position of admitting its ultimate irrelevance. He would be forced

to acknowledge that his role as philosopher was purely the result of historical chance and had little to do with any special gift or talent. Moreover, he would have to acknowledge that his lectures and writings carried only limited meaning, failing to provide an enduring contribution, and that there was really little to distinguish his own putative insights from others' messages.[29]

A psychological explanation for Foucault's failure of nerve might suggest he was reluctant to allow himself to be submerged in power's workings. Foucault *had* to preserve some freedom for everyone because he needed to preserve some for himself, to allow himself to be the visionary he thought that he was. Such a psychological explanation for the philosophical schism in Foucault's work, relying on considerations of how Foucault's own ego and self-perception affected his philosophy, has implications more far reaching than might initially be thought. Such a psychological explanation amounts to significantly more than an *ad hominim* argument. If one accepts genealogy, turning analysis of Foucault's philosophy into a psychological undertaking actually becomes a genealogical investigation in and of itself. Such an investigation can provide meaningful contributions in explaining how and why genealogy and ethics look as they do. Psychological investigations indeed are designed to probe those unacknowledged accidents, surprises and chance happenings which are so formative in shaping individuals and events. Genealogy can explain why, as philosophers, we should be interested in Foucault's psychological position. Foucault's psychology is relevant because it can take

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[28] Michel, Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" in *Michel Foucault: Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth*. Paul Rabinow Ed. (London: Penguin, 1997), p. 319. (my emphasis)

[29] Couzens Hoy and Habermas, of course, make just this point about Foucault's genealogies of penality and sexuality.

us some distance in explaining his philosophical shift. Genealogy makes a psychological investigation of Foucauldian philosophy relevant because historical contingencies and personal exigencies are revealed to be important.

Foucault's remarks to Horvitz indicate that for Foucault, philosophy is important, and Foucault's own views on this role of philosophy are instructive in understanding how and why his philosophical work unfolded as it did. A psychological account of his shifts can explain why Foucault adopts the ethical position he does, elevating philosophy and the philosopher, as opposed to taking the route that that we should take philosophy as just one more Rortyan conversation.[30] It becomes instructive in this context to employ what traditionally might look like an irrelevant psychological point as indicative of much more. An investigation of Foucault's psychology indeed can be instructive with respect to much about genealogy, ethics, and the Foucauldian perception of the role of philosophy at large.

Foucault requires the possibility of an aesthetic of existence as a way to validate his own life and his own lifestyle. Near the end of his life, Foucault no doubt began to realize that his health was very precarious, that he was, in fact, quite ill.[31] It also appears that he began to question whether his illness was indeed related to his activities in the San Francisco leather scene. Miller documents Foucault having engaged several individuals in questions about the alleged "gay disease" about which rumours were beginning to circulate. Foucault is also documented as having alluded to the beauty of sacrificing

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[30] Foucault might have been anticipated to take a route more akin to that of Richard Rorty, arguing that philosophy is simply literature that "matters". A psychological investigation of Foucault reveals why such a response indeed would have been unusual for a philosophical figure such as Foucault, his ego ultimately demanding he be allowed to maintain a much more important role.

[31] See Miller, p. 26.

one's life in pursuit of self-creation and the love of boys.[32] It seems somewhat questionable whether Foucault actually realized that he was suffering from AIDS, or would admit there was such a disease, which he called "the American invention".[33] But there is good indication that he was at least somewhat suspicious. This might account, in part, for his own need to validate his life choices philosophically and intellectually. If he was able to convince himself that his death was the result of choice, the outcome of self defining acts, no doubt he would find this more reassuring than the idea that he was a tragic victim of circumstance. Being a victim seems absolutely antithetical to Foucault's own conception of himself. Ironically, his own death of AIDS is a perfect case-study in how self-defining acts are less intentional, less strategic and predictable than we might hope, and how our best attempts at resistance are often blindly thwarted. In addition, our attempts at self-definition might ultimately say things about us which we did not intend to communicate, to put us in roles which we would not want to adopt. In an interesting turn of events, Foucault's own untimely death indicates that his genealogical depiction of power as capricious and converging in unexpected ways, from a multiplicity of points, leading to strange accidents and change outcomes, is actually much more realistic than his ethical depiction of power as something which we can strategically and creatively direct in our stylization of a self. Foucault's own attempt at self-stylization only proves how such attempts to create an aesthetic of existence often go awry because of

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[32] After a startling incident at Berkeley where an ailing Foucault fainted in public, the philosopher is documented as having dismissed questions regarding AIDS commenting, "To die for the love of boys. What could be more beautiful?" See Miller, p. 350. Also see p. 353 for further details of Foucault's discussion with Horvitz, in which Foucault alludes to how talk of AIDS is dangerous to the gay community and the value of pleasures (physical and intellectual) to be experienced in sexual relations with boys.

[33] See Miller, p. 349 for discussion of Foucault expressing certain disbelief regarding the serious threat of AIDS.

unanticipated turns of events. The multiplicitous ways in which Foucault's life has subsequently been interpreted reveals that past lives are indeed maps, schematics, to be interpreted and re-interpreted, far more than they are standing monuments for passive examination and admiration.

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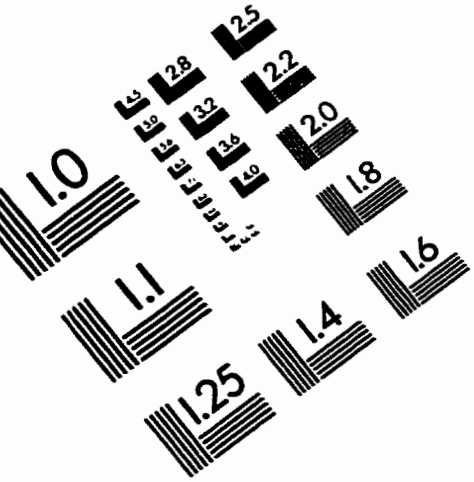

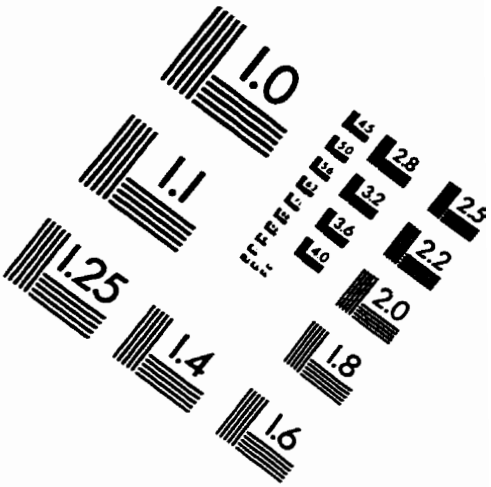

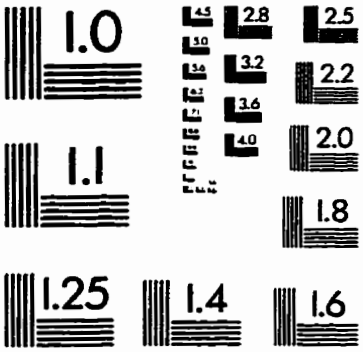

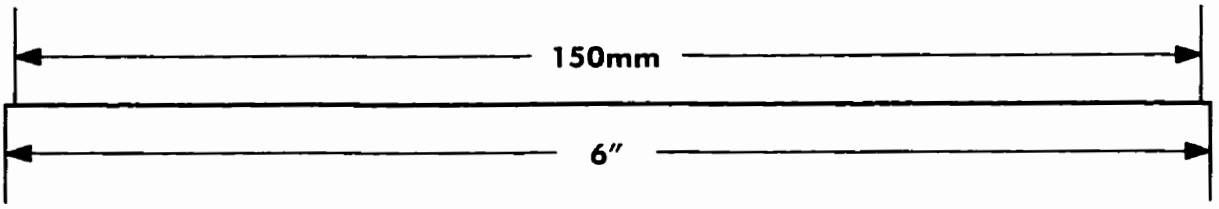

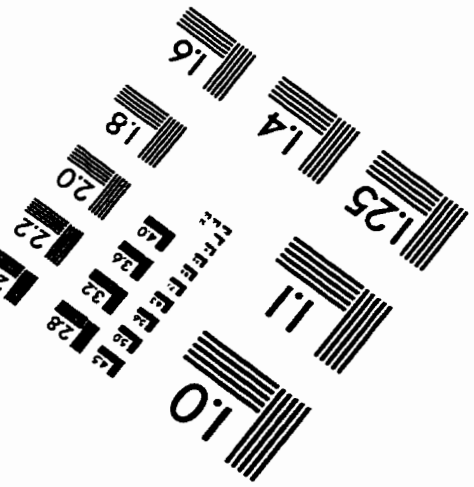

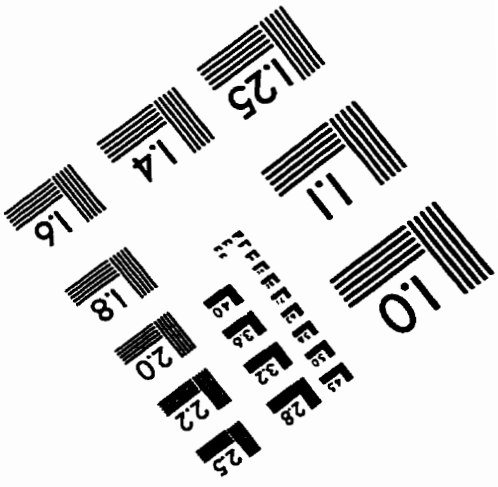

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